THE ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION EXPERIENCE IN STUDENTS‘ ADULT IDENTITY FORMATION

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Not I, not any one else can travel that road for you,
You must travel it for yourself.

It is not far, it is within reach,
Perhaps you have been on it since you were born and did not know,
Perhaps it is everywhere on water and on land.

Walt Whitman (1819-1892), *Song of Myself, 46*

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Summary

The present work investigates the role of higher education experience in the process of students' adult identity formation. In the broadest sense, adult identity is "seeing oneself as an adult" (Macmillan, 2007: 20), and it lays in the core of intensive processes of personal identity formation in the years following adolescence, which are for an increasing number of youth over the past decades spent in higher education. Approaches to adulthood in prior studies reveal ongoing discussions and attempts at re-conceptualisation against changing conditions and regimes of transition to adulthood. Traditionally, the so-called "objective markers" of adulthood have dominated the discourses for a long time, emphasising role transitions and demographic features as criteria for adulthood. The new research venues adding biographical approaches and subjective experiences reveal significance of inner, psychological processes of becoming an adult. However, the problem of the role of higher education in the process of students' adult identity has not been fully illuminated thus far. The reason for this might be sought within the domain of disciplinary orientation of the field of higher education and Educational Sciences.

Higher education research focuses on the overall, "grand" effects of education, while traditional Educational Sciences have not been showing much interest in higher education topics. Substantial work has been produced from developmental sciences, psychology in particular, which has revealed an intricate forest of today's adulthood and conditions for its attainment, leaving open a whole set of educational, social, economic, cultural antecedents, correlates and experiences affecting transition to adulthood. Besides, as analyses presented in Chapter 2 show, students' position in dominant discourses marked by political and economic imperatives is marginal. Their experiences and voices are in a sense excluded, making it almost impossible to infer on actual students' personal benefits of the higher education process.

The theoretical framework for this research consists of Erikson's (Erikson, 1959; 1963; 1968) positions on human development in post-adolescent years, and McAdams's

model of narrative identity (1988; 2011; 2018), which also arose from Eriksonian tradition. Psychosocial theory (Erikson, 1959; 1963; 1968) assumes that social institutions provide structure and guidance to personal development, whereby they create a niche for psychosocial moratorium enabling youth a period of "identity work" before taking on long-term adult commitments. Research over recent decades reporting that higher education provides opportunities for students' self-growth, exploration and resolving key identity questions in a variety of fields (e.g., Adams and Fitch, 1983; Arnett, 2004a; Berman, Kennerley, Kennerley, 2008; Mayhew, Rockenbach, Bowman, Seifert, Wolniak, Pascarella, Terenzin, 2016) supports such theoretical stances. The present research intends to extend existing knowledge raising the central question: *What role of higher education experience students perceive in their adult identity formation?*

The empirical part reports on biographical research into senior year students' lived experiences of their developmental path and their meaning to the higher education process. Students' experiences are approached using the qualitative technique of problem-centred interviewing (PCI), which helps focus participants' narration on the researcher's interest and subsequent in-depth analysis of collected experiences. In total, 40 senior year students coming from diverse backgrounds were interviewed. Data were analysed in *Atlas.ti* software, which enabled the coding system's better organization and browsing through transcripts. The qualitative analysis process consisted of both inductive and deductive approaches, wherein open and thematic coding techniques were performed interchangeably.

Research findings indicate that in certain groups of students – but not in all – higher education experience facilitates and enriches the process of adult identity formation granting orientation and guidelines. Students identify experiences with the highest adult identity formational potential organised in the four broad categories: relationships with teachers and peers, respectively, teaching approach and study material, and extra-curricular activities. Based on the obtained findings, four patterns of thinking about the role of higher education in students' adult identity formation have been identified: generator of adult identity formation, a safe-zone for exploration

processes, interim phase leading to adulthood, and higher education suspending adult identity formation. This formed the basis for constructing the four student types; proactive, explorer, comfort-zone and atypical student. Research findings give the rationale for rethinking the educative potential of higher education in terms of its relevance for diverse students personally – for their self-growth and forming their personal identities, in addition to the professional ones.

Key words: adult identity, higher education, student types, psychosocial theory, thematic analysis, type building.

Die Rolle der Hochschulbildungserfahrung im Formierung der erwachsenen Identität bei Studenten

Zusammenfassung

Die vorliegende Arbeit untersucht die Rolle der Hochschulbildungserfahrung im Prozess der Formierung der erwachsenen Identität bei Studenten. Erwachsene Identität bedeutet im weitesten Sinne „sich für einen Erwachsenen halten“ (“seeing oneself as an adult“, Macmillan, 2007: 20) und liegt im Kern der intensiven Prozesse der Formierung persönlicher Identität in den Jahren nach der Adoleszenz, welche in letzten Jahrzehnten von einer zunehmenden Zahl der Jugendlichen in Hochschulbildung verbracht werden. Die Ansätze zum Erwachsensein in früheren Studien weisen auf laufende Diskussionen und Versuche der Rekonzeptualisierung gegen wechselnde Bedingungen und Regime des Übergangs zum Erwachsensein hin. Üblicherweise haben die sogenannten „objektiven Kennzeichen“ („objective markers“) des Erwachsenseins für lange Zeit die Diskurse dominiert, dabei den Wechsel der Rollen und demografische Merkmale als Kriterien für Erwachsensein betonend. Neue Forschungsbereiche umfassen auch biografische Ansätze und subjektive Erfahrungen und drücken dadurch die Signifikanz der inneren, psychologischen Prozesse des Erwachsenwerdens aus. Das Problem der Rolle der Hochschulbildung im Prozess der Formierung der erwachsenen Identität bei Studenten wurde jedoch bis jetzt noch nicht völlig erläutert. Der Grund könnte in der Domäne der disziplinären Ausrichtung des Hochschulbildungsfelds und der Erziehungswissenschaften gefunden werden.

Das Feld der Hoschschulbildungsforschung hat allgemeine, “große” Effekte der Bildung in seinem Fokus und traditionelle Erziehungswissenschaften zeigten und zeigen immer noch kein großes Interesse an Themen der Hochschulbildung. Eine bemerkenswerte Arbeit wurde von einigen Entwicklungswissenschaften, insbesondere von der Psychologie, geleistet. Diese entdeckte die Komplexität des heutigen Erwachsenseins und der Bedingungen für seine Verwirklichung. Solche Komplexität

lässt eine ganze Reihe der erzieherischen, sozialen, ökonomischen und kulturellen Voraussetzungen, Korrelaten und Erfahrungen, die den Übergang zum Erwachsensein beeinflussen, zu. Außerdem ist die Position der Studenten in dominanten Diskursen, wie das die im 2. Kapitel präsentierten Analysen zeigen, durch politische und ökonomische Imperativen geprägt und deshalb marginal. Ihre Erfahrungen und Stimmen bleiben in gewissem Sinne unberücksichtigt, was dazu führt, dass die persönlichen Vorteile des Hochschulbildungsprozesses für Studenten fast gar nicht erschlossen werden können.

Der theoretische Rahmen dieser Arbeit besteht aus Eriksons (Erikson, 1959; 1963; 1968) Einstellungen zur menschlichen Entwicklung in der Post-Adoleszenz-Phase und McAdams Modell der narrativen Identität (1988; 2011; 2018), welches auch aus der Eriksonschen Tradition entstanden ist. Die psychosoziale Theorie (Erikson, 1959; 1963; 1968) nimmt an, dass soziale Institutionen Struktur und Betreuung für individuelle Entwicklung leisten, indem sie eine Grundlage für das psychosoziale Moratorium schaffen und dadurch den Jugendlichen einen Zeitraum für „Identitätsbildung" („identity work") vor der Übernahme dauerhafter Verpflichtungen der Erwachsenen ermöglichen. Das bestätigen auch mehrere Forschungen aus letzten Jahrzehnten (z. B. Adams und Fitch, 1983; Arnett, 2004a; Berman, Kennerley, Kennerley, 2008; Mayhew, Rockenbach, Bowman, Seifert, Wolniak, Pascarella, Terenzin, 2016). Nach diesen Forschungen bietet Hochschulbildung den Studenten Chancen für Selbstentwicklung, Erforschung und Beantwortung der wesentlichen Identitätsfragen in vielfältigen Bereichen. Die vorliegende Forschung hat zum Ziel, das bestehende Wissen zu erweitern, wobei sie die zentrale Frage auf folgende Weise formuliert*: Wie bewerten die Studenten die Rolle der Hochschulbildungserfahrung im Prozess der Formierung ihrer erwachsenen Identität hinsichtlich der Interaktion zwischen dem individuellen Handeln, den psychologischen Eigenschaften, der institutionellen Forderung und den objektiven Bedingungen?*

Der empirische Teil bietet biografische Forschung der erlebten Erfahrungen der Hochschulabsolventen bezüglich ihres Entwicklungswegs und der Bedeutung, die sie dem Hochschulbildungsprozess zuschreiben. Die Erfahrungen der Studenten wurden

mithilfe der qualitativen Methode der problemzentrierten Interviews (PCI) analysiert, was Fokussierung der Interessen des Forschers und des Erzählens der Teilnehmer, wie auch die nachfolgende eingehende Analyse der gesammelten Erfahrungen ermöglicht hat. Insgesamt wurden 40 Hochschulabsolventen mit verschiedenen Hintergründen befragt. Daten wurden in Atlas.ti- Software analysiert, was bessere Organisation des Codierungssystems und Durchsuchen der Transkripte ermöglicht hat. Der Prozess der qualitativen Analyse bestand sowohl aus induktiven als auch deduktiven Ansätzen, wobei die Methoden der offenen und der thematischen Codierung abwechselnd eingesetzt wurden.

Forschungsergebnisse zeigen, dass in bestimmten (aber nicht in allen) Studentengruppen die Hochschulbildung Erfahrung den Prozess der Formierung der erwachsenen Identität fordert und bereichert und gewährt dabei Orientierungshilfe. Studenten erkennen Erfahrungen mit dem höchsten Potenzial zur Formierung der erwachsenen Identität, und diese sind in vier Kategorien organisiert: Beziehungen zu Professoren bzw. zu Kollegen, Lernansatz, Lernmaterial und außerschulische Aktivitäten. Aufgrund der gewonnenen Ergebnisse wurden vier Denkschemata in Bezug auf die Rolle der Hochschulbildung in Formierung der erwachsenen Identität bei Studenten identifiziert: Hochschulbildung Erfahrung als Förderer der Formierung der erwachsenen Identität, als Sicherheitszone für Erforschungsprozesse, als Übergangsphase zum Erwachsensein und als Unterbrecher der Formierung der erwachsenen Identität. Dies bildete die Grundlage für die Konstruktion der vier Typen von Studenten; Proaktiver, Entdecker, Komfortzone und Atypischer Student. Forschungsergebnisse fordern das Umdenken des erzieherischen Potenzials der Hochschulbildung hinsichtlich ihrer individuellen Relevanz für Studenten - für ihre Selbstentwicklung und Formierung ihrer persönlichen Identitäten, im Zusatz zu den professionellen.

Schlüsselwörter: erwachsene Identität, Hochschulbildung, Typen von Studenten, psychosoziale Theorie, thematische Analyse, Typenbildung

Contents

List of Figures 15
List of Tables 16

1 Introduction 17
1.1 Problem statement 19
1.2 Structure of the thesis 22

2 Basic assumptions for revisiting student adult identity formation in higher education 25
2.1 Introduction 25
2.2 Conceptualising *higher education* 26
2.3 Changing reality of higher education 29
2.3.1 The three missions of higher education 29
2.3.2 Educational policy: The Bologna Process..30
2.3.3 Educational Objectives: Entrepreneurialism and employability..34
2.3.4 Knowledge: The performative turn 36
2.3.5 Students: Massification and diversification 38
2.3.6 Learning culture: Towards student-centred paradigm?..40
2.3.7 Conclusions 45
2.4 Context of the research: General remarks on higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina 47
2.4.1 Social and political background 47
2.4.2 Higher education system 51
2.4.3 Teaching approach 55
2.4.4 Student demographic profile 56
2.4.4.1 Participation in higher education 57
2.4.4.2 Living arrangements..58
2.4.4.3 Employment and transition to labour market 59
2.4.5 Conclusions 60

3 Theoretical positions on adult identity formation in higher education 63
3.1 Introduction 63

3.2 Use of theory in present dissertation 65
3.3 Psychosocial approach to adult identity formation 68
3.3.1 Identity development as a lifelong process 71
3.3.2 Self and identity 72
3.3.3 Adult identity 77
3.3.4 Adult identity formation as a developmental task 80
3.3.5 Adult identity as narrative identity...83
3.3.6 Conclusions 87
3.4 Reconceptualising *adulthood* 88
3.4.1 Transition to adulthood...92
3.4.4.1 De-standardising transition 94
2.4.2 Objective markers and subjective experiences of adult identity 97
2.4.2.1 Adult roles and tasks 99
2.4.2.2 Personal attributes 103
2.4.2.3 Confluence of roles, tasks, and personal attributes 107
2.4.3 Conclusions 109
3.5 Adult identity formation in higher education context 112
3.5.1 Factors participating in students' adult identity formation 113
3.5.1.1 Objective circumstances 117
3.5.1.2 Psychological characteristics 119
3.5.1.3 Context of higher education institution 119
3.5.1.4 Personal agency 120
3.5.2 Higher education as a context for students' adult identity formation 122
3.5.3 Students on the road to adulthood 126
3.5.4 Students as *emerging adults*..130
3.5.5 Higher education as *institutionalised moratorium* 134
3.5.6 Conclusions 136

4 Research methodology 138
4.1 Introduction 138
4.2 Research objective and questions 140
4.2.1 Research objective and general hypothesis...140
4.2.1 Research questions...142

4.3 Review of previous research approaches and methods 145
4.3.1 Quantitative approach 147
4.3.2 Qualitative approach 151
4.3.3 Conclusions 154
4.4 Defining research approach in present dissertation 155
4.4.1 Biographical method as a methodological framework 155
4.4.2 Use of problem-centred interview (PCI) 158
4.4.2.1 Interview structure 160
4.4.2.2 Interviewing process 163
4.4.3 Ensuring reliability and validity 166
4.4.3.1 Participants 169
4.4.2.2 Theoretical sampling 172
4.5 Data analysis 174
4.5.1 Forming the profile matrix 176
4.5.2 Thematic analysis 177
4.5.2.1 Developing categories and sub-categories 179
4.5.2.2 Type-building 183
4.5.2.3 Concept-mapping 184

5 Research results 188
5.1 Introduction 188
5.2 Positioning students in relation to the main factors of adult identity formation 189
5.2.1 Students participating in the research – remarks on the sample structure 190
5.2.2 Students' objective circumstances 191
5.2.3 Perception of adult status criteria 195
5.2.4 Students' self-evaluation of progress in becoming an adult 203
5.2.4.1 Adult identity achieved and halfway achieved 205
5.2.4.2 Adult identity not achieved 206
5.2.5 Students' personal agency in their developmental processes 208
5.2.6 Students' assessment of the role of higher education experience in adult identity formation 212
5.2.6.1 Generator of students' adult identity formation 215
5.2.6.2 Safe-zone for exploration processes 216
5.2.6.3 Interim phase leading to adulthood 217

5.2.6.4 Suspending students' adult identity formation....218
5.2.7 Summary of the main research results....219
5.3 Nature of relationships between adult identity forming factors....222
5.3.1 Amplification and compensation....224
5.3.2 Reciprocity and enabling....227
5.3.3 Linear stability....228
5.3.4 Contradicting....230
5.3.5 Summary of the main research results....232
5.4 Types of students in higher education....234
5.4.1 Type A: *Proactive students*....236
5.4.2 Type B: *Explorers*....241
5.3.3 Type C: *Comfort-zone students*....245
5.3.4 Type D: *Atypical students*....249
5.3.5 Summary of the main research results....253
5.5 Formative potential of higher education experience for students' adult identity....255
5.5.1 Personal development in higher education....256
5.5.1.1 Personal attributes developed in higher education....257
5.5.1.2 Adult identity forming experiences in higher education....259
5.5.2 Summary of the main research results....264

6 Discussion....266
6.1 Limitations and open questions....282

Bibliography....286
Appendices....311
Appendix 1: Invitation to participate....312
Appendix 2: Informed consent for interview....313
Appendix 3: Interview guide....315
Appendix 4: Postscript....318
Appendix 5: Profile matrix....319
Biography of the candidate....331

List of Figures

Figure 1: Structure of higher education system in Bosnia and Herzegovina..................52

Figure 2: Epistemological challenge of PCI 66

Figure 3: Variation of Erikson's epigenetic diagram depicting eight tensions permeating human development throughout the lifespan 69

Figure 4: Overview of data analysis methods in present research...............................175

Figure 5: Process of thematic qualitative text analysis..179

Figure 6: Four phases of empirical type-building..184

Figure 7: Co-occurrence of social achievement markers and personal attributes markers.. 200

Figure 8: Amplifying and compensating relationships..225

Figure 9: Relationships of reciprocity and enabling..228

Figure 10: Linear stability...229

Figure 11: Contradicting relationships...231

List of Tables

Table 1: Factors participating in students' adult identity formation 117

Table 2: Excerpt from the profile matrix..177

Table 3: Empirical description of the main categories in thematic analysis 181

Table 4: Sample structure 192

Table 5: System of categories and sub-categories for criteria of adulthood 197

Table 6: Sub-categories for the main thematic category SBA 204

Table 7: Assessment of students' personal agency 208

Table 8: Statuses of students' personal agency in adult identity formation.................210

Table 9: Assessments of the role of higher education in students' adult identity formation 214

Table 10: Category matrix...222

Table 11: Code relations matrix 224

Table 12: Combination of key factors of adult identity formation 235

Table 13: Proactive students..238

Table 14: Explorers 242

Table 15: Comfort-zone students ... .246

Table 16: Atypical students..251

Table 17: Personal attributes developed in higher education.......................................258

Table 18: Adult identity forming experiences in higher education..............................260

1 Introduction

Questions of what education is and what it means to be an educated person represent the enduring issues that have been captivating the minds of both philosophers and educators from the earliest times until today. Given the changing societal role of education and the extensive influence of *economic imperative* along with utilitarian and instrumentalist interests in its arena, the need to revisit the *meaning* of education – both as a process and outcome – today becomes more accentuated than ever. This is reflected in all the more pronounced calls (cf. Arnold, 2019) to change the educational paradigm and learning culture due to present-day education's incapability of meeting the challenges faced by the entire world; personal, social, economic and technological.

The present study examines the meaning of higher education for students personally by asking what role higher education experience performs in students' personal development, particularly their adult identity formation. This objective integrates two essential aspects. The first one refers to the meaning students attribute to higher learning, which is most commonly seen as a cognitive-emotional process of knowledge and competence building (Arnold, 2012). The second is related to the meaning students perceive as gains from higher education experience in their adult identity formation.

We start with the premise – introduced earlier by some of the notable education philosophers (e.g., Peters, 1967) – that the concept of education, although primarily realised as the development of knowledge and understanding, essentially refers to the holistic development that transgresses purely cognitive and narrowly specialised skills. Moreover, this feature distinguishes education from training or similar competence development and university education from purely vocational education.

It is expected that the findings of this study will offer one part of the answer to the question previously tackled by Arnold (2015: 18) of how well higher education institutions manage to refer to their participants, their life worlds and question horizons. Within the same frame of reference, in Professor Arnold's recent book, a whole set of questions related to the "actual effects of the time spent in educational institutions" (Arnold, 2019: viii) was developed, paving the path for more research endeavours in this direction.

Our motivation for researching students' adult identity formation in higher education originates from the need to understand subjects' position in higher education and their actual personal benefits. Adulthood is nowadays a fairly contested concept, and there are no generally accepted markers of whether one has transited to it or not. In addition, as some theories (e.g., Arnett's theory of emerging adulthood, Arnett, 2004a) posit, traditional-age students in higher education are prevailingly positioning themselves in-between, not in adolescence nor in the "full" adulthood. On the other hand, as it is an accustomed notion in Western culture (cf. Pallas, 2006: 177), the context of formal schooling is nurturing dependency, which does not contribute to adult identity development. Is this the case with higher education, or it affirms students' quest for more adult-like forms of existence?

The empirical research is located in the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which represents a rather specific socio-cultural and political setting, significantly different from most of the European Union countries. The country is currently adjusting most of its laws and regulations with the EU legislation, as part of its EU accession aspirations. Nevertheless, the overall socio-economic and cultural climate is dominantly insecure, most commonly subsumed under the term "society in transition". It is important to stress the overall social context, as it shapes much of the "external" conditions of transition to adulthood and attaining adult status, which will be discussed in Chapter 3. Although the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina can be interesting for a thorough investigation, especially in the examination of phenomena previously tackled in other contexts, the local focus also represents a limitation of our study. However, we

expect that the findings obtained from this study contribute to a better understanding of the process of students' personal development and the way the formational role of higher education is constructed in a context outside the European Union, in societies burdened with *communist legacy* (Kwiek, 2014), marked by transitional destiny, and accompanying economic and labour market instability.

We expect that this study will shed light upon particular aspects by which higher education experience can foster students' adult identity formation, and thus fill the existing gap in the discussions on re-conceptualisation of adulthood in multiple realities of today's youth and their position with respect to higher education institutions. Findings of the study may also contribute to better understanding the relevance of higher education for students' personal development. In the closing remarks, a set of recommendations is drawn for the practice of higher education. Having introduced the overall context of the topic, we shall formulate the problem statement and outline the structure of the work in the remainder of the section.

1.1 Problem statement

This dissertation seeks to add to the present understanding of the process of adult identity formation by placing interest on its relatedness to higher education experience, as the main social structure shaping young people's development. As exiting knowledge shows (cf. Benson & Edin, 2005; Lannegrand-Willems & Bosma, 2006; Mayhew et al., 2016; Hartmann & Toguchi Swartz, 2007; Berman, Kennerly & Kennerly, 2008; Barnett, 2009), both the concept of *adulthood* and student experiences in higher education are many-fold phenomena, context-related and connected to changes in culture and society, urging for deeper and contextualised understanding. This justifies placing our research in a specific local context of Bosnia and Herzegovina, assuming that this context, due to its underrepresentation in previous works, will offer new

insights. Relying on Erikson's psychosocial theory of identity development (Erikson, 1959; 1963; 1968), we start with the premise that post-adolescent years are crucial for the process of forming one's adult identity, which consists of exploration and commitment (Marcia, 1980; 2002). Likewise, higher education represents a niche for *a psychosocial moratorium* (Erikson, 1962) granting structure and orientation to exploration processes underlying students' personal growth and development while preventing entering into long-lasting adult commitments.

The decision to direct our interest towards the *role* of higher education in students' adult identity formation, instead of *effect, influence* or *impact* has methodological implications. All three latter terms are inherent to research designs that enable precise identification of relationships between the variables, such as experimental or quasi-experimental studies (cf. Mayhew et al., 2016) and are suitable for confirmatory studies in which variables can be controlled rigorously. According to Erikson (1963: 44-46), they lead to clear reconstructions and prognostic formulation incongruent with the nature of identity processes. Conversely, our research deals with a relatively nascent topic, where qualitative exploratory research is needed to grasp a wealth of ways in which higher education experience performs its role in students' adult identity formation. In the context of this research, *role* stands for the qualitative character of the data pursued, and is operationalised through senior students' narrative accounts of their adult identity formation processes during the university years. Focusing on the *role,* this research intends to avoid simplification and reductionism of causal approach admitting that adult identity formation consists of a number of factors with varying "relevances and relativities" (*ibid:* 46) depending on the interrelatedness between all participating factors.

Based on the literature discussed later in this work, points of dispute related to conceptualising adulthood nowadays and transition to it have been identified (cf. Shanahan, 2000; Arnett, 2004a; Settersten, Furstenberg & Rumbaut, 2005; Hartmann & Toguchi Swartz, 2007, Eliason, Mortimer, Vuolo, 2015), from one side, and the role of higher education in students' personal growth (cf. Goossens, 1995; Côté, 2006; Pallas,

2006; Barnett, 2009), from the other. Likewise, the research problem of this dissertation adds to the ongoing debates on adulthood in the light of extended transition, non-traditional pathways and trajectories of today's youth in the area of education, career, relationships and family life. By the nature of its research problem, the study relates to two research domains – higher education, from one side, and adulthood and transition to it, from the other. The issue of formational potential of higher education stands at the intersection between the two domains, challenging higher education to question its relevance to students' personal development and growth. This higher education dimension is markedly underrepresented in the existing discourses, as it will be exposed in the Chapter 2.

A plethora of studies in higher education research was conducted focusing primarily on institutional and organisational aspects of higher education functioning. Previous studies are dominantly interested in the way institutions survive in the changing realities surrounding higher education (cf. Jarvis, 2001; Brennan, 2004; Teichler, 2006; Altbach, Reisberg & Rumbley, 2009; Kwiek, 2014) or how well they establish links with economy and technology (cf. Antunes, 2001). Minor attention is dedicated to higher education's formational potential, or giving voice to the subjects participating in it, how they position themselves to the learning process and what happens in their personal and professional formation. Simultaneously, the student-oriented paradigm – overwhelmingly promoted in the European Higher Education Area – makes students' position not only relevant for the teaching process, but needed for higher education's overall self-reflection and definition of its purposes, values and roles. Nevertheless, so far, this potential of student-centred paradigm was not adequately addressed and promoted throughout the previous research.

As will be presented later in this work, research into transition to adulthood currently reflects lively debates originating from the need for reconceptualization of "adulthood" as such and recognizing the multiplicity of factors shaping one's adult identity. However, prior studies are dominantly located in the developed societies, with markedly more attention dedicated to the American context (cf. Holmstrom, Karp &

Gray, 2002; Arnett, 2000; 2004; 2004b; Arnett & Tanner, 2006; Meeus, 2011; Furstenberg, 2013). Thereby, European societies, especially those belonging to what used to be a part of the Eastern Block, are fairly underrepresented. On the other side, there are ongoing social transformations, welfare and educational reforms that justify our research capacities to those contexts.

1.2 Structure of the thesis

The present work consists of six chapters, inclusive of the introductory segment and conclusions. The chapter titled "Basic assumptions for revisiting student identity in higher education" is based on an extensive literature review focused on the examination of the two essential segments for positioning our research; the present state in higher education and the possibilities for questioning students' adult identity formation in this particular context. The chapter reveals aspects of changing reality of higher education and diverse demands coming from the wider society and economy, from one side, and the need for individuals prepared to face the world of *supercomplexity* (Barnett, 2000a) and uncertainty (Arnold, 2019: 64), from the other. The relevance of this chapter for the overall thesis is that it reveals current discourses in the field of higher education, which are ruled by economic imperative and neoliberal logic. This is confronted with all the more pronounced calls (cf. Arnett, 2019) to reconsider value of higher education for students' personal development. Having enacted ruling discourses, Chapter 2 provides a segment of justification for choosing this thesis topic – to shed light upon a counter-discourse based on the humanist perspective that promotes human growth in an educational context.

Chapter 3 describes the theoretical framework for this research, which consists of Erikson's psychosocial theory (Erikson, 1959; 1963; 1968) and McAdams's (1988; 2011; 2018) narrative identity theory, and why particularly these two were selected. The chapter presents key themes relevant to further developing the research design. They

include: conceptualising *adulthood* nowadays, conditions of transition to adulthood, criteria for attaining adult identity and adult identity formation in the higher education context, where the concept of institutionalised moratorium is utilised. The psychosocial theory is relevant for this research in terms of treating adult identity formation as the primary developmental task in the period following adolescence, in which both individual's psychological characteristics and social structures partake. Furthermore, the narrative identity theory views the process of narration as the occasion giving birth to one's identity, whereby a person becomes conscious of her/his life-story telling who that person is. This process of discovering own life-story and identity coincides with the post-adolescent years.

After examining the broader context and main theoretical premises, in Chapter 4 we proceed with methodological framework describing in detail research objectives, research design, data collection methods, and data analysis. Further, the biographical method in the present research is pinpointed, along with theoretical sampling and procedures of problem-centred interview (PCI) as data collecting method. We continue with describing the process of data analysis, along with strategies of thematic coding, type-building and concept mapping. This chapter shows that previous research did not make much use of the biographical method. On the other hand, longitudinal and quantitative studies made a prominent contribution to outlining the developmental process and its correlates, but missing to report on the meaning people undergoing development made out of their experience. This indicates the methodological gap that this research attempts to fill.

In Chapter 5, results of the empirical research are presented and structured around research objectives covering themes such as:

- students' self-assessment of the process of becoming an adult
- personal development in higher education
- adult identity forming experiences in higher education
- overall assessment of the role of higher education experiences in students' adult identity formation process.

Findings are integrated to build types reflecting multiple factors shaping students' adult identity formation, and different evaluations of the role of higher education in student's developmental processes.

The final chapter brings together conceptual and empirical findings to form conclusions and recommendations, together with discussion based on the existing knowledge and theoretical concepts exposed in Chapter 2 and 3. Questions that emerged from obtained results are urging further and more focused research, particularly related to learning culture at higher education institutions, students' living conditions, learning motivation and socioeconomic variables.

2 Basic assumptions for revisiting student adult identity formation in higher education

2.1 Introduction

The main question that this chapter raises is whether students' personal development and their identity formation are represented in the prevailing discourses on higher education. In the attempt to come closer to the resolution of the posed question, the chapter explores the current state in the field of higher education concerning five basic assumptions which shape its today's reality; missions, educational policy, objectives, the view on knowledge and learning culture, and the nature of student body. The opening section brings conceptualizations of higher education according to the relevant documents of recent educational policy and scholarship. Having presented the central part structured around the five general assumptions, we continue with the overview of the local reflections of those assumptions in Bosnia and Herzegovina's higher education.

While student-centred learning becomes widely promoted paradigm inside the higher learning arena (ESU, 2015; Kember, 2008; Tagney, 2013), the actual learning cultures, the intended outcomes, and position of the main actors reflect restraint from humanist ends of education for personal growth and development, which are suppressed by instrumental goals subsumed under commitment to economic ends imposed by wider social context. Moreover, the current tendencies in higher education and the surrounding context reflect complexities, instability, crises in knowledge legitimation, and the world of work. On the other side, higher education is widely becoming

transformed from elitist to mass, confronting thus with students of most diverse biographies, motives and expectations. Based on the presented overview, it is evident that more and more external actors are concerned with higher education and its role in societies' advancements. These concerns are coming mainly from economic and political domains, while educational sciences remain rather silent in this regard, or their contribution is limited to "catching up" with economic demands.

2.2 Conceptualising *higher education*

Ever since Educational Science was established as an individual discipline, teaching children and youth, and correspondingly school education context represented its privileged sphere of interest. Other periods of life and other learning contexts remained beyond a systematic scholarly interest for a much longer time. The awareness of higher education as a separate research field was not even present before the mid-1990s (in the USA) and the last decades of the same century in Europe (Kehm, 2015), when the series of changes and transformations were introduced to the sector. Still, higher education research remained outside the accepted domain of Educational Sciences inquiry, building itself as a kind of "hybrid" field on the margins of management, political sciences, the wider area of social sciences and the like. Nowadays, higher education is widely recognised as an interdisciplinary field of research, engaging a diverse range of methodologies and theoretical frameworks (cf. Tight, 2018). This fusion of various knowledge domains has sometimes led to a lack of comprehensiveness in conceptualising higher education. While there are several different concepts and understandings of the term *university,* it is most commonly associated with two cognate terms, *higher* and *tertiary education.*

Definitions of *higher education* and *university* would sometimes overlap and at times differentiate, depending on the criteria applied and the subject of analysis; the content of academic subjects and their level, the age of students and conceptions of

maturity, and the relation of advanced to elementary work within specific systems of organisation (Rothblatt & Wittrock, 2002). It is also widely recognised that both the "the concepts of 'higher education' and 'university'" (Barnett, 2004: 62), as well as the conditions of their realisation are not uniform, at least in some educational systems.[1] Others argue that *higher education* is a broader term, encompassing, among other forms, university education, which represents the most important higher education institution (Žiljak, 2012: 336). There are also authors who divide between the vocational nature of higher educational institutions, while maintaining that university is strictly referred to graduate schools claiming academic rank. Both terms, *higher education* and *university,* are to demarcate the educational level a person is pursuing and a social institution, or a group of institutions offering such a provision, but also having deeper social significance. The institutional aspect and the historical pathos related to this concept are even more emphasised in the term *university*. The term *tertiary education* became widespread in the last decades of the twentieth century (OECD, 1998). In the OECD documents, it encompasses institutions that award degrees and advanced research qualifications such as universities and other higher education institutions, but also post-secondary institutions not leading to a degree, which are more vocationally oriented (OECD, 2019).

The most common way to define higher education is as "education beyond compulsory schooling" (Jarvis, 2010: 49), referring to the part of formal education pursued optionally, after completion of the compulsory educational level. Nevertheless, compulsory education, its duration and terms of access are not equally treated throughout the world; in most countries, compulsory education encompasses primary and lower secondary education, representing the minimum needed for entering the labour market. At the same time, lower secondary education qualification does not provide access to higher education. Furthermore, the UNESCO publications (2011; 2012) report that in some countries (e.g. some Arab states, South and West Asia and sub-Saharan Africa), secondary education is still not completely mandatory. There are

[1] Some systems have binary structured tertiary education to differentiate between university-level and only higher-level education (i.e., Australia, Great Britain), which is more vocational.

no proper legal regulations related to this issue in some regions, while in others even with existing regulations (e.g., Angola, Central African Republic, Nigeria, Afghanistan, India, etc.), the enrolment rate to secondary education is very low. According to UNESCO (2011: 13), secondary education is compulsory in approximately 80% of countries in the world.

However, it is evident that previously cited Jarvis's definition stems from the logic of the education system, which is typically composed of primary, secondary and tertiary levels. On the other side, higher and lower education are not equally defined in every part of the world. Differences are also seen in criteria for academic work and demarcation between scientific and vocational programs. So far, the complete standardisation is contained in the UNESCO *International Standard Classification of Education* (ISCED) from 2011 (originally designed in the 1970s, revised twice – in 1997 and 2011). It was put forward as an attempt to offer a common framework for understanding and interpreting the inputs, processes, and outcomes of education systems from a global perspective (UNESCO, 2012: iii). ISCED 2011 took into account changes in education systems occurring over the last decade, mainly relating to the Bologna Process in tertiary education. According to the ISCED, tertiary education encompasses the last four levels (short-cycle tertiary, bachelor's or equivalent level, master's or equivalent level and doctoral or equivalent level). It is accessible after a minimum of 11 years of education and successful completion of the upper-secondary level. In the classification from 1997, the division between the university and non-university component was highlighted. However, the recent ISCED version divides only between "academic" and "professional", but leaves open either term's meanings.

What can be discerned from previous passages is that tertiary education, which is encompassing higher education and university, is all over the world deemed post-compulsory, meaning that it is not legally obligatory and that it can be accessed on the condition of completing previous educational levels. Higher education stands at the intersection between secondary education, labour market and adult education, whereby each of them represents a possible pathway for young persons' future. It entails a higher

level of cognitive demands, opportunities for knowledge, competencies and personal development, which is not necessarily confined to strictly vocational profiles. For those opting for higher education, it provides the potential for development inside a planned and structured area in the period of life when a person is defined by her/his role of a student.

2.3 Changing reality of higher education

2.3.1 The three missions of higher education

As previously discussed, we are witnessing changes in higher education resulting in its distancing from the inherited historical patterns and accustomed conceptualisations. The history of higher education amply documents how it has taken on a broader role and redefined its mission and purpose over time, though the processes of institutional shift have never been free of controversy and tension. Nowadays, higher education institutions are expanding their traditional role of imparting tertiary-level education and conveying research to take a broader role connected to societies' needs and expectations. This is quite often articulated in the European Commission documents (EC, 2003; EC, 2005; EC, 2010; EC, 2011), where much emphasis is put on ecological and socio-economic demands (economic growth, employment, sustainable development, competitiveness, etc.). Higher education's role is seen as expanding beyond itself, spilling-over into the broader community through “establishing academic links with industry and other stakeholders outside the Ivory Tower” (Keeling, 2006: 210).

Some recent approaches to this broadening of higher education's traditional roles and mission to become more relevant to society and engagement with various stakeholders refer to this as higher education's “third mission” (Pinheiro, Langa, Pausits, 2015a). The university's first mission was related to the conservation and

transmission of knowledge and was dominant in the medieval university. The medieval university's educational ideal was a holistically cultivated man, whereby developing character and personhood was among its most essential ends. The second mission originated with 19th century Humboldtian reforms, which promoted research and teaching as core missions of the university. From the 1980s onwards, there has been increasing debate on "direct contribution of university activities to economic development or its 'societal impact'" (*ibid:* 234), which is related to the third mission. Ideas as to what this third mission may involve vary across different academic communities and knowledge domains (Pinheiro, Langa, Pausits, 2015b).

All these changes surrounding higher education challenge the role it is expected to play in personal life and in the social arena. It is evident that the formulation of higher education's mission nowadays is inspired by economic and political logics and legitimisation, neglecting humanistic meanings of education, or its role in the individuals' development and formation (cf. Keeling, 2012). This discourse is to a large extant backed by recent educational reforms. Implications of this are seen in erosion of confidence in the aims of higher education and the value of degree pursuit (cf. Arum & Roksa, 2011) giving rise to non-university post-secondary programmes offering qualification and specialised narrow vocational learning. This momentum indicates the need to rethink the role that higher education plays in students' personal development in which learning is essentially conceived as an ontological journey towards own innerness.

2.3.2 Educational policy: The Bologna Process

As it is widely recognised (cf. Burckhardt, 2014 cited after Arnold, 2015: 19), the most recent reform of the European higher education, known as the Bologna Process, represents the unpreceded restructuring in terms of its scope, number of participating parties and far-reaching consequences. Among the various things included

on its agenda, the Bologna vision entails[2] fostering international cooperation in higher education, quality assurance, adoption of the system of two main cycles, recognition of degrees and establishing a study credit system, as well as broad access to higher education provision and greater scope for both horizontal and vertical mobility. In terms of the learning culture, the Bologna promotes a shift from education to learning, opening thus space for expanding distance learning, blended learning[3] and open online courses (e.g., MOOCs), the introduction of short study cycles, broadening access and opportunities for lifelong learning provision, and further education. It is evident, however, that the Bologna emphasizes structural changes, and fosters higher education to construct more competitive European societies. Nevertheless, how does the Bologna Process relate to the personal development and growth of students?

Both the EU and the global educational policy underscore the challenging dichotomies of external expectations and education values and functions for individuals. The two documents provide us with a relevant outlook in this regard – *Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes* (EC, 2012), and the recent UNESCO Report *Rethinking Education: Towards a Global Common Good?* (UNESCO, 2015). While the UNESCO Report declares itself as promoting "humanistic approach", the European Commission communication approaches to education as a "marketable service" (Antunes, 2016), which roots back to the previous EU's political interventions in education for the past forty years. Drawing on analyses conducted by other authors, Antunes concludes in the context of EU education policy that education has for some decades been viewed "in a multidimensional and unbalanced fashion as a fundamental human and social right, as a private and

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[2] *The Bologna Declaration of June 19 1999,* retrieved from: http://www.magna-charta.org/resources/files/BOLOGNA_DECLARATION.pdf (accessed August 17 2015).

[3] The term *blended learning* suggests „a suitable 'blend' of various learning scenarios" (Arnold, 2004). It represents the use of „a wide range of learning technologies and methods [...] Examples include the traditional classroom, web-based tutorials, web-based simulations, online-collaboration, online-coaching, video-conferencing, phone conferencing, knowledge management systems ... the list goes on." (Davis 2001 cited after Arnold, 2004. Retrieved from: https://www.giz.de/expertise/downloads/Fachexpertise/en-elearning-blended-learning-in-international-human-resource-development.pdf [September 9, 2016]

commercial good, as an economic and employment policy, and as an instrument for construction of Europe." (*ibid.:* 411). This reflects in part somewhat contradictory assumptions as to what education is for that inform EU policy. At the same time, this multidimensionality also reflects the superabundance of expectations placed on higher education today, most of which cannot be achieved within traditional forms and structures.

At the same time, higher education is probably more directly affected by changing societal conditions globally than other levels within the formal education system. *The Bologna Declaration* itself states that "higher education and research systems continuously adapt to changing needs, society's demands and advances in scientific knowledge."[4] This is expressed in sometimes contradictory demands for higher education to provide more considerable relevance for society and, chiefly, to its economic enterprise while maintaining the highest rigour level in knowledge production and dissemination. On the other side, the *Explanatory Memorandum to Recommendation REC (2007)* of the European Council stresses that "[w]hile much recent debate has focused on the importance of higher education and research in economic and employment terms, it is important to underline that higher education and research serve multiple purposes, and that these are complementary rather than contradictory".[5] The list of multiple purposes of higher education, according to the Recommendations, includes:

- preparation for sustainable employment;
- preparation for life as active citizens in democratic societies;
- personal development;
- the development and maintenance, through teaching, learning and research, of a broad, advanced knowledge base.[6]

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[4] *The Bologna Declaration of June 19 1999,* retrieved from: http://www.magna-charta.org/resources/files/BOLOGNA_DECLARATION.pdf (accessed August 17 2015)

[5] https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/PublicResponsibility/Explanatory%20Memorandum%20public%20responsibility_EN.asp

[6] *Ibid.*

However, the commodification of higher education promoted in the Bologna Process raised concerns among students (Klemenčič, 2006) that the intense focus on economic and market value would undermine the general student welfare and that it would hamper the creation of "a social environment that guarantees all the necessary provisions to ensure that the students are able to excel in their studies and to become active citizens".[7] Research on the Bologna Process provides scarce sources on the personal development of students. Even the study *The Bologna with Student Eyes* (ESU, 2018) leaves out this topic. Some notable efforts in bringing the perspective of students' personal development into the discourses on the Bologna can be identified in the two streams of research;

a) investigating students' expectations and position in decision making with respect to the Bologna Process

b) the concept of personal development planning (PDP) in higher education.

Research conveyed so far within either stream stresses the overwhelmingly marketizing discourses on higher education, resulting in promoting the "instrumental form of learning focused on process rather than genuine intellectual and personal growth" (Moir, 2009: 367).

Going back to the question posed at the beginning of this section, we can state that concerns with students' personal development stand at the peripheries of the current Bologna mainstream discourses. As stated in the relevant documents of the Bologna Process, it was initiated by growing demands for social and economic competitiveness with other developed regions (e.g. USA, Hong Kong, Singapore). Thereby, in the European Commission's perspective, higher education is seen as an instrument for achieving social and economic goals that transform traditional purposes of higher education and lead to prioritisation of employability and market-relevant development over other educational objectives.

[7] ESIB (2001), Brussels Student Declaration from the 3rd European Student Convention, see http://www.esib.org/.

2.3.3 Educational objectives: Entrepreneurialism and employability

The twentieth-century "entrepreneurial reforms" (Rüegg, 2011: 15) of higher education have brought along changes in both the idea[8] and some aspects of the institutional structure. However, these changes have been rarely accompanied by dubious thinking about higher education, which according to Gibbs and Barnett, "might be one reason why the economic discourse […] has taken such a strong hold on how we experience higher education in established institutions" (Gibbs & Barnett, 2014: 1).

Subordination of higher education to economic imperative has been a widely criticised aspect of the Bologna Process. However, the critical part is not the bare fact that employability and entrepreneurialism are promoted as desired educational objectives in higher education. It is, actually, the fact that the two have overshadowed all other educationally relevant objectives, such as those "related to individual growth and fulfilment or to democratic citizenship" (Sin, Tavares & Amaral, 2017: 1). This has given rise to the commodification and instrumentalisation of education under the promise of preparing graduates to respond to society and economy demands. However, preparation as an educational goal seems to be deeply questionable since it is impossible to "curricularize content completely" (Arnold, 2019: 120). Moreover, this implies that it is not tenable to determine clearly "what expertise we need to convey to students, apprentices, and employees today in order to prepare them as specifically as possible for their professional future" (*ibid:* 121).

In market-oriented higher education, the main concern is "equipping" students with competencies and skills imagined being needed in the economy and broader society. Looking from the humanist perspective, exploiting such a paradigm leads to depriving education of its value and inveteracy in human nature. Moreover, as it is

[8] A comprehensive overview of the history of the idea of higher education (from Platonic higher learning until the more recent stage of contradiction both of the system and the idea of higher education), see in Barnett (2016).

maintained in this work, we live amidst changing realities when there is no certainty that the conditions ruling today will be in place tomorrow, making the orientation towards economically and socially relevant objectives a rocky ground. Instead, as Arnold suggests, we need more "'identity education', more serenity, more depth, more self-empowerment, more time for search movements and skills development" (*ibid*: 121).

On the other hand, in the economic and educational policy discourse prevails "naive utilitarian concept of knowledge" (Nolda, 2001: 101). Moreover, the concept of employability is quite often misinterpreted and perceived as a threat to genuine humanist ends of education. Authors (e.g., McNair, 2003) underscore that employability is not the same as employment, whereby the former is an expression of the permanent strive of an individual to find suitable employment throughout the lifespan. Remaining employable means lifelong commitment to gaining knowledge and skills for confronting ever-changing professional environments. In a discussion on what it means to be an educated person today, Hodgson points to the threats of entrepreneurial higher education, based on the imperative "take care of investment in yourself or disappear" (Lyotard, 1979: 8 cited after Hodgson, 2010: 114). In such a paradigm, the purpose of education is to produce human capital based on the idea of the "entrepreneurial self" (*ibid*: 110).

Having presented a segment of the general outlook on the educational objectives in the market-oriented higher education, we can ask how can we justify the need for humanist educational ends, such as forming students' adult identities as a goal in higher education. A series of studies (Tesch & Cameron, 1987; Whitebourne, 2002; Sneed, Whitbourne & Culang, 2006) report on post-adolescent years as developmental period when significant changes occur in terms of the values, purposes and goals, but still this period of life stays rather outside the intentional educational concern. From one side, there is general discourse on post-compulsory education which is directed to social and economic ends, and from the other, Educational Sciences' lack of systemic interest in the period between adolescence and adulthood. In effect, as Barnett argues, we are

moving towards the educational ideal of *the performative student* (Lyotard, 1984 cited after Barnett, 2010) trained to "'deal', 'produce', 'interweave', and 'present'" (Barnett, 2010: 262), in other words – to be summoned to "instrumental and technical reason as distinct from reflective and communicative reason." (*ibid*).

2.3.4 Knowledge: The performative turn

Higher education nowadays is expected to be, as Barnett argues, "firmly on the ground" (Barnett, 2004: 62) and to take account of "the interpenetration of higher education with the wider host society" (*ibid.*: 63). Thus, the conception of devotion to intellectual inquiry entirely of its own sake and cultivation of personhood present in Humboldtian university seems overwhelmingly idealistic or romantic (cf. Gordon, 2011) and distant from today's conceptions of the knowledge society and knowledge-based economy. Put in the context of the Bologna Process discourse, higher education redirects itself to the concept of knowledge legitimacy, where pragmatism (Rorty, 1989), usefulness (Gordon, 2011) and performativity (Lyotard, 1984) are taking primacy over the value of its own sake. The implication of such an epistemic position for higher education is that knowledge is attributed legitimacy based on its instrumental value, while orientation towards competencies becomes the foundation for discussions on curriculum planning and educational outcomes. Explaining the distinction between *teaching* and *training*, von Glasersfeld warns that orientation towards performance, related to training, has "no place in constructively oriented instruction" (von Glasersfled, 1991: 236). Moreover, he continues by stating that the focus on performance alone might seem trivial in some knowledge domains.

The performative turn in knowledge communicated at higher education institutions signals stretching the borders of higher education and removing barriers between academia and common life. Hence, the ivory tower of elitist scholarship approachable only for a small portion of privileged individuals started to collapse under

massification of higher education enrolment. In effect, the traditional ideal of imparting discipline-centred knowledge within the university is seriously challenged, paving the path for a problem-oriented approach, whose end is developing demonstrable competencies. Performative principle sees knowledge as a commodity validated by instrumental reason through competence and utility (Locke, 2013: 250-251). Some authors (e.g., Biggs, 1999) see this as a signal of ongoing vocationalisation of higher education with overarching challenges to teaching, which is becoming less discipline and more practice-oriented.

Discussing implications of performativity on the formation of student identities, Barnett (2000) observes that the threat of the instrumental and technical orientations in higher education while "succeeding in helping students to live in the here-and-now, [...] may fail to impart to students the ontological and epistemological resources for engaging meaningfully with others in a world in which nothing is certain.“ (*ibid.*: 262). Implications of uncertainty for an educational context, Arnold formulates in this manner: "Precisely because the future is unknown, we need more than the handed down methods" (Arnold, 2019: 13). He alludes to those forms of learning that encourage development from *within*, "not in the context of adaptation, instruction, or even discipline" (*ibid*).

Once they enter the world of work, today's graduates are soon realising that the context they have found themselves in is much more complex and that the qualification they have brought from higher education is not sufficient in successful confrontation with it. This context is termed as *supercomplexity* and is characterised by fragility reflected "in the way that we understand the world, in the way in which we understand ourselves and in the ways in which we feel secure about acting in the world“ (Barnett, 2010: 262). In such an environment, both competencies and identities are constantly challenged and questioned, while acquired knowledge soon proves to be obsolete and incapable of responding to the growing needs brought in by the world of work. Discussing the aging process of knowledge Arnold (2019: 64) maintains that as knowledge becomes obsolete, the significance of personality and extra-professional

competency becomes more salient. For educational institutions, this imposes the change of focus from preparation to managing uncertainty.

2.3.5 Students: Massification and diversification

In this research, the focus is on students whose status is defined by their full-time enrolment in a higher education program, not overlooking the fact that there are various student profiles in practice. Defining student status nowadays in higher education is not an easy undertaking, for there is a diversity of study arrangements and student profiles that have been emerging only recently (e.g., distance-learning or specialised short-term programmes such as GRE). Mayhew et al. (2016), therefore, argue about multiple definitions of a *student*, meaning that it is essential to think inclusively and relative to the fact that study arrangements have witnessed dramatic changes over the past decades, expanding beyond traditional forms of full-time studying and attending classes provided in university halls. In this sub-section, we shall see how massification in higher education has given rise to an entirely new conception of a student compared to the traditional one.

Access to higher education was widening more slowly than in the lower educational levels, and it remained for a long-time domain reserved only for "indigenous, young middle class and academically prepared students" (Müller, Remdisch, Köhler, Marr, Repo, Yndigeng, 2015: 533). Today's higher education is more accessible than ever before, with a tendency to open towards non-traditional students, lifelong learners, and social groups traditionally not considered university students. This tendency contributes to broadening the accustomed conception of a student and higher education purposes. Over the past century, higher education institutions began to encourage the enrolment of diverse groups of students. They are from the late 1980s referred to as *non-traditional learners* (OECD, 1987), or in more recent works as *post-traditional learners* (Soares, 2013). Their distinctiveness is

expressed in multiple ways; untypical socio-economic background, family history, prior educational biography, or more mature age than is typical for a student cohort. Non-traditionality is also manifested in using diverse learning paths and modes, previously not considered legitimate in higher education (e.g., work-place learning, multimedia learning, digital media learning). Besides, diverse students bring their multiple identities into the educational processes. They include adults who are commonly wage earners for themselves and their families, combining work and learning, pursuing knowledge, skills, and a credential that employers will recognize, and seek academic/career advising to guide their professional path. Given the rising presence of non-traditional/post-traditional students, new research venues into adult identity formation and development of this group of students are emerging for more nuanced investigation. This is especially important given the findings that personal development through higher education shows "benign and transformative" (McLean & Abbas, 2011: 2), but also "negative and damaging" (ibid) effects on identity development. However, focusing on the context of non-traditionality is beyond the scope of the present paper, which intends to set the framework for conceptualizing adult identity formation of students transitioning from adolescence.

Transformations in higher education over the past century resulted in changes from elite to mass and universal. In the context of Michael Trow's (2007) view on these transformations, elite higher education is the one directed to „shaping the mind and character of a ruling class; preparation for elite roles" (*ibid*: 243). Mass higher education is related to „transmission of skills and preparation for a broader range of technical and economic elite roles", while universal form aims at „adaptation of the 'whole population' to rapid social and technological change." (cf. Brennan, 2004: 22; Trow, 2007: 243). More developed parts of the world have already achieved mass higher education (North America, Western and Eastern Europe, Japan, China and India) including more than 40% of the single age cohort in higher education (cf. Altbach, Reisberg, Rumbley, 2009).

Widening access to higher education in the European perspective is an expression of the social dimension of the Bologna process and its orientation towards "participation in higher education to all sections of society" (Council of Europe, 1998: 21), including adult learners, foreign students, as well as those of lower social and economic status. Higher education enrolment came to be seen not as a privilege of certain groups, but as a right, even an obligation for people with the eligible secondary school leaving certificate. The student body became even more heterogeneous with the increasing number of students originating from lower socio-economic status, different family educational histories and geographical areas. This move, in turn, changed the interpretations of the core skills and values of higher education (Gibbons, 1998: 12-14 cited in Kooij, 2015), moving it more towards socially and economically relevant criteria. With the rising diversification and the movement towards universal, higher education will face more challenges in addressing students' subjectivities and providing person-relevant experiences.

2.3.6 Learning culture: Towards student-centred paradigm?

Higher education is slowly opening itself towards non-traditional forms such as blended learning, MOOCs, e-learning or group projects[9]. However, it is still prevailingly professor-centred or discipline-centred nurturing hence reproductive and adaptive learning culture whereby students are passively exposed to teaching arrangements. Learning culture is perhaps the most change-resistant aspect of higher education, given its relatedness to a traditional conception of the university as a conservator of discipline-based knowledge and a collective of scholars who are considered authoritative in their fields. Moreover, as Arnold argues, today's tertiary education is wedged in "didactical antiquity" (Arnold, 2016: 157), in which students are

[9] Kember and McNaught (2007: 113) describe group projects as interactive teaching in a supportive environment. It is implemented so that a group of students chooses a type of teaching and then teaches the rest of the class about it. It favours role play and simulation of a type of teaching over presentations and lectures.

confined to “learning requirements that have nothing to do with them and their self-learning movements” (Arnold, 2019: 12). Likewise, empirical studies confirm that lecturing is a dominant form of teaching in higher education, although marking a decrease over the past two decades (Lammers and Murphy, 2002: 62).

The student-centred paradigm focuses on learning rather than on teaching, encouraging students’ active participation in the educational process. Its dimensions, according to Weimer (2002), include:

- the balance of power reflected in mutual decision making
- the function of content is in helping students learn how to learn
- the role of the teacher as “the guide on the side” rather than “sage on the stage”,
- students have claimed responsibility for learning, and
- the purpose and processes of evaluation are in function of learning, not accumulating grades.

Two strong traditions have contributed to the theory and practice of the student-centred (or learner-centred) approach – constructivist and humanist tradition. In the constructivist tradition, student-centred paradigm is associated with the ideas of “purposeful active engagement, discovery learning, creating one’s own understanding, building on prior knowledge, reflection and creating dissonance” (Tangney, 2013: 267). From the humanist tradition, on the other hand, the student-centred approach is bound to the ideas of “integrity and freedom of the individual“ (Fay, 1988: 8), which facilitate students’ personal development in larger extant than traditional instruction. These ideas are deeply rooted in Carl Roger’s humanist psychology explained in his works *Client-centred Therapy* from 1951, and *Freedom to Learn* from 1969 (cf. Rogers, Lyopn & Tausch, 2013). Previously, the idea of linking education and learner’s experience appeared in Dewey’s works from the 1930s, which urged distancing from traditional education, that was focused on the transmission of knowledge organised in textbooks and taught “by teachers who take positions of authority” (Dewey, 1938: 18). To this traditional paradigm, Dewey contrasts learning focused on cultivating learners’ potentials, which is not conceived as preparation for the future but as taking the most

out of the present opportunities and driving towards the aim of "acquaintance with a changing world" (*ibid*).

However, the whole idea of centeredness on a subject and his/her potentials in therapy or educational work was revitalised and further developed in Rogers' works. He states that "[w]e cannot teach another person directly; we can only facilitate his learning" (Rogers, 1951: 389) and "[a] person learns significantly only those things which he perceives as being involved in the maintenance of, or enhancement of, the structure of the self" (*ibid*). In *Freedom to Learn,* Rogers and Freiberg (1994) are more inclined to personal growth, empowerment and raising consciousness and responsibility in learners. These ideas were implemented in schooling and adult education, whereby the latter has contributed to promoting the learner-centred concept. Authors such as Lindeman, Knowles, Brookfield and Mezirow (cf. Tangney, 2013), have all cultivated the idea of diverse learners' needs and standpoints in adult education, and have promoted the approach of active learning and meaning-making in educational work.

While the learner-centred paradigm is a well-established approach in adult education, its position in higher education is not as favourable. Taking into account that in this paradigm a teacher is not an unquestionable authority but a facilitator while a student is active knowledge and meaning constructor, and that teaching experience has to be relevant for students personally – from the content, resources, methods and environment, it becomes evident that the paradigm opposes to the traditional learning culture. Nevertheless, its values for students' personal growth are many. Based on the systematic analysis of literature on student-centred approach Tangney (2013) identifies, among other elements, values of this paradigm for students' personal growth;

- it provides opportunities for empowerment
- respects students' free choice and responsibilities
- expresses faith in students' potentials (*ibid:* 268-269).

In the Bologna Process, student-centred learning is defined as "an approach to education […] focusing on the learner and their needs, rather than being centred around

the teacher's input. This approach has many implications for the design and flexibility of curriculum, course content, and interactivity of the learning process and is being increasingly used at universities across Europe."[10] Student-centred learning has not been attended to in the Bologna Process's initial documents, only to be included subsequently, a decade later in the Leuven ministerial conference of 2009[11]. This document affirms higher education institutions' teaching mission translated into concern for curriculum planning and learning outcomes. Further documents tackling the subject of student-centred learning are Bucharest Communiqué (2012)[12] and Yerevan Communiqué (2015)[13]. A passage from the latter document gives a glimpse of the spirit in which the EU educational policy interprets student-centred paradigm; "Study programmes should enable students to develop the competencies that can best satisfy personal aspirations and societal needs, through effective learning activities. This should be supported by transparent descriptions of learning outcomes and workload, flexible learning paths and appropriate teaching and assessment methods."[14] It is evident that this view supports performative and economic logic on student-centeredness, and gives no recognition to the process of personality or identity development.

In a study supported by the European Students' Union, a list of nine principles of student-centred learning in European higher education was formulated (ESU, 2015: 6-7):

1. Student-centred learning requires an ongoing reflexive process
2. It does not have a "one-size-fits-all" solution

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[10] http://www.ehea.info/page-student-centred-learning, accessed August 15, 2018.

[11] The Bologna Process 2020 – The European Higher Education Area in the new decade. Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve, 28-29 April 2009, http://www.ehea.info/page-ministerial-conference-Leuven-Louvain-la-Neuve-2009, accessed August 15, 2018.

[12] Making the Most of Our Potential: Consolidating the European Higher Education Area. Bucharest Communiqué (2012) http://www.ehea.info/page-ministerial-conference-bucharest-2012, accessed August 15, 2018.

[13] Yerevan Communiqué (2015) http://www.ehea.info/page-ministerial-conference-yerevan-2015, accessed August 15, 2018.

[14] *Ibid*: 2.

3. Students have different learning styles
4. Students have different needs and interests
5. The choice is central to effective learning in student-centred learning
6. Students have different experience and background knowledge
7. Students should have control over their learning
8. Learning should be about enabling and guiding
9. Learning needs cooperation between students and staff.

It is interesting to note that although it exists in the scholarly discourse and practice of adult education and schooling from the early 20th century, student-centred learning has only been recently recognised in the mainstream education policy discourse of the European Union. Nevertheless, its interpretation in higher education does not reflect its humanist meaning. However, more tendencies towards commodification and instrumentalisation of knowledge in the sense of outcome-orientation in curriculum planning should eventually result in students' acquiring competencies needed on the labour market. Concern with students' personal identity development is still not recognised and affirmed.

This section sketched a segment from the historical background of the student-centred paradigm, adding a glimpse into its current research and educational policy status. What can be discerned is that this educational paradigm, especially viewed from the horizons of humanist tradition, supports students' personal development, particularly their quest for meaning-making and skills development. However, as this section shows, this paradigm is relatively underrepresented or misinterpreted in current higher education practice, especially in the contexts traditionally bound to disciplinary knowledge and teacher authority. For education to be truly person-relevant Arnold proposes that learning has to be "appropriated, modified, and personalized by the learners to deliver on their promises as we expect over the long term" (Arnold, 2019: 12). To achieve such a learning process, a genuine student-centred approach is needed, which affirms the quest for personal development.

2.3.7 Conclusions

The main intention of the presented part of Chapter 2 was to position discussion on students' personal identity development in the dominant discourses on higher education. The section was organised around the six assumptions relevant for higher education's self-definition: its missions, educational policy, educational objectives, view on knowledge, the nature of learning culture, and the nature of the student body. Based on the presented assumptions of the changing higher education nowadays, six rather general conclusions can be drawn;

- The mission of today's higher education reflects its orientation towards political and economic objectives, suppressing thus educational and humanist missions of cultivating personhood and developing students' personal identities.
- Today's university is more accessible than ever before, with tendency to open towards non-traditional groups and lifelong learners and social groups traditionally not being considered university students, which broadens our conception of a student and higher education prospective effects.
- Due to massification, the student body becomes diverse, bringing in specific backgrounds and needs that seek to be addressed in educational process and impose the need for motivating and supportive learning cultures.
- Higher education strives to better link with labor market expressed in orientation towards performativity and vocationalisation, while the labor market itself changes at an unpredictable pace.
- Knowledge and competencies today's graduates acquire are not likely to be accurate for tomorrow's labour market and functioning in tomorrow's world. Moreover, academic knowledge and vocational skills seem not sufficient for preparing students to face the real world's challenges.
- To foster its position, higher education should turn to offer opportunities for self-growth to future graduates. Moreover, it is expected to transgress knowledge and skills, which are most likely going to be obsolete or non-needed by the time they establish their careers.

Much of the assumptions of today's higher education presented throughout the section are to a great extent resulting from the external actors, e.g., mechanisms of social and political context, whereby higher education is an instrument for raising the societies' overall wellbeing and economic competitiveness by training workforce to respond to the demands of the market. By virtue of its power, the political discourse and corresponding objectives have started to dominate the self-definition of higher education and how it defines its missions and purposes. On the other hand, university demonstrates a lack of ability to converge with the increasing changes in societies, the world of work and technology. A possible reason might lay in the fact that university often seems rather ignorant when it comes to self-reflection and self-examination. It seems that Eric James's observation dating back more than half a century ago that universities have researched every possible subject, except for themselves (James, 1949), is still valid. It is evident nowadays that the need to investigate various aspects of higher education's reality increases as time goes by and as the world changes and brings along education reforms, economic turnovers and advancements in science and technology.

However, from the educational process and the parties participating in it, the educational or formative potential in higher education is manifold, including, but also transgressing the vocational objectives, orientation towards competencies and skills acquisition. In a rather philosophical approach to higher education, Barnett adverts to "changes in human beings that might characteristically be sought in an educational process termed 'higher education'" (Barnett, 2009: 429). On the other side, Arnold urges for formation of "people who have developed confidence in their own powers of learning and are capable of engaging in self-organized social activities" (Arnold, 2019: 13). The cited quotes imply that the role of higher education, despite not affirmed in current discourses, should be directed explicitly to developing student's personal identities, to which adult identity is an integral part. The concept of adult identity development and its operationalisation in the present work shall be exposed in Chapter 3. The remainder of this Chapter is dedicated to setting the context of higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina, regarding the key assumptions highlighted so far.

2.4 Context of the research: General remarks on higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina

This section brings the characteristics of the local context of higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina, focusing on the structure of the higher education system, students' profile and their position therein. The section relies on statistical data issued by the Agency of Statistic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, including the results of the Census from 2013, as well as studies such as EUROSTUDENT Social and Economic Conditions of Student Life in Europe,[15] in which BiH participated in 2012, together with similar relevant surveys. In sketching out the profile of students currently enrolled in higher education in BiH, we focused on the traditional demographic markers of adulthood (Settersten, 2007) such as: school leaving and participation in higher education, living arrangements and family matters, as well as employment and participation in labour market. These criteria are applied here only tentatively to better structure the data in this section, while a thorough discussion on conceptualising adulthood nowadays is provided in Chapter 3.

2.4.1 Social and political background

This sub-section presents an overview of the key features of higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina to provide the general background information needed to situate the research in this particular context. The rationale for bringing in social and political dimension comes from the theoretical framework that we set for our research – Erikson's psychosocial theory of identity development, which assumes that human development happens at "the intersection of the individual life and the historical

[15] http://database.eurostudent.eu/es5/1#countries%5B%5D=3 [accessed April 11, 2019].

moment" (Douvan, 1997: 15). In support of this, differences in identity processes in Western and non-Western societies have been reported (Schwartz, Zamboanga, Luyckx, Meca & Ritchie, 2013: 107). Exploration in breadth is found to be the primary vehicle underlying identity development in Western cultures, while imitation and identification are found to govern identity development in non-Western collectivist societies. Furthermore, the same authors point to the lack of comprehensive knowledge of how precisely identity development mechanisms lead to forming a sense of identity in non-Western cultures. This gives the rationale for assuming culturally and socially determined factors underlying identity processes, whereby the context of Western countries has been confined to more thorough previous research than the non-Western one. It is widely accepted that adulthood is also socially constructed (Nelson, Badger & Wu, 2004; Gaudet, 2007; Petrogiannis, 2011), as well as the criteria taken for conferring adult status. Walther, Stauber & Pohl (2009) define five main models of transition to adulthood belonging to different regions; liberal transition in Anglo-Saxon countries, universal model in Nordic countries, sub-protective in the Mediterranean, transitional model in Austria, Germany and France, and models of post-communist countries. Exploring social correlates of adult identity formation process is beyond the scope of our work, but being aware that adulthood and transition to it are socially constructed implies the need to bring in the basic elements of the social and cultural context where the research is situated.

Like many other countries from Central and Eastern Europe, Bosnia and Herzegovina was during the second half of the 20th century under the communist political regime. Its transition to democracy was interrupted by the brutal war (1992-1995) in which social systems and infrastructure were damaged or completely destroyed. Education in general was "harnessed during the war to divide the country and then perpetuate these divisions." (Pašalić Kreso, 2008: 353). As for higher education, it was also instrumentalised for destructive political and nationalist purposes,[16] but still

[16] At the very beginning of the war, two universities (the University of Mostar and the University of East Sarajevo) were established to separate from universities that have been already operating in the respective cities. Many teachers were withdrawn from the earlier universities and appointed to the newly-established to promote nationalist ideologies (cf. Sekulić, 2016).

represented a more open arena for dialogue compared to lower educational levels. The country's post-war route was much often termed as "transition" period marked with continuous welfare state reforms aimed at bringing the state structures closer to the modern European political and social trends, and eventually, reflecting its aspirations towards the adjunction to the European Union. Moreover, the Dayton Peace Accord (1995), which marked the end to war and which still serves as the Constitution of BiH, tailored country's structure so its parts are fragmented and administratively deeply divided.[17] With due right, it can be concluded that all that was going on in the political arena of BiH over the past two decades resembles a "laboratory of social experimentation" (Kwiek, 2014: 48). In such an environment, the state systems are nothing else than "work in progress" (*ibid*); constantly under slow reform processes accompanied by high politicisation and still prevailing self-image of a country in transition, which is still healing war wounds and resolving the conflicts.

However, despite the evident need for critical evaluation and systematised research, the role of higher education in the war and post-war society of Bosnia and Herzegovina has not yet been seriously investigated, neither on personal or social level. On the other hand, in much regard, Bosnia and Herzegovina is a specific society, characterised by strong ambivalence and ambiguity related to its value orientation. Furthermore, it is constantly in reform processes as a part of its aspirations towards the European Union, and in need to revisit the social organisations and structures in the light of modern European practices, from one side, while there is still a strong impact of socialist mindset, from the other. In a society floating between the contradicting poles of past and present, tradition and modernity, global trends and local needs, young people are often confused about who they are and where they are going. Besides, a high rate of

[17] According to Bosnia and Herzegovina's Constitution, the country consists of two entities – Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of Srpska (RS), and Brčko District. Federation is further divided into ten independent administrative units – cantons. While education administration is centralised in RS and is governed by the Ministry of Education of that entity, in FBiH each of ten cantons runs its own Ministry and passes its education laws. The Ministry of Education in FBiH performs only coordinating role and is responsible for creating recommendations and monitoring implementation of framework laws inside the area under its jurisdiction. Educational matters at the state level are only nominally managed by the Ministry of Civil Affairs since 2002. However, its role is limited to formulating framework laws on the state level, ensuring minimum common standards and prohibition of discrimination.

the unemployed and devastated industry, from one side, and political priorities of ensuring stability and coming closer to the European trends, from the other, have made that the Bologna's objectives resonate differently than in most other economically developed countries. Educational institutions are often expected to resolve many of society's problems, which is a rather naïve expectation unless background conditions are favourable.

Despite a declarative commitment to tailoring the study programmes in cooperation with stake-holders from society and industry, universities in BiH have made little progress in this regard (Bartlett, Uvalić, Durazzi, Monastriotis, & Sene, 2016). However, what is positive, according to Sekulić (2016), is that the European integration process initiated some positive movements in the country's higher education system, such as harmonisation of legal framework, more inter-university cooperation throughout the state, especially in the EU-funded projects such as Tempus and Erasmus and more opportunities for teacher and student mobility.

Beyond these visible changes, one cannot easily conclude whether there is a direct impact on changing higher education's functions and roles. Much of the literature points to the local context's importance in the university's adaptation to changing external demands and circumstances (cf. Primeri & Reale, 2015). In line with this, as Arnold (2015: 7) observes, in educational policy, even well-intentioned interventions ultimately are capable of achieving what lies in the system itself as its capabilities, because every system reacts to the change impulse from its midst engaging what has been already present within. Per these remarks, it can be easily detected the need to address what happens inside the local education systems, their cultures and traditions as they intersect with the international educational agendas. How does this affect the construction of the role higher education is to have?

As seen from what has been previously said, the question of identity in Bosnian youth is by no means a challenging topic that recalls many aspects of social and political context reflecting on various identity types. Being mindful of the complexities of the social and political context, which is reflected in the educational arena, might be

valuable further in our work, especially in interpreting the data gathered from the interviews with young people. We are particularly interested in students' adult identity formation, but being aware of their actual social environment might add to our better understanding of the processes they are reporting on, since personalisation cannot be divided from socialisation.

2.4.2 Higher education system

There are eight public universities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with the University of Sarajevo (est. 1949) as the oldest and the most renowned. Private universities did not exist before the 1990s, and the sector's recent expansion is described as a "phenomenon of the proliferation or 'mushrooming' of private universities" (Sekulić, 2013: 322). The Bologna Declaration was ratified in 2003 and it divided the academic community and the general public into sceptics and conservatives. Sceptics were critical of the reform, mainly because it demanded significant structural changes and better links with the economy and industry, which were still suffering from war damages. On the other side, the conservatives were venerating the tradition of higher education inherited from the Yugoslavian period. However, although the reform was imposed and it required instant response, the processes were gradual and, based on the experience from the University of Sarajevo, three broad groups of processes can be identified (cf. Jokić & Stanković, 2016; Branković and Branković, 2013);

- focus on the restructuring of the system and introducing the three-cycle schema of study, modernisation of curricula, improving quality assurance system and opening up for European cooperation
- focus on students and improving the overall quality of student life and provision of services
- organisational and financial integration of the university.

In the political instances, the Bologna Declaration's ratification was seen as an opportunity to catch up with European trends, specifically in the sense of formulating new legislation. New higher education laws and several strategic documents regulating academic and scientific enterprise were passed.[18] Following the Bologna Declaration's ratification, higher education sector is under permanent reconstruction encompassing its curricula and organisational structure. The system now consists of the three-cycle studies in "3+2+3" or "4+1+3" arrangement (see *Figure 1*). This particular structure was widely criticised mainly due to discrepancies between labour market demands and actual higher education qualifications, given that an increasing number of students do not continue to MA studies after obtaining BA qualification. In some fields (e.g., Education), it raised the professionalization question, urging students with only BA diplomas not to claim educational professionals' status eligible for public services. As will be discussed later, in the exposition of research findings, students who had obtained a BA after three years of studies and have continued their Master's, report on the more emphasised sense of adult identity following the completion of the first study cycle and obtaining the BA diploma. This finding might be relevant in the light of recent initiatives of integrating studies in some disciplines (e.g., in teacher education), so students obtain a degree only after completing a five-year program.

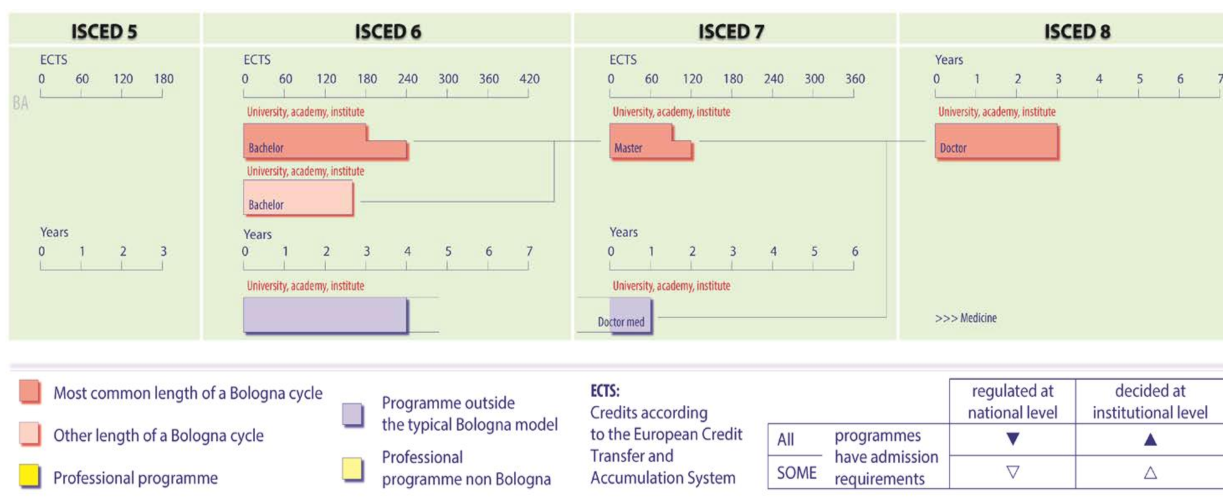

Figure 1. Structure of the higher education system in Bosnia and Herzegovina (EACEA, 2017)

[18] *Strategic Directions of Development of Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina with Implementation Plans for 2008-2015* (Official gazette of BiH, no. 14/08).

Academic institutions dominate the current higher education system in BiH, with several exceptions of professionally oriented institutions (such as Sarajevo Business School offering highly professionally profiled programs). In the local understanding of the Bologna process, vocational schools (ISCED level 5, short cycle vocational tertiary degree) were seen incompatible with the overall reform objectives, despite a long tradition of this type of school in the country through institutions known as *viša škola*. Writing about the non-university sector, Guy Neave (2011: 57) addresses comparatively development of short-cycle higher education, and notes that the Yugoslavian *viša škola,* just like Norwegian regional colleges, maintained possibilities for graduates of transition to universities, which was not the case with, for instance, *Fachhochschulen* in the Federal Republic of Germany or *hoger beroepsonderwijs* in the Netherlands.

As regulated by university statutes[19], it is possible to study full-time, part-time, distance studies, or a scheme combining the three, which varies across disciplines. In disciplines such as biomedical sciences, architecture or psychology, it is possible to study only full-time. Full-time study implies mandatory attendance and full engagement in classroom-based teaching. Given their study workload and obligatory attendance, these students have limited opportunities for employment while studying. Part-time studies are organised in social science disciplines, humanities (except for arts), and natural science disciplines.[20] Part-time studying is mainly implemented as a form of self-regulated learning assisted by teachers in providing resources and defining study objectives. Although there are no systematised data on the profile of part-time students in higher education of BiH, it is evident that a remarkable number of them have multiple roles and commitments related to work and family. Moreover, it is a frequent practice that adults enrol part-time in a university program as a form of their further education (after years of working in a particular field, they decide to pursue a university degree while not quitting their job). In Information Technologies programmes, recently, an opportunity was open for students to work with companies as a part of their studies

[19] University Statute http://www.unsa.ba/o-univerzitetu/propisi/statut-univerziteta-u-sarajevu-0 [accessed April 4, 2019].
[20] See http://www.unsa.ba/sites/default/files/dodatak/2019-6/Tekst%20konkursa%20pdf%20korekcija.pdf accessed June 10, 2019.

starting with the second year.[21] On the other hand, the first higher education institution that introduced distance learning was the School of Economics and Business, starting with 2006, while in humanities, this form of learning has not been introduced to date. For our dissertation topic, it is important to stress that exploratory behaviour in terms of choosing academic majors and switching between alternatives along the way is fairly limited for students in BiH. Even the system of elective courses is not working properly, meaning that a limited list of courses is offered to students and that they have a chance to choose only specific types of courses.

Overall, higher education is financed by the government, and students with the best results from secondary education are entitled to free schooling, except for PhD level, which can amount to up to 10,000 € in some programmes. Students are also eligible for a number of opportunities for scholarships and various other subsidies. Students studying full-time, but who are not „on the budget“ are called „self-financed students“, for they receive no governmental support for their studies. Students also finance part-time studies and distance studies.

The Bosnian higher education system offers students limited opportunities to choose courses and change majors once they are selected. This puts additional pressure on students when making their decisions, in the period of life when they are still searching for themselves and discovering opportunities. Moreover, “a lot of identity work needs to be done during the university years” (Kunnen, 2009: 568), which is sometimes reflected in a lack of self-confidence when making long-term decisions, such as choosing the field of study. On the other side, higher education institutions do not have a career or educational guidance programmes to facilitate future or present students’ decision-making process. Professional and career guidance in Bosnia and Herzegovina is underdeveloped (cf. FMON, 2014), lacking system, specialised structures and resources. This underlines importance of providing guidance related to students’ future education and career choices in regular educational activities such as teaching lessons and structuring learning contents.

[21] http://upis.etf.unsa.ba/?about [accessed June 10, 2019].

2.4.3 Teaching approach

According to the recent analyses (cf. Pašalić Kreso, 2017), the average teacher-student ratio at the tertiary level in BiH is 1 to 35. Nevertheless, it is not uncommon that a group of students consists of more than a hundred.[22] In the study on Education in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, Sondergaard and Murthi (2012) note the linkage between the teaching approach and the type of political administration in a given society. In this sense, they indicate rigidity and traditional orientation featuring post-socialist education, which is conformed to the transmission of declarative knowledge, often outdated and irrelevant for the graduates' future.

In research conveyed within the CONGRAD project[23] (Lažetić, Živadinović, Jarić, Radonjić, 2014) in higher education institutions of the Western Balkans, lectures and transmission of theoretical knowledge are the only two forms of instruction appearing in the above-average frequency, while other forms of interactive instruction including group work, projects, problem resolution, essay writing and oral presentations appeared in below-average frequencies. Lecturing is the dominant form of instruction, with 86,3% of graduates indicating that it was the most dominant during their studies (Lažetić et al.: 16). Comparing data obtained from the graduates studying according to the "ante Bologna" system and those studying currently, the research shows that the prevalence of lecturing did not decrease in the Bologna system of teaching. Moreover, a slightly higher occurrence is seen recently (88,3% compared to 85,8% in the former system). Although the data presented in the CONGRAD study are collated for the whole Western Balkans region, it is indicated that there is no significant difference between the individual countries concerning dominant teaching practice. Other studies

[22] In our research, we saw students reporting on large groups in the first two years and smaller groups later (e.g., in English language classes, studies of Security Studies, Medicine and Psychology). A student of English language and literature quite illustratively, alluding to the possibilities for establishing personal relationships between students and teachers, said: „In a large amphitheatre, in a group of nearly 100 students you feel that there is no teacher on Earth that can remember that you are her student." [M03]

[23] http://www.congrad.org/media/files/CONGRAD%20Report_Serbian_Website.pdf, [accessed December 1, 2017].

confirm the lack of practice, reflexivity and students' engagement. Šabić-El-Rayess, for instance, notes that learning is still "equated with the factual memorization of books" (Sabic-El-Rayess, 2012: 18), despite a declarative commitment to the Bologna study principles. On the other hand, as Jokić and Stanković (2016: 56) note, students positively assess their treatment by teaching staff, while they show dissatisfaction with the institutions' equipment and the arrangement of elective courses. Inputs on the dominant teaching culture presented thus far inform about traditional and teacher-centred learning culture, which is, to a certain sense, linked with the rigid socialist political context inherited from the country's past.

2.4.4 Student demographic profile

Participants of EUROSTUDENT[24] survey from Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2012 were on average 23,1 years old (the median age was 22,5), which is a year more than the average age of students in the European Union countries. The largest portion of students has parents with a secondary education degree (51,5%), while in 48,2% of students, at least one parent has completed higher education. Most of the students (83,9%) enrol in higher education within less than 12 months after completing secondary school. Data also show that most students (93,1%) had no work experience prior to enrolling in higher education institutions. Upon completing their bachelor studies, 42,1% of students plan to continue to master's within one year after obtaining the BA degree, while 17% plan to make a longer delay, while the remaining 33,1% are undecided on whether they are going to continue their studies.

The following sub-section deals with the student population characteristics concerning the three groups of variables traditionally related to adulthood markers (Settersten, 2007): participation in higher education, living arrangements and family matters, and employment and transition to labour market.

[24] http://database.eurostudent.eu/es5/46#countries%5B%5D=3[accessed May 13, 2018].

2.4.4.1 Participation in higher education

According to the last Census from 2013, only 12,71% of the population in Bosnia and Herzegovina hold a tertiary-level degree,[25] with a slightly higher share of women (4% more than of men) (ASBH, 2016). Over the recent years, universities have seen a decrease in the number of registered students. In 2014 it was 25 per 1,000 population, which is the lowest in the Western Balkans (Bartlett et al., 2016: 13). This can be traced to demographic changes; migrations of people mainly to the EU countries, and a low birth rate. However, these figures indicate that the transformation of education to mass or universal in BiH is very slow, as the population with a higher education degree is increasing at a markedly slower pace compared to other European countries. Only 20% of the youth aged 19-24 are enrolled in a higher education institution and the average time spent in university is between 5 and 7 years (Jokić and Stanković, 2016: 13). As for the OECD countries, participation of population aged 20-29 in tertiary education has increased on average about 10.1% from 1995 to 2010, while the increase of population with a tertiary degree in BiH was 6.2% in the period 1991-2013 (Pašalić Kreso, 2017: 110). It is also a noticeable 13% drop-out rate annually and 24% of students repeating an academic year (World Bank, 2015).

It is reported that most of the students enrol in higher education directly from secondary school or within the two years of finishing school, while around 8% of students take breaks longer than two years (Jokić and Stanković, 2016: 43). A certain portion of students enrolling in higher education are motivated by social benefits student status brings to them in terms of access to state social support, health services and scholarships. Given the relatively flexible access to most universities, especially public ones and relatively low tuition fees (cf. EACEA, 2018), it is also possible to admit academically unprepared and unmotivated students, who are content with their student status as long as it brings them social benefits. The searched literature names this group „car-park students“ (Thunborg, Agnieszka & Edström, 2013: 198), described

[25] According to the Census, this category includes those holding any post-secondary/tertiary degree, such as a college degree (*viša škola*), faculty diploma, BA diploma, MA or doctoral degree.

as weakly committed to higher education, who drop out when they lose interest and drop in again when nothing else is happening in their lives.

Recently, the sector has witnessed opening towards students coming from diverse social environments, among which a significant place take those who are the first ones in their families to attend higher education. Previous research raised the question of the educational gap and social capital of the first-generation entrants to higher education (Brooks, 2008) explaining that the choices and activities undertaken in higher education by this group of students require more individual efforts than in cases when students carry social and cultural capital from their highly educated families. Based on these findings and in the attempt to grasp different experiences related to the role of higher education in students' adult identity, in the research sample, we included both students whose parents had completed higher education and those whose did not.

2.4.4.2 Living arrangements

Surveys show (cf. Jokić & Stanković, 2016) that more than half of the students live with their parents while studying (58,4%), with 11,5% of those living independently, and 24,7% of students living with roommates either in student dormitories or in private housings. Students depend on their parents' finances in 89,6% of cases, while only 3,8% report that they are financially independent, and financial difficulties are more present in students whose parents are not highly educated. A small percentage of students live with a partner (5,5%), and even a smaller percentage have children (3,1%). Parents among the group of students are older than the average student group.

The presented data speak in favour of the sub-protective model typical of the Mediterranean countries (Walther et al., 2009), manifested as depending on family support in housing and finances sometimes until the mid-30s. This particular tendency has been documented in the two ex-Yugoslavian countries, Slovenia (Lavrič, 2010: 68) and Serbia (Dragišić Labaš & Ljubičić, 2012).

2.4.4.3 Employment and transition to labour market

Globally, it is evident that since the 1980s, the youth labour market has become limited to less-paid jobs, recently termed as “McJobs” (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007: 51). Moreover, “[y]outh participation rates in the workforce have decreased dramatically and youth unemployment rates have increased“ (Bowlby & Jennings, 1999, cited after Côté, 2006: 89). It is not common for students in Bosnia and Herzegovina to have employment or some work commitment while studying full-time. This is especially the case with undergraduate students, while the odds for employment increase at the master’s level. This might be from one side due to the study regime that leaves little space for students’ extracurricular activities, and from the other, to the lack of possibilities in the labour market, which might have oriented those young people to higher education in the first place. It seems that in this regard, Bosnia and Herzegovina is not far from the world trend by which higher education serves as “a ‘parking lot’ for surplus labor” (Furstenberg, 2013: 32), providing shelter to the group of young people not finding opportunities in labour market after completing secondary education.

Students not living with their parents usually have to cover more considerable expenses and thus face the need to earn money, which is reflected in a slightly larger portion of working students among the group of those not living with their families of origin (7.4%) compared to students living with their parents (4.5%). The highest percentage of students who work (54.7%) can be found within the group of students whose parents have not attained higher education (Jokić & Stanković, 2016: 50-51). Presented data speak of employment in the case of students in BiH as driven primarily by social motives, meaning that earning, and not work experience, is something that young people are striving for in the first place. This leads them further to jobs that are rarely related to their study fields or desired professional activity domains. It was also found (Jokić & Stanković, 2016: 77) that employment primarily improves living standards and then gains experience in the labor market. However, less than one-third of the students are working to gain adequate experience related to their study programmes, while over one half are working in the area very slightly or not at all related to their

study programme. The percentage of students who can correlate their study programme with employment increases with higher study levels. The number of students' working hours is lower than the usual 40-hour working week, except for students with the lowest social status. Students financed from public sources of income (such as student scholarships and loans) mostly have a *traditional educational path,* i.e., they do not delay enrolment to higher education institutions. Nearly one-third of the students are unsatisfied with the total study workload. The least satisfied are those students who see studying as their priority, with work as a subsidiary activity. Female students are less satisfied with both study workload and workplace workload (*ibid*: 56).

2.4.5 Conclusions

According to what has been presented in this section, resulting from the Bologna Process activities, from 2003 onwards, higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina witnesses relatively similar processes as universities around the Globe and European Union. However, the role of higher education for society and the individuals in this context is by no means specific. The current social processes in BiH are governed by its aspiration towards accession to the EU, which poses adjustment of social structures with the EU. Moreover, undergoing reforms are also seen as a part of modernisation processes aimed at catching up with the advancements in developed European countries. Educational reforms are thus going hand in hand with broader welfare state reforms. The relationship between the labour market and educational enterprise is continually assessed as loose (Bartlett et al. 2016), which moderates neo-liberal logic into the educational sector. However, from the other, it makes higher education curricula sometimes incompatible with the requirements from the sphere of praxis.

Demographic figures presented thus far show that majority of students are first-generation in their families pursuing higher education. Student employment is not common, while support from families of origin in terms of housing and finances is

traditionally expected throughout the studies, unless the family itself is in severe poverty. Higher education in BiH has become accessible to an increasing number of students from various backgrounds, demonstrating movement towards massification over the last two decades. However, this is more a sign of lack of opportunities in other societal structures (e.g., labour market) than the actual aspiration for a university degree. There is relatively free access to universities, and tuition fees for full-time studies are low. The Bosnian higher education system offers limited choices of courses and possibilities to change majors once selected, which is regarded as a reflection of rigidity and traditional orientation featuring post-conflict societies (Sondergaard & Murthi, 2012).

Lecturing and teacher-oriented instruction dominate learning culture, which is conformed to the transmission of declarative knowledge. It was also reported the lack of practice, reflexivity and students' engagement. The majority of students have no work experience, and overall, student employment is not encouraged, nor there are many opportunities in the labour market. Students typically move to higher education directly from secondary school with a small portion of those having prior work commitments. An almost equal number of students live with their parents and have left parental home to live independently, or with roommates and partners. However, assessments of BA students' plans concerning the continuation of their studies have shown that certain exploration activities are going on and that most of them are unsure about their future steps (Jokić & Stanković, 2016).

What has been said in this section speaks of a rather prolonged transition from adolescence to adulthood for students in Bosnian higher education. On the other hand, the higher education system itself sometimes serves as a "parking lot" (cf. Thunborg et al., 2013) for those youth who did not manage to place themselves within other social structures, meaning that lack of motivation for self-growth and development might be expected. On the other hand, by virtue of its intentionality and structure, higher education is expected to offer growth and development opportunities.

This section was intended to present an overview of higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina's local context to situate our empirical research. Works employing biographical method (cf. Suárez-Ortega, 2012), which is methodological orientation in our research, underline that studying an individual should be inseparable from the context, which endows personal experiences with meaning. Erikson's psychosocial theory also underlines the importance of seeing human development at the intersection of history and the individual. Moreover, as shown in this section, previous writings (cf. Schwartz et al., 2013) report on differences in identity development processes relative to cultural and social contexts, suggesting that knowledge on identity processes in non-Western countries is still insufficient. Besides, it is widely accepted that the concept of adult identity and conditions for its attainment are socially constructed (Nelson et al., 2004; Gaudet, 2007; Petrogiannis, 2011). Furthermore, different regional models of transition to adulthood have been delineated (Whalter et al., 2009), whereby a sub-protective model characterised by extended dependence on the family of origin has been identified in several ex-Yugoslavian countries (Lavrič, 2010; Dragišić et al., 2012). Based on this, it is possible to hypothesise the occurrence of specific processes of adult identity formation when researching higher education students in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Having presented broader discourses in higher education and specificities of Bosnia and Herzegovina's local context, in Chapter 3, we will review theoretical positions on adult identity formation to set the theoretical framework for the present research.

3 Theoretical positions on adult identity formation in higher education

3.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the three main questions, which organise its structure; What is *adult identity*? What is the meaning of *adulthood* that shapes our approach to the topic? In which sense higher education context affects the processes of student adult identity formation? Before attending to these questions, the sub-section integral to Introduction explains the use of theory in this research regarding its contested status in the qualitative approach. Erikson's identity theory (Erikson, 1958; 1959; 1963; 1964; 1968) provides the conceptual framework for this research as a theory formulating a model of adult development centred around identity formation. Its distinctive approach (a) links identity processes with shaping adulthood and a person's subsequent ongoing development as an adult and (b) premises the interplay of individual and social factors therein. The basic theory enriched a group of subsequent theories focusing on forming adult identity in particular (e.g., Marcia's Identity Status Theory, Whitebound's Identity Process Theory, Brezonsky's Identity Processing Style, and McAdams's Narrative Identity), which are also referred to in the present work.

Authors (cf. Côté & Levine, 2002) divide between crucial identity types that are most intensively formed in the post-adolescent period: adult identity, personal identity and social identity. Adult identity is intertwined with the remaining two (Schwartz, Donnellan, Ravert, Luyckx & Zamboanga, 2013: 341), but the mechanisms of its

formation and development need to be investigated with due attention and respect for its peculiarities.

This chapter intends to set the scene for the later research design in elaborating theoretical positions on identity formation as the primary developmental task between adolescence and adulthood (Carlsson, Wängqvist, Frisén, 2015), which expands over adulthood years due to the changing life circumstances, biological and psychological needs (Kroger, 2017). The discussion continues particularly addressing the formation of adult identity and transition to adulthood with which a typical student cohort is faced. In this sense, central discussion arises around objective and subjective markers of attaining adult identity and junctures between them. For a comprehensive insight into adult identity formation processes, it is also necessary to revisit the meaning of adulthood nowadays. To this end, two views that challenge traditional conceptions of adulthood are introduced. One is the concept of *emerging adulthood* (Arnett, 2000; 2004a; 2004b; 2016), which exists in the psychological but also in sociological discourses since the 1990s and represents a developmental phase between adolescence and adulthood. Although being a rather plausible model for understanding the transition from adolescence to adulthood, the emerging adulthood concept has been exposed to critics, among which is the one by Hartmann & Toguchi Swartz (2007), who propose the concept of *new adulthood,* proposing a new understanding of adulthood instead of adding a new developmental phase.

The closing section attempts to relate higher education experience with adult identity formation, based on the positions of psychosocial approach and prior research studies. We propose looking at higher education setting as a context providing the *institutionalised moratorium* (cf. Côté, 2006), analogous with Erikson's *psychosocial moratorium* (cf. Erikson, 1968), suggesting that higher education offers students opportunities for exploration, self-search and experimentation by yielding a niche that is suspending long-lasting commitments and adult roles taking.

3.2 Use of theory in present dissertation

The position of theory in qualitative research is widely disputed. From one side, there are authors (e.g. Charmaz, 2006; Mitchell & Cody, 1993) arguing for minimal use of theory in conceptualising research design to reduce presumptions and presuppositions in the later process of data interpretation. Within this stream of thinking, it is maintained that qualitative research theory emerges from collected data in the form of *grounded theory* (Glaser, 1992). On the other side, there are authors (e.g., Ravitch and Carl, 2016; Saldaña, 2015) who urge for the use of theory from the onset of research, in "understandings of methodology and epistemological dispositions" (Collins and Stockton, 2018: 1). This includes reliance on existing literature and theories in defining conceptual framework,[26] research goals and objectives, guiding overall methodological design and data analysis procedures.

A rather inclusive definition of theoretical framework says that it represents "any empirical or quasi-empirical theory of social and/or psychological processes, at a variety of levels (e.g., grand, midrange, explanatory), that can be applied to the understanding of the phenomena" (Anfara and Mertz, 2015: 15). Hence, the use of theory in the present research clarifies key concepts and processes related to adult identity formation, and the nature of its linkages with students' higher education experience. This will provide a framework for defining research objectives and questions and developing methodological design and data analysis approaches. In describing the potentials of using existing theories in qualitative research, Maxwell (2013) uses two metaphors: a coat closet or a spotlight. In the first case, the function of theory is to organize and connect data, while in the latter, its role is only to shed light on the data, which is done by a particular theory, meaning that another theory might illuminate something else.

[26] There is often confusion between the theoretical and conceptual framework. In the present research, it is maintained that, while theoretical framework identifies "terms, concepts, models, thoughts, and ideas, as well as references to specific theories" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016: 84), conceptual framework brings operationalisation of concepts and indication of their empirical investigation. It can be discerned that the conceptual framework emerges out of the theoretical.

The use of theory in the present work corresponds to its role as an organising framework, based on Honeychurch's argument (Honeychurch, 1996: 339 cited after Kroger, 2007: 179) that all theories and methods of research reflect a particular worldview. With this, we attempt to ensure that the theoretical framework provides opportunities to discover the voices of interview partners, and proper "intellectual resources to construct theories that seek to emancipate, rather than control" (Georges, 2005: 55 cited in Collins and Stocktone, 2018: 3). This is intended to lead to a balanced use of theory, ensuring that its positions do not blur the field's emergent findings. The way the position of theory is defined in research is further reflected in deciding the strategy of data coding, which can be theory-driven, data-driven or the combination of the two (cf. Syed & Nelson, 2015: 379).

In the methodology of problem-centred interview (PCI) – which will be explained later in detail – a researcher's theoretical knowledge "is organised within a *sensitising framework* in order not to jeopardise the requirement of openness in qualitative research" (Witzel & Reiter, 2012: 19).

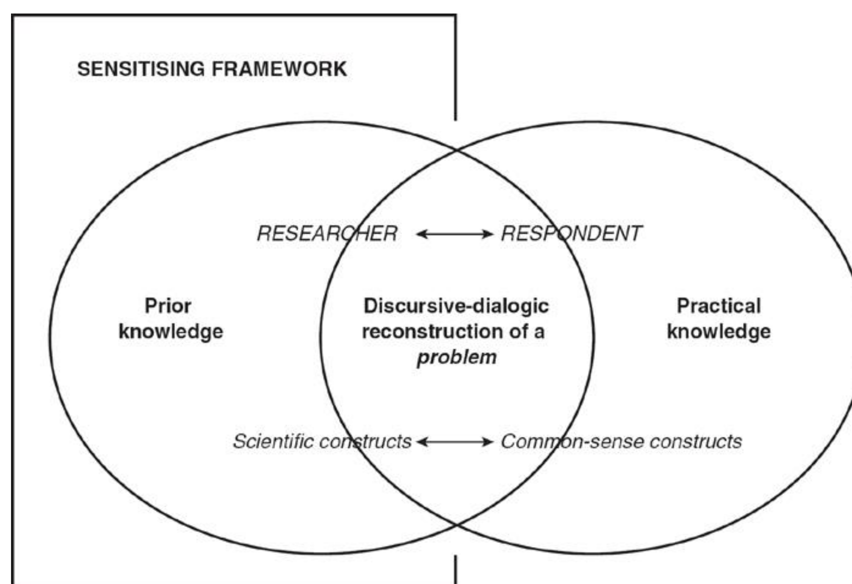

Figure 2. Epistemological challenge of PCI (Witzel & Reiter, 2012: 18)

The sensitising framework helps the researcher acquire theoretical knowledge of the topic to define the route that will be undertaken through the research process, but which will also be revised in the discursive dialogue with the research participant. PCI's particular epistemological challenge arises from discursive-dialogic reconstruction of a problem between a researcher's theoretical knowledge and an interview partner's common-sense knowledge (see *Figure 2*). In qualitative research, it is principal to disclose and explicate the researcher's knowledge of the problem instead of attempting artificially to ignore its existence. One way of achieving this is "by means of a critical discussion and appropriation of relevant theories, concepts, empirical studies and other sources regarding the issue" (Witzel & Reiter, 2012: 24). However, it should not be overlooked that this affects the nature of knowledge gained through the PCI, as sensitising concepts "are loosely defined, general concepts, rather than those that have specific, precise definitions" (Charmaz, 2015: 405). However, this will be reassessed when discussing the research results.

In compliance with this research problem's nature, its theoretical framework builds on Erikson's theory (Erikson, 1958; 1959; 1963; 1964; 1968) and theories continuing his tradition, such as McAdams's (1988; 2011; 2018) Theory of Narrative Identity. The present work does not aim to test positions of a single theory, but to use existing knowledge and patterns already explained by theorists and researchers to guide the research and bring the logic of the research problem and possible methodological choices. In defining adult identity, we use Erikson's identity theory to bring a broad framework, including psychological and sociological correlations, and nurture several subsequent research studies that are also referred to throughout the present work. In addition, when setting the scene for revisiting student identity development in the higher education context, Arnett's emerging adulthood theory provides valuable insight, despite not belonging to Eriksonian tradition and lacking a developmental theory's consistency. A theoretical model that will assist in designing research procedures is the narrative identity model proposed by McAdams, which provides a plausible methodological agenda and research instruments based on the well-elaborated conceptual ground.

3.3 Psychosocial approach to adult identity formation

Literature abounds in theories of identity, starting with Erikson's (1958; 1963; 1964; 1968) psychosocial theory, which was the first comprehensive theory of identity development, continuing with authors writing along the same line – like James Marcia (Marcia, 1980) and Jane Kroger (Kroger, 2003) – to more modern views on identity from Self-determined Theory (SDT), Self-categorization Theory and Narrative identity theory (McAdams, 1988; 2011; 2013a; 2018). In addition to psychological theories and conceptual frameworks derived therein, other fields of scholarship, especially recently, make prominent use of the term (i.e., Cultural Studies, Social Studies, Literature, Anthropology, Political Science, to name a few). Further, in this section, we shall try to understand identity as a general concept and adult identity as its integral part, mainly drawing on Erikson's and McAdams's theories.

Research in developmental psychology had been for a long time focused primarily on human development at an early age. Moreover, earlier theorists of human development approached normatively to draw a characteristic and expected developmental path of individuals belonging to a particular age group. Most of the classical theories of human development supported this normativism; Freud assumed that the developmental path of every person is going on according to a series of pre-defined stages, Gesell and Ilg (Gesell, 1943/2014) presented processes of physical maturation, Piaget (1952/1965) offered characterisation of the four stages of cognitive development, while Erikson (1958) went beyond childhood and adolescence introducing the four developmental challenges in post-adolescence and adulthood. Against his precursors, Erikson's vision of human development expanded beyond the mere biological influences and included psychological and social.

The idea of identity and its formation is central to Erikson's psychosocial theory permeating throughout his writings, from *Childhood and Society* (1963), *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (1968), to *The Life Cycle Completed* (1982) making him still recognised through the literature as the "father of identity" or "architect of identity" (cf. Friedman, 1999). Erikson posited that human development is a process made up of eight stages, each of them consisting of crises that need to be resolved before proceeding to the next stage (see *Figure 3*). However, Erikson's understanding of stages is dynamic and more sequential in the sense that it "tentatively describes […] the sequence to be followed" (Erikson, 1963: 271) making room for "variations in tempo and intensity" (*ibid*).

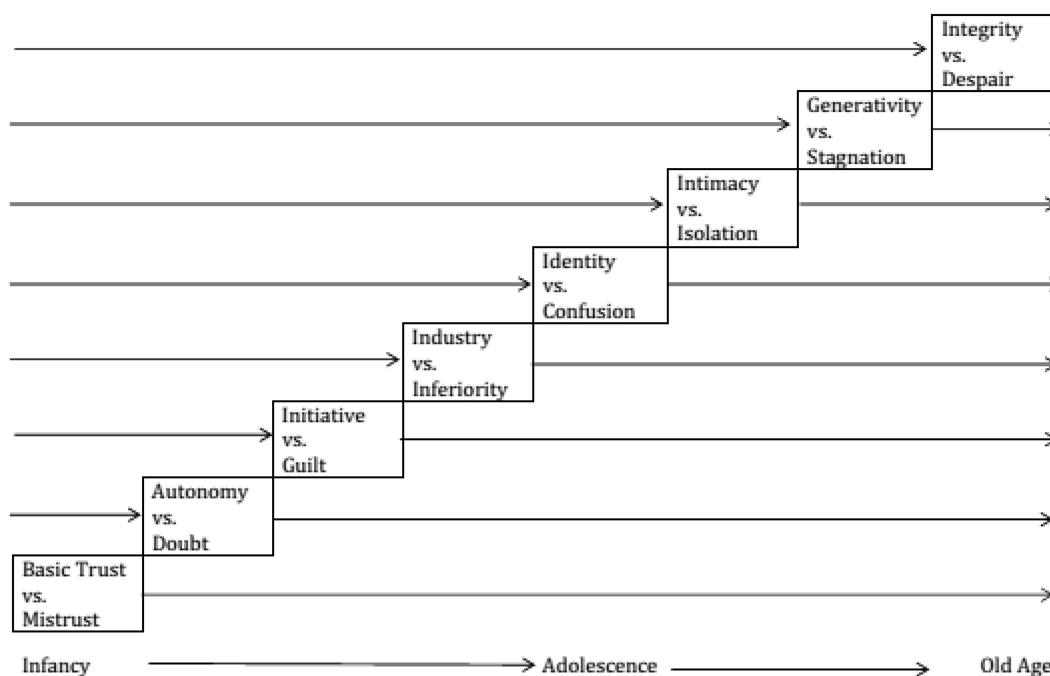

Figure 3. Variation of Erikson's *epigenetic diagram* depicting eight tensions permeating human development throughout the lifespan (Syed & McLean, 2018)

Erikson's theory is psychosocial by emphasising "the interplay between the individual biology, psychology, and social recognition and response within an historical context" (Kroger, 2003: 206), whereby all these elements are given equal importance. Development for Erikson is inseparable from culture and social structures; "Individual

and society are intricately woven, dynamically related in continual change" (Erikson, 1959: 114), whereby social influences and traditional institutions such as education "determine his perspectives on his more infantile past and on his more adult future" (Erikson, 1958: 20). Erikson elaborates on this further stating that in human development, crises and conflicts faced in each stage have developmental meaning "to connote not a threat of catastrophe, but a turning point, a crucial period of increased vulnerability and heightened potential" (Erikson, 1968: 96). Identity crisis is such a point in life history "in which development can only move forward by taking a new directional course" (Kroger, 2003: 207).

Even though Erikson's theory was designed in the 1950s, most works on personal identity still take it as a point of reference (cf. Vignoles, Schwartz & Luyckx, 2011: 7). However, it was widely criticised for the stage model of development (Pelaez, Gewirtz, Wong, 2008), normativism in treating human development (Reis & Youniss, 2004), lack of empirical support (Marcia, 1980), imprecise operationalisation of developmental processes and structures underlying psychosocial development (Kroger, 2000), and its adherence to Freud's misogynist positions (Douvan, 1997).

Recently attempts are reported at updating its positions in the light of social changes in the 21 century (e.g., Robinson, 2015) and feminist perspectives (Sorell & Montgomery, 2001). Additions to Erikson's theory include Marcia's Status Identity Theory (Marcia, 2002) and Chickering's psychosocial Theory of Identity Development specifically designed for higher education context (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Marcia's theory specifies four means by which one approaches decisions related to identity-defining, a developmental task that Erikson had previously described as standing between identity achievement and role confusions, but had not offered further operationalisation. Marcia (1966) proposed operationalisation of Erikson's identity crisis taking place between late adolescence and early adulthood via four identity statuses: identity achievement (commitments coming after a period of exploration), moratorium (ongoing exploration, very scarce commitments), foreclosure (firm commitments, no explorations), and identity diffusion (hesitant exploration, no

commitments). Proposing his identity status model, Marcia emphasised exploration and commitments as two main processes leading to identity formation (cf. Lannegrand-Willems & Bosma, 2006: 86). Chickering (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) also used Erikson's theory as the fulcrum for his theory, particularly by including *seven vectors,* or domains, of development in the identity stage.

3.3.1 Identity development as a lifelong process

Erikson's theory envisions human development as a lifelong process comprised of "eight fundamental psychosocial tensions that individuals must balance throughout their lives" (Syed & McLean, 2018: 578). Tensions from childhood and pre-adolescent years include: basic trust vs. mistrust, autonomy vs. shame, initiative vs. guilt, industry vs. inferiority, making the path for crises faced in adolescent and adulthood years such as identity vs. roles confusion, intimacy vs. isolation, generativity vs. stagnation and ego-integrity vs. despair. Erikson's work marked a paradigm shift placing theoretical interest on adulthood, introducing its view as a continual process of growth and development that starts in post-adolescent years (cf. Hoare, 2002). Major developmental crisis, the *identity crisis* "occurs in that period of life cycle when each youth must forge for himself some central perspective and direction, some working unity" (Erikson, 1958: 14). As subsequent research suggests (cf. Douvan, 1997; Kroger, 2003; Schachter, 2009), identity formation, particularly adult identity formation, starts in late adolescent years and extends until one reaches a strong sense of adult identity, commonly by committing to adult roles and tasks. On the other side, identity development continues through an individual's life, reflecting changes encountered along the lifetime in social roles, expectations, and overall living conditions. In this way, adult identity comes to represent the process of becoming, being, and remaining an adult.

Originally, Erikson had not defined year markers for his theory's stages, but only developmental tasks. Syed and McLean (2018) confront the widespread view on these tensions or crises as stages, arguing that "all eight tensions are present within individuals at all points in the lifespan, but that specific tensions are salient at different points in time" (*ibid:* 578), thus having more sequential character (see *Figure 3*). The same authors further maintain that these tensions, in essence, represent developmental tasks, whereby each of them has its primary developmental period, but will not lose its relevance in further development.

The remainder of this chapter deals in more detail with Erikson's positions on identity formation, deriving implications for the concept of adult identity and the concept of the psychosocial moratorium. The section closes by summarising the rationale for taking this particular model as a theoretical framework for our research. Before continuing with a more specific examination of adult identity, its markers and pathways, we shall first address the general question of identity and its relation to the self, referring to the relevant theoretical writings in this topic.

3.3.2 Self and identity

Since the very beginnings of humankind, people were urged by the imperative "to know thyself", which apparently has taken on different meanings across the eras and cultures. As Baumeister (2011: 48) observes, back in ancient times, it might have meant "to know your place and act appropriately", while today it tackles the most complex identity questions, requiring more profound insight into oneself and the surrounding context. Moreover, the world of modernity and postmodernity (cf. Baumann, 2011) is obsessed with identity perhaps more than any other era before, since the diverse, complex realities, lifestyles, orientations, and values make it difficult, if not impossible, to reach definite knowledge of oneself. Besides, development is no longer seen as a normative process with definite descriptors of attainment, as presented in the earlier

conceptualisations (e.g., Havighurst's Developmental Tasks Theory from the 1930s). It seems that identity markers and borders are more liminal today than ever before.

This infatuation with identity and its many forms and facets resulted in an abundance of different conceptualisations and theoretical positions. Despite this, at times, it might seem that *identity* is only a "catchword", void of any specific meaning, denoting almost anything, and that theories of identity have only made the discussions more complicated and confusing. However, it is clear that today we speak of identities – in the plural, for there are multiple identities and many layers in each of them. This results from the fact that identity is bound to "one's place in the social system, including one's roles and attachments" (Baumeister, 2011: 49). A person takes on as many identities as the roles played in distinct social contexts (Macmillan, 2007: 14). There are multiple social systems to which an individual can belong and many roles that he or she can perform. Notwithstanding its complexity, identity plays a central role in many issues related to individuals' psychological and social functioning.

Synthesizing from previous theorists' writings, Vignoles et al. (2011: 3) describe personal identity as a sum of person's goals, values and beliefs, standards for behaviour and decision-making, self-esteem and self-evaluation, future selves, and one's overall "life story". Likewise, adult identity is related to "seeing oneself as an adult" (Macmillan, 2007: 20), relying on a sum of a person's self-defining characteristics that make her or him feel like an adult. However, the definition of adult identity and criteria for it represent an arena of thriving research work, so more detailed elaboration will be presented later in a separate section. This research is interested in how higher education experience encourages an individual to form or affirm own sense of adulthood and how it stipulates transition from adolescence to adulthood. For the value of data obtained, it is central to maintain the *sensitising framework* throughout the research process to utilize "*elastic theoretical concepts,* which are developed at the beginning of the research process and kept open during it" (Witzel & Reiter, 2012: 21). This is a part of implementing the problem-centred interview (PCI), which will be elaborated in more detail in the Methodology chapter.

Erikson argues that identity essentially denotes "the sense of personal sameness and historical continuity" (Erikson, 1968: 17). It is the force that enables an individual to live with purpose and orientation. According to Erikson, the seminal period for identity formation is adolescence, when an individual is faced with a conflict between identity attainment and role confusion. However, the process does not begin in adolescence, nor it ends with it. According to Erikson's epigenetic principle, each of the eight tasks occurring in human development builds upon the previous ones' resolution (Erikson, 1964). This means that in what I am now some distant developmental outcomes and experiences play a role, and that points of crises, in order to be resolved urge for self-transcendence. Hence, the identity crisis is a point in one's life that provokes self-growth and self-transcendence, moving towards more advanced modes of defining oneself.

Erikson also sees identity as "a configuration of the self that integrates a person's talents, identifications, and roles" (McAdams, 2011: 101), contributing therefore to "the individual's awareness of his or her strengths and weaknesses facilitating thus personal functioning and well-being" (Luyckx, Schwartz, Goossens, Beyers, Missotten, 2011: 78). Along with the same tradition, James Marcia defined identity "as a self-structure, that is, as person's internal representation of who he/she is in terms of life goals, attitudes, and abilities" (Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2011: 383). According to Erikson, once a person has reached the formation of personal identity, he or she has entered the doors of (psychological) adulthood, meaning that the person can tell own life story (cf. McAdams, 2011: 101). It can be concluded that an important marker of one's identity formation, together with the sense of sameness and continuity mentioned earlier, is the sense of comprehensiveness and awareness of one's experiences and the path passed.

In the broadest sense, the self is constituted of physical and psychological characteristics. It "exists at the interface between the physical body and the social system, including culture" (Baumeister, 2011: 49). It consists of „reflexive consciousness, interpersonal roles and reputation, and executive function" (Baumeister,

1998: 683). Dating back to William James' writings in the late 19th century, it is accepted that the self consists of the two main parts – the "I" (the knower, active perceiver) and the "Me" (the known aspect of selfhood) (*ibid.*). The "I" represents an "unsocial individual, a relatively uncomplicated package of needs, wants, and desires" (Macmillan, 2007: 13). On the other side, the "me" bears the social side, the "ability to see oneself as others see you" (*ibid:* 14). Erikson sees the self "as an innate and natural *process* that guides one toward integrated and optimal functioning." (Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2011: 382, italics in the original). This distinction can be interpreted through the role of a subject, or an object. "[B]y the term 'subject' ('I') is meant the self as the active agent, the 'doer', the originator of actions and thoughts, the perceiver of experiences. Conversely, the self is 'object' ('me') when it is the 'done to', the one that is thought about, acted upon, or perceived" (Whitbourne, 1986: 4). Unlike identity, which is nowadays conceived in a multiplicity of its forms and dimensions, the self is seen as a single unique structure unless a person is suffering from pathological states (Baumeister, 2011: 52). Compared to the primarily biological self, the substance of one's identity is to a certain extent determined by social and cultural dimensions, meaning that identity includes "social validation", as well as "evaluative and knowledge dimensions of the self" (Serpe & Stryker, 2011: 236).

Nevertheless, it is not uncommon across the literature that self and identity appear interchangeably, implying their synonymous meaning. In a comprehensive review on self and identity in the life-span perspective, McAdams and Cox (2010) use the two terms interchangeably and most often merged in a single construction *self and identity,* implying that they refer to the same notion, and that their processes are inseparable from one another. Moreover, in McAdams' three-layered theory of personality (McAdams, 2013a) – which is at the core of the narrative identity model – the three layers of the self (the actor, the agent and the author) are constituents of identity. However, in some other theories, i.e., self-determination theory, identity and self have distinct meanings, and it is not necessarily expected that the two have congruent growth tendencies (Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2011: 382).

What is apparent from the literature reviewed is that generally speaking, the terms *self* and *identity* at times overlap and at times differentiate entirely, depending on the theoretical position from which they are treated. Questioning when identity is congruent with the self, Soenens and Vansteenkiste (2011) conclude that the relationship between the two depends on whether one sees identity as *discovered,* i.e., *developed* or *constructed.* For the proponents of development, there is an authentic self that individuals are striving to develop and cultivate by their identity-relevant choices, whereas for those advocating the construction perspective, there is no true self, but development achievements are seen in a pragmatic manner, in terms of whether they contribute to successful confrontation with life challenges (*ibid*: 382).

What can be discerned from the theoretical positions on identity and self presented thus far is the relative consensus among scholars that defining characteristics of identity are continuity and sameness across different times and contexts. The self is mostly of biological substance and it is there almost independently from the "Me". At the same time, identity is something arising from the processes of cultivation, socialization, upbringing, education, in which the "I" gains knowledge of thyself and takes evaluative dimensions. For our research, it is noteworthy to highlight that identity can be formed and developed. Moreover, in the light of Eriksonian tradition, identity is seen as a developmental task specifically related to the period from adolescence to adulthood, but also transgressing this time framework. The substance of identity, which is to be developed and formed, represents a sum of self-defining characteristics such as life goals, purposes, attitudes, abilities, and attribution of meaning to significant life events and choices.

3.3.3 Adult identity

As the emergent scholarship reveals, adult identity and adulthood are complex concepts, and have been recently subject of thorough theoretical analyses and rising research interest, to which contribute the most developmental psychologists, social psychologists, and life-course scientists. This complexity is a reflection of realities in which adult identity is formed, from one side, and changes in conceptualising markers for attaining adult identity, from the other. To better found our research, it is required to form an operational definition of adult identity, including its processes and constitutive elements. To this end, we shall attend to the theoretical positions starting with those from Erikson's psychosocial theory and shall present what has been known from the recent research on adult identity formation.

Writings on adult identity (e.g., Benson & Johnson, 2009; Berman, et al., 2008) are also rather strongly influenced by the postulates of Erikson's identity theory. Even more, it is not uncommon to encounter Erikson's definition of identity and the essential question of *who am I?* as a basis for explicating characteristics of adult identity and the processes of its formation (e.g., Whitbourne, 1986). This relentless parallelism between forming ego identity and adult identity signals the centrality of attaining an adult sense of the self for Erikson's theory. When writing about Luther, Erikson describes that he "granted himself a prolongation of the interval between youth and adulthood" (Erikson, 1958: 44) which eventually resulted in "his own hard-won adulthood" (*ibid:* 206). Erikson's representation of Luther's process of becoming an adult pinpoints at least three main aspects: (i) becoming an adult is a subjectively constructed process (ii) its timelines are flexible (iii) it includes deliberative efforts. Besides, the process of adult identity *formation* is taking place between adolescence and adulthood. In contrast, the process of adult identity *development* expands throughout the lifetime, representing the processes of re-evaluation and re-consideration of adult identity that had been formed previously.

However, authors such as Côté and Levine (1987) decades ago had urged for an additional dimension of identity formation – that of the life cycle notions. This implies that ego identity formation represents „the process by which this personality characteristic is formed and continually *trans*formed throughout the life cycle" (*ibid:* 275, italics in the original). This lifelong dimension is also emphasised in discussions on adult identity (Kroger, 2017), suggesting that it is developed and nurtured by the changes that a person experiences both within, and in the social context throughout her/his lifetime. However, as recent longitudinal research with young and midlife adults confirms (Fadjkoff, Pulkkinen & Kokko, 2016), adult identity, despite the general tendency towards progression, rarely remains fixed and stable throughout life. Likewise, contemporary identity models such as Narrative Identity consider adult identity development as "a dynamic and iterative process" (Schwartz et al., 2013: 96) that lasts throughout the entire lifetime.

Although the parallelism between ego identity and adult identity in Erikson's writings cannot be overlooked, other authors (e.g., Côté & Levine, 2002) view adult identity in a network of multiple identities related to development in various domains. The same authors maintain that a strong adult identity supports the development of the ego, personal, and social identities. However, as it is reflected in the discussion on the markers of adulthood later in this work, in this particular domain, conclusions on the nature of causal relations regarding adult identity formation should be dealt with caution. Just as adult identity achievement can reinforce other developments, achievements in some specific domains (e.g., professional or personal) may encourage adult identity development. However, as shown in more detail when dealing with markers of adulthood, prior studies fail to explain the nature of relationships between developments in different domains and their contribution to adult identity formation, or vice versa.

Back to Erikson's positions on adult identity, in his *Young Man Luther* (1958), it is possible to encounter a description of an adult person as the one who has an already formed definition of who he/she is. It is determined "on the basis of a function in an

economy, a place in the sequence of generations, and a status in the structure of society" (Erikson, 1958 cited after Côté & Levine, 1987: 111-112). The cited characteristics would comply with what is nowadays commonly referred to as "objective markers" of adulthood, which are determined by one's place in a social system or roles taking. In the subsequent work, *Insight and responsibility* Erikson (1964) indicates a more specific reference to a psychological set of factors that make one's adult identity; a set of goals, values and life plans that protect from daily living difficulties. This juncture of objective and subjective markers reflects the psychosocial nature of Erikson's theory.

Furthermore, Erikson posits that adult identity includes self-awareness and an ability to see continuity in one's life and reconstruct the past as a series of an individual's choices and decisions (Côté & Levine, 1987: 112). In this sense, the conception of adult identity is close to the one put forth by McAdams, who sees it as "an integrative configuration of self-in-the-adult-world" (McAdams, 2001: 102). The integrative effect is noted in synchronic and diachronic dimensions, whereby identity subsumes differences and contrasts appearing in one's life here and now and across different times and phases of development. Identity brings all of them "meaningfully together into a temporally organized whole" (*ibid*).

Adult identity formation processes are the most intensive between adolescence and adulthood (Schwartz et al., 2013: 97), which is considered nowadays to extend over the late twenties (Arnett, 2004a). As shown in a number of studies, the process of adult identity formation is gradual, multidimensional, un-even in the sense that it may be finished in one domain, but not in another, just as the markers of adulthood are appearing gradually, showing individual variations in timings (Arnett, 2000; Côté, 2006; Hartmann & Toguchi Swartz, 2007). This results in a sense of ambivalence in young people, producing a mixture of worry and anticipation, as reported by Arnett (2004a).

In the reviewed works, it was possible to discern factors playing a role in adult identity formation. Gilleard and Higgs (2016) point to the associations between identity

formation and the individual's reflexive capacity to draw meanings from life events. They go as far as to hold reflexivity as the condition for achieving "developmental virtues of adulthood" (*ibid:* 311), which is manifested in "deliberative actions" and "controlled narrativity" (*ibid*). Côté and Levine (2002) expand on by bringing in individual's agency and social organization or culture. They maintain that adult identity formation reflects a person's active pursuit, exploration, experimentation with life goals, values and self-regulatory processes, with reliance on social structures such as educational institutions, leisure organisations, workplace, family context, etc. As will be further elaborated in the Methodology chapter, factors such as deliberation, narrativity, individual's agency and social organization and culture are incorporated in the research design for approaching this problem.

What can be discerned from this sub-section is that adult identity represents a subjective sense of being an adult, in which a bulk of factors both subjective and objective, play a role. It emerges from a complex interplay of psychological traits, individual's agency, and social processes. Although it is evident that many factors are at play, relationships between them are not sufficiently documented and clarified in prior research. It remains unknown how important is attaining adult identity for individuals; is it the goal they are striving for personally, or is it something imposed as the expectation from society, and eventually, what it means for them personally to be an adult.

3.3.4 Adult identity formation as a developmental task

Although Erikson proposed the theory of identity formation for late adolescence, some research of the newer date has shown that identity attainment and maintenance processes extend deep into adulthood and last even across the whole life-span (cf. Whitebound, 1986; Gilleard & Higgs, 2016). Moreover, as Côté (2006) observes, it is widely accepted that the most critical phase in identity development occurs during the

transition to adulthood, while adulthood itself is understood in terms of continuous personal growth, an ongoing process that extends across the life course. Kroger (2007) explains why identity concerns become emergent in adolescence and points to the mixture of pressures of biological, psychological and social development. She goes on and describes this time as “when the social milieu begins to press for engagement in various adult psychosocial roles, and one’s biological and psychological features make responses to such processes both desirable and desired” (*ibid*: 192).

However, it has become widely accepted and supported by relevant research that the most intensive processes of identity formation and achievement concentrate around post-adolescent years and early adulthood (Schwartz, Côté, & Arnett, 2005). Soenens & Vansteenkiste (2011) go further concluding that identity formation as a developmental task is “a core feature of personality development during adolescence and through the life span“ (*ibid*: 381). Further extensions have shown that identity formation starts with adolescence and expands beyond its traditionally recognised timeline of teenage years, so the full sense of personal identity is expected to occur between 18 and 25, in a period recently conceptualised as “emerging adulthood” (Arnett, 2000; Robinson, 2015), which will be treated more extensively later in this chapter.

Erikson’s seminal theory emphasizes identity development as the most prominent developmental task of adolescence, and identity maintenance and revision as the developmental task during adulthood (cf. Kroger, 2017). Moreover, as Erikson maintained, “the major psychosocial task linking childhood with adulthood involves developing a viable adult identity” (cited after Côté & Levine, 2002: 14). Essentially, once the identity is achieved, a person enters adulthood. Equally significant is the presupposition that the process of identity development encompasses life-span perspective, respecting a totality of changes and transformations a person is subject to through life. The remainder of the section outlines characteristics of the process of adult identity formation as such, as known from the existing literature.

In the theoretical works, when speaking about the "identity work" that an individual has to undertake, two formulations appear – *identity discovery* and *identity construction* (Waterman, 1984; Berzonsky, 1986). The identity construction model focuses on the pragmatic value of identity processes, leading to successfully constructing such an identity that enables people to function and confront challenges in their social context. Hence, this model denies the existence of the true self and the substance inside a person that needs to be nurtured (Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2011: 381-382). It is more focused on the utilitarian value of identity processes and it takes the social system as the point of reference. Unlike the construction model, identity discovery or identity formation focuses on identity "as a person's internal representation of who he/she is in terms of life goals, attitudes, and abilities" (*ibid*: 383). Identity is thus closely linked to the self, while identity formation is essentially a process of cultivating the self and discovering who one truly is.

This model further maintains that adult identity is formed and developed by an individual interacting with the social context, in a process that combines both accidental and intentionally guided activities whereby education plays a paramount role in the process. Erikson's theory is the most prominent representative of this approach with its view on successful identity formation resulting from a combination of several crucial processes; identification with a role-model and introjection in the early childhood, individualisation, internalization of values and exploration during adolescence and emerging adulthood years (Luyckx et al., 2011). Within the Eriksonian tradition, adult identity formation represents a specific developmental task confronted by young people in late adolescence resulting in a qualitative change in "their thinking, feeling, behaving, valuing, and relating to others and oneself" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993: 2).

Two processes are leading to a successful adult identity formation – exploration and commitment. Exploration is related to young people's active experimentation and searching for their place, roles and orientations, while commitment refers to the personal dedication and investment into perceived relevant activities and incorporating them into personal identity (Kroger & Marcia, 2011: 33). Exploration underlies the

evaluation of the inputs from within and the environment to make decisions about important life choices. The exploration lies „at the heart of identity work in late adolescence and emerging adulthood" (Grotevant, 1987 cited after Luyickx et al., 2011: 79). Marcia (1980) also argues that exploratory behaviour is the most salient process in the "identity work" that youth has to undertake. Resulting from exploration are commitments taken on by an individual making an integral part of her/his sense of identity (Luyickx et al., 2011: 80). According to Erikson (1968), for adult identity formation to be successful, individuals need to go through internalization where identifications are assimilated into a set of coherent and unique commitments that are felt to reflect *who one is* as an adult person. Identity formation is not going on in the vacuum, distant from the overall social context and its institutions. As posited by psychosocial theory, there is an interplay of individual and social processes expressed in differentiation and integration as the core of the relationship between the individual and the broader context.

There are discussions (Brückner and Mayer, 2005; Shanahan, 2000) about institutionalisation/de-institutionalisation of the social world surrounding the transition to adulthood. Based on the *German Life History Study,* Brückner and Mayer (2005) conclude that although de-coupling of key life events and transitions is evident, in some regard institutionalisation is still in place, while in the other de-institutionalisation has already taken over. For instance, institutional framework continues to structure the social setting related to school, training and work, while private sphere, marital patterns, parenthood and forming an independent household are increasingly becoming de-standardized and de-institutionalised. Besides, there is a tendency towards equalisation of male and female pathways.

So far, we have presented what adult identity is and have seen that its essential feature is integrating a person's past and aspirations for the future in a coherent life story. This opens the floor for discussing adult identity as narrative identity, which helps pinpoint our methodological decisions.

3.3.5 Adult identity as narrative identity

Narrative identity, as elaborated by McAdams, represents a neo-Eriksonian model (Schwartz et al., 2013: 96), meaning that it rests on the prominent positions of identity formation developed in Erikson's psychosocial theory, such as identity as integrative force, dialectics between continuity and change, and identity development as a continual, life-long process. The concept of narrative identity as understood from the perspectives of psychology, is closely tied to the formation of adult identity. In McAdams's model, identity is not synonymous with self or self-concept, but rather with self-understanding (McAdams, 2001: 102). Therefore, narrative identity represents "the story of the self that weaves together the reconstructed past, the perceived present, and the imagined future, providing the individual with a sense of unity and meaning" (Adler et al., 2017: 519). Resonating his Eriksonian influences, McAdams further defines identity as "an integrative configuration of self-in-the-adult-world" (McAdams, 2001: 102). It is not that children do not have a sense of who they are; it is just that it becomes a psychosocial question only after adolescence, when society is posing pressure to youth to position themselves in terms of their occupation, values, beliefs and relationships. As it was explicated theoretically (McAdams, 1988) and supported by empirical evidence (e.g., Habermas & Bluck, 2000; Habermas & de Silveira, 2008), narrative identity emerges in the late adolescent years. Adolescence or young adulthood is when a person becomes "a biographer of self" (McAdams, 1988: 60; 2011: 103), and continues constructing and reconstructing his/her own life story for the rest of the life. Cognitive capacities of adolescence build on formal operational thinking and abstract forms of representing oneself, while life stories reflect causal and thematic coherence, also dealing with contradictions and paradoxes (McAdams, 2013a: 236). They reflect an adult identity that is being formed.

Narrative identity essentially represents an “internalized and evolving story of the self that provides a person’s life with some semblance of unity, purpose, and meaning“ (McAdams, 2011: 100; 2001: 102). It also provides „a subjective historical account of one’s own development, an instrumental explanation of a person’s most important commitments in the realm of work and love, and a moral justification of who a person was, is, and will be“ (*ibid*). As the cited passage indicates, narrative identity is closely connected to the human need for meaning-making, which is at the core of narration (Stapleton & Wilson, 2017). Narrative identity represents the third, the most advanced layer of human personality (Hooker and McAdams, 2003) or selfhood (McAdams and Cox, 2010), that of an *author* (cf. McAdams, 2011: 103). In the first years of life, human personality or selfhood is that of an *actor* defined by inherited dispositional traits. The second layer consists of characteristics that enable social adaptation and motivation of an *agent,* such as “goals, plans, desires, programs, and long-term aims” (McAdams, 2011: 103). The final layer, formed in adolescence and young adulthood, represents the I who is now an *author,* the one who is capable of putting the dispositional and social characteristics in a meaningful story (McAdams, 2013a; 2013b).

By equalizing life story with identity, McAdams (1988: 60) promotes the story as an object of identity investigation to which he approached via the Life-story questionnaire and interview[27]. The object of narrative identity research is a person’s life-story telling about “how she or he made sense of the various experiences and ‘turning points’ that comprise that life story, and the overall coherence and valence that characterizes the story” (Schwartz et al., 2013: 101). Therefore, it reveals how a person extracts lessons from memories, which “can be interpreted as a type of identity exploration” (McLean & Pratt, 2005 cited after *ibid*: 102).

A separate – though congruent – perspective of narrative identity was developed in the realm of philosophy with Paul Ricoeur as its most prominent author. For Ricoeur

[27] For the structure of Life Story Interview see https://www.sesp.northwestern.edu/foley/instruments/interview/ [April 11, 2016].

(1988), narrative identity speaks of change and permanence, and introduces two categories – *idem* ("identity understood in the sense of being the same") and *ipse* ("identity understood in the sense of oneself as self-same"). He continues explicating that "[u]nlike the abstract identity of the Same, this narrative identity, constitutive of self-constancy, can include change, mutability, within the cohesion of one lifetime" (Ricoeur, 1988: 246). This particular potency to put together disparate parts of one's life and to give them meaning as a whole is a signal of formed identity.

The narrative identity model as elaborated by Dan McAdams (1988; 2001; 2011; 2013) subsumes postulates of Erikson's theory on adult identity formation with the underlying dimensions of sameness and continuity that are brought to one's consciousness. "Erikson implied that ego identity needs to be organized not only synchronously, on the basis of identifications with roles, but first of all diachronically as a life story" (Habermas & de Silveira, 2008: 708). Another line of thinking about narrative identity has been developed within sociocultural model coming from Vygotsky's theory (McLean, Pasupathi & Pals, 2007), which emphasises emergence of stories from the interaction with others. Hence the narrative identity is formed from the very activity of storytelling by which experiences are shared, constructed and reconstructed against a specific sociocultural context. This approach also stresses the role of early socialisation and parental communication patterns in developing narrative skills and autobiographical reasoning.

As it can be discerned from the discussion presented in this section, narrative identity is emerging in the late adolescent years and is parallel to adult identity formation. Moreover, adult identity becomes apparent through the process of narration, whereby a person exposes the power of authorship over own life, which takes on a coherent form despite all the contradictions and disparities contained in it.

3.3.6 Conclusions

This section concludes the previous discussion pointing the rationale for Erikson's psychosocial theory as the theoretical framework for this research, which is due to the three basic positions. First is the centrality of identity formation for overall human psychosocial development. Erikson places adulthood as the central developmental domain recognising the interplay of psychological and social agents needed to attain adulthood. Secondly, its view on human development as a lifelong process guided by the epigenetic principle, or "a ground plan" (Erikson, 1968: 92), underlying psychosocial development and directing people towards more advanced modes of functioning. Thirdly, Erikson's position that a person's development is under the influence of social, cultural and institutional context, in addition to psychological factors (Patton, Renn, Guido & Quaye, 2016: 288). In the sense of identity development, social structures act as providing institutionalised moratorium, or a niche for intensive exploration processes. Erikson's theory is relevant for our research because it paved the path to most of the models existing nowadays, whether they are building on or against it.

What has been exposed in this section brings us to three conclusions central for further designing of our research study. Firstly, adult identity represents a complex juncture of various psychological, social, and cultural correlations. In essence, it encompasses all characteristics that define a person as an adult. Nowadays, it is maintained that those characteristics are not directly ascribed or put upon an individual, but they are sought for, cultivated and formed through structured and intentional acts of an institution or society. The formation process flows both by the individual's agency and support from societal structures (e.g., educational institutions, cultural organisations, sport and art unions, to name a few). This conclusion raises the question of social structures' actual role – particularly educational ones – in encouraging adult identity formation.

The second conclusion is that adult identity formation is the central developmental task coinciding with the years a person typically spends in higher education. As posited by Erikson, the early 20s is the time of intensive exploration, but not much of taking long-term commitments. This particular feature provides youth with the opportunity to question who they are, what they want to, what they strive for, and where they see themselves in the future. The third conclusion is that adult identity is related to the meaning-making process, and the ability to tell one's life story comprehensively. This aspect is particularly relevant for our decision to rely on narrative techniques such as the PCI as the main source of research data.

However, what has remained ambiguous thus far is the criteria for conferring adult status; what is it that grants a person the sense of being an adult? The following section brings an overview of different approaches to defining adult status, revealing the intricate network of today's adulthood conceptions.

3.4 Reconceptualising *adulthood*

At the beginning of the 20th century, scholarship and scientific research witnessed "invention" of adolescence at the hands of Stanley Hall (cf. Arnett, 2006). This resulted from changes in culture and society (cf. Settersten et al., 2005), where universal formal education became accessible after the age of 15 and child labour laws restricted their work in industry and agriculture. Society and individual's life course have changed substantively over the past century, challenging anew the ruling conceptions of human development, processes, structures and outcomes. Despite their classics status, much of the stage-graded theories have been disputed in their normativity and standardisation (cf. Pelaez et al., 2008), which suggests that in human development individual conditions and subjective agency play a salient role.

Adulthood represents a liminal period in an individual's life, when expectations are high, but attainment standards seem to be elusive. Defining adulthood as a phase in human development that follows immediately after adolescence and is determined by a set of pre-defined expectations, roles and psychological characteristics seem to speak too little about adulthood's reality. Hence, we should ask what adulthood represents nowadays, with extended and accessible post-secondary education, flexible work regimes, and diverse living arrangements related to family formation. A bulk of research has been conveyed addressing this question, but it seems that they reveal more and more cases of de-standardisation and de-normativisation in today's conceptions of adulthood. We should, perhaps, ask whether we need normative stage definition, or should we only become aware of diversity associated with circumstances and conditions related to conferring adult status. Findings from various research that will be presented later ask for going back to the very phenomenon of adulthood and raising anew the question of *what adulthood is nowadays.*

So far, two approaches have systematically challenged the question of adulthood. The one is proposed by Jeffrey Arnett, who formulated the concept of *emerging adulthood*, which presupposes existence of a distinct phase between adolescence and full adulthood (Arnett, 2004a; 2004b). The process of identity formation has changed under the influence of extended post-secondary education resulting in a "second age-period of relative dependency that is now called emerging adulthood" (Côté, 2006: 89). This concept is challenging new thinking from the perspective of discourse on delayed adulthood, while attempting not to fall into the trap of prolonged adolescence and immaturity, but rather emphasises the exploratory nature of the process leading to adulthood. The concept of *emerging adulthood* has been widely criticised (cf. Syed, 2015), and some of the critical points will be discussed later in this work. Conversely, the approach brought forward by Hartmann & Toguchi Swartz (2007) disclaims the existence of a new phase in the life of an individual. Instead, it proposes that we should conceive adulthood in a new manner, re-inventing it in the context of today's life and its changed sociological background, searching for *a new vision of adulthood* nowadays.

Regardless of the approach taken, we should ask: *What are the criteria for becoming an adult? When can we say that one has eventually transited to adulthood?* A number of studies from different fields of scholarship had previously addressed these questions. Traditional age limits are increasingly questioned by the concept of subjective age identity (Kirkpatrick Johnson, Allen Berg & Sirotzski, 2007). Besides, completing some of the traditionally accepted markers of adulthood, so-called “big 5” transition markers (Settersten, 2007), such as leaving parents’ home, finishing school, employment, financial independence, marriage, and becoming a parent in most of the Western societies now takes place markedly at later age than it was the case in the past. In a recent qualitative study based on a large sample on the meaning of marriage for young adults, only one-fifth of the participants in the study had got married at the age similar to their parents (Kefalas, Furstenberg, Carr & Napolitano, 2011). This tells of the change in traditionally accepted patterns of family commitments witnessed by today’s youth compared to the previous generations.

Moreover, the literature has already described that transitions to adulthood are sometimes reversible (Fussel & Furstenberg, 2005), implying that the time dimension can be fairly variable when considering the transition to adulthood. It is not uncommon that young people, often named the “boomerang generation”[28] return to their parents’ homes after spending a certain period living outside. The outspread of this phenomenon and a series of accompanying socio-economic and psychological correlates have recently generated a stream of research from the field of parenting, problematizing the quality of life of parents and the perception of their parental efficacy following the return of adult children to parents’ home (Tosi & Grundy, 2018). Some earlier studies spoke of “crowded nest syndrome” as one of the fundamental challenges of parenthood of a generation facing difficulties living independently (Schnaiberg & Goldenberg, 1989).

[28] http://www.lse.ac.uk/News/Latest-news-from-LSE/2018/03-March-2018/Boomerang-generation, [accessed April 30, 2018].

In a study from the late 1990s on whether higher education students are adults, Arnett (1994: 217) found that most participants did not consider it necessary to complete education to attain adult status. This finding was interpreted based on the expansion of education and the lifelong learning paradigm, which is even more widespread and supported. Furthermore, in subsequent studies, the same author (Arnett, 2003) concludes that “specific events traditionally viewed as marking the transition to adulthood, such as finishing education, beginning full-time work, and marriage, are irrelevant to the attainment of adult status” (*ibid*: 63). However, we should not undermine that the cited finding was drawn from the research in the American social context and that some variations across societies, particularly those not belonging to the group of countries with the same economic well-being, democratic culture fostering autonomy and individualism, can be expected. Variations in the transition paths and trajectories from adolescence to adulthood from European cultures have been recently documented in a volume edited by Rita Žukauskienė (2015). The studies conveyed across different countries and cultures unequivocally indicate the need for more extensive and locally specific research. There is a particular lack of research in post-Communist, post-conflict societies with the still turbulent political and economic environment; such is Bosnia and Herzegovina’s society.

This section reports on several studies that dealt with markers of adulthood, but it seems that they all left more questions open than solved. Although they managed to report on the effects of certain roles and psychological characteristics, they could not identify undisputed antecedents and correlates of attaining adult identity. Overall, findings from most of the studies support the urge for expanding awareness and tolerance of non-traditional and off-time transitions to adulthood put forward by Settersten (2003). In the remainder of the text, we shall deal with the transition to adulthood as a rising topic in the discussions about adulthood, which is coupled with the question of markers of adulthood.

Earlier theorists had displayed their ideas on developmental characteristics of the period following adolescence but not yet the „full“ adulthood. Erikson (1968), for

instance, deploys the term „prolonged adolescence", which is typical for the industrial era. He assumes that typical for young people in advanced societies is *a psychological moratorium*, representing „a delay of adult commitments. [...] It is a period that is characterized by a selective permissiveness on the part of society and of provocative playfulness on the part of youth" (Erikson, 1968: 157). Keniston (1970) proposes the term „youth" to demarcate the period between adolescence and early adulthood. Terms "young adulthood" and "early adulthood" are now also accustomed in the sociological parlance (Toguchi Swartz, Hartmann & Rumbaut, 2017: 1), suggesting that there are some peculiarities associated with the first years of adulthood compared to the later ones. Besides, Côté (2006: 112) proposes "alternative adulthoods" as opposed to "legal/traditional adulthood" starting with the age 18/19. The cited concepts reflect multiple relevances of the period leading to adulthood, which has recently come to occupy scholarship under the guise of *transition to adulthood.*

3.4.1 Transition to adulthood

By the time they enter higher education, young people have been exposed to various choices and decisions regarding their lives and futures. In this phase of life, most of them do not have a clear vision of what they will become by the time they complete their studies, nor where they are going to be after graduation. After living through the transition from secondary school to higher education, a new context provides a certain niche that grants students a safe zone for experimentation and questioning while for some time sparing them from many long-arching choices. The time of exploration and searching for new identities while suspending new responsibilities and commitments has been already explained in Erikson's theory by the term *psychological moratorium* (Erikson, 1968). Young people thus get several additional years for personal growth, learning and acquiring competencies, self-evaluation and questioning possibilities. Yet, in this phase of life, young people are no longer bound to the structured high school schedule, and have more freedom in self-

directing their life choices and developmental tasks. Therefore developmental scientists point to the importance of "social support and social psychological resources […] in facilitating young people's transition to adulthood that now extends to the 30s" (Benson & Elder, 2011: 1646).

For those opting for higher education, the new educational context offers time "in-between", granting them more autonomy than in the period of adolescence, but leaving them still to a certain extent dependent financially on their parents (cf. Arnett, 1998). Their prime identification as long as they are in higher education is that of a student, while committing to other roles is suspended, and they are overwhelmingly self-focused in their behaviour. However, a challenging world of possible routes and choices awaits them after completion of studies and in order to face them, present-day students need to acquire assets that will assist them in making decisions on which bridges to cross and which ones to burn. The exploration process that is inherently related to this period is not an aimless venture, but the one in which young people need support, and they seek it in the contexts of their secondary socialisation (cf. Gecas, 2001), such as higher education institutions, work settings, family or non-formal groups.

Young people's lives are certainly changing and require capacities to live through the change successfully. The points of transition challenge previously established perceptions of one's identities and mobilise the searching process anew. Participation in higher education becomes a station on their transition from adolescence to adulthood, but what is particularly its role in the process of young people's formation as persons? In this section, we aim to highlight the transition from adolescence to full adulthood as one of the most critical developmental challenges typical for the generation of students, which results in the formation of adult identity. Nevertheless, we should be cautious when speaking about attaining adult identity as it is widespread across literature that continual problems can be expected in the maintenance of identity once it is formed (Côté & Levine, 2002: 6). Likewise, as mentioned earlier, it was documented that the process of identity formation in some occasions can include regressive moments (Kroger & Marcia, 2011: 47), but in Erikson's view, it is a

progressive, cumulative process, whereby “every phase has to be traversed satisfactorily before the next one can be embarked upon” (Meeus, 1992: 85). Hence, stagnation moments signal foreclosures, not regressions. Foreclosures’ occurrence signals an individual’s need for some more time for exploratory and self-searching behaviour in that particular phase. Waterman’s earlier research confirms Erikson’s hypothesis “that movement from adolescence to adulthood involves changes in identity that can be characterized as progressive developmental shifts” (Waterman, 1984: 355). In support of this also speak findings from longitudinal studies that have shown a “higher prevalence of progressive than regressive shifts” (Meeus, van de Schoot, Keijers, Schwartz & Branje, 2010: 1566).

The remainder of this section first shows how the transition to adulthood has become a relevant topic for developmental studies only recently. It continues with criteria for adulthood, which are facing a paradigm shift from traditionally predicted age limits to fluid, extended, and utterly subjective paths and trajectories.

3.4.1.1 De-standardising transition

Transition to adulthood became both developmentally and socially relevant issue as the effect of immense social changes witnessed at the turn of the centuries, such as extension in the duration of compulsory education, the massification of higher education, and shrinking possibilities for youth participation in labour market. The “normal biography” with clearly defined routes and certainty in transition from school to labour market known to the youth of the twentieth century collapsed under the social changes of late modernity (cf. Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992). According to Furlong and Cartnel (2007), social changes have created circumstances in which “young people frequently lack clear frames of reference and attempt to establish adult identities in a world which they perceive as filled with risk and uncertainty” (*ibid:* 59). The emerging research practice on developmental processes in the transition to adulthood started to reveal a series of specific features of this period; from the question of defining criteria for adulthood (Benson & Furstenberg, 2007; Robette, 2010; Lyons, 2015; Panagakis,

2015), over limitations and delimitations of stage approach to understanding human development in this period (Reis & Youniss, 2004; Pelaez et al., 2008), to relations between the transition to adulthood and participation in education (Goossens, 1995; Côté & Levine, 1997; Berman et al., 2008; Patton et al., 2016). Existing scholarship points out that uncertainty and lack of referential solid points in society are making the transition from adolescence to adulthood de-standardised in which every individual is in a position to set own subjective "standards" of attaining adult identity. This is reflected in the move from "normative" to "choice" biographies of youth (Furlong, Cartmel & Biggart, 2006), which is a question that we will come back to later.

Nowadays, the dominant standpoint is that the human developmental path is lifelong, non-linear and that there are always possibilities for different developmental outcomes. This position is especially affirmed by life-span developmental psychology, with Paul Baltes as one of its most prominent authors. Baltes (1987) displays thesis that human development is a lifelong and multidimensional process, grounded in the assumption that it is necessary to address multiple referential frameworks for understanding changes in humans. In addition, the human development perspective opposes to uniform and final answer to the question: *What happens with the individuals across their life-span?* It respects the fact that there are certain normative, but also individual moments of development, that there are influences which are of general and specific character and that every individual is not necessarily destined to a single developmental path, nor that "critical phases" once for all seal her/his developmental possibilities.

Literature on adult education is ambiguous when it comes to defining adulthood, and has for a long time been founded in the concept of maturity, which was divided on biological, psychological, social and professional (Andrilović, Matijević, Pastuović, Pongrac & Špan, 1985). While biological (physical and physiological maturation of organism and its functions) and psychological maturity (balance in psychological functioning) are prerequisite for speaking about adulthood, social and, specifically, professional maturity can be obtained only if there are proper preconditions

in the person's environment (cf. Mavrak, 2005). Discussing the changing nature of maturity and identity, James Côté (2000), in a rather ominous manner, writes about "arrested adulthood", referring to young people who are not growing up in the traditional sense, meaning that they are not becoming mature enough to take responsibilities of adult life.

On the other side, in the present scholarship, the focus has been moved from the question of defining adulthood to the question of *transition to adulthood,* which has become more complex inside the uncertain realities of the world that we live in, marked by contingency, fluidity and opposing to traditional patterns. Discussing social changes leading to differentiation of transitional period between adolescence and adulthood, Furstenberg contends that for generations living by the late twentieth century, "adulthood began as soon as adolescence ended" (Furstenberg, 2013: 30), while today for most young people, at least in the Western societies, between adolescence and adulthood there is a transitional period that commonly lasts more than a decade. Buchmann (1989) rightly posed a question three decades ago whether anything resembled common and institutionalised pathways to adulthood, alluding to utterly individualised experiences of transition into adulthood.

Problematizing youth's crossing to adulthood, Hartmann & Toguchi Swartz (2007) argue about "new adulthood", indicating the existing need for re-conceptualization of adulthood itself, as "less of a static state or a permanent status […] and more of an ongoing process of development, achievement and discovery that extends across the life course, occurs in all domains of life, and varies from individual to individual." (*ibid*: 279). Such a conception of present-day adulthood is a reflection of weakening and questioning traditional perceptions of adulthood *per se* and economic, cultural presumptions of what is considered a successful biography (cf. Arnold, 2016). Some recent studies on delayed adulthood or extended adolescence (cf. Kins & Beyers, 2010; Sharon, 2016), while emphasising the exploratory dimension of transition to adulthood and the salience of psychological factors, also draw attention to possible side-effects of such developmental path. A series of studies indicate the importance of adult

identity formation for the sense of stability, self-continuity, and life satisfaction (Côté, 2006). Other studies reveal a correlation between antisocial behaviours and the absence of work and family markers of adulthood (Massoglia & Uggen, 2010). This all speaks of the importance of a systematic and structural approach to encouraging adult identity formation, and providing growth opportunities and support within the social institutions.

It can be concluded that external criteria for transition to adulthood have been documented as not taken-for-granted markers of adulthood. Moreover, they are treated context-specific, varying with other demographic characteristics and traditions related to different geographies and cultures. The labiality of external factors has prompted a whole stream of research on the transition to adulthood based on subjective judgments and perceptions of what it means to be an adult, which essentially constitutes the core of adult identity.

3.4.2 Objective markers and subjective experiences of adult identity

The main objective in this sub-section is to discuss subjective and objective criteria for attaining adult identity. Drawing from the relevant prior studies, we aim to present existing knowledge and current gaps to position this research study. As discussed earlier, defining adult identity is not an easy undertaking since no clear and uniform markers confirm adult status. Moreover, empirical evidence suggests that "young people's sense of adulthood may fluctuate considerably", especially during early adulthood (Benson & Furstenberg, 2007: 214). Different social systems have specific criteria; for the state, a person has entitled adult responsibilities at a certain age (most commonly 18 or 21), when it is considered ready to take on social obligations. In some religious traditions, there are biological criteria when a person is conferred upon an adult's status. From the perspective of the educational system, one is considered an adult based on her/his position concerning formal education, though, as mentioned

earlier, the educational criteria should be taken with caution, considering expansion of learning and education beyond traditional boundaries and spaces and the widespread of lifelong learning paradigm. However, leaving high school has been documented to be a marker of adulthood for young people not proceeding to post-secondary education (Benson & Edin, 2005). Differences related to family socioeconomic status, origin and social background are reported in some prior studies (Kirkpatrick Johnson et al., 2007: 249-251; Benson & Furstenberg, 2007; Hendry & Kloep, 2010), while others argue about more similarities than differences across social classes, which supports the thesis of belongingness to a common life stage regardless of the social class, as proposed by Arnett (cf. Arnett, 2016: 233). These indicate the lack of a stable referential framework and a mosaic of differences that urge special mindfulness when defining adulthood.

Adulthood was traditionally considered growing out of the criteria related to social roles and tasks bound to specific age expectancies. Recently, stipulated by growing research reporting on the individualized character of the transition to adulthood, the focus was moved to "the person's recognition, interpretation, and evaluation of experiences associated with those trajectories" (cf. Eliason, Mortimer, Vuolo, 2015: 206). By the end of the 20th century, the literature was reporting on the lack of normativism in transition to adulthood in the late modernity and insufficiency of traditional external markers for defining whether one has formed adult identity or not (Buchmann, 1989; Elder, 1985). In a volume on trajectories and transitions in the life course dynamics in the second half of the 20th century, Elder raised a question that seems to be far from a proper resolution even today; "At what point, do young people begin to take an adult standpoint and view themselves accordingly?" (Elder, 1985: 173).

The recent turn to subjective experiences of adulthood and transition to it, as well as actualisation of the concepts such as adult identity (Lyons, 2015) and subjective age identity (Kirkpatrick Johnson, et al., 2007) have paved a path to phenomenological approach to adulthood and, effectively, to grasping the multitude of subjective routes. Several recent studies raised questions such as what it means to be an adult, what makes a person consider her/himself an adult, and how individuals think of themselves when

asked whether they are adults (Arnett, 2001; Galambos, Turner & Tilton-Weaver, 2005; Shanahan, Portfeli, Mortimer & Erickson, 2005; Hartmann & Toguchi Swartz, 2007; Fadjukoff, Pulkkinen & Kokko, 2016; Tagliabue, Crocetti & Lanz, 2016). Common to all these studies is that they focus on the adult sense of the self regardless of chronological age – whether they name it adult identity or not – which constitutes what is called subjective adult identity (Lyons, 2015).

It is evident that recently the focus of scholarship has been moved from objective markers of transition into adulthood to subjective perceptions and experiences, e.g., understanding the process of becoming an adult and the criteria young people see as making them adults. However, it is still not possible to state with confidence how the transition to adulthood is understood and experienced by the persons living through the process. A variety of methodological approaches are employed in prior research, from quantitative surveys, systematic literature reviews to qualitative techniques, life histories, or intensive interviews. Some of them will be readdressed in the later chapter when explicating the methodological framework. The literature on adult identity takes one of the three perspectives grounded in much of the theoretical works; acquisition of adult roles and commitments, development of adult character qualities, and the model confluencing roles and character qualities (Kirkpatrick Johnson et al., 2007: 244). For the sake of clarity, the three perspectives will be elaborated separately in the remainder of the text.

3.4.2.1 Adult roles and tasks

Role transitions related to completing education, establishing stable love relationships, family, employment, and financial independence are traditionally considered "objective" markers of adulthood, implying that there are the right age and a particular arrangement in roles and tasks taking by which young persons get delivered to adulthood.

However, this topic reveals more complexities and ambiguities than might be expected. Even the studies arguing for role-taking as a marker of adulthood are restraining from exclusivist conclusions leaving space for a wealth of different influences and conditions leading to the perception of oneself as an adult. Even more ambiguous is the question of relatedness between the different markers (e.g., whether one comes to perceive her/himself as an adult and then comes to take certain roles or vice versa). Nevertheless, identity, roles and commitments are bound together in a specific way. This linkage, Macmillan (2007), drawing substantially from Stryker's identity theory, explains in the way that related to role-taking, "identities are multiple but variable" and dependent on the "hierarchy of salience" that affects the "varying degrees of commitment that one has toward different roles" (*ibid*: 14). He continues with a thesis that role commitments are not free from social relations and structures, which "either facilitate or impede access to a given role" (*ibid*). Their embeddedness in the social structures has resulted in specific role expectations for certain groups of people (present, for instance, in Havighurst's developmental tasks theory from the 1950s), from which contemporary scholarship is distancing itself quite transparently.

Most of the studies on adult roles taking have treated each role separately, making it difficult to document which one is the most related to attaining adult identity, under which circumstances, and the nature of that relationship. The question of roles taking raises three issues – how entering adult roles signifies becoming an adult for young people (Benson & Furstenberg, 2007: 200); which roles impose adult status more directly compared to others; and especially relevant from the perspective of our research, what role higher education plays in adult identity formation.

It was reported (Shanahan et al., 2005) that young persons who had completed all three transitions: establishing independence from parents, marrying or cohabiting, and becoming a parent tend to see themselves as adults in twice more cases compared to those who had not experienced this set of transitions. Researching the meaning of marriage for young adults, Kefalas et al. (2011) conclude the existence of the two groups – *marriage planners* and *marriage naturalists*. The authors contend that the

difference between the two is that "whereas the naturalists see marriage as a prerequisite for being an adult, planners want to establish themselves as adults *before* they wed" (*ibid*: 870). Furthermore, when it comes to parenthood, some findings indicate a different impact of entering this role on women and men experiences of adult identity, whereby having a child is found to be a marker of adulthood for women but not for men (Benson & Furstenberg, 2007: 214). According to existing knowledge, it remains unspecified under which conditions the role of a parent forms one's adult identity. Two persons who become parents in the age of 21 and 29 can have completely different experiences of their transition to adulthood, and it remains unclear whether their parenthood has made them an adult or some other previous or future transitions. However, Shanahan, Porfeli, Mortimer and Erickson (2005), based on their study on subjective age identity and transitions to adulthood suggest that the experience of family-related markers (marriage/cohabitation, living in an independent household, and parenthood) are positive correlates of adult identity, while experiences of attainment related transitions (completion of education or full-time work) are not.

In a study based on a systematic literature review investigating how do young people deal with identity formation during the transition from higher education to work, it was found that "emerging adults use the transition to answer identity questions and find out what job fits them best" (Grosemans, Hannes, Neyens and Kyndt, 2018: 18). Although it needs further empirical underpinning, the cited study indicates that taking job-related tasks can foster identity formation and the sense of responsibility and capacities of self-evaluation, which constitute individualistic criteria of adulthood discussed later in this work. Benson and Furstenberg (2007) report on the relatedness of employment and independence from parents in adult identity formation, explicating that „youths with full-time work do not feel fully adult unless they have also moved out of their parents' household" (*ibid*: 215). Further consequences of this finding suggest that being an adult means being independent of parents and capable of sustaining oneself financially. Moreover, financial responsibilities (paying rent and providing life maintenance to own household) have proved in several studies to be positively and

significantly related to subjective adult status (Benson & Furstenberg, 2007: 204; Andrew, Eggerling-Boeck, Sandefur & Smith, 2007: 229).

However, it was possible to identify a gap in present scholarship regarding research on the role of higher education in students' transition to adulthood and adult identity formation. In the concluding remarks for this sub-section, it should be stated that the cited literature provides evidence on how roles and tasks taking affect adult identity formation, whereby roles related to financial independence and responsibilities are weighed more than others. What is also evident is the importance of the context and circumstances under which certain transitions occur. Most of the studies reviewed did confirm that the process of becoming an adult in relation to a particular role-taking is deeply questioned nowadays when individualistic transition regimes and specific biographies are at play (Arnett, 2001; Andrew et al., 2007; Benson & Furstenberg, 2007). In addition, role-taking has a profound sociological connotation and dependence on cultural norms and expectations (Côté, 2000). Furthermore, as Benson and Furstenberg (2007) observe, there are differences in the perception of the significance of role-taking depending on whether one has acquired that role or not. Besides, roles can have a different impact on adult identity if they occur in combination with other roles (e.g., financial independence and moving out from parents).

It is also reported that young people in developed societies and originating from average or higher SES families tend to take on roles associated with adulthood at later age compared to young people from rural areas and lower SES background (Kirkpatrick Johnson et al., 2007; Benson & Furstenberg, 2007). This finding goes hand in hand with Erikson's psychological moratorium concept found in young people from industrialised societies with widely accessible post-secondary education and relative social security. Moreover, it was also reported (Cohen, Kasen, Chen, Hartmark & Gordon, 2003) that adult identity development can be domain-specific, meaning that a person can feel an adult in one way but not in another. The bulk of literature on adult roles and tasks and their relation to adult identity formation provides a particular insight into the relevant factors and circumstances, but still leaves us in need of further explanations, especially

concerning a diversity of social and cultural contexts and a variety of paths and trajectories young people can take. What can be discerned from the previous elaboration is that ordering and timings of roles taking are related to attaining adult status, but that the actual attainment is fairly subjective nowadays. In the mosaic of influences affecting one's adult identity formation, the literature indicates (Arnett, 2001; 2004a; Andrew et al., 2007; Cuzzocrea, 2018) that qualities of character together with other personal attributes should not be undermined.

3.4.2.2 Personal attributes

Demographic criteria such as age have been for a long time considered an "objective marker" of adulthood, yet, along with other previously held for granted characteristics, this one also has been questioned, shedding light on a group of individualistic characteristics playing a role in determining an individual's adult status. These characteristics are also referred to in the literature as the "inner side" of the transition to adulthood (Andrew et al., 2007). Others (cf. Scheer, Unger & Brown, 1996) put it among "cognitive-related factors" such as responsibility for oneself and making decisions, which are found relevant for the discussion about the end of adolescence. While much is known about changes in role taking, "less is known about how young people make sense of these changes" (Benson & Furstenberg, 2007: 201), and what markers they associate with becoming an adult.

In a study conveyed in the European context, it was found that "there are more young people than expected who do not use role transitions, age transitions, relational maturity or norm compliance as criteria to define adulthood" (Tagliabue et al., 2016: 385). Breaking up with traditional norms and expected pathways, young people are experiencing a rather individualistic, unpredicted and non-linear transition to adulthood, which is most intensively recognised as a period of searching for one's identity and self-exploration. Similar conclusions were drawn from the study conveyed by Scheer et al. (1996), where adolescents assessed themselves with the psychological criteria such as reaching maturity/taking responsibility, making one's own decisions and feeling

financially independent, more often than they referred to any demographic criteria. This speaks of the intricate relationships between varieties of markers of adulthood. Furthermore, certain research results show that “demographic markers provide the necessary structure for achieving many of the internal and individualistic changes” (Andrew et al., 2007: 228). Similarly, studies confirm that although demographic markers are not universal signals of adult identity, they still remain significant, even in understanding subjective perceptions and experience of transitioning to adulthood (Holmstrom et al., 2000).

As shown previously, a sizeable corpus of studies gives evidence that adult roles and tasks taking is not a linear marker of adult status. Roles and tasks are socially constructed and, in most cases, are related to life paths and trajectories one might experience; they tend to be delayed, impermanent and self-managed. On the other side, studies argue for adult identity as a subjective construct resting upon individualistic criteria, dominantly of psychological character (Panagakis, 2015). Among the most prominent authors proposing the subjective construction of adulthood is Jeffrey Arnett, who contends that individual characteristics such as independence, responsibility, emotional and cognitive maturity are more relevant for the sense of adult identity than taking adult roles (Arnett, 1998; 2000). In one of the earliest studies on the conceptions of the transition to adulthood that was conveyed comparatively on the sample of adolescents, emerging adults and young-to-midlife adults using quantitative techniques, Arnett (2001) extracted certain qualities of character that he called *individualistic criteria* to be one of the most important markers of the adult identity formation. According to this author, the individualistic criteria entail accepting responsibility for oneself, making independent decisions, financial independence, and establishing relationships with parents as an equal adult (Arnett, 2001: 134; Arnett, 2004a; 2004b). In Arnett’s research, a high percentage (75%) of participants dismissed transitional demographic transitions as something making them feel like adults (Arnett, 1998). This speaks in favour of subjective criteria for attaining adulthood on account of role transitions.

What was previously said opens the path for two essential categories in the group of personal attributes or individualistic criteria of adulthood – *subjective age* and *psychological maturity*. The subjective age concept (cf. Galambos et al., 2005) has risen as a counterpart to the objective age, which implies that there is an individual's perception of "own aging and maturation process in comparison with sameage peers and their identification with certain age groups" (Benson et al., 2012: 1753), whereby the pace of acquiring adult-like conceptions of the self is individual and diverse. The same authors cite evidence that subjective age plays a role in stepping towards financial and residential independence, which was shown in prior research as a relevant marker of adulthood, just as there is evidence that adult roles taking affects one's subjective age and self-perception as an adult. Studies (cf. Galambos et al., 2005: 540; Benson & Furstenberg, 2007) document that subjective age fluctuates, particularly in young people between adolescence and adulthood.

Based on the study with university students in Canada, it was reported that there is a significant negative linear relationship between chronological and subjective age, with 25.5 years as the turning point from an older to younger subjective age (Galambos et al.: 550-551). Previously, Montepare and Clements (2001) suggested that social and autobiographical reference points influence subjective age, sometimes manifested in higher subjective age in adolescents with deviant behaviour or senior adults feeling aimless and living an unfulfilled life. Eliason et al. (2015) point to the interplay of a person's recognition, interpretation, and evaluation of experiences associated with trajectories leading to adulthood and social comparisons of where one stands relative to significant others at the same or other life stages, and stage-specific personal identities and behaviours.

Another stream of research has been supported by Greenberger and Steinberg (1986) who proposed a theoretical model of psychosocial maturity, focusing on the three aspects that develop during the adolescence and early adulthood: *temperance* – the capacities of controlling impulses, including aggressive impulses; *perspective* – the ability to take various points of view, to think about long-term consequences;

responsibility – taking full control of own behaviour and resisting the influences of others. Later additions to Greenberger's model adapted it more for the contemporary context and the young people transiting to adulthood.

More recently, Benson et al. (2012) define psychosocial maturity as autonomy (independence, self-reliance, and the ability to set and meet goals) and social responsibility (contributing to the well-being of society and tolerating differences in others). The same authors further distinguish between household responsibility and financial responsibility, of which both are playing a role in adult identity constitution. Studies conveyed by Morales-Vives, Camps, Lorenzo-Seva and Vigil-Colet (2014) point to the possible threat of neglecting the maturity concept in defining adulthood. Researching the role of psychological maturity in direct and indirect aggressiveness in Spanish adolescents, the authors conclude that less mature adolescents tend to show higher direct aggression levels (physical and verbal). However, the conclusion should be drawn concerning the operationalisations of psychological maturity used in the study. For the cited study, it was divided into three components: work orientation – an individual's willingness to fulfill his or her obligations; self-reliance – a person's willingness to take the initiative, without allowing others to exercise control; identity – as the adolescent's knowledge of him or herself (*ibid.*: 2).

In the closing remarks for the segment on personal attributes or individualistic characteristics in defining adult identity, let us cite two views that alert caution. The first one is the standpoint found in Benson et al. (2012) that personal attributes are essential for defining one's adult status mainly because they provide a framework or resources needed for completing tasks and role-taking. For instance, in school-to-work transition, important facilitators can be self-reliance, responsible autonomy and adaptive potential. This implies further interplay of personal characteristics with roles and task taking. The second is cited by Andrew et al. (2007), who warn against the tendency to exclude traditional demographic markers and bare focus on the inner side of the transition to adulthood. Hence, they call for "a more tempered view of the importance of individualistic and internal changes and demographic markers" (*ibid*: 230), which can

be navigated by more qualitative studies on the topic of transition to adulthood. These concluding remarks lead us further to the doors of the confluence approach, which tends to integrate adult identity psychological elements with objective markers.

3.4.2.3 Confluence of roles, tasks, and personal attributes

Research on subjective criteria for attaining adult status illuminate important psychological processes of becoming an adult, but they are not free of critics, which come from two sides: artificial division of subjective and objective markers, which is due to the underdeveloped theoretical framework and methodological assets for researching this problem (Andrew et al., 2007) and overemphasis of subjective, individual criteria in attaining adult status, which is prevailing in Arnett's works (cf. Shanahan et al., 2005). The latter authors do not dismiss the role of either group of markers suggesting that a subjective sense of adulthood may be emerging simultaneously with entering adult roles. This view is compatible with Stryker's identity theory (cf. Serpe & Stryker, 2011) within social interactionist tradition, emphasizing the importance of roles taking in seeing oneself as an adult. Likewise, critics of Arnett's positions note that "objective role configurations and pathways have continuing importance for youth's cognitive interpretations of their own progress to adulthood" (Eliason et al., 2015: 223).

Summarising results from previous studies within the confluence model, Andrew et al. (2007) suggest that both objective and subjective criteria play a role in adult identity formation or the sense of oneself as an adult. Moreover, they conclude that "individualistic characteristics and demographic markers need not be antithetical and appear to be intimately related in young people's conceptions of the transition to adulthood" (Andrew et al., 2007: 229). When asked about whether they have reached adulthood, most people have in mind the timings for the tasks, activities and roles associated with adulthood, which to a large extent reflect society's expectations and the image of the "right transition" and "the right timing".

Nevertheless, the sense of identity includes the image of oneself and the image others have; the more congruence between the two, the more secure a person is in her/his identity. Adults assess whether their self-concept matches "their 'ideal' (aspirational) or 'ought' (obligational) selves. Adherence to age norms might constitute elements of both the 'ought' self, or one's perception of the general social norm, and the 'ideal' self, or what one wishes to achieve" (Eliason et al., 2015: 208). This partly speaks of the role of socialization processes, manifested in gender-related peculiarities reported by Aronson (2008). Besides concluding that objective markers do have a role in constructing a subjective sense of adult identity, she identified that women associate two markers with adulthood – parenthood and financial independence, while full-time work did not show an important role. This is also associated with how young people make sense of changes within themselves and outside, posed earlier by Benson and Furstenberg (2007: 201). However, social and cognitive processes underlying adult status assessment have not been illuminated sufficiently, as noted by Eliason et al. (2015).

In a study from the 1990s, Sheer and Palkovitz (1994) argue that young people between the age of 15 and 28 assess their perception of adult status based on both achieved role statuses and personal qualities. Further studies, focusing on the psychological states of being and independence versus sociological conceptions such as role achievement and aspiration, Hartmann & Toguchi Swartz (2007) argue that transition to adulthood includes "a dynamic, multi-dimensional *package* of new social roles and personal attributes" (*ibid*: 278, italics original). In line with this, Shanahan et al. conclude that "adult status is likely based upon a combination of personal qualities and social roles" (2005: 251). Massoglia and Uggen (2010) go further, indicating the interrelatedness of the two groups of criteria, suggesting that youth who feel like an adult may have embraced adult roles and responsibilities. Support for the confluence model is also found in Erikson's theory, which sees identity as "a product of individual factors unique to the individual combined with experiential factors derived from social forces" (Whitebourne, 1986: 17).

What hinders drawing sound conclusions on the associations between different markers is that when discussing personal attributes, most of the adult roles have been examined separately without looking at their relatedness to other roles and psychological criteria. Hence it is possible to identify which specific roles and personal characteristics are a part of a person's sense of adulthood, but what is missing is the nature of associations between the two sets of markers. In addition, Kirkpatrick Johnson et al. (2007) suggest that associations between objective and subjective markers vary by socioeconomic status and race. Based on presented prior research, it seems that the confluence model provides a comprehensive and inclusive approach that respects complex conditions under which adult identity is formed. However, many questions are remaining open concerning adulthood markers, and our research will be directed to examining how students narrate about their process of forming adult identity and the role of higher education as the most important social structure for this group of young people.

3.4.3 Conclusions

This section discussed the concept of adulthood, which has been challenged in prior scholarship by the concepts of *emerging adulthood* (Arnett, 2000; 2004a; 2004b; 2016)*, new adulthood* (Hartman & Toguchi Swartz, 2007) and *arrested adulthood* (Côtè, 2000). All three indicate the break-up with traditional static view on adulthood as a set of pre-defined roles and tasks ordered linearly, and put on an individual at a certain age. A changed view on adulthood has given rise to questioning the transition to adulthood and markers for attaining adulthood. Prior research shows fairly individual, non-traditional and non-standard transition pathways and trajectories coupled with the collapse of normative biographies.

Markers of adulthood are here discussed within the three approaches encountered in prior works: acquisition of adult roles and commitments, development of

adult character qualities, and the confluence of the two. Although demographic markers related to adult roles and tasks taking have been widely disputed as not universal signals of adult identity, they remain relevant, even in understanding subjective perceptions and experiences. The frequently cited approach proposing the subjective construction of adulthood is that by Arnett (2004a; 2004b), who posits three individual characteristics to be crucial for an individual's sense of being an adult: independence, responsibility, emotional and cognitive maturity. Summarising from the prior studies on markers of adult identity, it is possible to form an operational definition utilised throughout this research. Adult identity here is seen as a set of characteristics and behaviours that reflect independence, autonomy in decisions, clarity in personal and academic goals, and meaning-making from life events.

Based on the presented challenges in conceptualising adulthood, it can be concluded that scholarship has taken on the "subjective turn", opening towards individual experiences of young people and their sense of whether they have attained adult identity or not. Recent research focuses on the three questions;

- What it means to be an adult?
- What makes a person consider her/himself an adult?
- How individuals think of themselves when asked whether they are adults?

This reflects the rising relevance of the biographical method, particularly concerning the move from normative to choose biographies (Furlong et al., 2006) of the youth transiting to adulthood.

Given its correlation with a series of socio-economic, cultural, and even psychological factors, the phenomenon of adult identity formation is far from being fully illuminated. Among the whole mixture of different influences that occur, of particular interest for us comes participation in higher education and the totality of experiences it has to offer to young people's development and growth. It was also identified the lack of research outside the Western societies.

This section highlighted adult identity formation as one of the most important developmental challenges typical for higher education students. The literature pinpoints

the importance of social support and social-psychological resources in facilitating adult identity formation and transition to adulthood (cf. Benson & Elder, 2011). However, the role of higher education in that process has not been fully illuminated. The psychosocial approach to identity formation informs that the higher education context grants students opportunities for exploratory behaviour while saving them from long-lasting commitments. This further raises the questions of the mechanisms by which higher education experience performs its formative role, and that is the question that is dealt with in the subsequent section.

3.5 Adult identity formation in higher education context

This section discusses adult identity formation related to students' higher education experience, intending to set the theoretical basis for researching the linkages between them. Theoretical models that have been utilised in prior studies include Erikson's psychosocial theory (e.g., Sneed, Whitebourne and Cullang, 2006) and, more frequently, Marcia's theory (e.g., Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens and Beyers, 2006; Kunen, 2009; Kroger, Martinussen and Marcia, 2010). Marcia's status model was designed to provide "a methodological device by means of which Erikson's theoretical notions about identity might be subjected to empirical study" (Marcia, 1980: 161). However, it was widely criticised, particularly concerning its incongruence with Erikson's notions (cf. Côtè & Levine, 1988). This research is based on Erikson's positions, for they provide a framework for integrating psychological and social dimensions reflected in his concept of the psychosocial *moratorium.* Likewise, Erikson posited that educational institutions and relationships with other persons represent identity development sources (Reis and Youniss, 2004: 32).

Although Erikson's theory recognises the importance of social structures and, consequently, educational setting for identity formation processes, the limitation is that it does not provide sufficient reference to the actual benefits for students' development, since it was not designed for university context exclusively. On the other hand, Arnett's (2000; 2004a; 2004b; 2016) concept of emerging adulthood provides more insight into the adult identity formation processes, specifically in higher education students. Arnett's concept is utilised here for the breadth of descriptions and research findings concerning the youth in higher education. However, we are sceptical about its aspirations for theory status, as it has also been argued elsewhere (Côtè, 2014; Syed, 2016).

This section first addresses the factors participating in students' adult identity formation drawing on psychosocial approach and prior empirical studies, with the aim of setting the scene for evaluating the role of higher education. We continue with the status of higher education students in research on adult identity formation and then refer to them as a group of emerging adults, as Arnett's work suggests. Further, higher education is viewed in the context of psychosocial moratorium and the formational potentials it grants to students. The concluding remarks summarise main discussions on factors and processes partaking in students' adult identity formation presented throughout the section to open the path for designing the methodological framework for this study.

3.5.1 Factors participating in students' adult identity formation

It has become widely accepted that adult identity is a complex structure development of which is influenced by several factors that differ depending on the theoretical positions (cf. Brezonsky, 1989; Côté & Levine, 2002; Fadjukoff, 2007; Benson & Johnson, 2009; McAdams & Cox, 2010; Carlsson et al., 2015; Kroger, 2017). Earlier approaches, such as that from the side of developmentalists, defined adult identity formation regarding the age-graded criteria. However, current understandings disentangle developmental processes from normativity and linear causality and regard age only as "a proxy for underlying and co-occurring processes" (McLean & Syed, 2015: 567). The psychosocial approach, as discussed earlier, observes adult identity formation as an effect of integration and synthesis of the three groups of factors: biological growth, psychological experiences, and social context. This coincides with the trinary structure of identity within Eriksonian tradition, described by Kroger (2007: 128), which encompasses: biological capacities, psychological needs, wishes, interests, conscious and unconscious motivation and social context. Having adopted a psychosocial approach to adult identity formation, it is necessary to confront the two

main questions: (a) what role plays each of the factors constituting one's adult identity? and (b) what is the nature of the relationship between the factors?

It should be noted that both questions touch upon the intricate processes of human development that elude precise determinations. Moreover, as Hendricks (2012), a life-course scholar, maintains, there is "no standard model" (*ibid:* 226), for researching human development is not the matter of "an exact science" (*ibid*). He continues pointing to "a hierarchical problem in explaining the fluidity in the constellation of factors influencing life course" (*ibid*). The life course perspective adds a valuable view of the factors participating in human development, which is congruent with the psychosocial approach to adult identity formation.

Apart from advancing the integrative view on factors participating in identity formation, Erikson's breakthrough showcases the social context as a salient factor. Unlike his predecessors, who emphasize biological conditions of growth, Erikson maintained that "body, mind *and* society were equally critical in determining the process and patterns of growing up" (Gilleard & Higgs, 2016: 307, original italics). The equal status of all three factors of growth should be noted, whereby under certain circumstances, each of them can play a pivotal role, which makes research on adult identity formation intriguing and gruelling. Erikson goes further, posing the question of how systems support or fail to support "the generative potential in adults and the readiness for growth and development in those growing up" (Erikson, 1980: 49). Erikson himself appraises the intricacy of relationships between the developmental influences pointing to the complexity of processes of "mutual assimilation of somatic, mental, and social patterns which amplify one another" (Erikson, 1963: 156). Accentuating mutual assimilation and amplification as the processes regulating the interrelations of identity formation factors, Erikson disapproves of linear causality and the possibility for straightforward identification of causes and effects. Drawing on Erikson's ideas in contemporary scholarship, Syed and McLean (2015: 566) point to the cumulative effect of various factors participating in identity formation, explaining how none of them plays separately and without the influences of the remaining aspects. They

also describe integration and interrelatedness of identity levels and components in the way that "[o]ne's personal experiences (ego identity) are examined in relation to the roles one takes (personal identity), which are in reference to the larger culture in which one is defining the self (social identity)" (*ibid:* 567).

The further problematisation of the relationships between various factors of identity formation found in Erikson's writings includes "the combined circumstances" (Erikson, 1963: 44) that lead to specific developmental outcomes, as well as "an aggregate of simultaneous changes" at the three levels – biological, psychological and social (*ibid*). Erikson maintains that through these descriptions, it is possible to "explain how the relevance of each factor is derived from the relevance of other factors to which it contributes relevance and from which, by the very fact of this contribution, it derives additional meaning" (*ibid:* 45). This seems to be a cyclical process in which it is difficult to identify the beginning and the ending. Hence, researching adult identity formation needs to be approached with thorough methodological consideration and sensitivity to a multitude of circumstances and relationships. To address this complexity, Erikson proposes a methodological approach of *triple bookkeeping,* which he defines as "a systematic going around in circles" (*ibid*: 46). In addition to the cyclical structure of influences among adult identity formation factors, Erikson offers two concepts that facilitate understanding of the process between the developmental factors – aggravation and convergence. The aggravation effect is surfaced when the sudden change in one domain neutralises the other two's balancing power. The convergence effect is identified when all domains are mutually affected by the change (*ibid:* 44).

Attempting to propose more exact conclusions of identity formation in adulthood, Fadjukoff (2007) identifies *antecedents* and *determinants* in the process. Antecedents in her research include contextual variables, personality measures, and timing of transitions during developmental phases. Determinants, on the other side, are related to education and socio-behavioural strategies, which yields the conclusion that adult identity formation is "a person-in-context-process" (*ibid:* 49). Categories of antecedents and determinants seem to form a plausible framework for ordering the

factors participating in one's adult identity formation insofar as not implying linearity and causality, but more temporal occurrence where some factors act earlier in developmental history and others later. Awareness of the antecedents and determinants is also important for identifying the supportive and limiting factors of one's adult identity development and recognising the existence of developmental history of which effects and outcomes are seldom possible to outline and trace fully. Baltes et al. add to the understanding of this with the paradigm of historical contextualism, stating that "individuals exist in context that create both special opportunities for, and limitations to, individual developmental pathways" (Baltes et al., 2006: 586). Such an understanding of human development found in German thought sees it as a reflection of the "factors of education, socialization, and culture" (*ibid*: 572).

Prior research on adult identity formation in higher education context (cf. Côté, 2002; Côté & Levine, 2002; Grigsby, 2009) expands the view on the forming factors with the structure-agency debate that brings in a series of tangible and intangible influences and mediators. Essentially, it provides a framework for understanding the extent to which adult identity formation is "the result of external, social, political, and economic forces, on the one hand, or internal, individual, willful potentials, on the other" (Côté & Levine, 2002: 9). Both structural and agentic features participate in youth identity gains in the university, the workplace, and an adult community (*ibid*: 119). Several subsequent works (Côté, 2006; 2014) support the thesis that youth development is a function of the interaction between structural and agentic factors, and that development varies depending on the way those factors are utilised as developmental resources, representing *identity capital* (Côté, 2002). There is also a relational view explaining identity as "reflecting a variety of social networks, social capital and the contextual circumstances in which we live" (Hendricks, 2012: 227).

Recent perspectives on adult identity formation, especially in the specific cultural context, such as that of an educational institution, foreground the tension between agency and resources. Syed and McLean articulate their view stating that identity development is a substantially agentic process. "One *chooses* to explore or not,

to commit or not, to reflect on the past or not" (Syed & McLean, 2015: 566). At the same time, they recognise that "there are a variety of resources, outside one's control, which likely play into the ability to engage in this developmental task" (*ibid*). Thus, the agency is considered a variable, with individuals having more or less control over their lives depending on their location – within history, institutions, and within age-related exigencies (cf. Hitlin & Elder, 2007; Hitlin & Long, 2009).

Having presented the existing discussions on adult identity forming factors, it is possible to draw a matrix representing the elements and possible processes regulating their interrelations. Building on the present conceptualisations and research studies on adult identity discussed in the previous section, and in the attempt to offer viable concepts for this research, we propose the following four factors of adult identity formation to be examined: objective circumstances, psychological characteristics, individual's agency, and culture and social context (*Table 1*).

Table 1: Factors participating in students' adult identity formation

A **OBJECTIVE CIRCUMSTANCES** gender, family structure, family SES, family educational history, present living arrangements of a students, financial (in)dependence and relationship status	**B** **PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS** cognitive abilities, self-esteem, maturity, responsibility for oneself and others, autonomous thinking
C **CONTEXT OF A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION** 1. psychosocial moratorium 2. relational dimension 3. personal development 4. system maintenance	**D** **INDIVIDUAL'S AGENCY** intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, self-reflectiveness, the sense of agency, the sense of direction and purpose

3.5.1.1 Objective circumstances

The first field in the matrix belongs to *objective circumstances* encompassing sociodemographic factors (gender, structure of family of origin, family SES, family educational history), present living arrangements of a student, financial (in)dependence and relationship status, but also some of the traditional objective markers of adulthood explained by Settersten (2007). They are considered objective in the sense that together they form a context to which an individual has to adapt, and that some of those factors are beyond the control of an individual. Prior research on the association between objective circumstances and adult identity formation (Benson & Furstenberg, 2007; Burton, 2007; Benson & Johnson, 2009) indicates variations between the individuals in their subjective perceptions of becoming an adult. Benson and Johnson (2009) researched the association between adolescent family context and adult identity formation based on the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health in the USA. They found certain circumstances that lead to accelerated subjective aging, such as: growing up in economically deprived families, taking on some adult-like roles and interactions (e.g., household or financial responsibilities), growing up in a family without two biological parents. The latter is due to increasing household responsibilities and fostering psychosocial maturation to compensate for the missing financial and emotional resources. Burton (2007) addresses this issue in the context of childhood adultification and concludes that contexts of economic disadvantage can lead to premature, or even inappropriate, exposure to adult roles and responsibilities.

The type of attachment adolescents have with parents was also indicative of the tendency toward separating from the parental figure whereby adolescents who reported conflicted relationships with their parents tended to perceive themselves as adults earlier and prematurely separated from parental figures (Benson & Johnson, 2009). Fadjukoff (2007) found progress toward identity achievement related to gender, with men progressing slower than women. Erikson also identified constraints and opportunities resulting from poverty, political and economic circumstances, and institutional environments, such as education (Erikson, 1968). Present living arrangements, financial

independence, and firm relationship status, as discussed in the section on objective markers of adulthood, indicate more advanced adult identity. However, the processes that have resulted in attaining all those and the possible interrelatedness with the remaining factors of adult identity formation remain open. Therefore, it is vital to maintain a relational and integrative perspective.

3.5.1.2 Psychological characteristics

The second field contains factors of *an individual's psychological characteristics*, which are thoroughly discussed previously in the section on personal attributes of adult identity formation. This group of factors includes cognitive abilities, self-esteem, the achieved level of maturity, responsibility for oneself and others, and the level of autonomous thinking. They can be viewed both as a resource for and as an outcome of the developmental process. Looking through the lenses of developmental history, an individual enters a developmental process with prior psychological capacities that can act as resources, and those capacities are further cultivated along the way. As a resource, psychological factors help youth cope and manage the unstructured period of emerging adulthood (Mortimer, 1996). At the same time, characteristics such as the sense of independence, responsibility, and emotional and cognitive maturity are considered outcomes of the attained adult identity (Arnett, 2004a; 2004b).

3.5.1.3 Context of higher education institution

Broadly speaking, the third field corresponds to the culture and social context, which is in our research narrowed to the context of a higher education institution. Authors such as McLean and Syed note that in the existing scholarship, "culture is a comparatively less well-developed component of identity development than are other components" (McLean & Syed, 2015: 566). They continue stating that "the specification of how culture relates to particular identity processes and contents is relatively lacking" (*ibid*). Setting the discussion within an institutional framework, Moen (2013) pinpoints how social institutions are structuring expectations and choices,

transitions and trajectories, risks and resources, and are not just contexts and/or "neighborhood" effects, as maintained in the dominant scholarship. Correspondingly, Gilleard and Higgs (2016) maintain that scholarship has neglected the role of institutions in shaping individuals' processes and experiences of becoming, being and remaining a "grown-up" for a long time. Furthermore, Fadjukoff (2007) ascribes developmental value to social institutions, especially education, maintaining that context of adult identity development besides the family of origin includes "various educational and work settings, as well as friends and romantic partners." (*ibid:* 17). Elements of higher education context included in the matrix are derived from previous studies (Moos, 1973 cited after Adams & Fitch, 1983), and they encompass: relational dimension, personal development, system maintenance, in addition to psychosocial moratorium conceptualised by Erikson (1956).

3.5.1.4 Personal agency

As the factor participating in adult identity formation, an individual's agency is in recent discussions often confronted to structural elements found in the cultural context. It is argued that while the environment can provide support, an individual's openness to change is seminal in navigating the change and the processes of adult identity formation (Kroger & Green, 1996; Bosma & Kunnen, 2001). Drawing on a number of studies, Fadjukoff identifies "personal utilization of different adaptive processes" (Fadjukoff, 2007: 19) to be vital in understanding the interaction of personal agency and institutional structure. Agency can be defined as the ability to construct own life through the choices and actions a person undertakes in the framework of opportunities and constraints of history and social circumstances (Elder, Johnson & Crosnoe, 2003: 11). Further associations with cultural context indicate that personal agency and overall identity exploration are more likely to occur "in cultures and environments that expose the individual to differing points of view, and in which variability of choice is permitted" (Fadjukoff, 2007: 17). Higher education institutions nourish self-perception of powerhouses of free thinking, autonomy and exploration; hence it will be interesting to see how this acts in students' adult identity formation

through our research. Moen explains further that agency, put in the context, can be operationalised as "*degrees of choice and control* [which] *are institutionalized within the social organization of and power distribution in roles and relationships"* (Moen, 2013: 193, original italics). Hitlin and Elder (2007), on the other side, define agency in terms of intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, self-reflectiveness, and the sense of direction and purpose. Côté (2002) takes individual's agency understood as an individual's deliberate activity and enthusiasm in developing processes as the variable explaining, among other events, that not all youth normatively undergo *active* exploration.

Furthermore, Côté takes this variable to categorize students differentiating those with passive, active, or strategic "stances toward developing an individualized life project" (*ibid:* 119). Congruent with this understanding of agency is Chickering's (Chickering, 1975) understanding of student development resulting from involvement and integration. He argued that development needs active involvement in academic and social activities to gain experiences that are further integrated to provide growth potential.

In the concluding remarks for the section on factors participating in students' adult identity formation, let us state that the proposed matrix containing the four elements is a plausible asset in understanding the complexity of factors and processes. In the methodological sense, the fields within the matrix can be seen as domains to start with in exploring resources a young person possesses or lacks in the developmental process. Each of them can also be taken as a specific outcome of adult identity formation, but also, they can be viewed as jointly leading to formation of an adult identity. Given the main objective of this research, further attention will be dedicated to higher education as a context for students' adult identity formation.

3.5.2 Higher education as a context for students' adult identity formation

In its essence, education represents the process of cultivation, acquiring specific valuable knowledge, skills and competencies for purposeful living and effective functioning in demanding social and professional domains. Nevertheless, recent changes in higher education reflect restraint from the humanistic vision of education and confinement to economistic demands. It is obvious that education is witnessing the entrance of business principles, which are reflected in its mission and consumerist logic in treating knowledge and students. The value of higher education to students is seen through its capability to prepare them for the world of work and develop future graduates' occupational identity and work readiness. However, yesterday's world of work is by no means similar to the one we are witnessing today, and it might seem naïve to expect education to be capable of thoroughly preparing graduates to confront all complexities of tomorrow's labor market. Some views warrant that consumerist orientation in higher education can hinder students' development. "Approaching education as something to be served and consumed encourages a hedonic, extrinsic motivation for participating (e.g., Wexler, 1992), as opposed to an intrinsic motivation based on a love of learning, self-discipline, and mastery of experience (which are essential ingredients for ego strength)" (Côté & Levine, 2002: 149). Moreover, Arnold (2019) argues that the paradigm of *students' preparation* should be replaced with the paradigm of *identity formation*, suggesting that higher education's ends should be strengthening personhood and forming the personal identity of young people. An essential segment of development in higher education is related to the formation of adult identity.

An increasing number of youths are now attending some form of post-secondary education, and for them, the processes of socialisation and education interact with their personal development processes. Educational experience can hinder or discourage the key processes in adult identity formation in such an interplay. However, so far, studies examining the role of educational settings in the processes of students' individual

identities development have shown "the potency of identity as a concept at the core of educational processes" (Flum & Kaplan, 2012: 244), opening space for discussing processes of identity formation in various educational contexts, including higher education. However, research has not fully addressed how educational contexts shape the perception of adult status or contribute to its cultivation (cf. Syed & McLean, 2015; Gilleard & Higgs, 2016). Moreover, as Cooper et al. (2015: 301) argue, many researchers assume that youth have unrestricted identity exploration opportunities. In reality, as Erikson warrants, youth encounters both resources and challenges for adult identity formation in multiple contexts – individual, social, communal, and institutional.

Furthermore, summarizing from a number of longitudinal studies, Adams and Fitch (1983) conclude that higher education years are "an important time for continued personality formation" (ibid: 1267). This finding signals the formational potential of higher education and leaves open the question of whether the actual processes in it claim that potential. The importance of the context, particularly that of educational institutions, for the process of identity formation has been already recognized (Lannegrand-Willems & Bosma, 2006). Furthermore, Brückner and Mayer (2005: 32) argue that education and labor market institutions are key actors nowadays in structuring the life course, which governs individuals' age-graded behavior. Waterman (1993) suggests that the higher education context provides "a diversity of experiences that can both trigger considerations of identity issues and suggest alternative resolutions for identity concerns" (*ibid*: 53-54). However, it remains open to the question of the particular aspects in which higher education acts as a resource and support to students on the path of their adult identity formation.

Starting higher education represents a threshold in youth's lives. It often includes other transitions (leaving the parental home, independent living, and socializing in new peer groups), which challenge individual identities requiring a higher degree of reliance on personal psychological capacities while breaking up with adolescent forms of responses and adopting adult-like ones. This challenge is regarded as "identity reformation process" (Kroger, Martinussen & Marcia, 2010). However, reforming one's

identity takes time and requires resources, both from within and from the outside. In this sense, the educational process should be designed and governed so that it recognizes students' personal inner struggles on their road to adulthood. Students differ in their readiness for higher education, psychological maturity, and agency, which can influence their adult identity formation (Côté, 2006) and might require additional intentional support from an educational institution.

Educational context is essential for shaping young persons' self-image, modeling their behavior, and acquiring a sense of self-efficacy. Research by Lannegrand-Willems and Bosma (2006) documented this in the context of secondary education and identity development in adolescents. Their study demonstrates that school experience acts as "a personal resource in the development of identity" (*ibid*: 85). On the other side, when it comes to previous research on higher education context, in a voluminous study on *How College Affects Students* (Pascarella, 2006), which was initiated by Pascarella and Terenzin two decades ago, it is interesting that authors provide little evidence of the effects related to identity development, not to mention adult identity specifically.

Among the rare studies, Berman et al. (2008) focus on adult identity as an outcome variable while researching the effects of a university-based intervention program. Their research tells how a particular learning design (co-participatory and transformative) brings positive changes in students' adult identity development. Results suggest that students are interested in self-growth and are motivated to participate in such activities while in higher education, perhaps equally as they are interested in the main study program. However, these authors seem to be rather inconsistent in using terminology, particularly in relation to defining adult identity and adulthood.

The discussion on adult identity in higher education further leads us to clarifying interactions between social context and individual agency in the processes of adult identity formation. This theme has already been recognized as of particular value for considering the transition from adolescence to adulthood, as it is reflected in the volume edited by Ross Macmillan (2007). Summarizing from a bulk of different interpretations,

Hitlin and Elder (2007: 172) identify two characteristics of agency – moments of freedom and the ability to initiate self-change, in addition to four aspects of agency suggested by Bandura: intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness (self-regulation), and self-reflectiveness (ibid). This implies certain individual powers that stipulate person's developmental processes and interact with the resources and activities coming from the social context. The sense of personal agency, along with the sense of direction and purpose signals "positive adjustment and optimal functioning" (Berman, et al., 2008: 139). Besides, studies (e.g., Flum & Kaplan, 2006) document the benefits of exploratory process in an educational setting by providing students with adaptive outcomes, e.g., the ability to respond to situations that challenge their identities, which is needed throughout life, whenever one's identity is at the question. Moreover, researching in the school context, Lannegrand-Willems and Bosma (2006: 86) argue that exploration and commitment are inseparable from participation in important societal institutions.

As contained in Erikson's theory, identity development is a lifelong process, meaning that persons will face various transitions throughout their lives, which will challenge their already established answers to the key identity questions. Also, given the epigenetic principle of human development proposed by Erikson's theory, it is maintained that present developmental tasks build upon the previous conflicts and attainments. Eriksonian tradition, with special contribution by Marcia (1966; 1980; 2002), posits exploration and commitment as the two main processes of identity formation, which are going on inseparable from the social context. In this view, exploration represents "a process of information gathering" (Grotevant, 1992 cited after Zimmer-Gembeck and Mortimer, 2006: 549) that precedes making choices and commitments. A person pursues information both on her/his personality and the context. Higher education context provides this pursuit with "tangible resources" (Côté, 2006), representing a structured and organised environment for students' self-growth. Discussing the role of social context for the development and maintenance of the sense of ego identity, Erikson (1968) stresses the importance of recognition and support from the social environment. Interactions with significant others and social institutions are

fundamental as the source of ego strength (Côté & Levine, 1987: 275). In an earlier study, Adams & Fitch (1983) were interested in what they referred to as *university departments' psychological environments* characterised by the three dimensions defined by Moos (Moos, 1973 cited after Adams & Fitch, 1983: 1266). First is the relational dimension, which embeds interactions and support from people in a certain environment. Then comes the dimension of personal development, meaning that an environment supports the processes of personal development. The last one is the dimension of system maintenance, providing order and organisation to various processes at play.

What can be discerned from the previous elaboration is that educational context, through its structures and processes, provides a framework for students' exploration of their identities and search for new questions about who they are. Even the negative experiences should not be dismissed from the growth potential and possible developmental effects by activating "the ability to recast a negative memory as a positive turning point or learning experience" (Schwartz et al., 2013: 97). Therefore, we shall be interested in students identifying both positive and negative experiences related to their adult identity formation in higher education. In the remainder of the section, we shall look at students' main characteristics as a group undergoing identity formation.

3.5.3 Students on the road to adulthood

With massification and widening access to higher education, participation in post-secondary education has become an accustomed route for a more significant portion of young people after graduating from high school than it used to be generations ago. Years spent in higher education cover a significant part of the transition from adolescence to adulthood, for some even representing a station lunching them into adulthood. Higher education for most students provides a "vestibule", when assuming adult roles and tasks is suspended. Expansion of post-secondary education is also often

related to “delayed or jeopardized labor market integration” (Brückner & Mayer, 2005: 30). For youths attending some form of post-secondary education, socialization and education interact with their personal development processes. Educational experience can hinder or discourage the critical processes in adult identity formation in such an interplay. However, so far, studies examining the role of educational settings in the processes of students' personal identities development have shown “the potency of identity as a concept at the core of educational processes” (Flum & Kaplan, 2012: 244), opening space for discussing processes of identity formation in various educational contexts, including higher education. Research has not fully addressed how educational contexts shape the perception of adult status or contribute to its cultivation (Syed & McLean, 2015; Gilleard & Higgs, 2016). Especially, little is known about how higher education impacts the identity formation of non-traditional/post-traditional students.

Studies cited so far provide evidence supporting active psychological processes of self-exploration, questioning, and experimentation in students attending higher education. Furstenberg (2008) goes as far as to claim that over the past decades, higher education became the central social institution that structures early adulthood. In effect, it provides prerequisites for the transition to adulthood, enabling access to better-paid jobs and more flexibility in governing one's career. There are also countries like Bosnia and Herzegovina where higher education becomes a station even to those youth who never aspired to this educational level but are choosing for it due to lack of employment opportunities. This role of higher education has already been described as “parking lot” (Thunborg, et al., 2013). However, the global trend is that an average person in the early twenties spends five years more in education than the previous generations. Likewise, “educational experiences of those now in their early 20s resemble those who were in their late teens 50 years ago” (Côté, 2006: 89). Youth representing a group of higher education students are described (e.g., Furstenberg, 2013: 35) as having different transitions to adulthood than their counterparts not pursuing higher education. Persons embarking on work-related commitments after high school might enter adult marking roles earlier, but it is expected that even in this case, the transition is longer than it was generations before due to high demands of independent living.

Moreover, researching the inputs and throughputs of students' development in higher education, Côté and Levine (2002) show that prevailing motivation for attending higher education among students nowadays is extrinsic, with passive motivational profiles of expectations driven and default driven students. In the latter case, students are attending higher education because of the lack of alternatives, while in the former to please their parents (*ibid*: 150-151). The motivation is certainly in the core of human agency, the process of exploration and self-search, which, as shown in the section on factors participating in adult identify formation, plays seminal role in the process.

However, as stated earlier, research on the adult identity formation of higher education students is peculiarly scarce compared to adolescent development or the context of secondary education. According to Côté's (2006) findings, adult identity development scores increase linearly between 18 and 23, with about 53% of students aged 23 having moderate adult identity scores and 41% scoring for a high adult identity. Kroger, et al. (2010) found that one-third of students reach full identity achievement upon completing higher education. Those findings suggest that youth in higher education are somewhere in-between adolescence and full adulthood. Likewise, the cited results indicate that higher education does not have the same effects on all students and that some other factors partake jointly with higher education experience. Benson and Elder (2009) go as far as to maintain more significant variability in youth's pathways to adulthood, stressing the importance of "social support and social psychological resources" (ibid: 1265).

Prior studies (e.g., Holmstrom, Karp & Gray, 2002) have already documented that higher education faces students with upheaval in daily matters more than coursework complexities. In longitudinal research over three years with psychology students, the same authors also found out that students were reporting on becoming more independent and self-accountant "but at a comfortable and relatively unthreatening pace" (*ibid*: 454). This suggests that students perceive higher education years as a supportive context providing a niche for their personal developmental journey. It has been widely recognized that youth participating in higher education are undergoing

emerging adulthood, facing many challenges and opportunities on the road to becoming an adult.

Although existing studies provide limited insight into the experiences of the transition, they give no indications of the role of higher education experience in the process of forming adult identity. Some research (cf. Benson, Johnson & Elder, 2012) confirms relatedness of school and work statuses to subjective adult age in the early twenties, whereby persons that were out of school and having a job tended to perceive themselves as adults in greater extent compared to those with different school and work statuses. The same study also confirmed that self-perception of adult identity attainment should be observed in relation to a number of developmental processes, psychological maturity and school-to work pathways.

For most student populations, marriage and parenthood are not desired tasks during their college years, while most of them leave their parental households managing their everyday life matters and finances more or less independently of their parents. In a study with senior high school students transiting to higher education Holmstrom et al. (2002: 438) found that the students were much more concerned with the responsibilities of an independent living, like doing laundry, organizing daily routine, budgeting money, friendships and renegotiating relationships with family than they were concerned with academic challenges. It was also reported that leaving parents' home for college poses a set of identity questions before the youth who find themselves "negotiating a delicate balance of independence and dependence, autonomy and reliance on others, distance and closeness, change and stability" (Holmstrom et al., 2002: 255).

Among the most remarkable findings from Arnett's research (Arnett, 1994; 1998; 2000; 2001; 2004a) with higher education students is that they tend to feel like adults in specific ways but not in all, e.g., they tend to feel in-between, which lead to the formulation of emerging adulthood theory that will be discussed later. This leads to a hypothesis that the role of a student provides the most important identification for youth attending higher education, granting thus a niche that suspends entering other

developmental tasks that might endanger their student status. They might be working to gain some financial independence and valuable experience, but not full-time and not in a career-based way. They might enter relationships in order to explore themselves and possible partners but delaying marriage and parenthood. Arnett (2004a) identified the three central developmental tasks that arise for emerging adults: finding a satisfying career, choosing a partner for starting a family and establishing financial independence. All those tasks are considered to be a part of exploratory behavior while restraining from long-lasting commitments. Mitchell and Syed (2015) point out that there is no difference in work rates between students and non-students, yet the difference was expressed in the number of working hours for students, which was lower than the non-student group. Most of the students, at least during their college years, live independently of their parents and are entitled to certain financial responsibilities. However, not all of them manage to obtain financial independence from their parents, given limited job opportunities and sometimes demanding workload in their studies.

3.5.4 Students as *emerging adults*

Although earlier theorists (Havighurst, 1953; Erikson, 1982; Chickering & Reisser, 1993) have pointed to the need for more nuanced differentiation of the phases of human development, especially in the transition from adolescence to adulthood, only the concept of emerging adulthood introduced by Jeffrey Arnett in the late 1990s has witnessed affirmation in empirical studies (e.g., Reifman, Arnett & Colwell, 2007). Therefore, in the more recent literature (cf. Hartmann & Toguchi Swartz, 2007; Toguchi Swartz et al., 2017), especially that related to the context of higher education, emerging adulthood is treated as a distinct phase in human development placed "around age 18 and stretching into the early 30s" (Toguchi Swartz et al., 2017: 2). Recent Arnett's concept of "emerging adults" is gaining prominence in use, emphasising their liminal position between adolescence and adulthood. Notwithstanding the critics of the concept, it is relevant for stressing "the extension of identity issues from adolescence into

emerging adulthood" (Schwartz et al., 2013b: 107). By this, the processes of identity exploration and commitment are rendered as "the most central feature" of this period (Arnett, 2004a: 8).

Researching with young people between 18 and 25, Jeffrey Arnett (2000; 2004a; 2004b) concluded that there is a specific period of life, which is neither adolescence nor "full "adulthood. He named this period *emerging adulthood,* encompassing the time when persons think of themselves as more grown-ups to be adolescents, but they are still not considered mature enough to be adults. When asked whether they have reached adulthood, young people aged 18-25 respond "yes and no" (Arnett, 2006). Emerging adulthood is "distinguished by relative independence from social roles and from normative expectations. Having left the dependency of childhood and adolescence, and having not yet entered the enduring responsibilities that are normative in adulthood, emerging adults often explore a variety of possible life directions in love, work, and world-views." (Arnett, 2000: 469). This phase begins with graduation from high school, which implies several transitions in an individual's life. However, the endpoint is tensile, reflecting various individual paths and trajectories, giving this period "remarkable amorphousness" (Schwartz et al., 2013: 97).

Arnett's concept is mindful of social and demographic changes that have taken place in the decades following the proposition of Erikson's views on youth development, such as later age of marriage and taking the role of a parent, more extensive participation in higher education and higher tolerance to extramarital sexual relations and cohabitation (Arnett, 2004a). The generation under the focus of Arnett's study is characterised by a higher level of freedom, questioning, and unpredictability in terms of transition to adulthood, which carries a series of demographic and psychological challenges. Some of the challenges are related to public policies regarding tenure and education of the generation that needs more time to become a productive segment of the society, make money and pay taxes. In a psychological sense, the challenge is in the possibilities of developing the sense of autonomy, responsibility for own personal development, but also for other roles that are considered worthwhile in

a certain social context, such as the role of an employee, a spouse, a parent, and the like.

Critics of Arnett's concept have been directed to viewing emerging adulthood as a developmental stage and its aspirations towards theory status (Côtè, 2014; Syed, 2016). In this regard, Syed recognises integrativity and generativity as the main strengths of emerging adulthood, but questions its explanatory power needed for a theory's status (Syed, 2016: 22). The same author, referring to the streams in developmental science from the 1980s onwards (life course theory, life span theory, developmental contextualism, and dynamic systems) warrants that "stages are not good" (*ibid:* 14), for they imply universality, normativity and discontinuity in development, and have been abandoned in recent conceptualisations of human development. Côtè (2014) adds to the list of disputes stating that exploration before taking adult commitments, or *moratorium* in Erikson's terms, is not something that the whole generation will undertake, also, that his positions did not prove to be invariant across the social classes. Arnett's conception omits antecedents and long-term consequences of identity formation processes, which is another remarkable limitation according to Côtè (2014: 187). As stated earlier, emerging adulthood in this work serves to provide descriptors of the process of identity formation identified in Arnett's research, specifically with higher education students (1994; 2004a; 2004b).

Based on intensive research in the topic of emerging adulthood, Arnett (2000; 2004a; 2004b) extracted five dimensions that distinguish this period;

- feeling in-between – most emerging adults feel that they are no more adolescents, but they do not feel like full adults either
- identity exploration – emerging adults are actively exploring themselves in the domains of worldview, career, relationships and learning "who they are and what they want out of life" (Arnett, 2004a: 8)
- self-focus – emerging adults are gaining more independence and responsibilities for themselves; they are focused on fulfilling their own needs

- age of possibilities – for most people, this is an optimistic age; a person sees a number of possible partners, job opportunities, social goals, etc.
- age of instability – many possibilities and choices that have to be dealt can make a person confused; confronted with change, some persons can feel discomfort, while others can feel a lack of self-confidence and personal freedom; a person is confronted with choices regarding living arrangement, education, job and choosing partners.

Empirical research in emerging adulthood is still in its early days. Some of the pioneering studies (Reifman et al., 2007) affirm differentiation of the period between 18 and 25 years based on the existing distinctive characteristics compared to younger and older groups. Particularly relevant for our research is that emerging adulthood emphasises the process of becoming, exploration and questioning identity, searching for what one truly is, which leads to the question of agencies of those changes, among which education cannot be bypassed.

The logical question arising from this is whether the emerging adulthood as a separate phase of life actualises mainly in cases of a delayed entrance to "full" adulthood or is the phase to which are entitled all, regardless of the contextual variables of their individual developmental trajectories. Besides, the more and more visible differentiation of a group of young people who neither participate in education nor are employed (*NEET*) makes more complicated attempts of precise and clear defining developmental paths and trajectories in transition from adolescence to adulthood. Arnett's model was also criticised for overemphasising perceptions and the inner side of the transition to adulthood, failing to account for demographic and objective markers contextually (cf. Côtè, 2014: 182). A limitation that Arnett himself noted is its relatedness to the specific context, that is: Western, developed countries and elite youth attending higher education, saying that it is "a period that exists under certain conditions that have occurred only quite recently and only in some cultures" (Arnett, 2004a: 42). Syed and Mitchell (2013) indicate in this regard that no straightforward generalizations can be made on the existence and features of emerging adulthood to young adults with

different ethnical backgrounds. Therefore, more research is needed to illuminate the existence of emerging adulthood among youth originating from different social backgrounds and different cultures.

As was shown thus far, the concept of emerging adulthood contributes with descriptions of young people finding themselves in post-adolescent years but not reaching for full adulthood, which is mainly found among the youth enrolled in higher education. A series of studies conducted by its inventor reflects searching for one's adult identity while experimenting with varieties of options without making firm commitments. Just as the freedom to explore might resonate positively, the lack of guiding structures and norms in this process might be threatening, as Erikson himself suggested (Erikson, 1968). This gives an argument for looking at the role of social structures such as higher education in this regard.

3.5.5 Higher education as *institutionalised moratorium*

So far, we have seen that the processes of adult identity formation in higher education students are inseparable from their role of a student and educational context. We have discussed that the process of adult identity formation includes a series of crises or conflicts that a young person has to resolve in order to move on with her/his identity development. Crises resolution undermines exploratory behaviour before taking on firm commitments and claiming identity achievement. This all reflects an intensive "identity formation work", which, according to Erikson (1968), requires a psychosocial moratorium. Moratorium effects of higher education setting are manifested in the developmental delay. Opposite are acceleration effects when development is enhanced (Côté, 2002: 120).

Moratorium itself represents “a period of delay granted to somebody who is not ready to meet an obligation or forced on somebody who should give himself time” (Erikson, 1968: 157). The main goal of the psychosocial moratorium is “free role experimentation […] in some section of his society” (Erikson, 1959: 111). The concept of moratorium denotes the possibility for persons to “seek out and explore various possible identity commitments” (Berman, et al., 2008: 141). When exploration processes are high, while commitments are not yet taken, it means that identity formation processes are active, but during the moratorium period, identity is not yet achieved. Commitments typically result from exploration, but it is not in all cases this way. Côtè (2014) indicates that “neither Erikson nor Marcia argued that all young people pass through such a period of undertaking *active* identity explorations” (*ibid*: 187, original italics).

Further, this gives rise to an individual’s agency, especially in those youth involved with institutions in some crucial periods of their identity development. The lack of active exploration, while a person is in a state of prolonged transition to specific roles and tasks (e.g., occupational and familial), is what Cuzzocrea (2018), in her research with Italian youth, identifies as waithood, as opposed to the moratorium, which is expressed in active exploration. She defines waithood as “intermediate passages deprived of their intrinsic exploratory value” (*ibid*: 15), so persons are waiting until it passes. However, the way Erikson conceptualises moratorium it includes the individual’s active role, agency demonstrated as intensive self-search and experimentation. Drawing from previous research Fadjukoff (2007: 18) concludes that institutional support from the environment might be of crucial value in helping youth make use of the opportunities that the period between adolescence and adulthood grants. This support is viewed in literature through facilitation providing resources (in terms of equipping individuals with cognitive capacities and individualization strategies) or as an investment that individuals make in their identity (Côté & Levine, 2002; Schwartz et al., 2005; Fadjukoff, 2007).

Erikson posited that societies provide youth with a structured framework to guide them on the path to adulthood, by providing opportunities for exploration and development which represents institutionalised moratorium. One of the examples in higher education would be granting students opportunities to change academic majors or to encourage more mature meaning-making in the teaching process (cf. Schwartz et al., 2013: 97). On the other hand, Erikson also maintained that psychosocial moratorium can be self-constructed by youth. Self-constructed moratorium, just as the one which is imposed to the youth, can be source of social problems and threatening if it takes young persons away from social values and norms. Erikson, actually, assumed that institutions provide "the necessary matrix of the development of all behaviour" (Kroger & Marcia, 2011: 32). In Côté's (2006) interpretation of Erikson's theoretical positions, institutionalised moratorium provides a safe zone for "working through identity confusion and resolving an identity crisis" (Côté, 2006: 85). Institutional moratorium can have a double role – the institution itself in a way creates the moratorium by preventing taking commitments outside its framework, while in the other sense, it provides a shelter, a support for those in need for more time to explore themselves before making long and firm commitments.

3.5.6 Conclusions

The discussion in this section has shown that higher education today represents the principal social institution that structures early adulthood (Furstenberg, 2008). In addition, studies (Arnett, 2004a; Côté, 2006; Kroger et al., 2010) confirm that youth in higher education are somewhere in-between adolescence and full adulthood, when processes of becoming, exploration and questioning identity, searching for what one truly is are intensive. Implications for higher education's formational potential are seen in Arnold's (2019) urge that the paradigm of *identity formation* (instead of the paradigm of *preparation*) should be promoted in educational contexts, suggesting that higher education's end should be strengthening personhood and forming the personal identity

of young people. This further leads to inquiry of whether the actual processes in higher education claim its formational potential, which is a general question that will be developed throughout our research design later on.

To better understand the role of higher education, this section discussed different factors partaking in students' adult identity development. Based on the existing knowledge on the topic, it was possible to build the matrix containing four main factors of adult identity formation: objective circumstances, psychological characteristics, the context of higher education, and individual's agency, together with intricate processes regulating relationships between them. The role of higher education is viewed through the concept of *institutionalised moratorium*. Analogous with Erikson's psychosocial moratorium, institutionalised moratorium provides structure and resources to students in their identity exploration processes. Erikson's theory underpins relationships with others, recognition and support from the environment in providing students with adaptive outcomes enabling them to respond to situations that challenge their identities. Previous research (cf. Adams & Fitch, 1983) identified three dimensions by which educational environments support individuals' growth processes: relational dimension, personal development, and system maintenance. Research (cf. Hitlin & Elder, 2007) has also shown that the actual exploration process requires an individual's agency seen in intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, self-reflectiveness, the sense of agency, and the sense of direction and purpose. Studies cited in this section provide evidence that higher education is an important time for continued personality formation, since it faces students with challenges both in personal and academic life. Presented research also suggests that students are interested in self-growth while in higher education, perhaps equally as they are interested in the main study program, and that they need support and resources from their environment.

4 Research methodology

4.1 Introduction

As shown in the previous chapter, research on the role of higher education in students' personal development remains beyond the mainstream of the field of higher education. Little is clear on what higher education provides students in terms of their personal development, or how they actually perceive its role in their overall development. Summarising from the research literature on how college affects students, Pascarella (2006) concludes that research including students as the sample dominates the field of higher education. However, relationships "between various aspects of the postsecondary experience and different dimensions of student development" (*ibid:* 508) are addressed in just a limited percentage of studies. The author continues anticipating that this particular topic will prevail in the coming decades and he draws methodological recommendations for future research efforts, some of which are relevant to this research and will be discussed later in this chapter.

Research design developed in this chapter rests upon the three aspects treated throughout this work so far:

1. dominant discourses in today's higher education
2. theoretical positions derived from Erikson's psychosocial theory emphasising the centrality of identity formation in the post-adolescent years
3. previous research on the transition to adulthood and the position of students to adult identity achievement.

This chapter brings a detailed description of the research process designed and carried out to investigate the role of higher education experience in the process of

students' adult identity formation. Based on the theoretical positioning of adult identity formation discussed in Chapter 3, we first set research objectives and corresponding research questions, which organise presentation of the research findings in Chapter 5. For the purpose of better grounding this research in the existing methodological approaches to the topic, we continue with reviewing prior studies and their methodological foundations. A wide range of quantitative and qualitative approaches, methods, and analysis techniques are presented, along with discussion of their contributions and shortcomings to the issue of adult identity formation. Authors (cf. Vignoles et al., 2011) argue for more intensive integrative and qualitative research on adult identity, which will open up different avenues for conceptualising adulthood and rethinking criteria for attaining the sense of adult identity. This is owing in part to the unexplained nuanced linkages between various markers of adulthood discussed earlier in Chapter 3, as well as the phenomenology of individuals' intimate, subjective experiences of their adult identities, which is still unclear. This influenced our use of qualitative methodology, primarily the biographical approach based on problem-centred interviews.

The fourth section discusses the biographical approach to students' experiences of adult identity formation. Further, we explain the criteria for selecting participants for the research and the process of theoretic sampling. Following that, we deal with problem-centred interview (PCI) as the main technique employed in this research, which enabled a direct approach to students' experiences focusing specifically on the issues related to their adult identity formation and the role of higher education therein. Obtained data were analysed with *Atlas.ti* software, which made it easier to organise codes and categories and browse through the interview transcripts and post-scripts. However, the most challenging aspect of qualitative analysis for this study was establishing a suitable code system and balancing between deductive and inductive approaches to analysis, or – as Kuckartz (2019) suggests to be more suitable terms – between concept-driven and data-driven approaches to analysis. A related section on data collection techniques contains a thorough description of these systems. In this regard, computer software has proven to be of little use, and relying entirely on it would

almost certainly result in worthless data. This study is in a sense exploratory because the subject matter is nascent in the context of higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and that there are no accounts of the possible state-of-the-arts. Hence, it is expected that this research will leave more questions open than the answers provided.

4.2 Research objective and questions

4.2.1 Research objective and general hypothesis

According to the *principle of openness*, which is a property of qualitative studies, the main research objective was not to formulate hypotheses in advance, but to organise the research process around "relatively open theoretical concepts specifying the research question" (Witzel & Reiter, 2012: 19). Following this principle, the current study's research objective and questions are drawn from an analysis of the prevailing discourses on higher education, theoretical positions and research findings relevant to adult identity formation discussed in previous chapters. As seen in Chapter 2, discourses on higher education reflect the marginal role of students' personal development to higher education's missions and practices. On the other hand, literature of humanist orientation (cf. Barnett, 2009; Gibbs & Barnett, 2014; Arnold, 2019) advocates for a greater emphasis on strengthening personhood and eliciting subjective values of education in general. Further, Chapter 3 adds with psychosocial theoretical positions on adult identity formation, along with results from prior research suggesting that objective circumstances, psychological characteristics, social and cultural context, and personal agency all play a role in students' adult identity formation (see *Table 1*). Erikson cautions against believing a single one-way causality, arguing that a multiplex of elements involved in developmental processes requires "a reciprocal amplification" or "synthesizing trend" (Erikson, 1963: 390). Therefore, he proposes the method of *triple bookkeeping,* which recognises the need to account for multiple interactions among

developmental factors and processes. In light of this, the main research objective of this dissertation was *to identify how students evaluate the role of higher education experience in their adult identity formation process, given the interaction between an individual's agency, psychological characteristics, institutional support and objective circumstances.*

Existing knowledge on the topic discussed in Section 3.5.1 gave ground for the general hypothesis stating that students' evaluations would differ according to a specific combination of the factors framing their development. It was assumed that while every single student has unique experiences of own adult identity formation, there are also some common patterns which are yet to be identified. Higher education's position in individuals' adult identity formation is conceptualised in a manner that reflects these patterns. According to Ragin's (Ragin, 1994: 33) distinction among seven main objectives in social research, this one can be rendered as directed to identifying general patterns and relationships. The author maintains that researching patterns, unlike researching single cases, leads to revealing systematizations of knowledge and associations that have broader relevance. This can be accomplished by an iterative method of examining similar cases and categorising them into clusters or groups. Moreover, Ragin opens the way for causal inference in this approach stating that "[i]f a broad pattern holds across many cases, then it may reflect the operation of an underlying cause which can be inferred from the broad pattern" (*ibid:* 35).

As previously stated, the role of higher education can be conceptualised in terms of social framework that imposes certain demands on its participants and assigns them a specific position. As such, a social structure may encourage developmental processes, affirm a person's self-concept, support exploration and experimenting, but it can also act imposing a particular thinking pattern or framework that might be limiting and fettering. By inquiring about the role of higher education in adult identity formation, we pre-assume that students can act as biographers of their own life – as posited by McAdams's narrative identity model (McAdams, 1988; 2011; 2018) – and to engage in meaning-making processes which results in the evaluation of different experiences that

they had gone through. The Problem Statement section explains the rationale for exploring the *role* of higher education experience in students' adult identity formation, not *impact*, *influence* or *effect*, all of which recall measurement and predefined indicators.

Given the complex relationships between adult identity forming elements, it is not possible to approach the objective of this research directly by means of observation or measurement of antecedents and determinants; nor it is possible to go deep into analysis of previous developmental histories of research participants. Therefore, the general hypothesis from the beginning of this section is not formulated in terms of statistical testing, but as an assumption grounded in prior knowledge, eliciting further inquiry. Hence, the research objective will be addressed indirectly, through the personal accounts that students are willing to tell. To this end, three groups of research questions are formulated addressing the descriptive, relationship and evaluative levels of inquiry.

4.2.2 Research questions

The first level is descriptive and classification questions (Meltzoff, 1999), substantially asking about the phenomena, their properties and components, and how they can be categorised. This set of questions is aimed at gathering descriptive data whereby factors such as objective circumstances, personal criteria for attaining adulthood, assessment of personal agency and the perceptions of the role of higher education in students' adult identity formation are held as categories serving the purpose of describing the main topic-relevant properties of the sample. Questions addressed within this level are:

1. How do students from this sample position themselves to the main factors of adult identity formation?

   1.1 How can be described their objective circumstances?

1.2 What criteria students identify for attaining adult status and do they perceive themselves as adults?

1.3 How do students assess their personal agency concerning the developmental processes?

The given set of questions draws on already cited Macmillan's broad definition of adult identity as "seeing oneself as an adult" (Macmillan, 2007: 20), which consists of a person's self-defining characteristics that make her/him feel like an adult. The focus here is on subjective perceptions, which provides this definition with an inclusive framework for a variety of individual and personal accounts that might emerge from the interviews with students. To summarise what has already been said, the category of descriptive research questions is informed by two standpoints found in existing knowledge; (a) changes in perceiving adulthood and its markers, and the shift toward subjective perceptions of becoming an adult; (b) view on adult identity formation as a subjective and multidimensional process resulting from a multiplexed influence. Addressing the questions at this level led to organisation and systematisation of adult identity forming factors, which were then combined and analysed at the subsequent, relational level.

Relationship questions inquired into whether the factors were related between one another, the nature of that relationship, and whether one factor correlated with the other (Meltzoff, 1999). Erikson himself argues about difficulties faced in investigating identity forming factors, especially evaluating their actual effects. He instructs therapists (but also researchers) to focus on "whatever set of observable changes seem most accessible" (Erikson, 1963: 45), implying that the relevance of data gathered is only gradually clarified and revealed, in the cyclical process of *triple bookkeeping*. Also, he maintains that it is impossible to identify the "causal chain with a clear location and a circumscribed beginning" (*ibid:* 46). Hence, some authors maintain that there are "reciprocal relationships" (Pike & Killian, 2001: 434) between the factors. Relationship questions raised in this research were:

1. What is the nature of relationships between the adult identity forming factors?

2. What types of students can be identified in the sample based on the combination of factors affecting their adult identity formation in higher education?

The evaluative level, aligned with the main objective of this research, was intended to induce deeper meaning-making and evaluation of particular aspects of higher education experience. To this end, three research questions were formulated.

1. How do students assess the role of higher education experience in their adult identity formation?
2. What personal attributes do students report having developed in higher education?
3. What are the formational potentials of the higher education experience for students' adult identities (in terms of teaching approach, interactions with teachers and peers, and extra-curricular activities)?

This set of questions led toward more specific aspects of the adult identity formation process and higher education experience, in which students were invited to speak about particular events in various time points of their studies. We expected from students' narrations to reveal similarities and commonalities that would help us to recognise process-related factors. We were also interested in students' self-assessment of what particular personal attributes they might identify as developed in higher education. Studies cited earlier report on the cumulative nature of development, suggesting that most of the attributes were nurtured for a long time before manifesting. In this respect, our goal was be to navigate students towards identifying certain attributes that they had noticed developing as an effect of their higher education experience.

Closing this section, let us note that the nature of the research problem and corresponding research questions reflect underlying conception of adult identity as a subjective construction, which is consistent with the qualitative approach's intentions. These are the types of questions that describe processes, or "how something develops or changes" (Flick, 2009: 102), which we attempted to capture via retrospective

biographical interviewing through the PCI. Kroger (2007) pinpoints the importance of complying research questions with a methodological approach stating that "research questions should always determine the methodologies best suited for one's own focus of inquiry into the identity formation process" (*ibid:* 186). Before proposing and justifying the use of the qualitative methodological approach in this research, we provide a brief review of the selected relevant methods and approaches carried out in prior research on adult identity and transition to adulthood.

4.3 Review of previous research approaches and methods

To organise this review, we will use a tentative division on studies employing quantitative or qualitative approaches to data collection and analysis, although there is a tendency to integrate both methodologies (e.g., Watzlawik & Born, 2007; Skhirtladze, Javakhishvili, Schwartz & Luyckx, 2017). Based on this division in the remainder of the section, we will deal more specifically with the research process, methods, and the nature of the data obtained in both groups. Discussing a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods employed so far in identity research, Vignoles et al. (2011) maintain that "the differences in methodological preferences can partially account for the differences in how identity has been conceptualized across traditions" (*ibid:* 12). As shown in Chapter 3, conceptualisations of identity seem to evolve constantly, hence more methodological approaches are expected to emerge in the future. A volume edited by Watzlawik and Born (2007) discusses the subtleties of quantitative and qualitative methodology in researching identity in general and is a source of a thorough and comprehensive examination of both theoretical and methodological issues of identity as a general concept.

A relatively well-established quantitative research line in adulthood can be identified, reflecting a solid tradition of defining adulthood based on role transitions and objective markers, which are most commonly nurtured by demographic and statistical measures. Furthermore, compared to qualitative studies, quantitative research is better founded on theoretical concepts and has a myriad of available techniques. Nevertheless, the shortage of quantitative studies is that they produce aggregated results, which in studying adulthood implies “hiding the heterogeneity of individual pathways to adulthood” (Robette, 2010: 90). This raises the question of whether the quantitative approach is convergent with the recent de-standardisation of life paths, transition trajectories, and the move towards the subjective conception of adult status.

On the other hand, qualitative studies provide openness and exploratory possibilities needed in research domains such as forming adult identity, especially for opening a window into the subjective, inner side of the phenomenon. Similarly, among those who conduct qualitative research into identity, some treat identities mainly as discursive resources that in some sense “float free” of the individuals and groups who are using them. In contrast, others use phenomenological approaches to understand individuals’ personal, subjective experiences of their identities (Vignoles et al., 2011: 12). However, authors (e.g., Andrew et al., 2007: 230) warn against the weaknesses of qualitative approaches, such as the exclusion of demographic markers or lack of rigour in the process of data collection and analysis. Challenges faced when applying various qualitative interviews are described in Witzel and Reiter (2012), and we shall subsequently refer to some of the segments relevant to our methodological decisions.

For the sake of clarity, in the remainder of this section, we shall deal separately with quantitative and qualitative approaches in the context of researching adult identity formation.

4.3.1 Quantitative Approach

Among the quantitative studies included in this review, it was possible to identify two groups – large-scale demographic studies on transition to adulthood in the context of the new social conditions (Eliason et al., 2015; Benson & Furstenberg, 2006) and survey studies based on questionnaires and scales (Reifman, et al., 2007; Kroger & Marcia, 2011). For the qualitative methodology, we bring a review of Arnett's extensive research (Arnett, 2004a) on emerging adulthood, which has received quite remarkable further receptions, but also critics.

The first sub-group of quantitative studies are large-scale studies mostly of longitudinal design aimed at researching the trends in transitioning to adulthood concerning a bulk of societal factors. Eliason et al. (2015) report on the *Youth Development Study* (YDS), which was conducted on a sample of 1010 adults from 1987 until 2011, with the aim of documenting "the relationships between objective life-course structures and the subjective sense of timing of adult roles and acquisition of adult identity" (*ibid*: 205). From the ages of 17 to 30, participants presented continuously data on educational attendance, employment, family formation, attitudes and self-concepts. Life history calendar or event history calendar (EHC) is based on a chronological grid used to collect retrospective data on selected life events stimulating thus more accurate recall and reporting (cf. Morselli, Le Goff & Gauthier, 2018: 1-2). In addition, self-evaluation reports were used to collect data on the sense of timings of transitions, with predefined categories on a five-point scale ranging from "very early" to "very late". Based on the statistical methodology of hierarchical latent class models, the study offers mapping of pathways to adulthood confirming that "these objective routes to adulthood are significantly associated with the sense of being an adult as well as evaluations of being early, on time, or late with respect to key markers of adult transition" (Eliason et al., 2015: 206). Research results confirm the relevance of demographic role markers, but leave open „precise mechanisms by which different

roles, role configurations, and life pathways combine to *create* the subjective sense of being an adult“ (*ibid*: 224).

Philadelphia Educational Longitudinal Study (PELS) reported by Benson and Furstenberg (2006) examined „how the adult roles and responsibilities acquired by a sample of young adults between the ages of 19 and 21 alter their self-perceived adult status“ (*ibid*: 201). The research sample included 1500 students selected via cluster sampling technique, first schools were randomly selected, and then students from within the schools (*ibid:* 204). The study included both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews. The longitudinal design of this research was intended to overcome shortages of cross-sectional studies that cannot provide confident conclusions on causal relationships between subjective perceptions of adulthood, from one side, and adult role statuses or individual responsibilities, from the other. The study showed that “role transitions are central to youth’s subjective adult identity” (Benson & Furstenberg, 2006: 215), but did not differentiate individual responsibilities. The authors conclude by recommending that more longitudinal and qualitative research be conducted in order to get better understanding of the interactions associated with being an adult and the process of meaning-making.

Research on identity development, in general, has been dominated by cross-sectional, longitudinal, and retrospective studies. However, it is maintained that identity development research has benefited the most from longitudinal studies „designed to enable the observation of intraindividual pathways of identity development“ (Kroger, 2003: 215). Because of the generally short duration of the moratorium status, longitudinal researchers need to collect data at frequent intervals to fully understand all steps taken in various developmental trajectories of adolescence. Therefore, at least three or four data collection points should be included. This makes longitudinal designs time-consuming and iterative. Longitudinal research, on the other hand, have contributed to capture the developmental process *in vivo,* allowing for more accuracy in tracing the effects of time passing, maturation, and distinguishing between intra-individual and extra-individual changes. Longitudinal studies converge with identity as

a complex construct that is best to approach using continuous assessments to uncover growth processes combining both person- and variable-centred approaches (cf. Lerner, Schwartz & Phelps, 2009).

A second sub-group within the quantitative approach in studying identity formation and development includes (semi)-structured interviews, surveys, and questionnaires, such as *The Identity Status Interview (ISI)* or *The Ego Identity Incomplete Sentence Blank* (EI-ISB), both based on Erikson's theory. James Marcia designed the ISI to serve as "an empirical tool to test the validity of Erikson's concept of identity" (Marcia, 2007: 7). There is a pre-defined scoring system that "allows for both parametric and non-parametric data analysis as well as the use of percentage of agreement or alpha coefficients for inter-scorer reliability estimates" (*ibid:* 5). The EI-ISB represents a projective test, where stems are fixed and answers are scored based on the manual's measures. Categories that EI-ISB is measuring include self-reflection, a realistic sense of the future, commitment to occupation and ideology, self-initiated action, relatively safe expression of impulses, reformulation of childhood personality antecedents in adult terms, autonomy, group affiliation, social integration, and internal locus of self-evaluation (Kroger & Marcia, 2011: 34). Both instruments measure ego identity, and in studies dealing with specific domains of identity, they are commonly used in correlation with measures of other traits and characteristics (cf. Kroger, 2007).

Two questionnaires measuring adulthood markers have been developed based on Arnett's emerging adulthood model; these are *Markers of Adulthood* (MOA) and *Inventory of the Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood* (IDEA). Research by Reifman et al. (2007) aimed to describe characteristics of a group of emerging adults based on selected measures. It was a comparative study that included three groups of participants: college and non-college students in their 20s, adolescents and a group above 30. The study was based on the Inventory developed for identifying dimensions of emerging adulthood (IDEA), in addition to a series of scales measuring correlated variables: satisfaction with life, self-mastery, envisioned possible future selves, future orientation, novelty-seeking, and parental control.

The IDEA inventory[29] seems to be a rather logical and parsimonious instrument for measuring "*individual differences* in self-identification with the processes of EA" (Reifman et al., 2007*:* 4, emphasis original). Its subscales correspond to emerging adulthood dimensions: identity exploration, experimentation/possibilities, other-focus and self-focus. The research results showed that compared to teen and adult cohorts, the sample group in their twenties scored higher or lower, supporting the conclusion that they constitute a distinct age group. However, the instruments showed certain psychometric shortcomings (factor structure, reliability and ecological validity), implying that further research is required, perhaps in conjunction with the use of other instruments and in various cultural contexts. The MoA scale, on the other side, measures identification with adulthood themes, e.g., role transitions, norm compliance, relational maturity and independence.[30] Previous research using this scale (e.g., Sharon, 2016) found that youth develop conceptualizations of adulthood adaptively and that challenges around young people's transition to adulthood have grown more complex over the last 15 years since the MoA scale was first used. This result suggests that objective circumstances as an important variable to consider when analysing one's process of adult identity formation.

In concluding remarks on the quantitative approach to identity research, it is important to note that these studies have been concerned with a limited number of identity dimensions and used large samples. Variables are defined to enable objective measurements and uniqueness across different individuals. They contributed by revealing patterns, typologies, and expected processes in identity formation. However, in the back fore, the quantitative approach does not manage to resolve the question of whether it is possible to quantify identity while remaining true to its plentiful nature.

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[29] The IDEA inventory is available from:
http://www.midss.org/sites/default/files/inventory_of_the_dimensions_of_emerging_adulthood.pdf [May 10, 2017]

[30] See more at: https://osf.io/p8nwq/ [January 15, 2019].

4.3.2 Qualitative Approach

The qualitative approach, by contrast, is unconcerned with metrics, for it maintains that there is no objective reality and that identity is such a nuanced concept that it can barely be "caught" in a single methodological framework. Instead, a researcher can strive to "capture" identity relevant processes as accurately as possible, but never wholly (cf. Watzlawik & Born, 2007). A well-known book on emerging adulthood by Jeffrey J. Arnett (2004a), who explains the study focused on 300 in-depth structured interviews with persons aged 20 to 29, is one of the most influential representatives of the qualitative approach of adult identity research. Interviews are supplemented by demographic data from nationwide surveys, allowing for a better understanding of current societal trends. Arnett demonstrates how interview data usage enabled describing emerging adults' "different situations and perspectives" (*ibid:* 25) thanks to self-focus and self-reflection immanent to their age group and ongoing developmental processes. Data collected from the interviews were presented in a way that preserved the interviews' authenticity and individuality while also enabling the formation of typologies. This research is particularly informative in terms of identifying commonalities and patterns in the lives of diverse young people, as well as respecting the diversity and complexity of experiences that individuals have along their life paths and trajectories.

The study conducted by Andrew et al. (2007) on the "inner side" of adulthood aimed to investigate how young people see the process of becoming an adult applying focus group as a data collecting technique with 61 participants, college students and recent college graduates. Prior to the focus groups, participants were asked to include demographic details as well as complete a questionnaire of open-ended items on their assumptions on adolescence and adulthood. This research showed that focus groups allow for more flexible data collection, giving researchers the opportunity to inquire about dynamics that might be overlooked in a quantitative questionnaire. However, there are drawbacks in the sense that analysing a large corpus of data gathered

concurrently by several entities is challenging. The moderator faces difficulties as focus group members interact, such as potential digressions from the main subject or a lack of additional clarification of the opinions brought up by various individuals. Power relations in the group may also serve as a source of coercion, causing participants to feel compelled to align themselves with positions that do not necessarily reflect their true feelings. Focus group data are also based on reported attitudes and opinions that do not necessarily map directly onto or predict actual observed behaviour (Krueger, 1998). This represents one of the most apparent deficiencies of data obtained from focus groups, but on the other side, they do manage to reflect the core features of the experience shared by a particular group. Focus groups may trigger the processes that reveal the inner side of adult identity formation beyond objective markers and measures and initiate the dialectics between theoretical and personal conceptions.

As previously said, interviews and focus groups are the most common qualitative techniques deployed in researching adult identity formation. They have the advantage of not being oblivious to the complexities and processes of identity problems. Even the structured interview protocols leave room for unanticipated categories to emerge in the research process, bringing qualitative techniques closer to the "phenomenological aspects of the experience in a holistic manner and commonly from the perspective of participants themselves" (Kroger, 2007: 186).

The research problem of the present dissertation required a research technique in compliance with its nature and the theoretical framework elaborated in Chapter 3. The methodology chosen should be capable of capturing the psychosocial nature of adult identity formation, while respecting the act of narration as essential to being aware of the identity work that a person is undertaking – exploration, questioning, and achievements. Within the Narrative Identity, McAdams's model has widely promoted the use of life story interview, arguing that "identity itself takes the form of a story, complete with setting, scenes, character, plot, and theme" (McAdams, 2011: 101). Furthermore, the potentials of the qualitative approach for improving higher education

pedagogic quality have already been documented in research by Abbas and McLean (2007).

A life story interview methodology is specifically directed to obtaining "the story a person chooses to tell about the life he or she has lived" (Atkinson, 2002: 125). Therefore, life stories eventually reflect *choice biographies* (Furlong et al., 2006), which is central to understanding the process of adult identity formation. According to McAdams, the life story interview assumes that people will picture their lives as a book or novel, complete with high, low and turning points, characters, and themes, while telling their stories. Despite some criticisms of using book chapters as a metaphor for life stories, McAdams maintains that for most people in Western cultures, book chapters seem to be a rather plausible "organisational format" (McAdams & Guo, 2015: 4) to reflect and narrate their lives. The life story interview assumes that the individual telling a story has "the narrative competence" (Witzel & Reiter, 2012: 31), which would ultimately contribute to the collection of data required for the study. This method may provide rich accounts of a young person's life path so far, but only sparse accounts of their higher education experience due to its centeredness on life as a totality of experiences.

Therefore, when negotiating research methodology for this study, we faced the challenge of focusing our research approach on higher education experience and adult identity formation processes within this framework. We originally intended to adapt the life story interview script to focus more clearly on a person's time in higher education and the challenges they experienced in that particular context. In doing this, we faced another challenge of jeopardising methodological and epistemological assumptions of life-story interviewing, by slipping into reductionism and dismissing past life experiences and future life scripts. Instead, in order to stay within the frames of the research methodology that allows for "analysis of life-course dynamics and biographies" (Witzel & Reiter, 2012), we chose a problem-centred interview (PCI), which captures a portion of a person's life history focusing on specific life events, experiences and reflections. More detailed elaboration of the use of the PCI in the

present dissertation is brought forward in the next section, in which the research approach of this study is further explicated.

4.3.3 Conclusions

After reviewing the key features of quantitative and qualitative approaches to researching adult identity formation, we may infer that eventually, the research problem will determine which approach is used, as they both "offer a distinctive lens to the study of identity" (McLean & Pratt, 2006: 720). As shown by Watzlawik and Born (2007), combining the two approaches yields richer insights into the phenomena under study, but such studies might face the problem of theoretical compliance between the concepts underlying the two approaches (cf Skhirtladze et al., 2017). In this research, we choose a qualitative approach, and a more comprehensive explanation for this decision will be given in the subsequent section. Rather than formulating generalisations, qualitative studies are concerned with understanding individual circumstances of adult identity formation. They are specifically applicable in newly evolving identity domains where concepts and processes are not yet fully operationalised and where multiple influences are at work. Viewing quantitative and qualitative studies in the context of ego identity formation, Kroger concludes that the latter are more frequent "alongside other, more varied, dimensions of identity" (Kroger, 2007: 185), which are yet to be explored and fully described. Adult identity, in comparison to ego identity, is a largely unexplored dimension of identity due to the developments affecting the concept of adulthood and its relatedness to a series of contextual variables.

4.4 Defining research approach in present dissertation

This section describes the research process undertaken in the present dissertation. The first step is to pinpoint the use of the biographical method as a methodological framework. We continue with problem-centred interviewing (PCI) as the methodological technique designed and carried out to enable analysis of interpretations of individuals' biographical accounts reflecting their higher education experience centred specifically on the processes relevant to adult identity formation. We further describe the process of collecting empirical data, unfolding limitations and delimitations of problem-centred interviewing, and the modifications we made for our research. In ensuring validity and reliability of data collected with qualitative methodology, it is crucial to describe the strategy of selecting participants, establishing relationships between the interviewer and the participants, as well as ensuring participants' reflexivity and deliberation for the soundness of data. The section closes by describing data analysis strategies relying on thematic coding.

4.4.1 Biographical method as a methodological framework

As shown in Chapters 2 and 3, the concepts underlying our research (*higher education, student, adulthood, adult identity*) are undergoing continuing reconceptualization and change, challenging traditional assumptions. It was also shown that higher education changes have overlooked individual student perspectives, except when evaluating the instrumental educational outcomes (those related to competencies and employment ends). Therefore, it remains unknown how students experience their higher education development, particularly in terms of adult identity formation. On the other hand, adulthood and transition are contentious topics that defy straightforward demarcation and theoretical standardisation, especially given their dependency on

culture and context. As seen in Chapter 2, students are marginalised in dominant discourses on higher education, which manifests itself in a disregard for their personal needs and perspectives on personal development. In the mainstream discourses, they are treated more as an object of processes than as a subject initiating change. One of the reasons we used the biographical approach for our study is that it has the ability to give underrepresented people a voice. Biographical research bears the potential of transforming people's lives through provoking introspection and meaning-making. The biographical method gives a voice to "ordinary people" and makes them relevant as social actors. Biographical elements, in addition to their personal dimension, are often linked to the context, to specific circumstances in the social environment – economic, political and cultural in nature (Suárez-Ortega, 2013: 189).

The second motivation stems from the biographical method's heuristic possibilities and its relatedness to this study's theoretical framework. Furthermore, the biographical method is used in Erikson's major works, such as analyses of notable individuals' life events (Martin Luther, Gandhi, Bernard Shaw, Maxim Gorky, and Freud). He brought forward the method of *triple bookkeeping,* which involves keeping biographical accounts of multiple developmental processes and influences. Founded on Erikson's theory, McAdams's narrative identity model has contributed to the promotion of a particular biographical narrative technique of life story interviews, expanding theoretical and empirical works. However, a life story interview is focused on the analysis of life course, and includes a variety of events, experiences, scenes, and characters, which made its scope too broad for this study's main objective. As a result, we used a problem-centred interview technique that allowed us to focus on people's interpretations, meanings, and evaluations of events from a specific period of their lives. The concern with biographical material is common to both the life story interview and the PCI, but their focuses differ in that the former analyses life courses and the latter interpretations of events and experiences (cf. Witzel & Reiter, 2012).

Social studies in general, and education, in particular, have recently witnessed "biographical turn "(Chamberlayne, Bornat & Wengraf, 2000; McLean & Abbas, 2011),

which is observed both in research and teaching practices. The biographical method, when used as a teaching strategy, counters the prevailing discourse of marketization and politicisation of higher education by engaging students in taking their own stories into the analysis and interpretation of theory and topics covered in university courses (McLean and Abbas, 2009), as well as focusing on their personal gains from the coursework. Likewise, studies report that theoretical concepts also enrich students' interpretations of their own experiences (Wright, 2011). In the schooling context, educators have "special biographic interest in the educational lives of individuals" (van Manen, 1990: 71), which helps them "learn about the nature of educational experiences and individual developments" (*ibid:* 72). Unravelling the role of higher education experience in students' biographical narratives of their personal development through higher education indicates whether it is "benign and transformative or negative and damaging " (McLean and Abbas, 2011: 2).

The biographical method is utilised in the present research as a generic term encompassing research techniques involved in people's biographical experience (specific paths and trajectories, transitions, challenges), presented in a narrative way (cf. Bornat, 2008). In that sense, Flick echoes Ricoeur's perspective on mimetic relationship between life stories and narratives, noting that "[t]he narrative, in general, provides a framework in which experiences may be located, presented, and evaluated – in short, in which they are lived" (Flick, 2009: 81). The concept of *mimesis* is used here to denote a process of framing rather than mirroring experiences. This is exemplified by the distinction between a life history lived by a person, and a life story told in an interview (Rosenthal and Fischer-Rosenthal, 2004 cited after Flick, 2009: 347). Therefore, it is essential to distinguish between the story ordered chronologically in a life story interview and the experiences and meanings exposed in a PCI interview.

Miller (2000) outlines the shortcomings of biographical approaches to consider when interpreting research results and drawing conclusions. In the first place, biographical methods do not grasp the whole life, just a selective story of a particular segment of life. The second relates to the veracity of results and the likelihood that

people in their narrative accounts tell something that is not true. The third limitation comes from the story's subjective and situational character, which is also constrained by the culture and society. The characteristics of the biographical method discussed thus far reflect just a small portion of debates about this method, which is gaining in popularity in social science research (cf. Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). For the present study, it is particularly relevant the possibility of the biographical method to employ a range of research techniques dealing with biographical material, such as people's lived experiences, their interpretations of life events, and the process of meaning-making.

4.4.2 Use of problem-centred interview (PCI)

The PCI was used as the main research technique to collect "biographical data with regard to a certain problem" (Flick, 2009: 162). In this case, the central problem is students' evaluation of the role of higher education experience in their adult identity formation. The PCI is deemed an adequate technique in a research focused on "evaluations from the perspective of the moment of the interview" (Scheibelhofer, 2005: 26) or "the analysis of individual reconstructions and their structuring conditions" (*ibid*: 27). The PCI's application rests on the three principles (Witzel & Reiter, 2012);

1. problem centring (orientation to the relevant problem, which has been previously investigated and presented in the *sensitising framework* in order to gain awareness of prior theories and concepts before entering into the discursive-dialogic process with research participants)
2. process orientation (flexible production and analysis of data, a combination of inductive and deductive logic, e.g., dialectics of theoretical and practical knowledge)
3. object-orientation (researcher is required to comply the PCI with the nature of the research problem in the sense of adjusting interview questions).

The PCI is "designed so that the researcher's *prior knowledge* defining and structuring the research interest in a preliminary way enters into a discursive dialogue

with the respondent's *practical everyday knowledge* about a relevant issue" (Witzel & Reiter, 2012: 15, italics original). In the present research, the PCI is centred around obtaining interpretative accounts of the developmental process a person has undergone, including influences, contexts, facilitators, and pitfalls from the higher education context. The PCI is also found suitable for grasping "structuring conditions under which interviewees gain experiences" (Scheibelhofer, 2005: 20). With such an object-orientation, we expected interview participants to tell whether they saw themselves as adults, what experiences influenced the formation of specific segments of adult identity, and what role higher education experience played in that process. Thereby, we aimed at capturing the essential function of identity as conceived by Erikson – that of integration. Besides integrating the self diachronically (across time dimensions), it also aims at synchronic integration by putting together a person's various social roles, values, and attitudes (McAdams and McLean, 2013). The theoretical framework pre-assumes that all those might be relevant for interpreting the experiences occurring in persons' adult identity formation. The distinctive feature of problem-centred interview is dialogic-discursive practice resulting in reconstructing "actions and experiences, their justification and evaluation, as well as individual opinions" (Witzel & Reiter, 2012: 8).

Authors have already identified the phenomenon of the so-called "reminiscence bump" (Thorne, 2000 cited in Meeus, 2011: 89) in biographical research with emerging adults, denoting the propensity to over-represent events from adolescence and emerging adulthood in storytelling. Narrative identity researchers assume that a reminiscence bump occurs because an integral life story develops in adolescence for the first time (Habermas & Buck, 2000; Pasupathi, 2001). However, this tendency in narrative approaches is widely criticised in PCI methodology, and is referred to as the *fallacy of non-intervention* (Witzel & Reiter, 2012: 8). Unlike narrative interviews, which rely on open narrative questions and minimal interference from the interviewer, in PCI, interviewers ensure deliberation and controlled narrativity (cf. Gilleard & Higgs, 2016) through *ad hoc questions* and *interview guide*. This is achieved by asking opening questions and a series of follow-up questions. The structure of the PCI designed for our research is explained in more detail further in the text.

4.4.2.1 Interview structure

This sub-section explains how the PCI was included in the current research and what its key components were. The formulation of interview questions was based on the prior knowledge of the topic, which in our case relied on the psychosocial theory of identity development, narrative identity development, as well as the results from empirical studies directly relating to the conditions of transitioning to adulthood and conceiving of adulthood in the light of broader social changes. However, our knowledge of the topic was incomplete, and especially given the subjective nature of the concepts in use, such as identity, adulthood, life transitions, prior knowledge required to be supplemented and, perhaps, modified by the actual experiences of young people. Therefore, we needed a discursive-dialogical method that confronted theoretical and practical knowledge of students' adult identity formation in higher education. Here we employed inductive and deductive logic in the sense that "[t]he *inductive* moment of fully considering subjective perspectives complements the *deductive* moment of building upon available prior knowledge from research in a way that allows novel data to question and revise previous knowledge" (Witzel & Reiter, 2012: 15; italics original). This facilitates the problem centring of the interview and gives control to the researcher in meeting the research objectives.

Practical implementation of the PCI includes a set of instruments (Witzel, 2000, par. 5): a short questionnaire, interviewing guidelines, tape recordings and a postscript. In Witzel's earlier works (2000), a short questionnaire was used before the interview, and this was subject of critics (e.g. Flick, 2009: 164) for possibility of directing the process of storytelling depending on the questionnaire components. In later versions (Witzel & Reiter, 2012), the questionnaire was moved to the end of the interview. However, in order to see which form was more suitable for promoting narrative processes in our study, both options were tested in pilot interviews. We conveyed three pilot interviews, with the questionnaire being used at the end of two of them and at the beginning of the third. Interview situations were then compared, and results showed that using a short questionnaire at the beginning of an interview helped interview partners

become more acquainted with one another; the questionnaire exposed the interviewee to the topic of interest and acted as a basis for further narration. In this way, the interview partner demonstrated awareness of the interview's main topic before initiating the interview. When used at the end of the interview, the questionnaire's factual value was emphasised, as the interviewee only gave brief answers, with no additional explanations. It did not affect the narration process, but both interviews in which the questionnaire was implemented at the end had more ad hoc questions asking about topics of particular interest for our research than it was the case when the questionnaire was introduced at the beginning. Of course, these observations did not have confirmatory value; they just served in the process of adjusting our interviewing style and finding the best way of converging the elements of the PCI with the topic of our interest.

In formulating an interview guide (see *Appendix 3*), as suggested by Witzel and Reiter (2012), it was necessary to transform the theoretical framework and research questions into interview questions to enable further negotiation between the two parties in the interviewing process. Based on the same authors' instructions, we shall outline the interview structure employed in our research.

The interview questions should be tailored to involve subjects in a dialogic situation that is not just focused on probing questions and formulating responses. This is a pre-requisite for "the establishment of a narrative conversational structure evolving largely according to the priorities of the respondent" (Witzel & Reiter, 2012: 68). Our goal was to encourage storytelling and meaning-making by interview partners. Witzel (2000) proposes the following for achieving this:

1. Pre-formulated opening question – keeping the principle of problem-centeredness.

Example from our study: *Imagine yourself at the beginning of your studies. Try to recall the most significant events that happened to you over the past four/five years of higher education. Let's talk about them.*

2. General exploration – in compliance with object-orientation, the interviewer asks for further questions in order to gain "concrete examples of experiences or biographical episodes" (Witzel, 2000, para. 14)

Example: *What has changed the most in the way you see yourself over the past five years?*

3. Ad hoc questions – introduced in case the interview partner omits some topics that ensure comparability of the interviews.

Example: *How do you think about yourself as an adult? Are you there yet? Why? (pay attention to the criteria for yes and no; ask for further explanation).*

Thus, the opening question preserves the narrative character of the interview and focuses on the partner's process of telling. The narratives produced in the PCI are "important means of generating knowledge that corresponds closely to the way experiences were originally made" (Witzel & Reiter, 2012: 68). In this case, the researcher is actively searching new knowledge in order to revise her own pre-conceptions and become more receptive to the unique qualities of the research problem. This quality of PCI manifested itself more clearly at the relational level of questions, as well as in the later data analysis strategy of concept mapping. It was possible to create linkages between factors based on students' own evaluations by continuously questioning students for their interpretations of factors forming their respective adult identities. As an individual's life emerged through the interview process, it became clear that it was impossible to prepare a definite set of questions and that the interviewer had to strike a balance between being an attentive listener and a researcher interested in "the most important influences, experiences, circumstances, issues, themes, and lessons" (Atkinson, 2002: 125) concerning the part of the lifetime that the interview is about. This makes PCI a highly demanding interviewing technique and requires maximum personal engagement by the researcher, both in conveying interviews and analysis and interpretation. The use of tape recordings and postscripts will be explained in the following subsection.

4.4.2.2 Interviewing process

Participants in this research were first nominated by their professors, colleagues or other relevant persons from higher education setting who were familiar with their academic work and recognised them as outstanding in much of their personal qualities (work ethics, devotedness, responsibility in social relations). A detailed description of the sampling strategy will be explained later. The researcher approached the participants via e-mail to explain the main intention of the research and expectations from their involvement (*Appendix 1*). Informed Consent (*Appendix 2*) was sent by e-mail explaining the terms of their participation, and the interview partners were offered to sign the Consent before starting the interview. Most of the interviews were held in Room 101 of the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Sarajevo, from October 11, 2017, to May 30, 2018. Seven interviews took place elsewhere (two at the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine on December 20, 2017; three at the Faculty of Natural Sciences on April 11-12, 2018 and two at the Faculty of Political Sciences on March 9 and 15, 2018).

Three pilot interviews were conducted earlier, in July 2017. Pilot interviews were conveyed, as previously described, in order to develop the interview guide and formulate the most stimulating opening questions, and test the most suitable communication strategies. We looked for volunteers among students for this purpose, without applying any particular selection criteria. Pilot interviews were not later included in the data analysis process. The duration of the interviews ranged from 76 to 125 minutes (M=99; σ=15, 92). Although it was planned not to exceed 90 minutes, more than half of the interviews (62,5%) lasted longer. The transcription process was "interwoven" (Flick, 2009: 306) with collecting interviews, which served as a basis for further informants selection.

This strategy of navigating the data collection process is consistent with theoretical sampling, which is explained further in this chapter. Therefore, the sample size was not defined a priori, as it depended on the dynamics of data collection as well

as the quality of data obtained. Moreover, comparing individual cases at specific points necessitated the inclusion of additional participants in order to probe the validity of provisional findings. It took an average of 12 hours to thoroughly transcribe an interview. We choose verbatim over selective transcription (Miller & Brewer, 2003: 169). Therefore, complete interviews were transcribed as authentically as possible so that consistency in narration, integrative and adult identity-forming moments could be traced.

In the beginning, interview participants were asked to answer the questions in the short questionnaire briefly. The questionnaire contained some socio-demographic details (age, family educational history, how students financed themselves during studies and living arrangements during the study years). It also inquired about their involvement in extra-curricular activities during the studies (see *Appendix 3*). The questions were designed to include some of the adulthood markers discussed in Chapter 3;

- residential and financial dependence/independence on the family of origin/guardians, employment or participation in the labour market
- love relationship status (absence or presence of stabile love relationships, marriage with or without children)
- an overall assessment of living conditions in the context of their origin.

Such a focus of the short questionnaire enabled us to determine whether the interview partners had already attained any of the traditionally accepted adult roles and tasks, which, according to the confluence model, may reinforce or suspend the subjective sense of adult identity. Interview partners were given the option of requesting further clarification for the questions they were asked. At the end of the interview, the interview partners were given the opportunity to comment on or provide further explanations for the answers given in the initial questionnaire. Only five of them referred to the initial questionnaire at the end, but all did refer to it during the interviewing process. Example:

I: *Have you ever thought that instead of enrolling in university, you had gone out and looked for a job?*

F15: *Well, yes and no. I have no regrets, and I made the decision on my own. No one forced me to study, not even my parents, and it turned out to be a good decision. But, on occasion, I wondered if my life would have been different if I had worked full-time by now. Perhaps it would. Maybe, by now I would have my own family by now…*(33-38)

In this interview segment, the student refers to the question found in the short questionnaire about how she chose to enrol in this particular study program. Although the question was not posed in the interview, on the basis of the questionnaire, the student was able to bring to the consciousness how she came to her decisions and use it in justifying her experiences.

As specified in the Informed Consent, the interviews were audiotaped, and none of the participants expressed any discomfort or disapproval in this regard. They were told that audiotaping was used to ensure the authenticity of data and that the transcripts, once prepared, would be sent for authorisation. There were no additions to the transcribed interviews by any of the participants.[31] Thanks to audiotaping, it was possible for us to make notes all through the interviewing process, which are included in the postscript document (see *Appendix 4*) and concentrate on formulating *ad hoc* questions where it was necessary to stay on track with the main focus of the interview. Postscript was adapted from Witzel and Reiter (2012: 96-97). It served as a "self-debriefing tool that helps to capture important information about the conversation and its context which has not been registered otherwise" (*ibid:* 11). The postscript was especially helpful in forming cases and building types.

The interviewing process *per se* was conducted in accordance with the Interview Guide (see *Appendix 3*). Having posed the opening question, we left the interview partner to tell her/his story without interruption. To ensure the progression of narration according to our research problem, we introduced additional exploratory questions

[31] It was explained in the e-mail sent to the interview participants that if they did not respond, it would be assumed that they agreed to the transcription of their interview.

asking for more detailed accounts of the narrations' segments. In the third stage, to maintain the deliberateness of the stories told (cf. Plummer, 2001), we came with short ad hoc questions. Hence, we found ourselves in the position of encouraging narration, on the one hand, and retaining dialogue, on the other, in order to confront our theoretical knowledge with the practical knowledge of our interview partners. We were faced with the task of maintaining the naturalness of the process where "questioning and answering builds on itself" (Bornat, 2008: 349), which necessitated the previously mentioned "task of listening while questioning, holding at least two, sometimes more, foci of interests" (*ibid*). In this way, the interviewing process has forced us to reconsider our previous knowledge, negotiate meanings, and accommodate the narrator's viewpoints.

4.4.3 Ensuring reliability and validity

The questions of reliability and validity in qualitative research are anchored differently than in quantitative studies, and they tend to acquire certain specific features depending on the applied data collecting methods and techniques. It is now accepted that validity, reliability, and generalisability do not have the same "authority to legitimate the data" (Miller & Brewer, 2003: 101) obtained in qualitative studies as they do in quantitative approach. Therefore, it is necessary to define what precisely is understood by reliability and validity in qualitative research such as this one. We will focus specifically on reliability and validity in biographical research regarding the characteristics of the PCI.

In ensuring reliability in our study, we followed two main questions (cf. Flick, 2009: 387) about:

- the genesis of the data (ensuring clear demarcation between the statements of the research subjects and the researcher's interpretations)
- procedures in the interviewing process (making sure that all steps are described and documented).

Reliability can also be obtained during the data analysis and interpretation, as coded segments are assessed with other passages and in the context of the whole interview, as well as to other interviews (Flick, 2009). In the present study, we re-read each interview several times in order to clarify codes and double-check their cross-referencing in a single interview. It was also possible to determine the compatibility of accounts against the overall corpus of interviews due to a degree of commonality between the students' experiences. Furthermore, the process of thematic coding, which was performed in this research, allows for comparison of cases in order to distinguish shared and dissimilar characteristics. The whole process of multiple-checks in a single interview, as well as among the group of interviews was facilitated by *Atlas.ti* software. Another strategy for maintaining data validity was to have the interview partners revise the transcripts. This was also utilised with intention of ensuring authenticity and demarcation between the narrators' actual experiences and those of the researcher. Moreover, codes were checked against the existing literature referred to in Chapters 2 and 3. Remarks were included in a total of 98 memos, which came in handy during the interpretation process.

When it comes to the question of validity, the first conundrum that arises when dealing with biographical narrative techniques is ensuring that research participants are selected according to the clear criteria and that research methods are best fitted (Suárez-Ortega, 2013: 191). We have already discussed the criteria underlying our decision to apply the biographical method and the PCI, and later in this section we shall describe in detail the process of selecting participants for our research. The question of validity relates to the soundness of person's stories and subsequent researcher's interpretations. In qualitative research like this one, validation was conducted via "checking out of interpretations with participants and against data as the research moves along" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008: 48). All interviews included subjective constructions of events and experiences; however, researcher's role was not to investigate the veracity of accounts but to facilitate the process of emerging a personal story by not imposing any preconceptions and attitudes to the interview partner.

The richness and validity of the interview depend upon the degree of social desirability biasing the interaction as well as on the ability of the participants to manage their possible multiple roles. In our study, challenges in establishing interview relationships stem from our positions in the teaching process interfering with the interview situation. Being aware of this, we used the strategy of explaining to the interview partners the importance of their story, their views and interpretations (cf. Cormier, Nurius, Osborn, 2009). At the same time, we tried to put aside our role of a teacher and to take on the part of a curious listener. This fostered the adoption of the discursive-dialogic stance in relation to our existing knowledge.

In addition to maintaining validity and reliability, Flick (2009: 391) emphasises transparency of the research process, while Witzel & Reiter (2012) cite two validation strategies; using the text or case as a source of control and using the opinions of multiple interpreters as a source of control. The second strategy is often difficult to implement in single-researcher studies, such as doctoral or master's theses, so we primarily focused on the first validation strategy. This included development of various interpretations and counter-interpretations and their intra- and inter-textual confrontation throughout the analysis process. Authors note that "PCI is particularly suitable to being subjected to this kind of validation because of its *dialogic reconstruction of problems*" (Witzel & Reiter, 2012: 83).

When discussing reliability, Lincoln and Guba (1985) present the concept of *trustworthiness* of data, which originates from the four characteristics: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. We attempted to establish credibility in this study by including a thorough description of the entire research process. We sought to maintain credibility by probing the same questions to different interview partners in order to verify their subjective accounts against the broader context, keeping in mind the subjective quality of the data gathered from biographical research.

However, it seems impossible to test veracity of the accounts told by the individuals, since they are exclusively subjective experiences, which constitutes a limitation of biographical approaches when it comes to data credibility. In order to ensure transferability, it was important to choose interview participants from similar contexts; in our case all students were in their final years of studies (fourth or fifth year) at the University of Sarajevo. Dependability illustrates how results are bound to the specific context, so we defined context-related factors concerning higher education in BiH in Chapter 2, and referred to it in the interpretation of data. Confirmability tells about how the results are based on the actual data, which is seen from the coding as well as authentic quotes by the interview participants.

The following section describes how the research participants were selected to ensure that they were relevant informants who could provide reliable and valid data. Afterwards, in a separate section, we shall refer to the data analysis process and establishing a coding system, which is also an important strategy in ensuring the reliability and validity of research findings.

4.4.3.1 Participants

Participants in this research were senior year students (fourth or fifth year) studying at the University of Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina). This particular group of students was selected for they are considered to have a complete experience of higher education, and therefore are useful informants on various facets of that context. Entry and exit points of university attendance have been identified as periods of active identity processes in longitudinal studies (cf. Kroger, 2003: 217). Furthermore, as previously reported, anticipated transition from higher education accentuates identity issues. Early and mid-twenties is the age “old enough so that issues of timing and adult identity are likely quite salient, but young enough to have not yet acquired all the adult role markers” (Eliason et al., 2015: 211). In addition, Arnett’s research has demonstrated that students describe themselves as being “in-between” adolescence and full adulthood,

implying that they feel like they have reached adult status in certain domains, but not in others, suggesting that adult identity formation is domain-specific. On the other hand, senior students are on the verge of transitioning from higher education to new environments and roles linked to employment, formation of family and independent household, all of which are traditionally considered markers of adulthood. Therefore, the ability to integrate past and future in a coherent story makes senior students' narratives relevant for inquiry and analysis, from the perspective of both Erikson's and McAdams's theories. The process of narration is indexed by reflexivity, as the capacity which, according to Margaret Archer includes "questioning ourselves, clarifying our beliefs and inclinations, diagnosing our situations, deliberating about our concerns and defining our own project" (Archer, 2003: 103). Archer found that reflexivity is associated with agency in university students, and that both qualities are present in this group in various modalities.

As discussed earlier, previous studies, particularly those based on the narrative identity model, maintain that a typical emerging adult acts as an author of own life, demonstrating the capability and proclivity to integrate their lives into a coherent story, along with all of its contradictions and non-senses. Central is the ability of meaning making from lived experiences, which develops during middle adolescence (Pasupathi & Hoyt, 2009; McAdams & McLean, 2013). All of this suggests that, emerging adults are suitable as storytellers or narrators, from one side, and that it is important to engage them in that process for its developmental benefits.

The sampling strategy applied is non-statistical, purposeful and based on theoretical framework discussed in Chapter 3. Students were selected in two stages, each with its own set of criteria. In the first stage, we sought nominations from teachers and student union activists based on factors such as a student's diligence, high achievement, extra-curricular participation and social competence.

Nominators were addressed with the following request;

I am currently conducting research with the aim of exploring students' adult identity formation in higher education. I would like you to nominate one or more

students that you appreciate (e.g. for their diligence, high achievement, involvement in extra-curricular activities or their work in social arena) to take part in my research. Senior year students are of special concern to me (fourth or fifth year of studies).

The reason why we intended to include outstanding students is because we pre-assumed that more successful students and those involved in various domains had stronger communication skills, autobiographical reasoning and more questionings about themselves and their living context. It was actually proven throughout our research that all interview partners had exceptional narrative capabilities and were able to tell the story in a reflective manner. In the first round 32 students were nominated, of whom 28 were included in our final sample. After the interviews were taken and the initial analysis was performed, it became obvious that not all groups of students were included, specifically those with atypical family structures or those who had already assumed adult roles and commitments. Therefore, we initiated another round of nominations with a modified request;

I am currently conducting research with the aim of exploring students' adult identity formation in higher education. I would like you to nominate one or more students that you know have an atypical family structure or who have already assumed adult roles and commitments (e.g. married or divorced, raising a child, working full time, etc.) to take part in my research. Senior year students are of special concern to me (fourth or fifth year of studies).

In the second round, 20 students were nominated, of which 12 were included in our research, for their contexts seemed to be atypical and, as such, they added to the variety of the research sample, reflecting thus the diverse reality of student population.

The number of nominations per person ranged from one to three, indicating a high level of selectivity and a small number of nominees relative to the general population in which an average university teacher interacts (between 50 and 150 students). The total number of participants was 40 and, as previously noted, the number

was not defined a priori. Instead, cases were added based on the principle of empirical saturation, which seeks to include a variety of informants and their diverse experiences (cf. Sandelowski, 1995). Theoretical sampling, which represents the case where researchers try to add new properties to already existing theoretical categories, is a suitable strategy for data saturation (Charmaz, 2015: 406). In sensitising for the potential diversity of cases in our topic we found helpful discussion on adulthood in recent scholarship provided in Chapter 3, which showed that there were multiple circumstances shaping a person's adult identity, and that the concept of adulthood does not have monolithic and universal meaning. The application of theoretical sampling in our research will be explained in the reminder of the text.

4.4.3.2 Theoretical sampling

The concept of theoretical sampling originates from the grounded theory of Glaser and Strauss, who proposed this strategy for ensuring the emergence of theory from obtained data (Coyne, 1997: 623-624). Further additions to theoretical sampling define it as a strategy aiming "to develop, refine, or fill out the properties of tentative theoretical categories" (Charmaz, 2015: 406). It further means that researchers start with tentative categories and concentrate on data collection in order to "answer specific questions about the properties of their theoretical categories" (*ibid*). The sample is considered complete as the researcher finds less and less variation in „the relationship between the codes, categories and the core category. At this stage, the categories, codes and emergent theory are said to have reached 'saturation'" (Miller & Bewer, 2003: 134). In this manner, theoretical sampling "offers a way of designing the variation of the conditions under which a phenomenon is studied as broadly as possible" (Flick, 2009: 407). As a result, coping with "the social distribution of perspectives on a phenomenon or a process" (Flick, 2009: 318) becomes possible. This further affects the criteria for defining sample structure, which are based on theoretical knowledge about the problem and are modified throughout the research process. With this, the strategy of theoretical sampling becomes congruent with the process of focused and thematic

coding. Theoretical sampling entails inductive logics, but it also includes some elements of deduction in the form of tentative theoretical categories and their testing against the data found. This process is described by Miller and Bewer (2003: 68) as "an oscillation between induction and deduction" in which a researcher continually balances between data and theory "revising the theory by means of more data and onwards to the refinement of the theory" (*ibid).*

In this research, the main criteria for sampling were defined based on prior theoretical and empirical knowledge of the final study year as the transitional period in which identity processes become more prominent. Senior year students have a complete insight into the period of higher education and the possibility to evaluate its impact. As the previous theoretical works show, developing a sense of adult identity is a fairly subjective process that is nowadays de-standardised and non-normative. Therefore, it was required to include various categories in our sample based on the criteria for attaining adult status discussed in Chapter 3; those with work commitments and those without, married and single ones, those living with their parents and those living apart from them, those who were the first generation in their families to complete higher education as well as those with highly educated parents or siblings. Hence, objective circumstances became the categorical variable used to classify participants in the research. However, since the composition of the sample could not be determined with confidence a priori, it was developed throughout the research process. The way theoretical sampling was used in this research allowed for the identification of various cases, which were compared later on the basis of defined themes (cf. Flick, 2009: 318).

4.5 Data analysis

The essence of data analysis in qualitative research is to ensure valid interpretation and conclusions that are founded in empirical findings. To this end, a researcher confronts the challenge of as authentically as possible understanding the participants' referential frameworks, which form their experiences and unique perspective on life. The researcher thus attempts to prioritize the "participant's subjective consciousness" (Curtis, 1978 cited after Suárez-Ortega, 2012: 191), evoking the meaning-making process and reflexive knowledge production. Hence, the data analysis and interpretation process should take into account the subjectivity, authenticity and reflexivity contained in the material obtained from the research participants.

Data analysis for this research was conveyed in three rounds. The first took place during the data collection process through interview transcriptions and memos writings, with the purpose of saturation and problem-centring the research process. The second round took place post data collection, during which data analysis methods were applied and some basic research findings were produced. Following this round, results were sent out to the supervisor for reviewing, and on the basis of received remarks, the final round of data analysis was conveyed. In order to meet the methodological criteria of qualitative data analysis, and accurately answer the research questions in the present study, three major data analysis methods were applied: thematic analysis (Flick, 2009: 318; Kuckartz, 2014: 69), type-building (Kluge, 2000), and concept mapping (Morgan & Guevara, 2008: 109). *Figure 4* illustrates how three data analysis methods interact with one another, with one method's results leading to the next. Integration and internal coherence between various sets of research results may be accomplished in this way.

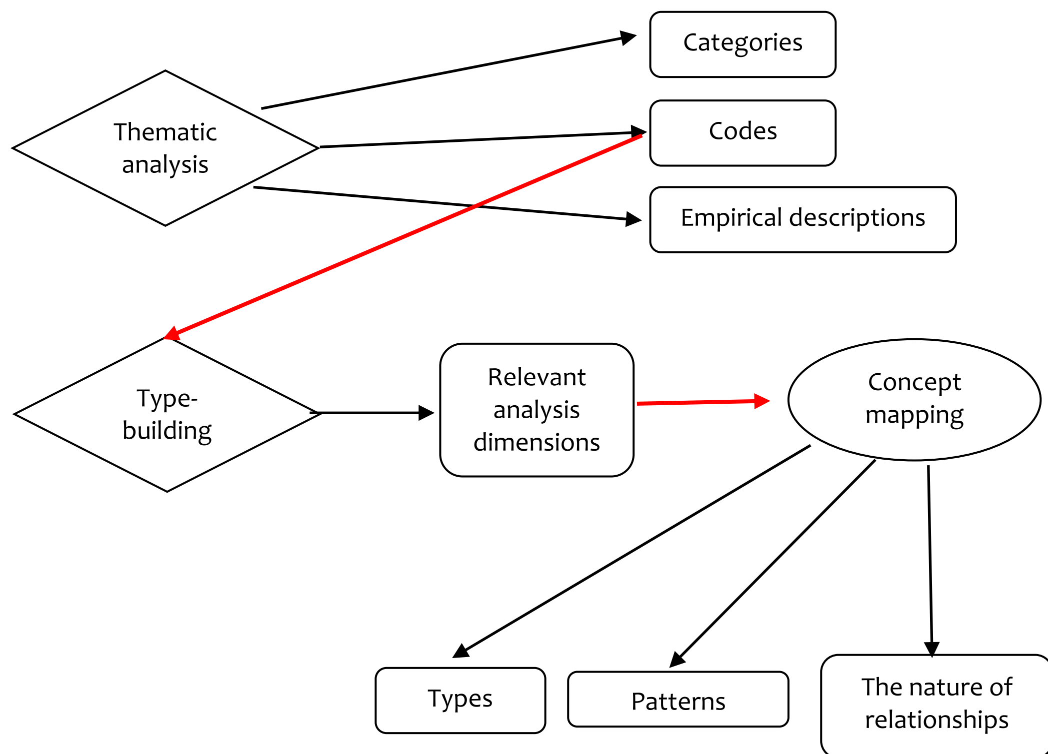

Figure 4: Overview of data analysis methods in present research

The analysis process began with thematic scrutinization of transcripts in order to identify relevant passages. Within this method larger interview segments were extracted, while in the subsequent stages they were reduced and organised into categories and sub-categories. Categories were first deductively derived from the already existing themes in theory and research (discussed in Chapter 3), while the sub-codes were extracted inductively from the interviews. To address the descriptive set of research questions, a category-based analysis was conveyed to provide descriptors of students' positions in relation to the main factors influencing adult identity formation. Concept mapping, an analysis strategy that allowed for the identification of relationships between adult identity forming factors, as well as orderings and co-occurrences, was used to answer the second level of research questions. At this stage, *meaningful relations* forming combinations of attributes (Kluge, 2000) were created, paving the way to type-building. A detailed description of applying data analysis methods is provided in the remainder of this section, starting with the profile matrix.

4.5.1 Forming the profile matrix

The first step in organising data was creating the profile matrix (see *Appendix 5*) containing socio-demographic properties of the sample identified in the theoretical framework as relevant for research on adulthood, together with the motto (Flick, 2009: 319) summarising the key stance of every single participant in the research in relation to the main research problem. Mottos contain “analytical summaries” (Kuckartz, 2014: 80) of the original interviews “compressed and reduced to what is really relevant for the research question” (*ibid*). Socio-demographic data were extracted from short questionnaires, while mottos were added later, resulting from the process of thematic analysis. As such, the profile matrix is designed to keep each participants’ individuality while also providing contextual information for a greater understanding of his/her perspectives on the research problem. The matrix proved to be a practical tool in various stages throughout the process of data analysis. In addition, data contained therein reflect “input factors” (Côté & Levine, 1997: 230) that can be used to distinguish students based on their perceptions of higher education’s role in adult identity formation. Hence, the matrix preserved the complexities of each student’s influences in her/his adult identity processes thus facilitating context-sensitive subsequent interpretation of the results. Only the excerpt comprising the matrix’s main categories will be included here for illustration purposes.

Table 2: Excerpt from the profile matrix

LABEL	STUDY FIELD	AGE	FAMILY EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND	FAMILY STRUCTURE	RELATIONSHIP/ MARITAL STATUS	LIVING ARRANGEMENT	WORK COMMITMENTS	SOURCES OF FINACES	MOTTO
M01	English language and literature	22	Parents with high school qualification; older brother completed university	Parents, two sons	In Stabile relationship	With parents	Working full time in the final year of studies	Scholarship; parents' support; own salary	*"Day by day I upgrade my personality and become more mature in every sense"*
M02	English language and literature	23	Parents and sister completed university	Parents, a daughter and a son	In a relationship	In students' dormitory	Seasonal work	Parents' support; occasional honorarium	*"Right now, I want to do a lot of different things and not worry about making commitments."*

As suggested by Kuckartz (2014: 67), rows in the profile matrix offer a *case-oriented perspective* based on thematic categories of analysis, while columns show a *topic-oriented* perspective. As seen in *Table 2,* each research participant could be viewed as a single case with a multiplex of attributes, whilst the process of further data systematisation and iterative examination of comparable features revealed commonalities between individual cases, providing a basis for the further level of data systematisation – thematic or case summaries and type-building.

4.5.2 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is considered to be a highly recognised method in qualitative research, especially in the context of dissertations (Kuckartz, 2019: 181). It is specifically applicable when working with broad data sets encompassing different

perspectives, as it allows for the identification of commonalities and disparities, as well as the extraction of main features (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017: 2). It is a strategy compatible with both theoretical sampling (Flick, 2009: 318) and the PCI (Kuckartz, 2014: 70). Thematic analysis is a category-driven coding process directed to "identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes found within a data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006 cited after Nowell et al., 2017: 2).

A theoretical framework originating from a formal theory provides deductive epistemology in the sense that it prepares researchers for concepts and existing knowledge, which explain the relationships between them. In the initial stages of the text analysis, we incorporated prior knowledge of various contemporary re-conceptualisations of adulthood, as well as psychosocial theoretical views on the process of adult identity formation and psychosocial moratorium. However, the material collected during the research contained its own heuristics, which was revealed by the means of inductive analysis. Therefore, according to some authors (e.g. Rule & John, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), it is critical to establish dialectics between inductive and deductive approaches during the coding process in order to get the most out of both.

Constructing categories is based on the interchange of deductive and inductive approaches (cf. Kuckartz, 2014: 69-70), and it is the foundation for the development of cases and types. However, more recently, Kuckartz (2019), finds naming the process deductive-inductive problematic in the context of formation of empirically-based categories. Instead, he proposes the terms *data-driven* and *concept-driven* approach to formation of categories (*ibid*: 185). Accordingly, the strategy of thematic analysis used in this research integrated both approaches in the way that codes originating from the psychosocial theory and research questions served as the starting point, while in the next stage codes were further organised and systematized from the empirical material until saturation was reached (*ibid:* 184-185). It was essential to remain open for the knowledge emerging from the data set analysed. In achieving this, we tried to maintain „constant comparison of phenomena, cases, concepts, and so on, and the formulation of questions that are addressed to the text" (Flick, 2009: 307). As seen in *Figure 5,* we

applied the basic process of thematic qualitative text analysis, which consisted of seven steps starting with initial readings and memos writing and ending with the category-based analysis (cf. Kuckartz, 2014: 70).

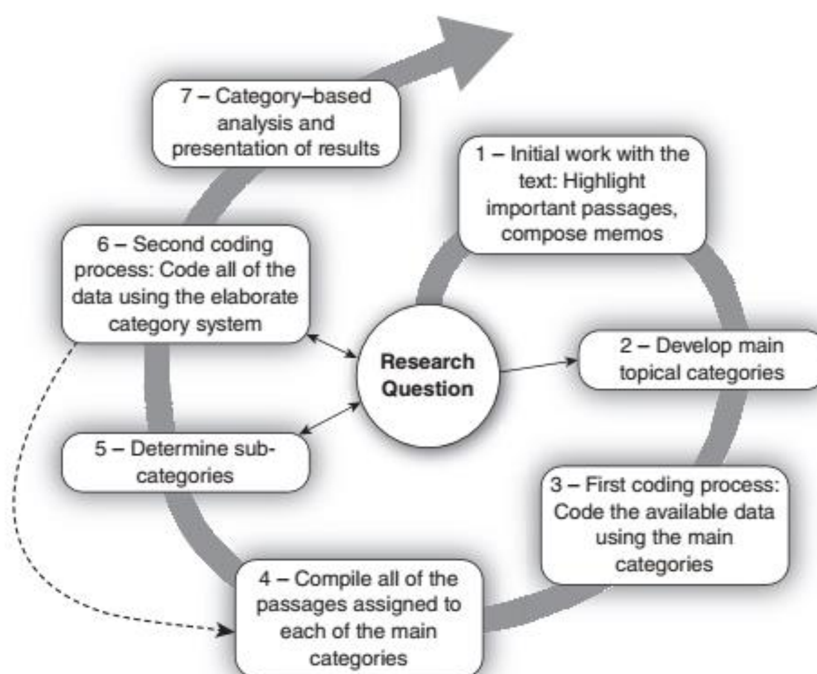

Figure 5: Process of thematic qualitative text analysis (Kuckartz, 2014: 70)

The reminder of the text delves into the method of creating categories and sub-categories, which is at the heart of thematic analysis.

4.5.2.1 Developing categories and sub-categories

Categories represent both an analytical instrument and the substance of the research process (Kuckartz, 2019: 183), guiding a researcher to the relevant empirical knowledge. As maintained earlier by Kuckartz (2014: 71), the main categories in thematic analysis are drawn from the research questions and have already impacted the way data were collected. Different types of categories (cf. Kuckartz, 2019: 183-184)

were formed throughout the analysis process depending on the nature of the data collected. Factual categories were defined when describing students' objective circumstances. Thematic categories were used in identifying adult identity criteria among the students, while evaluative categories appeared when assessments of the attributes or the extant of students' experiences were analysed.

Departing from the theoretical framework and research questions, the main thematic categories were defined deductively, or in relation to prior conceptualisations of the main factors participating in students' adult identity formation (perception of the criteria for adult status, students' self-evaluation of progress in becoming an adult, students' personal agency in their developmental processes, the process of becoming an adult, perception of the role of higher education institution, adult identity forming experiences, and factors contributing to students' adult identity formation). Further, those categories were also checked against the empirical material during the coding of the interviews (step 3 in *Figure 5*) in order to form descriptions for each of them based on the obtained data. The first step in organising the data was to describe the categories and sub-categories, which represented the participants' perspectives on the research questions. However, those findings had only descriptive value, allowing students to be placed and grouped in relation to various factors of adult identity formation addressed by the first set of research questions. Yet, they did not reveal the nature of those relationships, nor did they have explanatory power of types.

Following the compilation of all the passages assigned to each of the main categories (step 4 in *Figure 5*), it was possible to search for further thematic differentiation resulting in data-driven construction of sub-categories. This initiated the second process of coding, which involved defining sub-categories in an abstract and general manner, together with identifying the relevant dimensions for each of them. This was seminal for later concept mapping and type-building.

Category-based analysis informs the first set of research questions. *Table 4* contains results of the process of developing categories and sub-categories with

definitions and prototypical examples from the empirical material as suggested by Kuckartz (2014: 76). The main thematic categories may be taken from either the research questions or the interview's main thematic structure (Kuckartz, 2014: 71-72). We started with the research questions, which were founded in the theoretical framework defined for this research, and to which the empirical material was later assigned. This deductive approach allowed us to narrow our analysis to only those topics that are relevant to the research questions, and to grasp them with empirical material as comprehensively as possible. As previously said, data analysis ran concurrently with the data collection process, allowing for a greater degree of control over the quality of the empirical material and its contribution to the research questions.

In the process of coding the material, it was essential to code integral interviews in order to collect all empirical items that complied with the categories, which could be dispersed due to the narrative nature of interviews. Only in the text retrieval and the second stage of coding was it possible to clearly define each of the categories and corresponding sub-categories on the basis of empirical material.

Table 3: Empirical descriptions of the main categories in thematic analysis

Category	Acronym	Empirical description	Examples from the data
Criteria for adult status	CAS	Includes views on what qualifies someone as an adult; personal „definitions“ on when someone is considered an adult	Personal attributes and social attainment factors, social recognition is emphasised
Self-evaluation of progress in becoming an adult	SBA	Answers the following questions: are students undergoing the process of adult identity formation; do they feel like adults; when yes and when no; why yes and why no;	Variety of views; feeling like an adult as context-related. Diversity in progress of becoming an adult; some students feeling like grownups but not like adults; some students feeling like on the road to adulthood; others feeling like having achieved adulthood

Degree of personal agency concerning the developmental processes	DPA	Includes a person's intentional activities with the purpose of gaining a more stable sense of being an adult	Some students have no idea about activities that they have to take in order to develop adult identity, others report about a range of deliberately undertaken activities
The process of becoming an adult	PBA	The path passed in adult identity formation from the first university year until now; the process of exploration and commitments	Dynamics and statics, ups and downs, moments of stagnation and confusion, but also growth and progress; crucial moments (of various intensity) can be identified; individual developmental tasks and external expectations
Adult identity forming experiences	AIFE	Includes persons, contents, activities, teaching approaches, living arrangements and social issues created while attending higher education	Moments related to overall experience as a student, not only those related to HEI. Teachers, peers, books, higher expectations, autonomy, separating from the family of origin, paid job for sustaining the studies
Perception of support from HEI	PIS	Whether HEI supports or hinders adult identity formation; by which means it plays the formative role and what constrains it. Includes evaluations about how higher education has helped students develop the sense of being an adult. It includes comparison between objective conditions, person's own agency and experiences in higher education.	Supportive role, neutral, supressing; HEI's mindfulness of students' developmental tasks; students' agency and objective circumstances
Nature of relationships between different adult identity forming factors	NRAIF	Contains students' reflections on what has influenced their adult identity formation, under which circumstances and in what intensity. It includes assessments of interrelatedness between the different factors, and the meaning and significance of existing relations	It is possible to identify order in terms of temporal occurrence, mutual influences, amplification of effects of certain factors under specific circumstances

In the second round of coding, the categories were further differentiated and text passages were assigned to each of them, highlighting the main positions of the research

participants in relation to the given topics. This enabled identifying dimensions in each of the categories, as part of the process of constructing relationships and types.

4.5.2.2 Type-building

Type-building as a strategy of data analysis provides „multi-dimensional patterns and models that enable researchers understand a complex subject or field" (Kuckartz, 2014: 103). It results in knowledge of typical manifestations, and is often referred to in the literature (Flick, 2009; Kuckartz, 2014: 68) as the qualitative counterpart of generalizations characterising quantitative studies. It is argued that generalization in qualitative research is achieved through "the gradual transfer of findings from case studies and their context to more general and abstract relations, for example a typology" (Flick, 2009: 408). Kuckartz (2014: 105) goes as far as to assume that the main goal of social science research is to understand what is typical. The purpose for applying type-building in this research arises from the assumption that different combinations of adult identity forming factors would produce systematic differences in students' assessments of the higher education's role. Constructed types are intended to reflect those combinations present in this research sample. There are three groups of types, according to Kuckartz (2010: 109-110): monothetic (with homogenous attributes), types created by reducing diversity and polythetic types (with heterogenous attributes). The aim of type-building in this case was to create polythetic types, which are also referred to as natural types, suggesting that they are constructed from the actual empirical material. While polythetic types reflect internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity, it is important that they "are not absolutely the same in terms of the attributes within the attribute space, but they are quite similar" (*ibid:* 110). This openness implies that, while cases may be grouped into the same type, they still retain some individual properties.

The object of building types may be people, institutions and organizations, but they can also be patterns of thought (Kuckartz, 2014: 106). In this research, types were constructed from patterns of thought, i.e., students' evaluations of factors that framed

their adult identity formation. There are four steps in the type-building process (see *Figure 6*). It begins with the development of relevant analysis dimensions, which basically builds from the prior thematic coding process. Building empirical types is the process of grouping individual cases based on their attributes whereby cases with maximal similarities and minimal differences are grouped in a single type. The process ends with analysis of relationships between the cases forming a single type, and characterisation of constructed types.

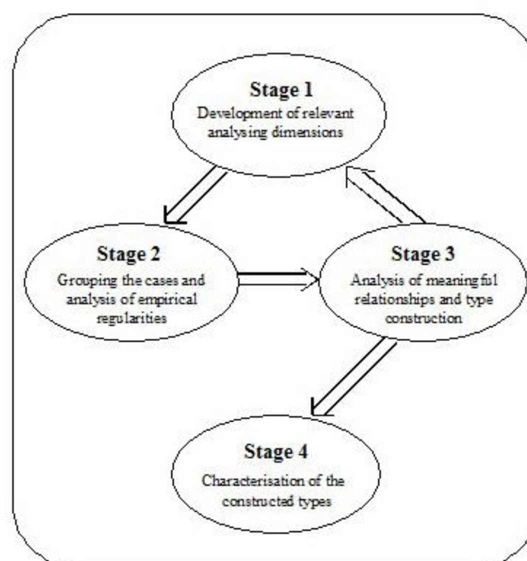

Figure 6: Four phases of empirical type-building (Kluge, 2000: par. 9)

In order to ensure more transparent and valid mode of data analysis (as described in Section 4.4.3) and interpretation, type-building was combined with concept mapping, which will be described in the remainder of the text.

4.5.2.3 Concept mapping

Concept mapping is substantially a visualisation of the interconnectedness of the concepts found in the empirical material. It is applicable both as a method of data collection and data analysis (Morgan & Guevara, 2008). Utilised in the process of data analysis, concept mapping enables synthesising, organisation and identifying relationships and meanings between the different concepts (Conceição, Samuel &

Yelich Biniecki, 2017). It is compatible with both theoretical sampling and thematic analysis, because it locates cognate data sets and ensures comparability between codes and categories. Concept mapping was applied in this research as part of the first two stages of the type-building method. It started with the identification of a core concept (assessment of the role of higher education in students' adult identity formation) to which other concepts were joined based on identified relationships. For the sake of data transferability, codes were first *dimensionalised* (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), relations between them were also coded and presented in the matrix (see in Chapter 5). The analysis of *meaningful relationships* was first based on interview participants' own comments about the links they could identify in what has led to their current development. Those comments were later analysed across different cases to find *properties* and *dimensions* (cf. Corbin & Strauss, 2008), which were then used to compare cases and later type-building. In the process of identifying relationships between the factors, the principle of *triple book keeping was* implemented in the sense that analysis of existing relationships was approached by simultaneously tracking the occurrence of various factors and iterative processes of analysis of existing relationships. An example illustrates how interview partners were encouraged to reflect on the relationships between the adult identity forming factors, and locate influences that affected them.

Interview excerpt	Coding
I: *What do you think, how have your living conditions shaped your development as an adult person?*	
M07: *Well, in many ways. My parents always taught me the importance of responsibility and independence, they encouraged me to pursue my dreams, to try out many things. They had high expectations, but I never had a pressure of letting them down or failing. I felt rather confident that eventually I shall succeed. We lived quite a decent life.*	combination of effects parents' support **leading to** developing attributes of adult identity
I: *So, the living conditions in your family of origin allowed for more relaxed self-development work?*	favourable living conditions **facilitating** self-developmental work
M07: *More or less, so. I didn't have some major concerns… like earning money (as I do now) or taking care for anything in the household.*	

I: *What about your studies and what happened during that time, how that affected your development as an adult person?*
M07: *Well, a huge change was when I decided to get married. It was in the second year of my studies. Everybody thought it was a crazy idea… You know, just starting with the Medical school and plus marriage – seems not fitting together. I was in a relationship for about three years, and it was like natural to think about getting married. This was definitely a major change, finding an apartment and then sustaining me and my wife. I wanted to get some financial independence, and I started to work in a hotel.*
That was the point of time when everything changed. I was no longer upset by some irrelevant everyday matters, I was concerned how to get the two ends meet each month, and to prove to myself, my wife and our parents that we are old enough and capable of independent living. It was not all that easy, though.
Studying, working par-time… but it definitely made me a real adult.

marriage **accelerating** adult identity formation (other situational pre-requisites are missing)

personal agency **amplifying** adult identity formation processes

responsibilities for another person **accelerating** adult identity formation

difficult life circumstances **accelerating** adult identity formation

the need for recognition **accelerating** adult identity formation

causal effect of a combination of factors on adult identity formation

Relationships between the factors were also reconstructed on the basis of coding all other interview segments containing the relevant accounts. Findings from individual cases were cross-checked against other similar cases, and as the interviewing process progressed, questions about relationships became more explicit. Following the identification of relationships in the interviews, diagrams were created in *Atlas.ti* representing the main concepts and descriptions of relationships between them. The central concept was the role of higher education in students' adult identity formation, to which other adult identity forming factors were joined containing also the description of identified relationships. Based on this, it was possible to identify groups of students with similar combination of influences shaping their adult identity formation.

Through the opening phase of data analysis, it became apparent that categories and sub-categories reflected variations in individual experiences, but that this heterogeneity should be properly systematised in order to address the research questions accurately. This resulted in groupings of similar individuals, leading to "structure understanding (i.e., the understanding of relationships pointing beyond the individual

case)" (Flick, 2009: 408). Identifying groupings of students based on the shared combinations of relationships that shaped their adult identity formation was an important step in systematisation of research findings. Furthermore, the resultant groupings acted as the base for "transferability of findings from one context to another and fittingness as to the degree of comparability of different contexts" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 cited in Flick, 2009: 407). This was the attempt to compensate for generalisability by systematically comparing data in different contexts, as proposed by Glaser (1969 cited after Flick, 2009: 408). However, Flick (2009: 407) warns that it is important to remain cautious when integrating different individuals and their contexts under a common denominator. In particular, this implies the risk of reductionism and unnatural groupings based on supposed similarity. The analysis at relational level resulted in the identification of student types and the description of the relationships between adult identity forming factors.

5 Research results

5.1 Introduction

This chapter is concerned with presenting the results obtained from the data analysis and interpretation processes. The presentation of results follows the three levels of research questions: descriptive, relational and evaluative. Substantially, they address the two main areas essential for understanding the problem of this dissertation – the structure of the student population in relation to relevant properties, and the potential of higher education experience to index the formation of adult identity in students. The first section deals with how do the students place themselves in relation to the main factors that influence adult identity formation. In the second section, relationships between adult identity forming factors are identified and their different combinations are explained. The third section delves into the construction and characterisation of student types identified through type-building. It deals with the formative facets of higher education experience for students' adult identities, treating personal attributes that were developed and adult identity forming experiences that different types of students reported about. On the basis of identified types, it was possible to draw conclusions about the nature of relationships within the group of adult identity forming factors. This segment of the results eventually gets to the point of why this research was initiated in the first place.

The results are organised and presented in tables and diagrams, along with quotes from the original material serving for empirical grounding of abstract categories and codes. However, as Kuckartz (2019) points out, there is a risk of *selective plausibility,* which manifests itself in the selection of quotes that affirm "the alleged

connections between categories, while contradictory examples are not considered" (*ibid:* 194). He recommends using counterexamples wherever possible to avoid this. Each section contains concluding remarks that highlight the most important results related to the corresponding set of research questions, and indicate further open questions. The chapter closes with a general conclusion about the knowledge created on the role of higher education in students' adult identity formation, as well as the interaction of various factors, accompanied by a discussion of the implications, limitation and recommendations related to the obtained results.

5.2 Positioning students in relation to the main factors of adult identity formation

On the basis of the prior knowledge provided in Chapter 3 on the transition to adulthood, it is retained that youth experiences are fairly individual, non-linear and that adult identity formation may be seen as a result of a variety of factors surrounding an individual young person. Perhaps it is not an exaggeration to say that each individual carries a unique combination of factors that have shaped her/his path to adulthood. Therefore, we intended to include as many diverse students as possible in the sample, not with the purpose of reaching representativeness and forming general conclusions, but with the intention of recognising varieties in student body in terms of their living circumstances (the structure of the family of origin, study field, relationship status, living arrangement and financial (in)dependence). This heterogeneity certainly does not add to generalisability, but it does add inclusiveness and sensibility to varied student experiences and backgrounds, resulting in richer insights into the factors framing students' adult identity formation.

This section brings results obtained from merging the descriptive questions with an evaluative question about students' assessments of higher education's role in adult identity formation. The presentation of results commences with the sample structure, and continues with students' descriptions of their objective circumstances, identifying criteria for attaining adult status, assessment of their personal agency, and closes with the assessment of higher education's role(s).

5.2.1 Students participating in the research – remarks on the sample structure

In total, 48 students were nominated for this research by their teachers, community leaders or fellow students on the basis of diligence, high achievements and overall social activism. Some of the nominations came with a brief outline that provided us with the initial background information about the particular student. The next step was to contact the nominees via e-mail, when the accompanying documents of the research project (*Appendix 1 and 2*) were sent, with the intention of informing students about the main research objective and eliciting expectations from their participation. Two students out of 48 did not respond to the e-mail, and two students said that they were too busy to participate in the interview. Four students expressed an interest in participating, but eventually it was not possible to arrange a convenient time for a meeting. Accordingly, the final sample consisted of 40 students who studied diverse fields and came from a variety of family backgrounds. All interview partners were guaranteed anonymity, so their personal data were removed and they were assigned labels *M* – for male participants and *F* – for female participants, together with a belonging number that indicated the order in which the interviews were conducted. However, considering the biographical orientation of this research and its intention of giving students a voice and encouraging them to articulate their perspectives on reality, data de-personalisation proved to be limiting and hindering to our initial intention. On the other side, the strategy of anonymising data resulted in students becoming more

relaxed and encouraged to talk freely about themselves, relevant persons and, especially, the higher education institution.

Details of the final sample structure are described in the profile matrix (see *Appendix 5*). Below are extracted data on the sample structure containing characteristics representing traditionally considered criteria for adulthood discussed earlier in Section 3.4.

5.2.2 Students' objective circumstances

Within the group of factors pertaining to students' objective circumstances – and aligned with the theoretical discussions presented in Chapter 3 – sample structure is displayed according to gender, family structure, family SES, academic inheritance from family of origin, present living arrangements, financial (in)dependence and relationship status. Most of the data presented in this section were obtained from the short questionnaire administered at the beginning of the interviewing process, but some details were supplemented by accounts collected during the interview.

Table 4 shows that the age range of students who participated in this research was 21 to 26 years, with an average age of 23, and a dominant value of 24. From the stand point of adult identity processes, this age is considered formational in the sense that "it is old enough so that issues of timing and adult identity are likely quite salient, but young enough to have not yet acquired all the adult role markers, nor assumed a taken-for-granted identity as an adult" (Eliason et al., 2015: 211). Given this, the research meets the key criteria for selecting participants – their status of full-time senior year students, in their fourth or fifth year of studies, and their belonging to the typical student age group (with 26 years as the highest age limit). Considering that, results of this research are comparable with earlier studies on adult identity formation such as

Arnett's (2000; 2004a) and Grigsby's (2009), whose respective samples included students aged 18-25.

Table 4: Sample structure

Age	Range	21-26 yrs.
	M	23 yrs.
	D	24 yrs.
Structure of the family of origin	Complete family	60%
	Divorced parents	17,5%
	A missing parent or both to death	15%
	Raised in orphanage or missing data	7,5%
Family of origin academic background	One or both parents with HE degree	40%
	First generation higher education student[32]	40%
	A sibling studying or holding a HE degree[33]	20%
Living arrangement	With family of origin	40%
	In a rented apartment separated from parents	27,5%
	In students' dormitory	25%
	In own household	7,5%
Relationship status	In a relationship or engaged	47,5%
	Single	35%
	Married, with/out children	7,5%
	Divorced, with/out children	7,5&
	Missing data	2,5%
Work experience	Occasional or seasonal work while studying	45%
	No work experience	27,5%
	Part-time or full-time work while studying	22,5%
	Volunteering	5%

[32] A first-generation higher education student in this research is defined as a person who does not have anyone in her immediate family who has or is pursuing a higher education degree. As interview participants reported that their siblings were still studying, they were included in the category „a sibling studying or holding a HE degree".

[33] This category includes students whose parents are not highly educated, but whose siblings are either pursuing a degree or have already completed studies.

Based on the studies that indicate existing gender differences in acquiring adult sense of self (Fadjukoff, 2007; Aronson, 2008; Cooper et al., 2015), it was planned to have rather balanced gender structure in the sample, so the final sample consisted of 55% female and 45% male participants. Based on this, the structure of this sample corresponds to the overall gender ratio in higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with 9,6% more women completing tertiary education compared to their male counterparts (ASBH, 2019: 51). When it comes to educational inheritance from the family of origin, it's worth noting that this sample includes students from both groups: those with higher education history in their families (having a parent and/or a sibling who has completed higher education) and those from the first generation of higher education students. Two students who reported they were raised in an orphanage were also included in the group of first-generation higher education students, since it can be taken as a signal of not possessing prior family academic capital. In that sense, this sample is rather consistent with the results of the EUROSTUDENT survey cited earlier in Chapter 2, which showed that 48.2% of students in Bosnia and Herzegovina reported having at least one parent who was highly educated.

Rather diverse structure of family of origin was present in this sample, which is to a certain extant a reflection of the complex reality of today's families. However, complete families of parents and children were the most common, but there were also cases of living with divorced parents, as well as students who have lost one or both parents. One person said that she had been a caretaker to her severely sick father for a longer period of time. As for the relationship status, the majority of students were in a relationship or engaged (47,5%), while 35% of participants reported to be single. Students who were married or divorced, with or without children, made up a lower share of the student body. The ability to form and maintain a lasting and stable love relationship is regarded as a marker of social maturity which, according to Erikson (1968), constitutes an element of adult identity.

More than half of the students participating in this research were living separately from their parents, either in a dormitory or in a rented apartment, while 40%

reported they were living in the households with their families of origin. In prior research residential independence was identified as one of the most important markers of adult status, as well as one of the most challenging tasks for students, in general (cf. Holmstrom et al., 2002). However, in the case of students, residential independence often denotes pseudo-independence, meaning that they are only living independently during the study years, after which they return to their families, or that residential independence is not accompanied by financial independence.

When it comes to financial independence, 40% of the students in this sample reported having no work experience, while the rest worked occasionally (often in jobs that were unrelated to their fields of study, such as working in a hotel or a restaurant), and only a small portion of them were working full-time. This finding was attributed in part to the fact that full-time students are required to attend classes regularly (less than 19% of class absence is tolerated at the University of Sarajevo). At the same time, registered student work is only available via Student's Service, with few vacancies. Hence, students commonly work unregistered or are forced to change their status to part-time student in order to obtain a registered job position.

Another attribute that can be used to characterise students is their study field. It is based on the premise that different academic environments would produce systematic differences in students' perceptions and experiences, and hence would affect their personal development (Pike & Killian, 2002). Study fields varied in our sample and included the majority of disciplines taught at the University of Sarajevo. This variety is important to encompass because of the study arrangements students encounter, different teaching approaches and learning cultures in various schools and departments. Some study programs are organised as 3+2 or 4+1, while others are integral 5 or 6 years.[34] The difference is in the time when students receive their first higher education qualification, which has proven to be a common point of reference in students'

[34] The most common study arrangement was 3+2, while 4+1 was in Faculty of Science, integral 5 years was at Faculty of Veterinary Medicine and integral of 6 years was at Faculty of Medicine.

narrations.[35] Humanities and Social science students make up 67,5% of the total sample structure, followed by students studying biomedical and technical disciplines (25%), and students studying sciences (7,5%). Studies in humanities, social sciences and natural sciences are organised in the 3+2 scheme, and allow for part-time student status. On the other hand, biomedical and technical disciplines can only be studied for an integral of 5 or 6 years solely as a full-time student.

Despite the fact that all of the participants in this research shared the same student status and had more or less comparable experiences in higher education, their individual contexts affecting the adult identity formation were diverse and perhaps unique. It is hardly possible to claim that two persons had the same experience of their adult identity formation processes. Therefore, qualitative research and biographical method were rendered suitable methodological framework since they preserve subjectivity and individuality of experiences. At the same time, this fact challenged our intention of building types and identifying patterns, as grouping might compromise individuality of experiences. Having presented objective circumstances of students participating in this research, we shall proceed with analysis of their perceptions of the criteria for adult status.

5.2.3 Perception of adult status criteria

As the coding process progressed, it became apparent that students had their subjective conceptions about adult identity and what it entailed. Furthermore, their narrations about the perceptions of achieving it were clearly context-bound, as though the context itself approved or had "made" them adults. In three cases interviewees

[35] A student in Education says of the moment she completed her three-year Bachelor's program: *„At that time, I felt like I had reached my goals, like I was a complete person, and like I got more options to choose between – to continue studies, to pursue a job, to form my family... It was as if my life had been given a boost"* [F18, 111-115]. This quotation indicates completing the three-year BA level as a certain turning point when a person adopted more adult-like forms of opportunities.

reported about "*life circumstances that launches you into adulthood*" [F22: 35]. However, it is significant to note that none of the three students said they grew up in a typical family setting with both parents (one of them reported losing both parents). The contexts that students commonly referred to were their families of origin, higher education institutions and the circle of friends, as illustrated in the quotes: *"Teachers play an important role in developing an adult sense of self; they treat you as a responsible, worthy, competent… maybe, even equal to themselves…"* [M10: 31-33]
"I am not yet an adult in the eyes of my parents." [F06: 87]
"Since I no longer live with my parents, my friends look at me differently. Somehow, they started showing more respect for me as an independent person" [M09: 109-110]

As the qualitative material started to reveal certain patterns and regularities during the coding process, it became evident that all of the criteria students cite as indicators of adult identity should be grouped into two sets of markers, which we labelled *social achievement markers* and *personal attributes markers*. Social achievement markers included: completing education, employment, social recognition, forming a family and moving out from parents' home. They were assigned to the domain of socially related criteria for they were indicators of major changes in status within their relevant social groups in the lives of youth. *"Once you have your own income, somehow you are a grown-up in the eyes of others"* [F13: 80-81]. In the accounts of students who have not yet committed to those roles and tasks, achieving them was a life goal in and of itself. The goals, on the other hand, sometimes collided with one another and sometimes hampered each other's progress. This is the question that was addressed when assessing the role of higher education in students who have already achieved adult identity.

Table 5: System of categories and sub-categories for criteria of adulthood

SOCIAL ACHIEVEMENT MARKERS

- **Completing education** (5)
  - Graduating from university (2)
  - Obtaining diploma/qualification (3)
- **Employment** (15)
  - Having any paid job (2)
  - Finding a job according to obtained qualification (9)
  - Working in family business (1)
  - Employment as a prerequisite for other roles and tasks (3)
- **Social recognition** (6)
  - Recognition from family (2)
  - Recognition from teachers (5)
  - Recognition through employment (2)
  - Recognition of one's success (1)
  - Recognition of one's capabilities (1)
- **Forming a family** (2)
  - Expectation from others about the right time to get married and have children (1)
  - Forming a family as the next big step after finding a job (1)
- **Moving out from parents' home** (2)
  - Immaturity related to living with parents (1)
  - Lack of possibilities to live independently in a rented home (1)

PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES MARKERS

- **Maturity** (18)
  - Be complete person (5)
  - Having control over own actions and thoughts (2)
  - Not to overreact (1)
  - To know your boundaries (5)
  - To hold the ties of your life (3)
  - To have good relationship with others (2)
- **Independence** (23)
  - From parents and family of origin (3)
  - Financial independence (10)
  - Managing life matters (5)
- **Freedom of choice** (10)
  - Not to ask parents what to do (3)
  - Be your own person (7)
- **Responsibility** (25)
  - Having full entitlement for own life (15)
  - Be responsible in a professional domain (5)
  - Taking care for others (parents, partner, children) (5)
- **Capabilities** (8)
  - Having developed intellectual capabilities (3)
  - Life skills (4)
  - Professional competencies (1)

Furthermore, personal attributes markers represented capacities that students recognised as characteristics which an adult person has cultivated. Based on the obtained results, this group of markers included: maturity, independence, freedom of choice, responsibility and developing certain personal capabilities; "*In higher education, I specifically developed my intellectual capacities and life skills needed for functioning in the adult world*" [M16: 113-114].

As seen in *Table 5,* both groups of markers were composed of five categories and a corresponding number of sub-categories (15 in social achievement markers and 17 in personal attributes markers). It can be seen that personal attributes markers dominated with rather high occurrences, while in the domain of social achievement markers, only employment and job commitments emerged as prevailing topics, but, as shown in co-occurrence analysis (see *Figure 7*), in all instances, they appeared in conjunction with personal attributes (e.g. responsibility). Aside from the common categories already present in the literature, the results surfaced with categories of *social recognition* with belonging sub-categories (*recognition from family, from teachers, recognition through employment, recognition of one's success,* and *of one's capabilities*). Social recognition as a social achievement marker fostering adult identity formation is especially important in the context of higher education as an institution providing support to students' personal development by means of recognition of their capacities and competencies. In the other hand, it is interesting to note that being independent from parents was not emphasised as a criterion of adult status by the interviewees, and there were no gaps between those who lived with their parents while studying and those who had separated. When asked to elaborate why they considered employment an important marker of adulthood, the interviewees further described that in their view employment represented a confirmation of one's qualities and capabilities to live and act independently in the world.

"I think my father won't consider me successful until I begin to earn money." [F14: 75]

"People see you in a different way when you work. It's as though you've acquired some special value and have suddenly become more serious and important" [M15: 181]

Furthermore, students' self-perception of themselves as adults seemed to be incomplete, reflecting uncertainty about whether their self-image matched that of their significant others.

"Well, I can say: 'Yes, I am an adult'. But for my parents, for society, I am not. I don't have a diploma, I'm unemployed, and I live in a dormitory…" [F08: 40-42]

"As I see myself, I can say I am an adult. I am really independent, autonomous, have my own goals." [F10: 57-58]

"At the end of the day, society will determine whether you are an adult or not. It gives you permission to access the adult world." [M11: 36-38]

This may be indicative of how young people are treated by their environment, which seems to lack trust in their abilities and a desire to empower, nurture accountability, and foster autonomy. Educational institutions play a vital role in creating such an ambiance so youth will have a context that grants self-growth opportunities, moving them from dependence to independence and encouraging autonomy. This is further clarified in the interview segments;

"I think I started to act like an adult, you know, when I moved away from my parents, started studying, and started to earn some small money. Those were the turning points of my life when I realised I was becoming an adult." [F01: 56-59]

"Of course, if you have your own family, wife and a child, you are an adult. No question." [M07: 68-69]

"Until now, I hadn't felt like an adult; I had just felt like a student. But, now that I am nearing university graduation, I feel compelled to act like an adult. It's the time for that." [F14: 153-156]

"When you are in higher education, you have to behave like an adult. It's not an ordinary school." [F06: 166-167]

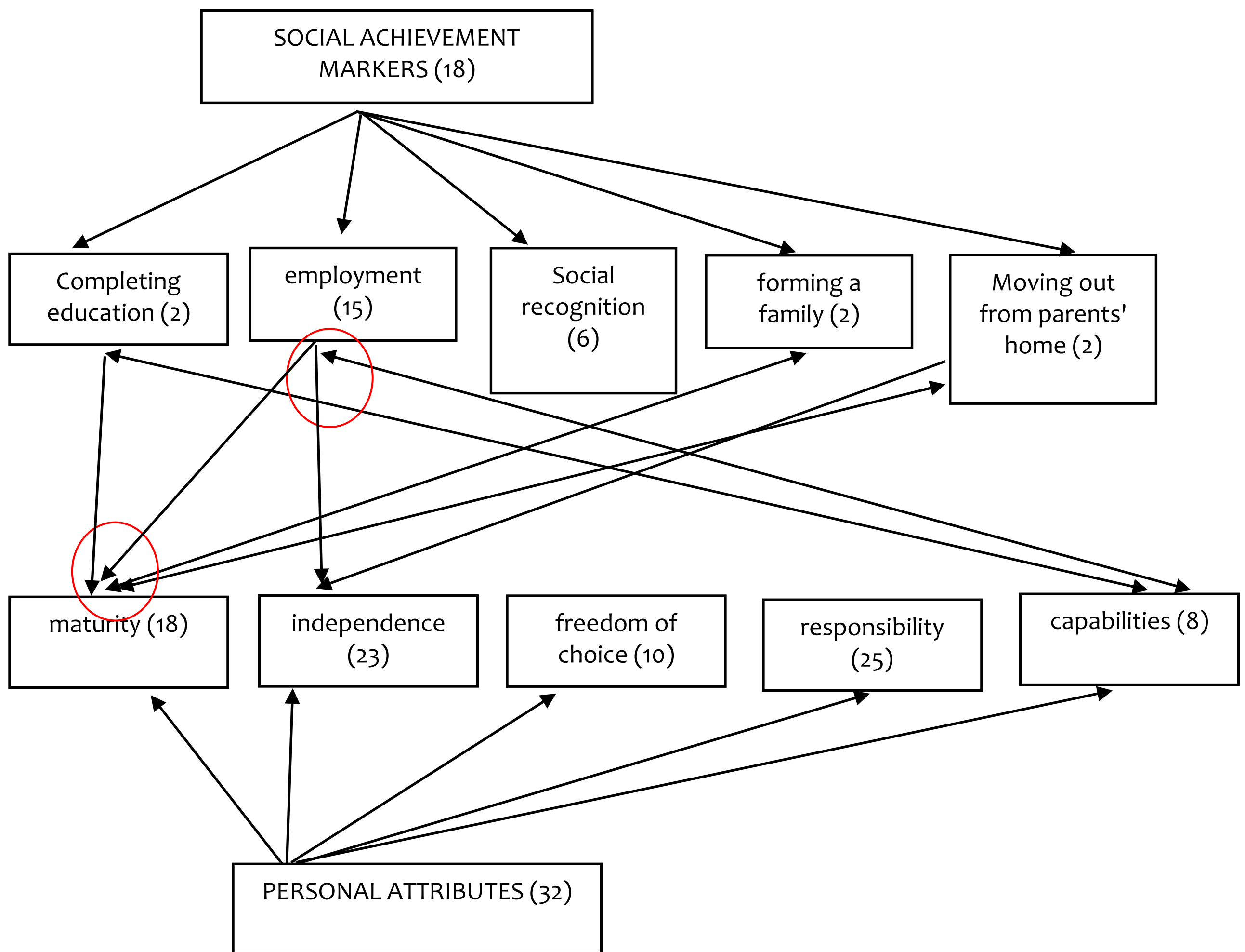

Figure 7: Co-occurrence of social achievement markers and personal attributes markers

Overlapping between the two broad categories (social achievement and personal attributes) and inside the same categories was quite obvious. The interview partners also referenced social achievement markers in conjunction with a certain personality attributes marker;

"Hopefully, I will have the opportunity to find a decent job, so that I can finally contribute to my family and repay my parents for sustaining me." [M03: 175-176]

"I am not yet living independently, do not have a stabile income, and do not have my own home, so I do not feel as responsible as a proper adult would."

[M12: 155-157]

This finding prompted us to perform *Atlas.ti*'s co-occurrence analysis, which confirmed interrelatedness of social achievement markers and personal attributes. *Figure 7* shows the co-occurrence diagram of the two groups of markers. The numerals indicate the number of coded segments for each code in the two categories. It is clear that personal attributes of *independence* and *responsibility* occupy a disproportionately larger area of the coded narrations, and that independence is related to employment. It should also be noted that each social achievement marker is related to at least one from the category of personal attributes.

While the two groups of adult identity markers are clearly discernible, their interrelations are utterly ambiguous, making antecedents and influences impossible to pinpoint. Several quotations vividly illustrate the intricate web of criteria students use to determine adult status.

"An adult is someone who <u>has a job</u> and is able to <u>sustain himself and others financially</u>. I mean, when you <u>don't have to depend on your parents' help</u>. Finding a job makes it possible to make a decision <u>to start a family</u>." [M03: 56-59]

Employment remains a significant social achievement marker that leads to financial independence and responsibility for oneself and others. Likewise, forming a family is linked to gaining independence from one's family of origin and readiness to take responsibility for oneself and others.

"There are a lot of things that make someone an adult person; <u>completing studies</u>, reaching some kind of <u>maturity that others also notice</u>, but the most important is <u>finding a proper job</u>. Then everybody knows you're <u>capable of create something</u>. I mean, you don't have to go to university to be an adult, but being employed is important." [F15: 105-110]

The above quotation shows that completing studies is a social achievement marker which is seen as a reflection of one's maturity and social recognition of creative

and constructive capacity, e.g. achievement capacity. Furthermore, completing studies is interpreted as a ticket to employment, which also leads to social recognition and independence. Both quotes reflect imagined, not actual situations, and prior research discussed in 3.4.2.1 showed that when speaking about adulthood markers, it is relevant to consider whether or not a person has already achieved some of them. It can also be discerned that maturity is interpreted as resulting from completing education, employment, forming a family and moving out from parents' home. Simultaneously, all those social achievement markers are described as an expression of certain maturity. Furthermore, employment leverages maturity, independence and capabilities.

However, it became apparent that those reporting about having achieved the sense of adult status or being in the process of obtaining it had a vision of certain domains which made them feel adults, at least to a certain extent. Narrations of students' personal development over the course of their university years were analysed further to identify domains of achieved adult identity. Students described themselves as adults in the sense that they were *fully responsible for own actions and decisions* [M10: 45]*; were aware of the future challenges* [M10: 49]*; nearly completing university studies* [F14: 61]*; having acquired advanced competencies and knowledge in the study area* [M17: 50-51]. Conversely, they did not feel they had reached adulthood in the areas of *independence* (financial and household), *employment,* and clear plans for the future.

However, the given results do not include indices on the nature of the relationship between the markers, not even between those belonging to the same category, for co-occurrence diagrams "do little to reveal the hierarchical relationship of themes" (Guest & McLellan, 2003: 188). Moreover, as described in Chapter 3, prior research does not provide confident inferences on whether maturity develops before or after positioning on the labour market.

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that students in higher education had varying perceptions of their progress in achieving adult identity, and that this variation

was often related to their personal conceptions of adulthood and the objective circumstances in which they were living. This induced understanding of adult identity in a complexity of roles, tasks and psychological attributes. Moreover, prior research indicates existence of certain orderings in the way those factors influence adult identity formation. This particular question will be addressed later, while analysing the nature of relationships between the adult identity forming factors. The next step within the process of developing categories and sub-categories was to identify how students from this sample self-evaluated their progress in becoming an adult.

5.2.4 Students' self-evaluation of progress in becoming an adult

Results presented in the previous section reflect students' conceptions of adult identity and the criteria for attaining it. This was one of the pre-requisites for maintaining the reliability and validity of the obtained results, since it demonstrated that students were mindful of the processes of adult identity formation and their progress in becoming an adult.

To obtain accurate results, it was necessary to compile all coded segments of interviews belonging to the first thematic category *self-evaluation of progress in becoming an adult* (SBA), and to create sub-categories by means of data-driven analysis. This process led to an in-depth reconsideration of a long list of codes, whereby similar codes were collated to create dimensions that allowed for a better understanding of how students perceived their current adult identity. Empirical data called for further re-organisation of transcripts' coded segments in the second round of coding, resulting in the four empirically-based sub-categories displayed in *Table 6.*

Table 6: Sub-categories for the main thematic category SBA

Sub-category	Empirical definition	Examples from the data	Cases
Achieving adult identity as not essentially relevant developmental task for students currently	The perception of adult identity is blurred and is not possible to trace elements of exploration nor commitment	Students reporting as not thinking that they have to do anything in order to develop their adult identity; "It just happens. You become an adult naturally as you get more mature" [M11: 10].	F03; M04; M11, M12; F21 *N=5*
Adult identity as a desired goal in the developmental process, but not yet achieved	The sense of adult identity formation processes is high, while achievement is low	Students narrating about desiring to achieve adult identity, which would make them "complete persons" [F17: 62], to be "ready to face the challenges ahead" [F03: 77], "to start job/business" [M19: 55], "to form family" [M19: 57] and to "live more actively and responsibly in the society" [F05: 33]	F04; F05; M05; M16; F17; M18 *N=6*
Adult identity halfway achieved	The sense of discrepancy between the personal feelings of becoming an adult and social recognition	Students narrating about being an adult in the sense of independent living, autonomous decision making, financial independence and responsibility for oneself and the others, but not being recognised by the family and the community as such	M01; F01; M02; M03; F06; F07; M14; F12; F16; F20 *N=10*
Adult identity achieved	Commitments are high, but exploration varies, the tendency is towards choices leading to stability and minimal change.	Includes students: 1. who have already taken on adult roles (a spouse, a parent, a full-time worker), and 2. students reporting that they began to feel as adults after gaining residential and financial independency from parents/family of origin, as an effect of student status	F02; M06; M07; M08; F08; M09; F09; M10; F10; F11; M13; F13; F14; F15; M15; M17; F18; F19; F22 *N=19*

As seen in *Table 6,* students from this sample assessed their progress in becoming an adult in four distinct ways, ranging from adult identity achieved and halfway achieved to adult identity not yet achieved, or not being considered an essentially relevant acute task for students. For the sake of clarity and comparability, they are presented in two groups in the remainder of the section.

5.2.4.1 Adult identity achieved and halfway achieved

According to the results of the analysis, almost half of the participants in this research reported that they had achieved a full sense of adult identity, based on their own criteria of attainment. In terms of students' accounts, achieving adult identity is *a gradual process of becoming more mature, goal-oriented, committed to high educational achievement, having residential and financial independence from family of origin, having full responsibility for oneself while also being focused on others and providing support to parents and siblings.* The first half is comprised of students who were living in atypical objective circumstances (e.g. married, growing up without one or both parents, having the role of a caretaker to a parent). Their non-typicality surfaced with prominent role of objective circumstances in the process of adult identity formation for the given group of students. It was apparent that they had achieved adult identities at an accelerated pace, primarily under the influence of role taking (e.g. marriage, forming own household, childbirth, divorce). They reported that their attained identities, as well as taken roles and the meaning of higher education in their self-definition, were being re-evaluated at this time in their lives.

Students who had partly achieved adult identity were identified as being highly committed to their development through the studies and extra-curricular activities, in addition that they reported coming from less privileged social backgrounds. They also stressed the residential independence and some form of earnings that came with their student status. An element that they saw missing was recognition of their attained adult identity from their significant ones, e.g. family members and teachers. When asked to elaborate on the role of significant others, a student said: "*You know, there are subtle*

messages by teachers that we are not sufficiently grown-ups to understand the complexities of social functioning, financial systems operating, or that we are immature to take on responsibilities such as those in the banking sector" [F13: 228-232]. This quotation by a student in the School of Economics reflects gaining responsibilities and maturity within the professional domain, a concern that is common among nearly graduates; however, this student interpreted her concerns about the teacher's attitude as threatening the social recognition of her adult status. Another one referred to her father stating that what particularly made her insecure about her adult identity was that he: "*every now and then says that I do not have a clue what true life is or what responsibilities it entails. He is always critiquing my ideas and decisions*" [F06: 78-80]. "*It hurts when he says I am still the immature little girl with no idea about what life is all about. I feel like I want to prove him that I am a full grown-up, and at the same time I feel helpless*" [F06: 82-85]. It is noteworthy that parental recognition and respect continued to play a role in the integrity and development of those young people even in post-adolescence and after they had reached a certain level of autonomy and independence.

5.2.4.2Adult identity not achieved

Students who stated not having attained adult identity fell into two sub-groups; those who considered adult identity to be a desired goal but did not have a sense that they had reached it, and those who were not concerned with the task of achieving adult identity. The two groups of students had specific conceptions of what adult identity should entail. For them, it signified an idealised state in which an individual was expected to become mature, complete, and take on firm commitments and tasks. The concept of responsibilities and having a certain form of "identity project" was emphasised in the group of students who reported that their adult identity formation was on standby.

Both sub-groups showed that biological processes of growing up are not necessarily accompanied by social and psychological processes leading to adult identity

formation. Since this research is not based on a large-scale sample and statistical inferences, we were foremost concerned with the meanings people make from their experiences and possible patterns existing within.

In relation to our initial expectation, results presented within this sub-section showed that some students did actually reach the sense of full adulthood by the end of their studies. At the same time, the results showcased a group of students who, even prior to graduation, nevertheless felt like "incomplete adults", as well as others who were not deliberately concerned with the processes of becoming an adult. Summarising the derived sub-categories, it was apparent that students' perceptions of progress toward adulthood differed according to the specific combination of factors shaping their development, but it was impossible to conclude at this stage of data analysis which interactions resulted in students' sense of achieved adult identity and which intercepted it. Therefore, it was important to elicit more information about the common characteristics of students pertaining to each of the groups. In the following sub-sections, we shall look at what helped some students achieve adult identity during their higher education, while others stayed dazzled in a blurred vision of their current and future selves.

Results in this section showed that students' perceptions of progress toward adulthood differed not only based on objective circumstances and their living conditions, but also that the category of students' *personal agency*, i.e. their deliberate activity with the purpose of cultivating a sense of being an adult should be examined. The properties identified in both groups of students called for a more sensitive analysis of the actual influences and ordering of the factors underlying their development, which will be addressed in the next section.

5.2.5 Students' personal agency in their developmental processes

The analysis showed that personal agency concerning adult identity formation among students was manifested in three modalities; low, mediate and high, as displayed in *Table 7*.

Table 7: Assessment of students' personal agency

Category	Codes
High PA (18)	awareness of personal role in cultivating adult identity (21) seeking for employment (12) engaging in community work (7) showing high educational aspirations (17) being politically and socially active (9) showing responsibility for parents (11) showing responsibility for own family (10) being aware of the importance of autonomous decision-making (15) mastering self-control (13) accepting complex view on reality (9) accepting diversity in people (5)
Moderate PA (11)	being aware of the personal role in adult identity formation, but feeling constrained by the environment (12) not knowing which activities can contribute to forming adult identity (13) questioning stability of adult identity (5)
Low PA (11)	thinking that becoming an adult is not the matter of personal effort (7) not having any work commitments and not seeking for one feeling completely dependent on family of origin not feeling responsibility for own decisions

High personal agency is identified in the majority of cases within this sample, indicating a student's awareness of deliberately planned self-growth and cultivation of more mature personal characteristics and modes of living. A person is conscious of own responsibility for her development and undertakes activities accordingly. To this end, experiences within the higher education institution are transformed into personal goals of cultivating a more mature sense of self. The analysis shows activities such as: seeking for opportunities to earn money, showing responsibility for others by engaging in community activities, high educational aspirations, presenting oneself to the

professional community, mastering self-control, accepting a nuanced understanding of reality, and accepting diversity in people. An example illustrates high personal agency: *“Why did I want to go to university? I guess, I wanted to grow more mature, to gain some qualities before embarking on the journey to the real-life issues.”* [M13: 64-66]

Moderate personal agency was seen in students who reported being aware that becoming an adult resulted from personal effort, but who also felt constrained by their environment, ruling perceptions and expectations. They even felt constrained by their student status. *“It is difficult for me to emancipate and... grow up as long as I am a student”* [M11: 113-114]. This made students bewildered as to what specific activities were within their capabilities that would contribute to becoming an adult. Moderate agency was also found in students who reported to have reached full adulthood whereby they assessed their current agency as not purposefully focused on adult identity formation, but rather on questioning its stability. Low personal agency was manifested in thinking that becoming an adult did not require personal effort, hence a person was not committed to planning or conveying specific deliberate activities in that direction. This particular group was characterised by a lack of consciousness of post-adolescent developmental tasks, and personal responsibilities in it.

Students’ personal agency was further matched with student cases and their self-evaluation of progress toward adulthood. As a result, three statuses of students’ personal agency toward adult identity formation were identified, each corresponding to three levels of observed personal agency: *proactive* (high level), *questioning* (moderate) and *indifferent* (low), as seen in *Table 8*.

Table 8: Statuses of students' personal agency in adult identity formation

Personal agency status	*Proactive*	*Questioning*	*Indifferent*
Cases	F02; M06; M07; M08; F08; M09; F09; F10; M10; F11; M13; F13; F14, F15; M15; M17; F18; F19	M01; F01; M02; M03; F06; F07; F12; M14; F16; F20; F22	F03, F04; M04; F05; M05; M11; M12; M16; F17; M18; F21
Empirical description	Being aware of developing adult identity as a person's developmental goal and acting accordingly. High PA is identified	Questioning previous experiences leading to adult identity attainment and stability of current adult identity. Questioning also own capabilities in developing adult identity. Moderate PA is identified.	Not being aware of adult identity formation as a current developmental task. Low PA is identified
Self-evaluation of progress in becoming an adult	Feeling like being adult in some regard, but not completely	Feeling like already having attained full adulthood, but asking whether it is permanent	Not sure whether there are any processes going on in this regard

Grouping students according to their personal agency status enabled further associating this factor with students' perceptions of higher education's role, which is addressed later in this chapter. Results within the proactive conscious personal agency status showed that students were mindful of ongoing identity processes. Moreover, they were agents of "identity work", which means that they purposefully engaged in certain activities with the awareness that they were yielding the formation of more adult-like forms of being. Students recognised the change in their self-perception, i.e. that the way they thought of themselves after four or five years of studying was not the same as it was at the beginning of their studies. When speaking about themselves as adults, students with conscious and proactive status perceived that they were not full adults yet, but that they were *"work in progress"* [F14: 57], because *"some things have to settle down"* [M17: 77] and *"some more steps have to be undertaken"* [M17: 78].

On the other hand, the status of questioning was interesting for several reasons. It was found in students who reported having reached adulthood due to taking on adult

roles (a spouse, a parent, or having paid job). This status revealed that adult identity attainment could be relative and that it could be questioned, especially if achieved at an accelerated pace, as it can be claimed for students aged 25 who have already formed a family. Their narrations contained questioning of previous choices and some of them emphasised the role of difficult life circumstances in accelerating their personal development.

"I was growing up with my mum, just the two of us. I had no siblings. I never knew my father. He was killed in the war. I always had an impression that I was living with my best friend, not just mother. She was also very young. I mean, I had respect for her as a parent, but we always used to sit down and make decisions together. ... When she got sick, I was not solely her daughter, but her nurse, everything... Maybe if she were still alive, I wouldn't have married this early... I knew she'd be pleased to see me married and have someone to lean on in life..." [F13: 131-139]

"My life is a bit different compared to the majority of the young people here. Now everyone wants to leave the country and go to live somewhere in Europe. I was living in Germany, actually I was born there. My grandfather migrated there several decades ago, during Tito. He worked for a German company, and then the family moved. But I always wanted to come back and I did so in my secondary school. I decided to leave my parents and family and come back to Bosnia and attend Gymnasium here. I lived with my grandmother. Ever since I was 15, I learned how to take care of myself and make decisions on my own. There is no-one on Earth who can influence my attitudes and make me do something I dislike." [M09: 61-70]

"Ever since I was in a high school, I was earning money, not only for myself, but for my younger brother. I learned a lot in this process – to fight, to be resolute and persistent. I learned the adult way of life even before I became one." [M06: 49-51]

"Actually, when I think of myself, I see that there are so many things that I have yet to build, to develop. I would never claim to be a complete person now. But, after beginning to teach in the school, I've realised that I must assume all adult roles and

responsibilities and act accordingly. It kind of made me grow up overnight. Not literary, but in a sense, yes, it accelerated my whole process of self-growth. Everyone at my work place treats me as an adult, which is the most natural thing to expect. Yet, I am not accustomed to it." [M17: 104-111]

Students with indifferent attitude reported that they *"never thought of higher education in terms of strictly personal development"* [F21: 46] or *"it is interesting to reflect on our studies in this manner also"* [M16: 203]. When asked to provide further explanation, they said that *"university is about acquiring knowledge and qualification, it is not really concerned with developing students as persons"* [M11: 69-71]. Consequently, research participants in this status stated that they were unsure if any adult identity formation processes were taking place.

This section provides the answer to the question how students deliberately partake in the adult identity forming processes. Furthermore, positioning students in relation to personal agency and juxtaposing this factor with their self-evaluation of the process of becoming an adult led to differentiation of the three statuses. This form of data organisation further yielded the possibility of associating students' statuses with the remaining descriptive categories, in order to build typologies.

5.2.6 Students' assessment of the role of higher education experience in adult identity formation

Having identified objective and personal factors of adult identity formation within the given student sample, it was possible to proceed with the central question to this dissertation. In order to assess the role of higher education experience, students were asked to tell how specifically they saw that it helped them build adult-like forms of being or to acquire some adult qualities, as illustrated in the excerpt from the interview;

I: *How precisely has the overall experience of higher education helped you to build some adult-forms of being or some qualities of an adult person?*
F15: *Well, one might expect to answer this in a positive manner. Actually, I never felt higher education was respecting my self-image of an adult. Take only formal procedures. They are so infantile, distrustful in many forms. Teachers have certain patterns in their heads how a student should be acting, disregarding students' actual needs. I think there were only three occasions in these five years that I could speak openly with my professor, but there were dozens of them when I felt not entitled to raise hand, to speak up, and so on. For me all this is thwarting development of any kind.* [140-149]

Whenever it was natural for the interview situation, the above question was complemented by another one that asked students to compare within several factors of adult identity formation, and thus to think about perceptions of the relations between the factors. A segment from the same interview illustrates this.
I: *OK, but what has affected your development the most, then? If not higher education experience, what actually has?*
F15: *Myself... I worked a lot on my personal development. I didn't have such a favourable starting position in my family and I knew I had to work three times harder in order to succeed. I was not running away from commitments if I thought I could have gained certain benefits. I worked in a bakery, in a cinema box office,... many other things, and studied along.* [155-160]

The main stances of every single student about the role of higher education in adult identity formation are summarised in mottos included in the profile matrix (see *Appendix 5*). They resulted from meticulous readings of individual interviews in search for the main idea concerning the given research problem, and served the initial organisation and grouping of individual cases on the basis of identified similarities. Mottos also facilitated defining names for every single role of higher education, as they displayed the most frequent words and phrases identified within the groups. Further thorough analysis of interviews resulted in the main categories reflecting four roles that

students from this research ascribes to higher education experience in their adult identity formation (see *Table 9*).

Table 9: Assessments of the role of higher education in students' adult identity formation

Categories	Codes	Cases
Higher education as a generator of adult identity formation (8)	- granting independence in teaching process (9) - fostering self-directedness (7) - developing autonomy in thinking and taking responsibility (10) - trustworthiness from significant others (5) - belief in success from significant others (7) - recognition from the authorised social structure (8)	F08, M06, M10, F10, F13, F14, M17, F18
Higher education as a safe-zone for exploration processes (10)	- no pressure to take on lasting commitments (12) - dichotomy higher education-cruel outside world (11) - offering a variety of extra-curricular experiences (15) - challenging teaching process (6) - time of many opportunities (7) - a person is a designer of own plans (5) - no imposed expectations from significant others (9)	M01, M02, F01, M03, F06, F07, F12, F16, M14, F20
Higher education as an interim phase leading to adulthood (11)	- no particular formative value of higher education (6) - higher education is not necessarily person-relevant (7) - no real growth impetus (7) - real adult life starts only after completing studies and confronting the real-life issues (10)	M04, F03, F04, F05, M05, M11, M12, M16, F17, M18, F21
Higher education as suspending adult identity formation (11)	- higher education not relevant for students' adult identity formation (11) - disrespect for students' self-image (13) - promoting regressive communication patterns (10) - insisting on dependency and embarrassment in teacher-student relationship (9) - lack of independence and autonomy for students (11)	F02, M07, M08, M09, F09, F11, M13, F15, M15, F19, F22

Higher education's role was assessed in a variety of ways, ranging from highly positive (where it was seen as a generator of students' development) to negative (seen as suspending adult identity formation). In between were rather neutral values, with higher education as a safe-zone for exploration processes and as an interim phase leading to adulthood. However, students perceiving higher education as a safe-zone did not neglect its formational potential; it was just that they couldn't see the actual outcomes of their

overall development, since it was still ongoing. Higher education, for this group, effectively granted a certain institutional moratorium on formational experiences that were actually being explored and enjoyed in, despite the fact that they did not inherently result in a particular observable developmental outcome. In contrast, assessing higher education as an interim phase on the way to adulthood reflected a lack of perception of developmental potentials in the context of higher education experience, which is rather comparable to Cuzzocrea's earlier description of waithood (Cuzzocrea, 2018). It was possible to describe what specifically each of the categories encompassed based on the collected data.

5.2.6.1 Generator of students' adult identity formation

This role can be viewed in terms of the framework and content it offers, as well as the support and dynamics it provides to students at a particular time in their lives. Youth who, after completing formal education, encountered challenges of transition to the world of work or a lack of opportunities for meaningful life, found in higher education a framework providing structure and dynamics to their lives. This was reflected in the interview segment: *"If I didn't go to college, I'd stay in my small town and work in a grocery store. I'd get stuck in the ruts of daily life. Eventually, I'd probably try to migrate to Germany or anywhere else"* [F13: 73-76].

Teachers demonstrating respect for students as persons and encouraging more symmetrical relationships with themselves were examples of how higher education provided social and psychological support. Experience of studying and living a life as a student posed challenges and questions that necessitated higher capabilities in order to confront them successfully. Overall, students reported having more independence in their courses and living arrangements than they did in high school, particularly those who had separated from their families of origin or had obtained some financial income. Open discussions were welcome, and freedom of choice was highly encouraged. They perceived that they had enough space to act self-directedly and autonomously – in planning their study activities, as well as in other life matters. Facing the need to make

some important decisions independently was also identified as an element generating adult identity development: *"In higher education a person has to make a series of decisions without asking someone else. Maybe for the first time in life. Those are not extremely important decisions, but they do count as gaining independence"* [M06: 68-72]. Students also reported teacher and peer trustworthiness as an important component of their sense of security and impetus for growth. Teachers, specifically, showed encouragement and recognition of their developmental path; *"My supervisor, who taught a second-year course, told me how impressed she was to see the person I had grown into over the previous four years. She said I look much more confident and resolute now"* [F18: 135-139]. Together with support, facing academic challenges was described as another moment identified generating development of more adult-like forms of being and acting. Perceived as a generator of students' adult identity formation, higher education epitomised recognition and belonging to an authorised social structure, a place to search for strength and a pillar to lean on while heading off for the adult world. In this sense, higher education is perceived as a truly transformative force, an emancipatory endeavour that drives students from social deprivation and personal dependency to empowerment and autonomy.

5.2.6.2 Safe-zone for exploration processes

In this role, higher education was contrasted to "the cruel outside world", ensuring security for the period when a person belongs to it. It was perceived as providing a framework where students could question their orientations, and ponder about actual and anticipated possibilities. It provided an overall experience outside of the instruction halls that was stimulating students' self-exploration. It was reported that the teaching process itself elicited questions that had an effect on students evoking a change in their previous orientations and thinking. The formative aspect was seen in the lack of pressure to make long-term commitments, as it allowed students to be fully self-directed, self-organised and plan their own developmental agendas. Perceived as a safe-zone for exploration processes, higher education gave students a moratorium in the sense that they were not under the pressure to take on long-term adult roles and

commitments, or even to have clear plans for the future: *"It's still OK not to be certain about what you want to be in the future, or where you want to be"* [M03: 111]. Instead, it granted them the sense of freedom to explore whatever they might be attracted to.

The status of a student was seen as providing stability amid uncertain world outside, where a young person could face competition, a lack of job opportunities, or constrains concerning moving on with life trajectories. A student spoke about this particular aspect of higher education: *"The world outside is ruthless, especially in a society like ours. When I realise that I will no longer be a student in a few months, that I will lose this shelter, I become concerned. I don't feel like prospects are on the horizon, and it's something I'll have to deal with – doing nothing, being rejected in job applications or being unable to pursue my life goals"* [M14: 151-156]. Quotes like this one showcased the role of higher education in providing a safe-zone for students for their creative exploration while relieving them of existential concerns. Despite not being accounted for as resulting in adult identity formation, it appeared just to assume that such activities did have certain formational values. However, exploration activities prompted the development of those qualities that became resources for facing the challenges. The outlined process reflected continual identity exploration, which was not over even in senior university years. Adult behaviour expectations were not imposed by their environment, but students reported progressing in that direction as a result of intensive exploration and self-agency. The development of self-responsibility and the organisation of future goals were identified as the real outcomes of higher education.

5.2.6.3 Interim phase leading to adulthood

This role was linked to the view that university education had little to do with personal development and that it was not expected to be person-relevant. Because young people still don't have a clear vision of what they want from life, on the one hand, while feeling constrained by the student status, from the other, all that remains is to wait for it to pass; "*Somehow, I live in the moment. Currently, I don't have any concerns regarding my life. My only preoccupation is to study now. After graduating, I*

guess, the real-life issues arise" [F15: 63-65]. To some extent, assessing higher education as an interim phase leading to adulthood obliterates the developmental potential of the whole experience, as if it is not something that higher education is capable of providing. Furthermore, it appears to produce an "ivory tower" that prevents students from confronting real-life challenges so impeding their growth potential. Following this line of reasoning, students are neither more equipped for adult life nor have acquired adult-like qualities after graduation. Higher education is perceived as providing temporary stability in this category, but unlike the preceding one, the actual formational processes are questioned.

5.2.6.4 Suspending students' adult identity formation

Unlike the characterisation of the previous role, assessing higher education as *suspending students' adult identity formation* was basically related to the perception of its inability to handle the needs of students who have self-defined as adults. Those students were already living the life of an adult, with all of the obligations and tasks it entails. Students highlighted organisational and communication barriers as reasons why higher education institutions were disrespectful of the needs of adults, which may have also hampered accessibility for adult population, whether they were 18 to 25 years or above. Aspects that contributed to the suspension of adult identity formation included for the most part regressive communication patterns, in which students reported being treated as ignorant, dependent and incapable of having autonomous paths and stances. This lack of autonomy was highlighted as a threat to higher education's formative potential. Another unfavourable practice mentioned by students was causing embarrassment when giving feedback. *"The professor is going through my essay, making comments about it, saying things as if I am in elementary school. I really got the feeling she was trying to make me humiliated and incompetent of communicating on her imagined level"* [F02: 90-93].

Students also complained about a lack of independence and choices in higher education. Assessing higher education as suspending students' adult identity formation

was a signal of harmful effects of an institution that is entitled for educating, but also for promoting values of development and growth across an individual's lifetime. However, this finding should be interpreted in relation to the wider context of higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which offers limited opportunities for both traditional and non-traditional students, as already discussed in Chapter 2.

The results displayed in this subsection reflect rather disparate assessments of higher education's role in adult identity formation among students. At this stage of presenting results, it was possible to observe matching between students' SBA and their assessments of higher education's role. The four identified values were rather evenly distributed within the chosen sample. This variousness, on the other hand, was unexpected due to the same institutional framework chosen for the research. Although their schools and departments were different, the interviewed students shared the same University structure and nearly similar academic culture. This gave rise to a further assumption – perceptions of higher education's role varied according to differences coming from students and their contexts. As stated in the research objectives and questions, it was expected that assessments of higher education's role would be related to combinations of additional adult identity forming factors. The goal of further analyses was to link particular groups of students with certain assessments and to describe the nature of relationships between different adult identity forming factors. The findings from this stage served as the basis for later creating combinations of factors through type-building and concept mapping.

5.2.7 Summary of the main research results

This section addressed the descriptive set of questions, which resulted in positioning students according to the main factors of adult identity formation. Category-driven thematic analysis of interviews showed that students' assessments of higher education's role in adult identity formation differed, but also that their individual progress in becoming an adult was not on the same level. Contrary to the prevailing

positions in the literature cited so far, the majority of the students in this sample reported attaining full sense of an adult. This result, however, might be explained by the proportion of atypical students (those who had already taken on family commitments) represented in the sample. Despite being of the same chronological age and participating in the same socialisation processes at the University of Sarajevo, differences in self-assessment of the progress in formation of adult identity were evident. Characteristics of "objective circumstances" (e.g. family structure, family status, living conditions, financial and residential independence) also varied across the sample, together with students' assessment of their importance in the ongoing developmental processes and tasks taking. However, as this research revealed, circumstances surrounding students' development even in higher education persist to play a role, particularly in adult identity formation. In the case of higher education students, depriving or difficult living circumstances tend to accelerate development, raising questions about whether all students are given the opportunity for exploration before committing to adult roles and tasks. More solid conclusions should be drawn from research on exploration and commitment in students' identity forming processes, which is beyond the scope of the present research.

The results also show that students have their own conceptions of adulthood and what it entails, with their criteria divided into two groups – social achievement markers and personal attributes. Although personal attributes were mentioned more frequently in the findings, it was impossible to claim that they are overall more relevant compared to the other group of criteria for acquiring the sense of adult identity. Moreover, overlapping was high between the two categories, whereby each social achievement marker corresponded to at least one marker in the group of personal attributes. This confirmed the intricate interrelatedness of many factors leading to the formation of one's adult identity. From the students' standpoint, employment and completing education are evaluated as highly important social achievement markers of adulthood. This was expected given that senior year students are at the vestibule of adulthood from which they seem to be divided by a "mystified" labour market, which embodies more advanced, independent and sophisticated ways of being.

Aside from the remarkably different objective circumstances that shaped students' development, there were also discernible disparities in their personal agency towards adult identity formation. Three statuses were identified in this regard: indifferent, questioning and proactive. Questioning status revealed that adult identity attainment is relative at this age, and that it can be challenged, especially if achieved at an accelerated pace. Furthermore, social recognition emerged as an important category in the process of adult identity formation, bearing the social dimension of identity emphasised by Erikson. This nurtures the image of an adult status as pertaining to the special sphere where one is admitted after a rigorous initiation procedure. Students specifically pinpointed the formational value of social recognition which empowered them to think about themselves in a new manner; as more mature, more capable and self-worthier. In providing this, educational environment is indispensable, as it bears the potential to provide students with continual and intentional social support and recognition to their adult identity forming impulses. The results of this research clearly outlined personal development which was going on in higher education. A more detailed presentation of the actual personal qualities developed is provided in the last section within this chapter.

The final set of research results presented in this section revealed students' assessments of higher education's role in their adult identity formation. Based on this, four values were identified ranging from highly positive to highly negative; generator of adult identity development, safe-zone for exploration processes, interim phase leading to adulthood, and suspending adult identity formation. It was also assumed that variations in assessing the higher education's role in students' adult identity formation should be put within the context of multiple adult identity forming factors. This would precipitate better understanding of the actual nature of the relationships between the forming factors themselves, and provide a framework for more objective view on the role of each of them.

5.3 Nature of relationships between adult identity forming factors

Based on the category-driven thematic analysis, it became apparent that different combinations of relationships between the adult identity forming factors appeared in the sample, but the nature of those relationships remained inaccessible within that particular data analysis method. Furthermore, calculating correlations and causalities was inconsistent with the qualitative approach followed in this research, necessitating the use of more appropriate analysis methods. Qualitative data analysis programs include operations for identifying co-occurrences, which indicate simultaneous presence of two or more codes, but they do not reveal orderings and mutual influences. Concept mapping, on the other hand, eventually leads to the description of the nature of detected relationships. The basis for analysis of relationships was students' explicit assessments when they were asked to describe specifically how certain factors affected their adult identity formation. Relationships were also analysed from relevant students' accounts, regardless of the interview question that prompted it. They were then further checked and compared to other cases that were gradually joined to one another on the basis of identified similarities.

Prior to concept mapping, the Category matrix was created encompassing dimensions identified from the thematic category analysis of empirical material (see *Table 10*). Results presented in the previous section were summarised in the Category matrix, which enabled positioning and grouping students on the grounds of identified similarities between them. The matrix served for structuring and visualising another set of research results, those informing about relationships between the adult identity forming factors and the corresponding student types. Following our orientation towards the natural types and relying on empirically grounded categories, the dimensions contained solely those descriptions that were extracted from the analysed material, meaning that they did not cover all theoretically possible dimensions existing outside the obtained results.

Table 10: Category matrix

Categories	Empirical dimensions
Family SES	Below average Average and above
Family educational background	First generation higher-education student A member of close family holding HE degree
Perception of objective circumstances	Difficult Average Favourable
Perception of progress in attaining adult identity	Achieved Work in progress On standby
Personal agency	Proactive Questioning Indifferent
Adult roles and commitments[36]	Fully taken Partly taken Not taken
Perception of the role of HE in students' adult identity formation	Generating development Safe zone for exploration Indifferent to adult identity formation Suspending adult identity formation

Identified links between those categories were displayed through concept mapping. As explained in the Methodology section, concept mapping was applied as a part of type-building method, providing meaningful relations that served for later constructing types. Identified relationships were also coded and corresponding empirical descriptions were assigned (see *Table 11*). Relevance of a certain code was indicated in *Atlas.ti* by code density (D) and groundedness (G). Density stands for the

[36] While dimensions of other categories are described in relation to the empirical material elsewhere, dimensions of adult roles and commitments need to be clarified more thoroughly. Those who reported having completely separated from their families of origin and gaining full residential and financial independence were assumed to have fully taken up adult roles and commitments. Partly taken adult roles and commitments meant that a person had gained some financial or residential independence (i.e. earning some money or living separately from the family while studying). If a person reported being financially and residentially dependent on family of origin and not having any lasting responsibilities for another person, it was considered that adult roles and commitments were not taken.

number of direct links to a code, while groundedness designates the number of quotations from analysed material adjunct to it.

Table 11: Code relations matrix

Relation Type	Empirical description
accelerating	A is developing earlier under the influence of B
amplifying	the effects of A are strengthened under the influences of B
compensating	shortages or negative effects of A are reduced by B
contradicts	A and B act in opposite directions (e.g. one in positive, other in negative)
enabled by	A is the condition for B
is associated with	a reciprocal relation between concepts
is cause of	B results from A, which is the cause
is part of	A belongs to B

Students' evaluations of higher education's role in adult identity formation were used as the central concept in concept mapping, with others from the Category matrix being linked to it based on empirical material. When the concepts were linked together, four groups of relationship combinations emerged: amplification and compensation, reciprocity and enabling, linear stability, and contradiction. The rest of the section delves more into the nature of those combinations.

5.3.1 Amplification and compensation

The analysis of relationships between factors connected to the main concept *higher education generating adult identity formation* showed that they were dominantly characterised as amplifying or compensatory. In addition, the map in *Figure 8* clearly depicts the two central concepts on the basis of density (D) and groundedness (G). These included high personal agency and higher education as a generator of students'

adult identity formation.[37] Within the given combination of factors, it became apparent that the two factors had the central role in students' adult identity formation.

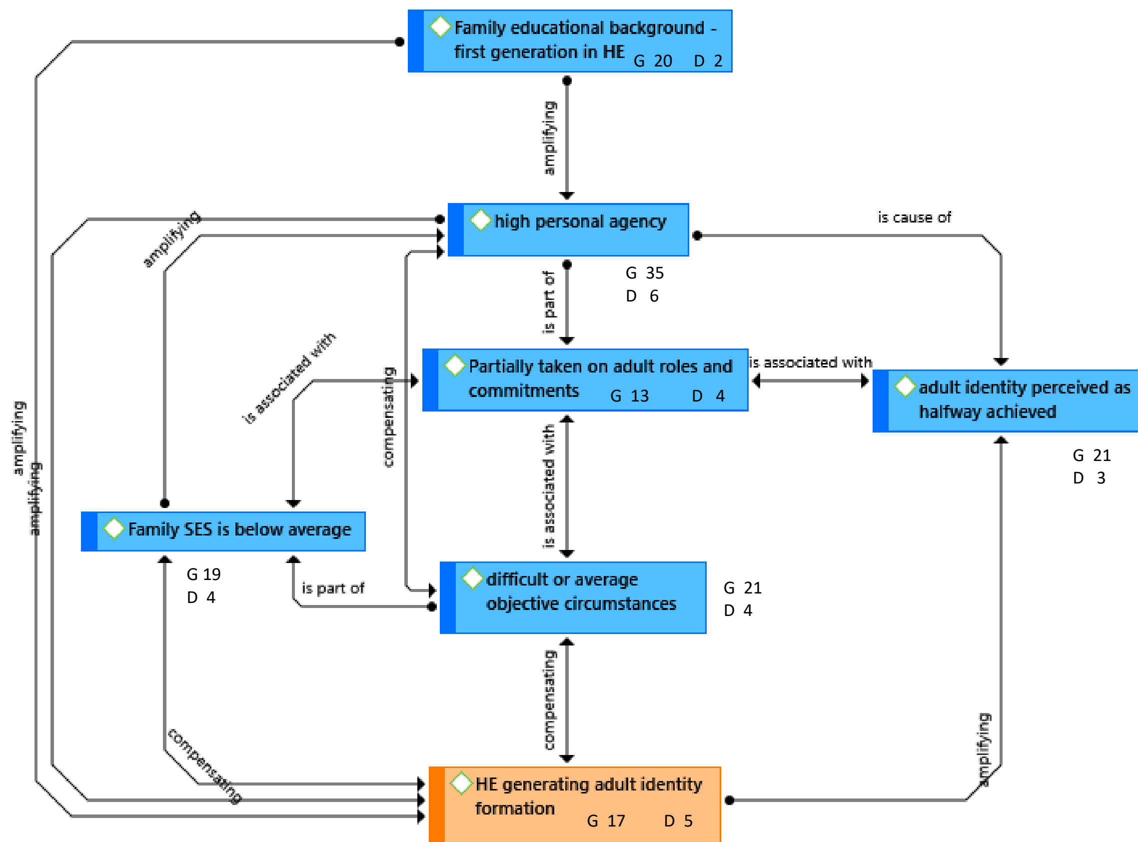

Figure 8: Amplifying and compensating relationships

As for the nature of relationships, it was identified that the perception of higher education as generating adult identity formation was amplified by the three factors: being the first-generation higher education student, having high personal agency in adult identity formation, and having the sense of achieved adult identity. All three were mutually interconnected forming a combination of factors that eventually led to such a highly evaluated role of higher education in students' adult identity formation. The following quotes illustrate amplifying effects:

[37] The groundness of a code (G) indicates how many quotes from the entire collection may be linked to a code. However, this does not necessarily mean that quotations belong to different interview participants.

"I had a feeling I'd have to struggle more in order to succeed in my studies. Perhaps not having a role model in that regard forced me to do my best and acquire the qualities essential for success in higher education." [F19: 83-86]

"My total higher education experience had a significant role in developing that sense of becoming an adult. I mean; more freedom, more independence, more respect from others, doing what I liked without being forced to anything." [F14: 120-123]

"I worked really hard, I mean, I was not only concerned about passing exams and assignments, but I wanted to obtain some life experience and earn some money,..." [F11: 72-75]

Furthermore, it was possible to associate difficult objective circumstances with the partial taking up of adult roles and commitments expressed in occasional or seasonal job, as well as relative residential independence from one's family of origin. At the same time, there were clear indicators that students perceived their achieved adult identity as the result of their high personal agency, or deliberate actions that they believed would prompt growth and better preparedness for facing life's challenges. Moreover, high personal agency has been precisely identified as causing the attainment of adult identity across several cases.

"I had no other choice, I was – a kind of – on my own, and I struggled to cover some expenses while simultaneously giving back to my parents." [F14: 121-122]

"I was solely reliant on my own efforts. There were no parents pulling strings, or taking care for everything. That's why I believe I had to grow up even earlier than my peers." [M06: 103-105]

Higher education, in combination with a high level of personal agency, has been recognized as a means of compensating for students' difficulties coming from unfavourable objective circumstances and low family SES.

"I would have stayed in my small town and worked at a grocery store if I hadn't pursued higher education. I would have stagnated in the routines of everyday life. Eventually, I would probably try to migrate to Germany or elsewhere." [F13: 113-115]

This led to a conclusion about the value of attending higher education, particularly for students from socially and academically less advantaged backgrounds. It appeared that students who showed a high degree of personal investment and engagement, were more likely to gain notable developmental benefits from higher education.

5.3.2 Reciprocity and enabling

Rather reciprocal relations of mutual support and enabling between the factors were identified in the context of the main concept *higher education as safe-zone for exploration processes.* Three direct relations identified with the main concept were: high personal agency, favourable objective circumstances, and adult identity as a work in progress. There was also internal complementarity and reciprocity between the three factors. In addition, it was shown that those factors, along with their relations, created conditions under which students perceived higher education as a safe-zone for exploration processes. Enabling is demonstrated in an interview segment;
"I had enough freedom and independence to consider my own preferences and seek out choices that I enjoyed. I didn't feel like my parents had some high expectations from me. Even more, they were rather relaxed concerning my plans, didn't interfere." [M03: 129-134]

Specifically, favourable objective circumstances characterised by familial educational inheritance and a family SES rating of average or above, were allowing for a more relaxed stance to attaining adult identity, as well as greater room for experimentation and exploration. The concept of adult identity as a work in progress was associated with not yet having taken on adult roles and commitments, which is actually possible by living in favourable circumstances and not being subjected to external pressures and expectations. Students reported a degree of disengagement from "serious" tasks and commitments, leaving ample room for self-directedness and exploration;

"I think everyone should make the most out of the opportunities that student status gives to a young person. I was very carefree, didn't have to worry about my living conditions, and was able to focus on what I was truly interested in" [F04: 111-114].

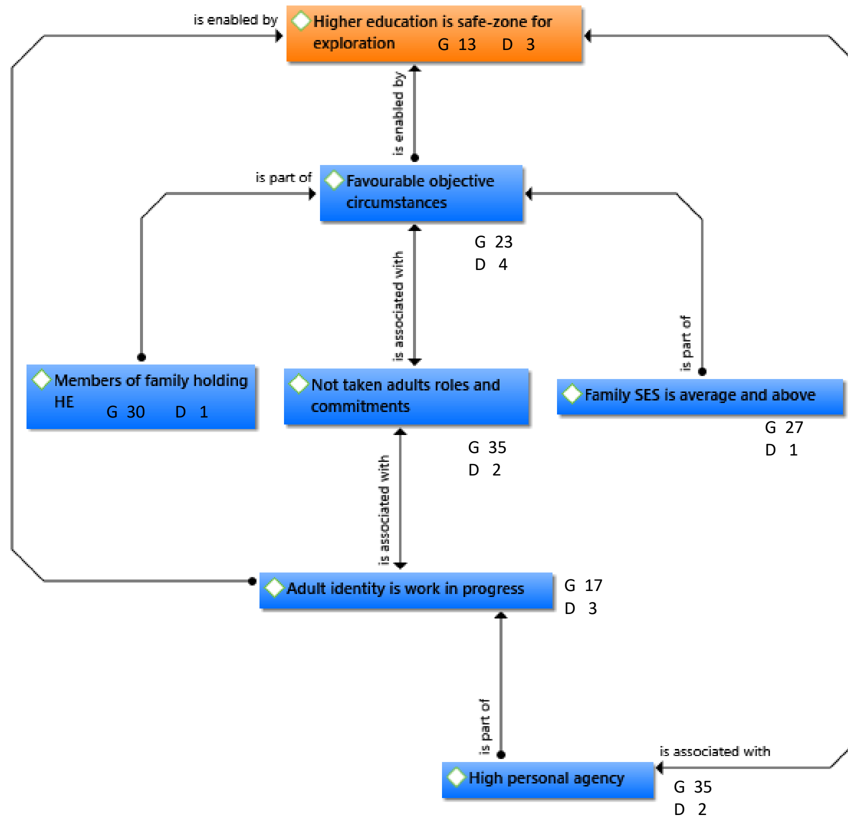

Figure 9: Relationships of reciprocity and enabling

Higher education was perceived as a context that granted *"innumerable opportunities to benefit from"* [M10: 187] in such an ambiance. Its formative value was demonstrated in students' empowerment to pursue what they truly wished for while still cultivating adult-like qualities. Overall, enabling and reciprocity reflected a combination of factors resulting in a rather favourable context for developmental processes, analogous to a moratorium. The actual role of higher education in it, on the other hand, was not as dynamic as the role of personal agency. As a result, the combination of favourable objective circumstances and high students' personal agency may account for the majority of developmental outcomes within this group.

5.3.3 Linear stability

When adult identity formation was perceived as being on standby, it was identified that this, along with low personal agency, a lack of commitment to adult roles and tasks, and favourable objective circumstances, was associated with the perception of higher education as being indifferent to adult identity formation. The factors between themselves created a certain loosely connected structure with recognisable interconnections that were characterised by stability, which was regulated and maintained only by natural processes and linear causality (e.g. low personal agency caused perception of lack of dynamics in adult identity formation, which was also caused by not taking on adult roles and commitments), as articulated in the quotation below:

"During these years, my focus was on completing my study program, and I didn't have much time for other activities. [...] Adult identity formation? Hmmm... I don't think I should be concerned with it right now" [M11: 144-147].

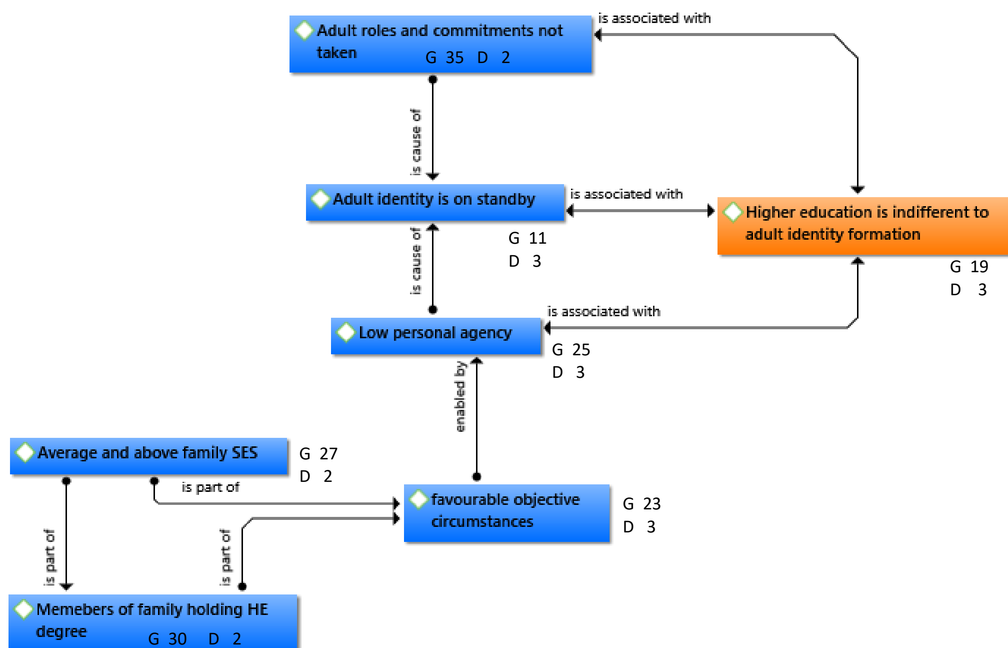

Figure 10: Linear stability

Based on the given concept map, it was possible to conclude that a low personal agency was the central factor, which was nourished by a lack of pressure and concerns from the surrounding context as a result of favourable objective circumstances. Low personal agency was expressed in *"studying now, and facing the life challenges afterwards"* [M11: 190]. This resulted in a confluence of factors that led to suspension of adult identity formation. Furthermore, neither the role of higher education nor the importance of adult identity formation was considered. Moreover, it was stated that *"higher education does not have much to do with personal development [...] it is not school"* [M12: 75-76]. By the laws of linear stability, it can be expected that adult identity formation is a task that a person will have to face later, resulting from the encounter with the real-life challenges following graduation. However, the question remains of what prior qualities and capacities they would have nurtured in order to face life's challenges.

5.3.4 Contradicting

The final concept map depicts the links that existed around the main concept *higher education suspending adult identity formation.* The main concept in this map actually appeared to be detached from the remaining set of factors, since there were only two linkages connecting to it, both of which were described as contradicting the remaining set of the concepts. While personal agency was high and adult roles were fully taken, higher education actually functioned in a confuting manner;

"An adult person with a family and a job faces so many obstacles while studying; from formal procedures and working hours, test schedules to communication with professors, who don't understand that we have other things to do in our lives except studying." [F09: 81-4]

The other set of relationships was rather comparable to the first concept map, with the only major difference in the fact that here adult roles and commitments were fully attained, whereas they were just partly taken in the first case. Furthermore, here adult

identity was achieved at an accelerated pace, resulting from taking on adult roles and commitments, but also from high personal agency. As it can be noted in the earlier concept maps, high personal agency was the central factor, but one that regulated the combination of the remaining factors rather than having a positive influence on the role of higher education. It compensated for a lack of academic family inheritance as well as for difficult objective circumstances, but also led to the achievement of adult identity. On the other side, taking up adult roles and commitments accelerated personal agency.

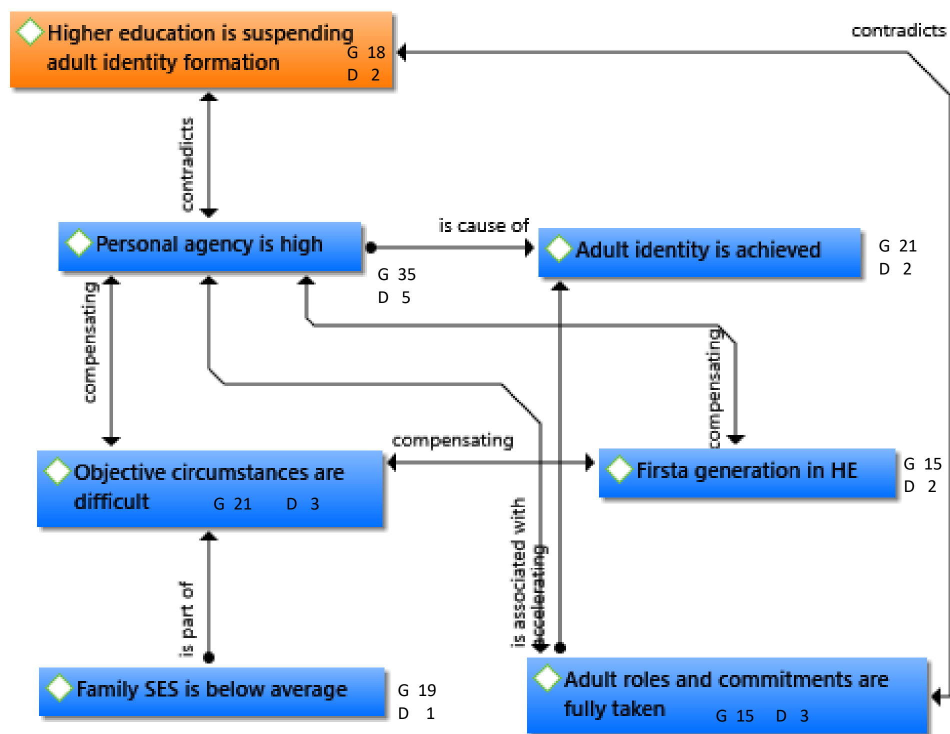

Figure 11: Contradicting relationships

This final set of relationships actually showcased the obstructive role of higher education in adult identity formation in the cases where students had already defined themselves as adults with all belonging tasks and commitments, in addition to high personal agency. The fact that this concept map for the most part mirrored the first one (*Figure 8*) indicated that the role of any individual factor in adult identity formation can

only be defined inside the combination of all other relevant factors, and that seemingly slight alterations might transform a factor's role form supportive to obstructive.

5.3.5 Summary of the main research results

Analyses presented in this section answer the question of what the nature of relationships between the adult identity forming factors is. Given the methodology of this research, our intention was not to identify unambiguous linear causalities. Moreover, as discussed in previous chapters, this would be incongruent with the very nature of the research phenomenon, whose forming factors seem to be revolving in a cyclical manner encumbering the tracking of early antecedents and later consequences. Therefore, the aim in this chapter was deconstructing students' narrations in order to identify how they accounted for the existing relationships. While this methodology yielded a plethora of insightful descriptions and allowed for contextually relevant interpretation of every single factor, relying solely on students' narrative accounts was also the source of shortfalls in the obtained results. This will be discussed in further depth in the section on research constraints.

The research question was addressed within concept mapping, a data analysis method with a potential of describing the character of relationships identified between the concepts. The main concept with which others were associated was students' perceptions of the role of higher education in their adult identity formation. Four types of relationship combinations were revealed through concept mapping based on meticulous qualitative analysis of interview segments identified as containing relevant accounts of the existing relationships between the adult forming factors. Within each of them, dominant relations were extracted and further characterised; amplification and compensation, reciprocity and enabling, linear stability and contradicting. The analysis showed that the first two groups of relationships carried formational potential, whilst the remaining two were either supressing or confuting it.

Based on the obtained results, it is possible to make an overall conclusion that the role of higher education in students' adult identity formation should be assessed only against the wider context created by a combination of forming factors, with which it builds a meaningful relation. Therefore, crucial relationships and factors can be identified;

- When there was a high level of personal agency combined with partially taken adult roles and commitments, higher education worked as an amplifier or generator of developmental processes.
- When combined with a high personal agency, higher education experience could also compensate for the negative effects of objective circumstances.
- In cases of achieved adult identity resulting from already fully assumed adult roles and commitments, higher education was evaluated as irrelevant or even neglectful of students' needs and their adult status.
- When personal agency was low and objective circumstances were favourable, adult identity formation was on standby, and higher education's formative potentials were not seen or utilised by students.
- Higher education was perceived as providing support and a niche for students who possessed a high personal agency and exploratory inclinations, but had not yet taken on adult roles and commitments.

All of this points to the conclusion that higher education had a high formational potential for students without prior family academic history. At the same time, it's worth noting that these conclusions were based on a study of high achieving students who identified that their personal dedication and effort were critical to their success. However, it is impossible to infer whether this would apply to less successful students. The results presented in this section served further in the type-building process, providing another organisational framework in which the formative value of higher education was more thoroughly encompassed.

5.4 Types of students in higher education

This section attempts to add to a deeper understanding of the interplay between the adult identity forming factors by grouping cases with similar combinations of factors in types. It is assumed that types of students reflect different qualities that each adult identity forming factor acquires when put in a specific meaningful relationship with others, which may serve for planning further social and educational interventions. Type-building drew on previously obtained results of thematic category-analysis and concept mapping, which covered tasks in Stage 1-3 (*Figure 6*), and laid the groundwork for the characterisation of the constructed types in Stage 4. The attribute space was comprised of categories and their dimensions derived through thematic category-based analysis (*Table 10*), together with meaningful relationships identified during the concept mapping process. It is important to note that groupings were made according to maximal similarities between the cases, which means that cases assigned to the same type were not treated as being identical, and that their individual features were retained. Further reduction of the data led to creating the Matrix Combination of the key factors of adult identity formation, that eventually resulted in the four types of students, as shown in *Table 12:* proactive, explorer, comfort-zone student and atypical student. The labels for the types were derived from two factors that have already been identified as seminal in understanding the perception higher education's role – personal agency and objective circumstances. In the following sections, each type will be extensively analysed on its own.

Parallelism between type A and D, as well as between type B and C, may be seen in the Matrix (*Table 12*). A and D shared the same personal agency and objective circumstances, but they differed in terms of taking on adult roles and commitments. Students in type A characteristically had only partially assumed adult roles and commitments, whereas in type D, they reported full commitment. Therefore, their perceptions of adult identity attainment differed, although they both showed positive

growth tendencies. However, dominant relations between the factors were antithetical, including highly supportive in type A and obstructive in type D. Comparing this pair of types revealed the importance of adult roles and commitments in students' assessment of progress in becoming an adult, a segment that remained unreachable within the first data analysis method. Likewise, it was seen that higher education's supportive role became less likely to occur in students who had already taken on adult roles and commitments.

Table 12: *Combination of key factors of adult identity formation*

Adult identity forming factors	Personal agency		Objective circumstances			Meaningful relations				Perception of adult identity attainment				Adult roles and commitments			Types of students
Role of HE	Indifferent	Proactive	Difficult	Average	Favourable	Amplifying and compensating	Reciprocity and enabling	Linear stability	Contradicting	Achieved	Partly	Work in progress	On stand by	Fully taken	Partly	Not taken	
Generating adult identity formation		■	■			■					■				■		**A: Proactive students**
Safe-zone for exploration		■			■		■					■				■	**B: Explorers**
Indifferent to adult identity formation	■				■			■					■			■	**C: Comfort-zone students**
Suspending adult identity formation		■	■						■	■				■			**D: Atypical students**

As for types B and C, they had the same objective circumstances and commitment status, but differed in personal agency statuses, perceptions of adult identity attainment, and dominant relations. This comparison revealed the importance of

personal agency, which might offer students' self-assessment of progress in becoming an adult and defining their life goals a distinct dimension.

5.4.1 Type A: *Proactive students*

Mottos:

"Every since I moved to Sarajevo for my studies, I've definitely started to feel like an adult."

[F08: 53-54]

"I've seen that as time passes, I'm becoming more confident, more independent and closer to my goals." [M10: 62]

The first type was constituted by students identified throughout the thematic analysis as highly aspiring and engaged – both academically and in their personal development. They were considered *proactive students* for they demonstrated a high personal agency and investment in adult identity formation, while seeking opportunities in their higher education context and through work experience. Relationships between adult identity forming factors in this type were dominantly amplifying and compensating. The majority of the students originated from smaller towns and from families of lower socio-economic status, with one or both parents jobless. One student came from the neighbouring country, and she particularly described the moment of sacrifice hidden in the fact that she left her small town and came to Sarajevo for studies.

"It was difficult for my parents to send me for studies here because they have a difficult life. I decided to earn money and ensure finances for myself." [F10: 42-44]

There were students in this group who were the first generation in higher education. They tended to describe their living circumstances as unfavourable, but despite that, it gave an impetus to their development and fulfilment of goals in the sense that it urged them to *"fight for better future"* [F08: 102] and build themselves as *"responsible, mature and self-conscious persons"* [F08: 104]. This reflected a

compensating relationship between difficult objective circumstances and personal agency. Two students reported losing a parent, which led to their taking up some part of responsibilities for the family matters in place of the missing parent during adolescence.

"I was in high school when my mother passed away, younger sister was completing elementary school at that time. We had to move on with our lives and to organise our everyday matters. At that time, I started giving additional classes in Chemistry and writing essays in order to earn some money. I am still doing this and helping my father that way." [M06: 99-105]

This type of students had some employment experiences, either in occasional jobs, working part-time or full time, all of which provided them with a source of revenue that they also allocated to their families back in their small towns. Work engagement was not career-based, but in the first place it was motivated by a financial benefit, even though some students reported facing difficulties in managing work commitments and studying.

"I am working part-time in a small firm, as an accountant, undeclared, of course. But it is my source of income now. It is sometimes difficult to complete all assignments, especially during the exam terms…" [F13: 122-124]

"One of my professors recommended me for work in this firm. Teachers now know us and tolerate absence from classes. I needed this job, as I am planning to get married and need to have some earning." [M17: 175-178]

Students reported being in a relationship, with one of them being engaged and one not revealing data on this. Being in a relationship was a source of additional stability in their lives or an incentive for personal growth.

"We've been together for three years now. It is invaluable to have someone with whom to set plans, get support, and work together. She definitely makes me think positively about myself." [M17: 222-225]

"Through this relationship I realised how important it is to think about own emotions. I mean, to know what you like and dislike, what are your needs and to tell it to another person." [F19: 180-183]

Table 13: Proactive students

Type	***PROACTIVE STUDENTS***
Interviews belonging to this case	F08; M06; M10; F10; F13; F 14; M17; F18
Family SES	Assessed as below average
Family educational background	Most of them are the first generation in higher education
Perception of objective circumstances	Not accustomed to easy living Having adult tasks in family of origin High expectations from them by family of origin and belief in success Occasional opportunities for paid activities
Work experience	Part-time job Full-time job Primer motivation is financial
Perception of own adult identity	Adult identity partly or fully achieved
Perception of own agency in adult identity formation	Highly active and engaged. They are practicing what is it to be an adult, while living independently and earning money, providing subsidiaries to their families. Looking for recognition of their maturity and independence in every aspect of their every-day functioning; completing study assignments, participation in extra-curricular activities, love relationships, managing living matters
Perception of the role of higher education in students' adult identity development	Supportive and generating development of adult-like forms of acting Emancipatory potential of HED Arena for self-actualisation and acquiring adult-like forms of existence. Higher education is seen as the generator of students' development and self-actualisation. Its role is primarily seen through the recognition from the authorised social structure granting thus entrance to other social privileges. Adult identity is formed through opening opportunities to socially relevant knowledge and valued activities. Certain degree of independence and responsibility is achieved both residentially and financially; autonomy in thinking and making life decisions

They all declared high academic achievement and working hard to attain their goals, in addition to demonstrating high level of self-activity and a persistent quest for new opportunities to broaden their experiences. While studying, they lived independently either in students' dormitory or in a rented apartment with a flatmate. Students reported about being independent and self-responsible, especially in finances, time management and decision making in everyday living. From students' narrations it was possible to identify special status of higher education in their overall biography.

"I can't imagine how my life would have looked like if I hadn't gone in university. It would be miserable, I guess – going to coffee shops, working somewhere in a bar, making two ends meet every month." [F13: 188-201]

"My parents are so proud of that I am pursuing university degree and they hope my younger brother will follow in my footsteps." [M10: 152-153]

Higher education had the status of a self-actualisation arena, which was generating growth possibilities, granting thus recognition and socially relevant support.

"When I completed my BA studies, I knew I had achieved something big. I proved to everybody that I have capacities and that I can succeed." [M10: 182-184]

"*I will never forget my professor who told me once that he had never heard such an explanation of factors affecting economic growth. I don't know was he serious, but I really started thinking how nice it is to be recognised in this way by someone who is an expert in this field.*" [F13: 142-145]

For proactive students, higher education had also emancipatory value, opening them prospects for better socio-economic status than their family members had. Here, it was possible to see the transformation of compensatory relations into emancipatory value of higher education for students with less favourable academic background. Students told about numerous opportunities for self-growth in higher education, and particularly found it generating the processes of their adult identity formation. Their narrations contained segments of other-focus where they also demonstrate mindfulness of others around them and their needs, particularly members of their families of origin.

"Yes, I am more adult now. Not because I am older than four years ago, but because I have acquired certain skills of independent living. I know how to take care of all my personal matters without asking anything my parents and they trust me in my choices." [F13: 212-216]

"Higher education, as an institution, treats you as an adult from the onset. You have to do all things by your own. No one will do a thing for you, there is no single headmaster taking care of your progress. You are now entitled to manage everything." [M17: 152-158]

"It puts high standards in front of the students. You have to become more mature all at a sudden in order to manage that all." [M10: 77-78]

"If one wants to grow up and become more mature, act like an adult, he will learn how to take stances, form own opinion and act autonomously. Parents do nothing for you while you are in higher education." [M06: 115-118]

All of what has been said thus far about this type of students adds to the perception of higher education as a generator of students' development and self-actualisation. Its role was primarily seen through the recognition from the authorised social structure granting thus access to other social privileges. Adult identity was gradually formed by opening opportunities to socially relevant knowledge and valued activities. Certain degree of independence and responsibility was achieved both residentially and financially, as well as the autonomy in thinking and making life decisions. A quote by a student epitomises this type of thinking quite well; "*Without higher education I would be nothing"* [M06: 130]. When asked if their lives would have been different if they had not enrolled in higher education but instead started working after completing secondary education, students claimed they would have been lost, without adequate direction in their lives and without the opportunity to become more mature. It is interesting that higher education for this type of students had greater value in forming adult identity than it had participation in labour market. At the same time, this type of students was identified as investing the most in their development, and those whose life conditions were assessed as difficult.

Based on the presented results, it can be concluded that higher education experience made the strongest effect on first generation students, whose family SES was below average and who demonstrated proactive attitude related to the use of social and educational resources in tailoring their personal development in order to break up with the inherited family social status. These students were self-motivated and activated, and having enrolled in higher education, they were determined to utilise its benefits and engage in attaining their own goals.

5.4.2 Type B: *Explorers*

Mottos:

"I just want to partake in everything that attracts me. Eventually I shall find something that suites me." [M03: 102-103]

"Higher education grants me opportunities to act like an adult but not to be fully responsible." [F01: 63-64]

Students in this type were labelled as explorers for they described their adult identity as *"work in progress"* [F12: 84], and higher education as an arena where they sought to realise their interests, discover their potentials and cultivate some of the characteristics needed for "living in the adult world".

"Eventually, diploma will mean nothing if one doesn't become a complete person, if doesn't learn how to act in professional circles, how to organise life and what to do with own life." [F07: 113-116]

Their most important goal at the moment was to work on personal development and upgrade, and they were unconcerned about any commitments that might stop or their exploration or interfere with it. Therefore, a favourable aspect of higher education for students in this type was that it *"grants opportunities but doesn't ask for commitments"* [F12: 111]. Overall, relationships between adult identity forming factors were identified as reciprocal and mutually enabling. They had at least one member of their close family holding higher education degree, and they seemed not having pressure in academic achievement. Yet, they stated achieving average or above average results. Some of them reported having divorced parents and living in incomplete families, but none spoke about serious financial concerns. Moreover, they recognised that parents' support and a stipend were enough to cover their living costs. However, they sought seasonal jobs as a source of valuable experience and opportunities to explore the world of work. There were also three students working full-time or part-time during studies and they described their work experience as an opportunity to position oneself in the

professional domain, or as a chance to complement with a segment that was not offered in higher education. *"An opportunity appeared and I thought: Why not give a try? So, I now work full-time and study part-time. It will most likely delay the completion of my education, but that's ok. Workplace provides me with fresh opportunities, and to be honest, it's a really good job for the time being."*

[F01: 121-124]

Table 14: Explorers

Case	***EXPLORERS***
Interviews belonging to this case	M01, M02; F01; M03; F06; F07; F12, F16; M14; F20
Family SES	Assessed as average or above
Family educational background	Members of close family holding higher education degree (a parent or a sibling)
Perception of objective circumstances	Not reporting financial concerns Not having any firm commitments No pressure from the family of origin in terms of academic success, but there is support
Work experience	Occasional opportunities for paid activities Part-time job Full-time job Primer motivation is exploring the world of work and own financial independence
Perception of own adult identity	Adult identity is *the work in progress*
Perception of own agency in adult identity formation	Challenging opportunities They are currently trying out opportunities for more mature behaviour in personal life, especially related to their relationship status and employment.
Perception of the role of higher education in students' adult identity development	Higher education is seen as a safe context providing opportunities for exploration and self-growth. Expectations are not imposed in terms of adult behaviour, but the students report moving towards it, as a result of intensive exploration and activity. The actual result of higher education experience is reported to be development of self-responsibility and organisation of future goals.

In this type it was also possible to find students originating from smaller towns, and living apart from parents while studying, but their narrations emphasised the freeing character of separation rather than any indicators of sacrifice.

"I had an opportunity to study in Zenica, my hometown. But I wanted to come to Sarajevo, to separate from my parents in order to prove to everyone that I am capable of living independently. My parents supported me in that." [M14: 113-116]

This type of students emphasised the emancipatory value of higher education as well, but they tended to be more self-focused in articulating their needs and goals than students from the first case. They, unlike them, did not take responsibilities for others. While seeking for challenges and exploration opportunities, these students seemed to be avoiding commitments.

"I can't imagine myself being married or having a child. I just don't see myself ready for that." [F20: 78-79]

"The good thing in higher education is that no one expects you to do so serious things with your life. Everything is still open and ok." [F16: 142-144]

"I am so open to many things and I think there is so much to be done before I start considering myself fully an adult person." [F20: 122-123]

Students in this type considered higher education as a safe zone for experimenting and exploring new possibilities, but it did not totally satisfy their interests. They expressed dissatisfaction with the prevalence of traditional instruction, a lack of active learning and a culture that nurtures dependence on teachers rather than fostering self-learning. The view on higher education found in this type was the closest to the concept of psychosocial moratorium, for students reported as gaining a kind of framework of belonging while also being free to pursue what they thought was appropriate without having to commit to long-term obligations.

"As long as we are in higher education, we feel like we are a part of some big structure that is standing behind us and giving us shelter. I mean, as a student you have certain benefits in social care and access to some programs. On the other hand, you are not expected to give anything in return. I mean, one does not have to take care of anyone accept for oneself. " [F16: 203-210]

In this type of thinking, the role of higher education in students' adult identity formation was positively assessed, but in a moderate intensity, meaning that it exercised a limited impact on students' exploration processes. It was not suppressive, but the impact itself was mediated by students' quest for challenges and possibilities, for which higher education environment by its nature sometimes seems to be insufficient and inadequate, and hence fails to meet students' expectations in this regard. Higher education years were considered to be a safe zone for experimentation and personal growth, for a person does not face pressure to take on long-term commitments or to manage complex obligations and relations like those found in a work setting. These students tended to value more the overall experience than educational process as such, e.g. they tended to enjoy extra-curricular activities accessible to them such as participation in students' unions and traveling as an arena for self-growth. Peers and exchange with diverse students were more valued than interactions with teachers and the teaching process itself. They were not as much governed by the motive of achievement as by the process and benefits it brought along. Overall, the motto of this type of students may be summarised as follows: "*I feel like I have so many opportunities to explore myself"* [F20: 140].

Therefore, students thought of higher education as a framework for practicing their adult-like forms of being and progressing their identity work, as they reported not having yet reached prerequisites for being full adults (stabile job or an individual household). In higher education they tended to seek more space for trying out different forms of acting as self-responsible and independent, and to experiment with own needs and desires. Attributes that students from this group saw as being developed in higher education were: self-worth, appreciation for personal development, organisational skills, responsibility for oneself, awareness of higher standards and demands for success, and critical thinking.

5.4.3 Type C: *Comfort-zone students*

Mottos:

"Nothing special happens in higher education. Things are more or less the same all the time. One just gets additional years before embarking on the real adult world where has to find a job, earn money and take care of family matters." [M11: 93-97]

"Honestly, I would never start higher education if I had a good opportunity for job after graduating from high school." [M05: 47-50]

"I still don't know what I exactly want from my life. It's good not to be too exposed as a person is when having job or having a family." [M04: 83-84]

Table 15 shows that students in this type came from well-standing families that had no major financial concerns in everyday living. They all lived with their families of origin, with the exception of one, and were mostly reliant on family finances. They talked about having strong relations with their parents; in one interview good relations with the student's stepfather were also described [F03: 18]. There were holders of higher education degree among the members of their close families. There was almost an equal share of those who were single and those in a relationship, with one female student reporting being engaged. However, they provided only scarce reference to their relationship status in their narrations.

Table 15: Comfort-zone students

Case	*COMFORT-ZONE STUDENTS*
Interviews belonging to this case	M04; F03; F04; F05; M05; M11; M12, M16; F17; M18; F21
Family SES	Assessed as average or above
Family educational background	Members of close family holding higher education degree (a parent or a sibling)
Perception of objective circumstances	Not reporting financial concerns Not having any firm commitments No pressures from the family of origin in terms of academic success
Work experience	Scarce work experiences Financial aspect is not emphasised Motivation comes from the opportunity for self-actualisation and doing something worthwhile
Perception of own adult identity	Adult identity is *on standby*
Perception of own agency in adult identity formation	Reluctant Lack of intentional and focused adult forming activity Becoming an adult is not perceived as developmental task in the present time of their life course No planned activities are reported intentionally focused on adult identity formation
Perception of the role of higher education in students' adult identity development	Higher education is perceived as a shelter saving students from adult-like roles and not imposing expectations for adult-like behaviour. Overall, students do not see higher education as gearing up their adult identity formation process.

Overall, their environment did not put pressure on them in terms of academic achievement, nor they put high expectations of taking more responsibilities in households and families. This all provided students with the sense of comfort and easy-going through the present life course, not imposing specific tasks and assignments. Their major concern at the time was the study program they were enrolled in.

"I don't see that I am becoming an adult in higher education. Moreover, I am not. I just do what I do, it's not that I want to become all at a sudden some more serious and mature person." [F17: 93-96]

This type of students had scarce employment experiences; none of them worked full-time, and the majority of them stated that they had never worked before. Even those with some work experience prioritised the chance for self-actualisation and doing something useful over the financial aspects of their work jobs. *"My high school teacher asked me to work with her students in additional classes in Chemistry. I was thrilled, because I love Chemistry and love teaching it."*

[M05: 39-41]

Students in this case were identified as being rather sceptical when it comes to adult identity formation in higher education. They didn't see it as being developed exclusively in higher education, since it as an institution does not provide relevant experiences in that regard. They saw higher education concerned in the first place with scholarly knowledge and professional competencies, not *"as a school caring for persons' moral development and personal growth. Some centre for students should be doing that – counselling and helping students' personal growth*[38]*"* [M16: 59-61]. However, when it comes to adult identity specifically, students belonging to this type didn't see it as priority of their current life courses. The most that is possible to develop, according to this type of students, is the sense of becoming an adult, but a person actually never becomes one while in higher education. It seems that these students were participating in the process of higher education rather than thinking about actual benefits they acquire from it.

"It is too early to become an adult, and higher education does that – extends the time until one becomes actual adult. I mean, I can't imagine how difficult would be a life of a student who also had a baby and family." [F21: 119-122]

[38] Although they exist in Statutes and similar relevant documents, university student support services do not work in their full capacity and students are not accustomed to ask for help concerning their personal matters (e.g. career guidance, psychological counselling, time management, etc.).

"Certain things should be done in certain times. Therefore, studying is something the best to be done in the early 20s. If a person manages to become an adult during that time – be independent and responsible – it's ok, but it is not necessary." [F17: 145-149]

Adult identity formation was effectively suspended in higher education by fostering dependency and insisting on teacher-centred instruction. *"There are professors who treat us as if we we are still teenagers, pushing their own opinions on us, demanding discipline and calling upon us in the middle of the lecture to test our knowledge"* [M18: 252-525]. Furthermore, higher education involvement led to a prolonged dependency and a lack of commitment in other life spheres as well. They described studying as their primary present task, after which they *"will search for new opportunities in the adult world"* [F21: 129].

Students within this type did not neglect that certain developmental processes were going on, but they questioned whether they were supported or initiated by higher education experience. Therefore, the analysis showed that its role in this group of students was indifferent and marginal, which might be attributable to the students' own description of themselves as passive and not particularly consciously active in their adult identity forming processes while in higher education. They spoke of other priorities in their development, such as seeing the opportunity to encounter people with high aspirations, to work with demanding tasks and to develop skills, to learn from interactions with diverse students and to have mentors and role-models in the study field. Overall, students in this group reported reluctance in continuing higher education even in the third study year, and were thinking about dropping out and searching for a job instead. They saw this period of life as an interim phase when a person did not have social pressure to become an adult. The processes that a person underwent eventually would lead to adulthood, which would be reached afterwards, in more or less close future. As shown in concept mapping, relationships between the adult identity forming factors within this type of students can be described as regulated by natural linearity.

The prevailing thinking in type C was that higher education does not make students adults, but that it represents the time when they are still not full adults, nor it is expected from them to be become that. The most that can be achieved is developing certain adult-like forms of being, such as cultivating cognitive capacities, self-reliance, self-representation, social skills, but that is *"something that happens by the time, regardless of whether a person attends higher education or not"* [M11: 50-51]. This, however, revealed that this type of students might not be fully aware of the actual role of higher education in adult identity formation. It seemed to be more of a representation of silent processes occurring in students during their time in higher education that may be unknown even to the students themselves, let alone teachers and higher education professionals. For these reasons, it is important to be conscious of students that are hard to reach; just because their needs are not recognised does not mean they do not exist. It is more the case that their developmental processes are occurring at some unknown dynamics.

5.4.4 Type D: *Atypical students*

Mottos:

"I guess higher education helps us think independently, but it does not prepare us for life in the real world, neither professionally nor personally." [F19: 143-145]

"*I believe I started to think of myself as an adult much earlier than normal persons do. As a teenager, I left my parents and lived in another town.*" [M13: 113-116]

This type consists of ten students who are fairly unique and atypical in the sense that their experiences and commitments go beyond what is expected of students between the ages of 18 and 26. The case of a girl who lost her father in the war, while her mother passed away during her first year of the Master's studies was unlike any other in this research. She was completely alone after her mother passed away, with no

relatives and immediate family members, which led to her marrying her fiancé soon after. At the time of interviewing, she was pregnant and still attending classes. A striking quote from her interview summarises the role of difficult life circumstances in accelerating her taking adult roles and commitments;

"Who knows, maybe if my mother was still alive, I would not have married by now and I would not have been expecting a child at such a young age. I would have most likely enjoyed my education and been looking for prospects for professional development." [F02: 161-165]

Her narration revealed high value she saw in higher education for her overall sense of self-worth. However, she neglected the importance of higher education in adult identity formation. She described it as "*not facilitating entrance to adulthood"* [F02: 174].

In Chapter 2 we have already discussed non-traditional and post-traditional students, whose most obvious distinction is that they are older than the traditional student cohort. However, in this research, atypical students were the same age as the majority of the student population, but their experiences and commitments had already made them adults. Student status, in their opinion, was not a zone for exploration and trying out various possibilities, but rather a necessity to safeguard better opportunities for their families in the future. They were already under the pressure of social roles and tasks influencing their development and life decisions. By the role it played in students' lives, in this type, higher education was more similar to adult education, in the sense that for these students, it had a compensatory or social function.

"*Higher education helps in the sense that I build self-esteem and have greater prospects in the future. Honestly, I started to feel like an adult even in high school.*"

[M15: 117-120]

"I see higher education as my refuge. I feel worth and like I am doing something significant." [F22: 137]

Table 16: Atypical students

Case	***ATYPICAL STUDENTS***
Interviews belonging to this case	F02, M07, M08, M09, F09, F11, M13, F15, M15, F19; F22
Family SES	Assessed as below average; some of them have formed their families – with or without children
Family educational background	First generation in higher education
Perception of objective circumstances	Having financial concerns for their families Having firm adult tasks and commitments Academic achievement is not the most important task in their lives
Work experience	Report as occasionally working Work is not career-based nor full-time Primer motivation is financial, yet multiple roles in everyday life does not leave much space for more serious work engagement.
Perception of own adult identity	Adult identity achieved at accelerated pace. The primer sense of forming adult identity is influenced by individual's role taking (marriage, forming own household, childbirth, divorce)
Perception of the role of higher education in students' adult identity development	Higher education is seen as the context granting opportunities for better paid job and better position in the social structure, but not much reference is made to adult identity and overall personal identity; it is in this type developed as the function of adult roles taking atypical for an average student cohort

As seen from *Table 16*, students in this case felt they were adults due to life circumstances and that they now had to "catch up" on all that was expected from them (job, financial and residential independence, responsibility, reasoning, independence). However, they saw no support from higher education for their specific life circumstances, and even more, they saw it as neglecting their developmental tasks and somehow pushing them to the periphery of higher education processes.

"In a way, I feel like I do not belong in higher education any more. I do not want only to pass my exams, but I want to be respected there, to feel like I am gaining something for myself as a person." [F15: 66-69]

Students have said that they faced difficulties because their teachers were unaware of or ignored their multiple roles, and they were held to the same expectations from them as they did from regular students who did not have such a complex set of tasks and roles. The case of atypical students demonstrates how higher education contexts are designed to meet the assumed level of learning and developmental needs, while being insensitive to individual circumstances and particular needs that atypical students may have.

This was the only type that reflected higher education' negative role in students' adult identity formation, as it was perceived as suspending it. Because of their biographies and the fact that they seemed to have already achieved adult status, students in this type were deemed atypical. They felt like they were becoming adults as a result of life circumstances which led them to take on adult roles and commitments. They felt that forming adult identity was primarily influenced by an individual's role taking (marriage, forming own household, childbirth, divorce). In this accelerated adult identity formation process they reported missing the exploration phase and were currently questioning themselves about their past actions and decisions. However, they saw higher education as failing to recognise them as students with specific developmental needs and social roles, as well as a lack of regard for their individual wonderings and (self)search. Instead, they reported that rigid rules and dependency in the instructional process were incompatible with their self-image. They felt they were treated as students with no previous real-life experience and as if they did not have a vision of how higher education could contribute to their future lives. As a result, they did not see much formational moments in higher education. It was seen as a context that offered opportunities for a better paid job and a better social status, but there was no reference to its contribution to adult identity and overall personal identity formation and development.

The students in this type noticed that their teachers sometimes acted ignoring the realities of their personal lives (e.g. a married student and a student with a child were reported as not having any additional support). This resulted in a delay in completing

study assignments and graduating at a later age. What was positive in this type was the sense of self efficiency and investing in own future by pursuing higher education, and the sense that they were putting hard work in something worthwhile, practicing time management, belief in success, prioritising, diligence and persistence. This type of students exemplifies confinement of higher education to the structures of formal education system. Despite being directed to students who are no longer secondary school adolescents, higher education does not seem to be equipped to empower and grant opportunities to students who already identify themselves as adults. This finding further generates the question of openness of higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina to lifelong learning opportunities and to fostering adult participation in higher education.

5.4.5 Summary of the main research results

Through the type-building method, which relied on the thematic category analysis and concept mapping, four types of students were identified. As the comparison showed, they differed in the main factors of adult identity formation as well as in the relationships between them. Consequently, these types reflected an overview of student individual differences, which ultimately resulted in different impact on their overall development and the perception of gains from higher education. This research lays the groundwork for understanding at least four types of higher education's role in the formation of students' adult identities. Each type can be seen as the product of at least three groups of factors; students' family background and living conditions, their perception of progress in adult identity formation and their perception of own agency. Having described the interplay of different factors and their relationships it is possible to understand why in the same university setting certain students benefit largely, become more mature, more responsible and accountant, while others leave with their diploma, but yet feeling confused and not prepared for stepping into the adult world.

Proactive students reported about receiving high motivation from difficult life circumstances to their adult identity formation processes. As well, they were deeply personally engaged in the growth process, and eventually perceived the support from higher education institution as equally high and strong. On the other hand, explorers reported on being actively engaged in adult identity forming experiences, but they perceived the role of their living conditions and higher education institution as moderate. It should not be overlooked that they reported about having average or above average SES and not facing financial and existential pressures from their families. Their most important task was studying and completing goals they had set for themselves. Comfort-zone students showed low self-activity in adult identity formation, and in the same way perceived both the role of living circumstances and higher education context. Moreover, these students said that they were not concerned with adult identity formation and that they did not see it as priory in their current personal development. Despite putting forth a high level of self-effort and being pushed by their living conditions to develop adult like forms of responsibilities and acting, atypical students perceived higher education as irrelevant in this regard. Moreover, they spoke about harmful effects because it was clear that their specific needs were being ignored. These results showed that higher education provided limited exploration opportunities (vertical and horizontal mobility can be illustrative of this, as well as limited offer of elective courses or their confinement only to the same department, without possibility to choose from different faculties and departments). By insisting on rigid and formalised teaching approaches and traditional student position in higher education, it was also ill-equipped to meet the needs of atypical or non-traditional students.

Based on the results presented in this section, it is possible to conclude that the role of higher education in students' adult identity formation should be viewed as a multidimensional phenomenon, and that higher education does not have the same effects on all students. This tells that higher education alone is not necessarily effective or ineffective, or that its role is *a priori* supportive, neutral or harmful. The results indicate that when evaluating higher education's effects, impacts or roles, education researchers should consider multiple factors, both those from social and economic

environment, and those coming from students' characteristics. The obtained research results originate from the same university and students belonging to the same age group, which makes it easier to ascribe varieties between them to differences existing between students. However, we should be aware of the limitations coming from the very research design, which does not allow for experimental manipulation with variables and precise identification of all antecedents to students' development. On the other hand, the results give impetus for more consideration of groups that could benefit the most from attending higher education and those who could experience the weakest effect. This further indicates how important it is for higher education teachers to be aware of diverse students and to try to find the ways of addressing their needs in educational process. Limitations also come from the fact that results originate from a single university, which is functioning in a specific social and political environment and the results speak only about the context in which they have been obtained, not generally about higher education in a broader perspective.

5.5 Formative potential of higher education experience for students' adult identity

The final set of research results brings students' evaluations of higher education' formative potential, which was operationalized with the perception of personal attributes developed in higher education and identification of adult identity forming experiences. This showcased how relevant overall higher education experience was for students personally and in which areas that relevance was manifested. Research results concerning the question of how students assessed the role of higher education experience in their adult identity formation, which is also evaluative in character, has been presented earlier, in Section 5.2.6.

5.5.1 Personal development in higher education

When asked in which sense they are today similar or different from the persons that entered university four years ago, students reported about the three groups of changes; (a) *changes in judgements and emotional reactions*, (b) *changes in self-concept* and (c) *changes in socialisation with peers.* On the other side, things that did not change students locate in the domain of their worldviews, beliefs, moral values and the awareness of family values and traditions, "*that what my parents taught me is right"* [F10: 111].

When speaking about their cognitive and emotional development, students reported about acquiring more complex way of thinking, being aware of the multiple views in a single matter, or about how it was important to maintain certain emotional and cognitive distance towards the reality. *"I have become calmer and more relaxed. There were situations in which I used to overreact. Now I see that I could have resolved them in a much more constructive way"* [F06: 146-148].

"I have certainly learned a lot from diversity in the classroom. You suddenly get surrounded by students from all parts of the country, with different accents, habits... Some of them are first time staying in Sarajevo. But, bit by bit, you see that it is important that they are here. You hear their opinions and reflect about your own."

[M01: 94-99]

"I have definitely learned that things are not black and white. Never." [M02: 162]

In relation to peers, socialization and collaboration with the diverse student body has been identified as fostering establishment of more mature relationships with their peers, practicing self-control, politeness and collaboration. *"Over these five years we had so many group assignments and you learn that not everyone has the same work ethics as you do, but you have to find some common language."* [F07: 72-75]

“I came to accept diversity of lifestyles and life views, as I really had chance for close encounter with different people coming from different places in the country.”

[M01: 100-101]

“An important thing that I have learned is to stand for myself and to know how to defend my values in a group.” [F13: 54-55]

Students’ self-concept has changed over the course of university years, in the sense that they now think about themselves as competent persons, who are nearly professionals in their fields and who have capacities to shape their future. *“At the beginning of my study years I was a kind of lost. I didn’t have the idea where I would be in four years’ time. Now, I am confident, I appreciate myself for all the efforts I have put and for all the things I have accomplished”* [F05: 88-92].

5.5.1.1 Personal attributes developed in higher education

Six personal attributes related to formation of adult identity were identified through thematic analysis: discipline, self-worth, cognitive development, maturity, independence and social skills (see *Table 17)*. All of them were operationalised with the corresponding number of empirical codes reflecting more specific properties and capacities. It was shown that, as observed by students, higher education institution provided the context which, besides acquiring disciplinary knowledge and professional skills, cultivated certain personal qualities in them.

Table 17: Personal attributes developed in higher education

PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES	CODES	QUOTATIONS
Discipline (37)	Diligence (25) Organisational skills (35) Time-management (19) Hard work (29) Prioritising (14) Persistence (11)	*"I realised that no assignment was too difficult and that in order to complete all of them it was important to improve my organisational skills and to put much more effort than I used to in high school."* [M13: 122-124] *"Higher education forces you to develop certain discipline and commitment to hard work."* [M16: 86] *"I am 100% positive that I have developed persistence and awareness of the goals in life."* [F09: 118]
Self-worth (44)	Experiencing success (17) The value of personal development (13) Belief in success (14)	*"With hard work comes success and it proves you that you worth."* [F07: 71] *"When I enrolled my studies, my parents told me: Listen, whenever you finish your studies it is ok. Just finish, even if you repeat every year twice and pass with minimal grades. No one had high expectations from me, but I eventually shined."* [M03: 33-36]
Cognitive development (32)	High standards of achievement (17) Acquiring worthwhile knowledge (25) Complex and critical thinking (10)	*"Studying is more demanding than learning in high school. I learned that there are multiple perspectives on a single topic."* [F04: 57-58] *"I definitely developed the sense of competence and expertise in my study field."* [M13: 127]
Maturity (39)	Controlling emotions (9) Acquiring elements of professional conduct (23) Self-representation (7)	*"I learned that no one cares for your emotions and the more you control them, the better is for you."* [F02: 46] *"Failing in an assignment is not something to be desperate about. There is always another opportunity."* [F09: 112] *"By their own approach they teach us about professional stance, how to stay sober and calm in various situations."* [F04: 66-68]
Independence (36)	Responsibility for oneself (15) Self-reliance (8) Autonomous thinking and decisions making (13)	*"I learned that no one will do your dishes and laundry."* [M02: 113] *"For me the largest challenge was to manage my finances and not to ask for more from my parents."* [M03: 100] *"We were encouraged to think out of the box, and I had to learn how to express my thoughts."* [M16: 92]
Social skills (17)	Cooperation with diverse students (17)	*"In my Gymnasium we were all more or less similar to one another. But in higher education, there were students from all over the country, even from other countries. They are different, but we learned to work together."* [M01: 120-122]

Codes listed in *Table 17* represent the general attributes regardless of the study field, and based on this, it can be assumed that within each program students developed certain discipline-related personal properties and capacities. However, attributes that students recognised as having been developed in higher education cannot be confirmed

to be completely non-existent beyond the given context, since the obtained data and research design do not have causal power. However, the fact that students were able to relate those attributes to their experience of studying tells that higher education is still the time of formation and personal development, supported by the program itself and overall experience, as well as students' proactive personal agency. In addition, it tells about personal meaningfulness that higher education tends to have for certain groups of students.

5.5.1.2 Adult identity forming experiences in higher education

Furthermore, we were interested in the means by which development of personal attributes was achieved, i.e. what adult identity forming experiences students cited. This particular aspect added to deeper understanding of how higher education played its role in students' adult identity formation. To this end, students were encouraged to think about positive and negative events that had a strong formational effect on them. The limitations concerning this aim stemmed from the fact that the research design employed did not deal with identifying causalities, while students possessed a whole set of properties that had been formed through earlier socialisation and development processes. Therefore, our task was not to trace the genesis of some attributes, but only to check whether students recognized their development as supported in higher education, and by which means. Reflections about formational moments were dealt in with special sensibility encouraging students to think of what meaning certain experiences had in their adult identity formation processes. This resulted in the list of categories and codes pertaining to the adult identity forming experiences in higher education, inclusive of those related to curriculum, as well as to living conditions (see *Table 18*). In the analysis process all of them were structured around seven broad categories commonly found through comparing cases; relational dimension, teaching approach, study content, peers, extra-curricular activities, employment, and independent residence. Those categories reflected both on and off-campus experiences indicating that student status granted access to a certain domain of social relations and privileges that transgressed solely lecture halls and campus-site

living. They also contained both positive and negative experiences, and in the analysis process it became apparent that both had certain formational potential.

Table 18: Adult identity forming experiences in higher education

	Positive experiences	Negative experiences	Formational moments
Relational dimension	Symmetrical relationships with teachers. More respect from teachers to students as their future colleagues.[39] High expectations from teachers. Possibilities for acquiring professional communication codes. Recognition from a respected professor	Disparaging students' abilities. Insisting on classroom discipline and rigid rules. Disrespect for students' multiple roles and identities	Positive experiences are reported as forming the sense of self-worth and professional accountability in students. Negative experiences are also reported as having formative value in the sense that students were reflecting upon their own needs and tried not to ignore them in relation to certain teachers.
Teaching approach	Student-centred Interactive learning, practical assignments, discussions and debates, multiple-evaluation methods, students' self-evaluation, co-construction of curriculum	Professor-centred and content-centred. Insisting on rote learning and reproduction of facts. Lack of transparency in evaluation process	Positive experiences enabled students to feel as responsible for their education, to develop more mature attitudes in the learning process and to distance from dependency inherent to formal education. Negative experiences nurtured the sense of insufficiency and frustration, they maintained the sense of dependency on teacher as the main legitimating point in educational process
Study content	Cognitively demanding material; books that brought a new way of thinking, especially in humanities and social sciences; opportunities to confront with different interpretations of a single phenomenon	Insisting on certain authors and works; centeredness on outdated concepts and thinking	Positive experiences are seen as helping students find some answers to their personal questions. Negative experiences are seen as fostering quest for expanding horizons and views.
Peers	Collaboration in group work and projects Classroom discussions Diversity of worldviews, family backgrounds and values Socialization outside the institution	Intolerance to diverse students Lack of support in assignments Irresponsible conduct in group work and expectations that someone will do all the work	Both positive and negative experiences are reported as contributing to communicating clearly own attitudes, setting limits and learning to respect others and their individuality.

[39] In Bosnian higher education institutions teachers normally address students with *Colleague.*

Extra-curricular	Workshops, students' unions and activities as an arena for self-actualisation	Extra-curricular activities as time-consuming endeavour	Adult identity forming moments are seen in an opportunity to show competencies and skills outside the higher education context, in an "outer world"
Employment	Recognition, self-worth, independence, earning, professional maturity, possibility to help financially parents and siblings	Students are working in less-paid jobs, job is not related to the study field, it takes much time and energy, but brings small money	Positive experiences are seen as a strong impetus for adult identity formation. Negative experiences are reflected as an opportunity for exploration of own possibilities at the labour market
Independ residence	Being responsible for oneself, taking care of all life matters independently, organising daily routine	Sometimes difficult to finance independent living, demanding extra time for maintenance and other responsibilities	Possibility for learning "the adult way of living", seeing the good and bad sides of being responsible for own life matters

Regardless of their study field, all students have experienced certain critical points in their study processes, when they were questioning whether or not to continue their studies. Those points actually indicated the ongoing processes of self-questioning and examining whether they had made the right choice for their studies based on their abilities, interests, and their identities. In the majority of cases, the questioning took place during the first or second study year, and was a side-effect of stressful moments resulting from the encounter with particular courses and teachers. Those emotionally difficult episodes reflected the sense of failure when students' self-perception and identity were threatened, as seen in the quotes below.

"While I was waiting for the results, I was constantly angry with me and asking myself was this all worth my health and wellbeing. I have started to feel severe health problems due to this exam that I had failed three times previously. I decided to withdraw my documents and quit if I fail one more time." [M03: 62-65]

"I will never forget the first day at the Faculty when we had to stand up in front of the whole freshmen class and our teachers and introduce ourselves and explain why we chose this particular program. I don't recall ever having such tremors as I did at that time." [F02: 136-139]

"The teacher had such an ability to tell you that you are inadequate as a person, that you are a complete failure." [F05: 63-64]

"We had teachers who were constantly telling to the class if someone didn't read correctly that he or she shouldn't be studying this program at all." [M01: 52-53]

"I will never forget my exam ... in which I literally knew my teacher's book by heart. I knew literally everything, all footnotes, tables, figures... and in oral exam I insisted to go for an A, but she just went on yelling at me and telling to be happy with passing the exam." [M05: 65-70]

"I was the only student wearing scarf on my head. Whenever we were doing interpretations of literary works, a teacher used to make reference to religious stuff urging me to react. I soon realised that he was just provoking me and I started to ignore those things. But it was difficult all the time." [F01: 71-75]

Offensive or negative accounts were mainly attributed to specific teachers or initial exams, whereas as they progressed through higher education, students reported developing a coping mechanism or the ability to re-claim their self-concept and goals. This was something that added the formative value even to negative experiences, whereby students managed to cultivate their inner capacities and grow more mature. On the other hand, students with proactive and questioning attitude were also able to interpret the negative experiences in formational manner reporting that such experiences prompted them to think about their own needs more carefully and to try not to ignore them in relation to specific teachers.

"This I remember as one of the worst experiences from my higher education years. We had a teacher who was so moody and we never could be certain about what would annoy her. She acted as if her own needs were the most important in the classroom. However, it challenged me to think more profoundly about my own feelings and needs and not to supress them just in order for her to be pleased. I think this is an adult way of acting." [M15: 179-185]

Unambiguously positive experiences were those forming and nurturing the sense of self-worth and professional accountability in students.

"I shall never forget those professors who cared about us and our development. Some of them I consider my role model, they showed me respect and treated me with dignity. It made me feel like my integrity was respected." [F03: 144-147]
"In building ourselves as future professionals and responsible individuals it is important to be treated with respect and trust by our teachers." [F13: 150-151]

The teaching approach was reported as having formational potential when it was student-centred, cognitively, emotionally and socially challenging, and when it granted students the sense of self-directedness in learning. On the other hand, professor- and content-centred teaching approach, insisting on rote learning and reproduction of facts, as well as a lack of transparency in the evaluation process, were reported as nurturing the sense of insufficiency and frustration, maintaining dependency on the teacher as the main legitimating point in the educational process. Students were also able to identify some study material segments that expanded their horizons and helped them arrive at the answers to their personal questions and dilemmas. Even negative experiences with content material were reported as initiating continuing quest and independent search as if students were more encouraged to undertake self-organized search when feeling that material provided by teachers was inadequate and insufficient.

"I was convinced that this program was for me the moment I entered the laboratory. Practical work that we were exposed to in the third year of studies was so rewarding and productive for my own development as a person that it is beyond words." [F15: 41-43]

"My overall higher education experience can be described as a self-search. I was always looking for new opportunities, for new people and I was all the time exploring and learning something new from every situation." [F18: 188-191]

"The most important lesson that I have learnt is that no one is going to do your laundry or dishwashing. All that you have to do by yourself, plus prepare exams and go out with friends." [M02: 113-16]

Examining the elements of higher education experience showcased the developmental path consisting of five key points;

1. High enthusiasm and high expectations at the beginning fostered by the feeling of opening a new life chapter, followed by separating from parents/guardians and orienting towards independent living.
2. Disappointment and crisis, feeling that one will not meet her expectations in the educational process, motivation decline following the first assignments which were not completed according to initial expectations (the sense of lack of stabile ground, questioning about self-worth and choices of study program).
3. New opportunities for self-actualisation following discovery of worthwhile activities, sense of initial success, recognition from peers and teachers (reclaiming personal strength to face the challenges).
4. Success episodes towards the end of second and during the third year, a feeling of getting stronger to face the challenges.
5. Recognition from family and significant others following completion of BA studies and continuing with Master's.

5.5.2 Summary of the main research results

The final set of results included a description of personal attributes developed in higher education as well as related experiences. It displayed students' evaluations of the ongoing personal development, and the elements of higher education experience that were relevant to them personally. While talking about their experiences with adult identity development in higher education, students cited both positive and negative incidents and were able to discern their formational value. Overall, formational value in students' perceptions was related to whether certain experiences granted them opportunities to act as more responsible, more autonomous and independent individuals, whether they respected their meaning making processes and whether they treated them as subjects driven by their specific needs in an educational context. In that sense, students' forming experiences described in this research were organised in seven

groups: relational dimension, teaching approach, study content, peers, extra-curricular activities, employment and independent living.

This sheds light on the potential of higher education environment to support students' adult identity formation by providing personal meaningfulness and expanding their question horizons. In such a process, every relation, approach, study content, exchange with peers may have a growth potential, for it triggers quest for one part of the puzzle of a student's personal identity. By offering students new symbolic meanings, challenging their thinking and perceptions, and putting them in a position of active knowledge construction, higher education environment fosters adult-like ways of thinking and acting, released from censorship of earlier educational levels and immaturity of an adolescent educational environment. However, what remains beyond the reach of the methodology applied is the intensity in which higher education can compensate for earlier shortfalls in students' development, or the extant of change it can initiate when certain patterns had been already established through the previous education and socialisation. At the same time, the results clearly indicate the significance of relational dimension, recognition and support from teachers, but also of the overall experience that a student status grants.

Implications of these findings include creating the culture in higher education institutions that would enable "students discover who they are and negotiate connections between who they are and what they do in school" (Faircloth, 2012: 187). This would require enriching higher education experience with specific interventions and integrating didactics that supports students' autonomy, independence, mature way of thinking, which put them in the position of active designers of their development, enabling them to feel respected and their needs fulfilled. However, in view of the COVID-19 crisis, which affected the educational sector tremendously, and displaced university students from the campuses, it would be worthwhile to reconsider the formative capacity of higher education experience given the fact that in this occasion it is dominated by the instruction process and depriving students of direct socialisation and relationships.

6 Discussion

With this dissertation we intended to actualize discussion about adult identity formation as the main developmental task of post-adolescent period, focusing on examining the role of higher education therein. As discussed in Chapter 3, post-adolescent years is perhaps the most intriguing period of personal development, as it represents the threshold when a young person decides whether to stay within the formal education and training processes or to proceed on to the labour market, or even not to join either of the socially recognised spheres, such is the case with the NEET. In addition, youth as a social group are from one side enfolded in common misunderstanding by the wider society, and from the other, they are distressed by supercomplexity (Barnett, 2000a; 2000b) and uncertainty (Arnold, 2019) affecting their transitions and adaptations to social structures.

As shown in this work, the concept of adulthood is currently undergoing serious questioning, witnessing de-standardisation and brake-up with traditional norms. These attempts have already given rise to "alternative adulthoods" as Côté (2006: 112) formulates it. Among the alternatives, the concept of *emerging adulthood* (Arnett, 2000; 2001; 2004a; 2004b) is probably the most widespread one, in addition to *new adulthood* suggested by Hartmann & Toguchi Swartz (2017). From the perspective of Erikson's psychosocial theory, identity development is a lifelong process, of which the initial, forming period is placed in the post-adolescence and is influenced by a multiplex of biological, psychological, and social factors. The role of higher education institution in the light of psychosocial theory is in providing an organised and structured arena for purposeful identity work, while saving youth from society's pressure to take on adult

roles and commitments. Thus, the sense of adult identity is gradually gained through intentional institutional support, instead of being imposed on by the pressures of social expectations or life circumstances. Concurrently, *emerging adulthood* acts as a concept which recognises youth's extended exploration and gradual nature of formation processes before attaining full adulthood. While Erikson's theory allows for a niche inside the social structures by providing youth with psychosocial moratorium, Arnett's concept advocates for an additional developmental period with the aim of preparing youth for full adulthood.

Against such a backdrop based on the developmental needs of youth facing de-standardised transition to adulthood, during the past decades, higher education has witnessed massive transformations moving from elite to nearly universal in most of the societies, admitting thus students of diverse backgrounds, academic preparedness and motivation. In the face of those changes, as discussed in Chapter 2, the purpose and the mission of higher education are also being re-defined, expressing its inclination towards industry and economy, and setting preparation of students for the labour market as its utmost goal. Furthermore, as also shown in Chapter 2, the mainstream discourses on higher education seem to neglect students' personal development as the educational goal, ignoring thus the role it could play in that process. Conversely, as Arnold (2019) notes, facing uncertainty of the present and the future will require from higher education more focus on personality and extra-professional competency development.

In the light of the foregoing, the present research intended to tackle formative potential of higher education as perceived by the students, touching upon its capacity to shape young persons' character attributes, and to develop personal properties needed for more independent and autonomous mode of living as an adult. The empirical research was conducted investigating how students evaluated the role of higher education in their adult identity formation, given the interplay of multiple forming factors – both personal and social. This objective contrasts the prevailing perception of higher education as being concerned exclusively with academic goals related to a scientific discipline or imparting professional knowledge leading to a qualification. The rationale for raising

such a question stems from the fact that higher education is the only social institution entitled for systematic education of youth undergoing the processes of adult identity formation.

Adult identity forming factors examined in this research include: students' objective circumstances, self-assessment of personal agency, own conception of an adult status, taking on adult roles and commitments, and the support from higher education institution. We were interested in the way each factor was manifested in the selected sample of students and the relationships that existed between them. All assessments were self-reports obtained from students in the process of problem-centred interviewing, which is proposed by McAdams (2018) as the method reflecting participants' own perspective and the assigned meanings. Eventually, this created a context against which it was possible to understand multifaceted roles of higher education within students' perceptions of the overall process of adult identity formation. Results showed that there are four clearly discernible roles of higher education; a generator of adult identity formation, a safe-zone for exploration processes, interim phase leading to adulthood or, in the negative sense, suspending adult identity formation.

The research results showed that students are able to note certain developmental value in higher education by identifying specific personal attributes that are developed and nurtured through it. However, when it comes to adult identity formation particularly, results are rather ambivalent, with only a small portion of students (20%) considering higher education as generating adult identity development, and the rest having more reserved, even negative assessment. This further tells that students differentiate between adult identity formation and the overall personal development in higher education, and that not all youth undergoes adult identity formation in the same intensity during higher education years. Côté (2002) has earlier argued that exploration, as a part of identity formation processes is not normatively found in all youth alluding that some young persons take on adult roles and commitments before being even

granted the opportunity of exploration and questioning. With respect to the obtained research results, this was manifested in the group of atypical students.

Following the recent trends in research with higher education students (cf. Hu et al., 2011), which showcase diversity of student body, and suggest typological approach in order to grasp students' experiences as authentically as possible, the present research employed type-building as data analysis method. This resulted in the typology comprised of four types of students according to identified similarities in adult identity forming factors and relationships between them; proactive students, explorers, comfort-zone students and atypical students. The created typology enabled exploring adult identity formation within the context of other relevant factors, which led to verification of the general assumption stating that the role and effects of every single adult identity forming factor gains its value and quality within the context of other factors and existing meaningful relationships. The typology showed that the growth potential of each factor is relative, meaning that none of them can be evaluated accurately in isolation from the others. This contextual approach led to rich qualitative data enabling for comprehensive interpretations transgressing purely linear and causal inferring. A parallelism was identified between the perception of the role of higher education in students' adult identity formation and the student types, meaning that each type is featuring one dominant role. Given that the created types are polythetic, cases inside are not absolutely the same, but they share the most similarities. In the remainder of this Chapter, the major results encompassing descriptive, relational and evaluative data will be discussed in more detail.

We started with describing students' objective circumstances, which included the structure of family of origin, SES and academic history. Students from the sample who assessed their living conditions as difficult were also identified with high personal agency and adult identity either as partly or fully achieved. Through concept mapping, as the data analysis technique within the type-building method, it was possible to note that below average family SES amplified personal agency, which also, in return, acted compensating for difficult objective circumstances (type A). Difficult objective

circumstances were further found to be related to earlier taking on adult identity roles and commitments (type D). This led to the conclusion that difficult or depriving circumstances urged for more active attitude towards personal growth expressed in struggling for opportunities and even taking on tasks leading to obtaining earlier household responsibilities. On the other hand, favourable objective circumstances acted enabling high personal agency by not making the pressure on young persons to take on adult roles and commitments (type B). Furthermore, favourable objective circumstances enabled linear stability in which personal agency was low, adult identity was on standby and youth were not concerned with specific "adult identity formation projects" (type C).

However, based on these results, it is not possible to infer that difficult life circumstances prompted development. Moreover, as shown by Petersen et al. (2009) low family SES and low family education corelate with lower social expectations from parents, as well as with low self-esteem and low confidence, as noted by Guay et al. (2008). The case of participants in this research is specific given the fact that they are academically successful students, at the end of their graduate studies, who had demonstrated high persistence in their academic development, and overall high personal agency. Beyond the scope of this research remains a group of youth coming from difficult objective circumstances who failed to adapt to academic demands, and who struggled through higher education, repeated years, or even dropped out. In this sense, Brock maintains that "although *access* to higher education has increased substantially over the past forty years, student *success* in college – as measured by persistence and degree attainment – has not improved at all" (Brock, 2010: 109, original italics). However, results from our research speak for the personal agency and persistence as drivers of adult identity formation exclusively in the case of senior year academically successful students coming from disadvantaged backgrounds. Yet, for drawing more general conclusions, less academically successful students, and those who are at the beginning of university education should be included.

It was noted a rather high percentage of students having academic education history in their families compared to the overall population of highly educated in the

country. This can be interpreted in terms of positive social reproduction in higher education whereby children benefit from educational inheritance passed on in the sense that they have pre-requirements to follow the lead of their parents. At the same time, it seems encouraging in terms of social mobility to note that 40% of students interviewed are the first generation pursuing higher education in their respective families. This also illustrates students' motivation and individual engagement in the context of lacking or minimal family academic education capital, specifically given that participants in our research were pre-selected as high achieving senior year students, a step close to obtaining a Master's degree. Results from this research showing that the most positive perceptions of gains from higher education in terms of adult identity formation were observed in the group of first-generation higher education students (type A) are in compliance with some findings from Pascarella et al.'s (2004) study. They identified differences in personal development among the group of first-generation students compared to those with family academic education capital. It is maintained that among the former student group effects of higher education experience are "more consequential for college outcomes […] than are pre-college characteristics" (Beattie, 2018: 173). This, along with the results of our research, demonstrates the importance of higher education experience in compensating for less favourable or depriving objective circumstances. However, compensatory role of higher education seems not to be addressed with due attention within the existing scholarship, while "remedial programs" are finding their way to higher education institutions with the rise of non-academic short-cycle programs within the universities' lifelong learning provision, intended at ensuring the pathway for academically less prepared students (cf. Müller et al., 2015). In the context of the results from this study, it is important to discern between academically high achieving students coming from financially, socially and educationally disadvantaged family backgrounds, for whom higher education compensates for the lack of social and developmental resources in their respective environments, and academically less prepared students at whom remedial programs should be targeted.

Based on the obtained results, Erikson's idea of identity as a configuration of "aptitudes developed out of endowment" (Erikson, 1963: 121) and "opportunities offered in social roles" (*ibid*) seems to lend itself to understanding even adult identity development in higher education. It puts emphasis on opportunities in the social environment shaped by the higher education institution as an important developmental element. There are also different positions, such as that by Baltes at al. (2006) maintaining that adult identity formation is both enhanced and limited by the elements of the context. It can be assumed that the impact of objective circumstances would not be the same in low and high achieving students, which is beyond the scope of present research results. Yet, this research has shown that the potential of higher education to shape students' adult identity development is perceived differently in students with difficult and favourable objective circumstances.

Further on, the nature of relationships with the family of origin and students' assessments of developmental processes could be interpreted with respect to cultural and social peculiarities of BiH explained in the Chapter 2. Those are: *socialist legacy* favouring collectivism and society's transition producing social and economic insecurity, close family links whereby youth even if separating actually never distances completely from the family of origin. There is an indication that subjective perceptions of adult identity may be viewed also as a reflection of social and cultural transformations (cf. Cuzzocrea, 2018; Hartmann & Toguchi Swartz, 2007). Based on the accounts of family structure in the student sample, it is possible to observe elements of a co-protective model of transition to adulthood already identified in countries from the region of the south-eastern Europe, such as Serbia (Dragišić et al., 2012) and Slovenia (Lavrič et al., 2011). In this model education system and labour market are loosely linked, employment opportunities for youth are limited, and youth's reliance on the support from family of origin is present even in the 30s. Another feature of this model is that both parents and children continue to take care of each other throughout the lifetime. In such an environment, interdependence is often emphasised and youth's parents are to a great extend involved in determining their life paths and choices. It is important keep this finding even when interpreting the results of international statistical

reports (e.g. Eurostat *Being young in Europe today*[40]) on transition of young adults to independent living across Europe. The co-protective model indicates that in some cases staying in parents' household is not resulting from a lack of finances or inability to form own household, but is more a reflection of existing culture whereby more than two generations of family members tend to co-habituate and support one another. Developmental benefits or shortfalls of such a co-protective model should be further examined. Also, more comprehensive research is needed in the area of family upbringing and education in order to gain more in-depth understanding of the dominant regimes of transition to adulthood specifically in the social context of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The results showed that being in a relationship or married is fostering the more secure sense of being an adult person. In Arnett's understandings, lasting love relationships are the signal of preparedness for adult-like commitments and taking responsibility for oneself and the other person. Furthermore, in Erikson's theory, gaining intimacy and closeness with a partner, as the main developmental task of stage VI is inseparable from a healthy identity development. Erikson links intimacy with the emerging *ethical sense* manifested in questioning, differentiation and delineation of own positions by which an individual enters the intimate relationships with the other, and which Erikson himself designated as being "the mark of the adult" (Erikson, 1968: 264). However, the present research did not assess the quality of existing relationships and their future prospects.

Prior studies cited in sub-section 3.4.2 indicate existing associations between disrupted family structure and premature taking on adult-like roles and commitments, which according to Benson et al. (2012) signals *pseudo-adulthood.* It results from a sudden taking of roles and tasks for which a young person has not been previously prepared, and which is deprived of prior deliberate and gradual developmental processes. Within the group of atypical students in the present research (type D) it was

[40] https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Being_young_in_Europe_today_-_family_and_society [accesssed September 20, 2020]

possible to encounter students coming from incomplete families, but also having taken on roles of a spouse, a parent or even a caretaker to a family member at an early age. Within this type, there were also cases who reported having attained full adult status, and were identified with questioning of previously taken on adult roles and commitments. This result indicated that adult identity was unstable when achieved at accelerated pace and without a time of exploration. However, with the utilised data collecting technique it was not possible to pinpoint precise modalities of achieving adult identity other than students' assessments of either partial or full attainment.

In the context of this research, pseudo-adulthood was found in the group of youth who have gained a certain form of residential and financial independence which were temporarily bound to student status (type A). These students tended to assess their adult identity as partly achieved, and related it to the current residential and financial independence from the family of origin. If they were asked for a new assessment after graduation, when they might expect to transit to a career-based job as well as return to the family household, a more holistic view could be provided. Basically, the concept of pseudo-adulthood addresses two important issues – the relativity of adult status criteria and the reversibility of transition markers. In Mouw's view, reversible transition markers mean "that an adult status marker can be acquired [...] and then relinquished as youth return to their prior status" (Mouw, 2005: 229).

Related to the criteria for achieving adult status, results showed the tendency towards relativisation of age as a marker for subjective sense of attaining adult status. The age of students participating in this research was between 21 and 26 years, however, their self-assessment of progress in adult identity achievement showed variations from identity achieved to not being concerned with that task at all. Furthermore, this finding spoke more in favour of taking on adult tasks and commitments, which basically differentiated between those who considered their adult identity fully or partly achieved. As discussed in Chapter 3, there are two streams of thinking in relation to the age as a marker of adult status. The first is confrontation of chronological age with the concept of subjective age (Galambos et al., 2005; Benson

and Furstenberg, 2007; Benson et al., 2012). It is maintained that there is negative linear relationship between chronological and subjective age in student population, with the age of 25 as the turning point when it is identified that some youth start to think about themselves as less adults compared to their actual chronological age. The second, albeit congruent, stream of thinking is the one that advocates for positioning chronological age within the interplay of other relevant biographical characteristics in order to comprehend more deeply an individual's subjective sense of being an adult (Montepare & Clements, 2011; Eliason et al., 2015). Our results add to the latter stance showing that criteria for adult status emerge from a multiplex of personal attributes and social achievement markers, whereby chronological age is only one of them, effects of which on self-definition of young people as adults can be questioned on the basis of the overall developmental context.

While Arnett's research has shown that students tend to feel in-between adolescence and adulthood (Arnett, 1994; 1998), in our research we could not identify the sense of confusion between the two phases. It was rather apparent that from one side there were students who have already established partial or full sense of adult identity (type A and D), and from the other were those who were striving to it (type B). The third group were those who were not thinking about forming adult identity as their developmental task (type C). This does not necessarily imply regression to adolescence; it is rather an expression of the lack of active and conscious engagement with certain elements of students' personal development.

Derived from students' personal conceptions, adult identity was defined as a set of characteristics and behaviours that reflect independence, responsibility, autonomy in decisions, clarity in both personal and academic goals, and the capability of meaning making from the life events. At the same time, the results showed that not all of the listed characteristics and behaviours need to be present in order for a person to consider herself an adult. Moreover, students' self-assessments of progress in becoming an adult reflected subjective perceptions of salience of the criteria. Discussions on the criteria for adult status presented in Chapter 3 revolved around the roles, tasks, and personal

attributes, which were divided into the two groups – objective markers and subjective experiences. However, it is possible to question both groups from the stand point of what is considered to be objective and what is subjective. Some authors (e.g. Andrew et al., 2007) are more inclined to different terminology, e.g. differentiating "inner side" of the transition to adulthood as opposed to the external, observable, resulting from the social relationships.

Results from this research open the way for a different interpretation, whereby two groups of criteria have been labelled as *social achievement markers* and *markers of personal attributes*. Focusing in this research on how young people *make sense* of the processes leading to attaining the adult status, as urged by Benson and Furstenberg (2007), it was possible to distil social recognition as the prominent motif featuring students' narrations. This motif permeated reflections on the higher education's role, but also the assessment of other factors. Certain markers of adult identity i.e. graduating from university, starting a job, and forming a family, represent socially recognised achievements in the eyes of students. At the present point of youth's lives, attainment of those markers *is* itself the goal that they strive for. Personal attributes, on the other side, include what from the stand point of the obtained results can be considered as "resources" needed for entering the adult world (maturity, independence, freedom of choice, responsibility and certain specific capabilities). It was shown that the two sets of criteria complemented one another and it was difficult to trace their antecedents. This question has been already identified by Benson & Furstenberg (2007), which implies the need for more thorough future research designs directed to tracing the most relevant "triggers" of adult identity formation. In addition, as shown by Sharon (2016: 165), conceptualisations of adulthood and self-perception of being an adult change as young people reach some of the markers.

While the results show clearly that social recognition is an essential component of adult identity formation, further research is needed to fully comprehend how it affects young people's self-constructed and self-built adult identities. The results indicate that objective circumstances play an overemphasised role in young people's self-definition.

This finding particularly calls for rethinking the concept of socially constructed biography, which reflects society's expectations and limitations imposed to the youth. Authors in prior studies (Hartmann & Toguchi Swartz, 2007; Cuzzocrea, 2018) have indicated the importance of social and cultural transformations when talking about adulthood nowadays. However, the question of whether adult identity formation is socially or personally constructed should be more thoroughly explored using life-story interviews. From the standpoint of this research, the social element present in students' reports is seen as indicative of expectations from higher education to provide for social recognition. This, along with encouraging social relations, personally relevant study content, student-centred teaching approach, peers, employment opportunities, extra-curricular activities and independent living represent "social resources" (cf. Erikson, 1968) by which higher education plays its role in students' adult identity formation. Obtained results confirm the underlying assumption that there is a dynamic interplay of multiple factors co-creating and co-enhancing developmental processes in an individual. Based on this, it was possible to reconstruct the intricate networks of influences shaping a person's adult identity formation within the experiences framed by a higher education institution. Yet, as stated earlier, research on adult identity formation of higher education students is peculiarly scarce compared to adolescent development or the context of secondary education (cf. Meeus, 2011), and further comparisons in order to arrive at deeper understandings were compromised.

Having identified that students differ in their objective circumstances, but also in personal agency towards adult identity formation (with *proactive*, *questioning* and *indifferent* status), it became clear that the role of higher education in students' adult identity formation is conceived differently depending on the student as the main agent of her developmental processes. Attending to both the factors of social attainment and personal attributes, this research adds to the structure-agency debate (cf. Côté, 2002; Côté & Levine, 2002; Grigsby, 2009) by finding that there is an interaction of structural and agentic elements, whereby deliberate personal activity is shown to determine the perception of the resources found in the higher education experience. Results show that the same institutional resources are perceived differently by students with proactive and

indifferent personal agency. Namely, proactive students who have not yet fully taken on adult roles and commitments see higher education as generating adult identity formation (type A), while students with low personal agency have opposite perceptions (type C). In between are students questioning their attained adult identities (type D), who find higher education contradicting their needs and expectations.

Viewing higher education as a generator of adult identity in the context of students belonging to the type A grants to higher education a truly emancipatory and transformative role, where empowering students to out-grow their inherited selves becomes its key feature. Studies cited earlier support the view on higher education as a resource or investment into a person's identity formation process (cf. Erikson, 1968). Côté and Levine (2002) maintain that "these resources have an inoculation quality in the sense that they can enable people to reflexively *resist and/or act back on* the social forces impinging on them" (*ibid*: 145). They continue stating that "[i]n this way, individuals should be more likely to develop a sense of authorship over their own biographies, of taking responsibility for their life choices, and of creating a meaningful and satisfying life for themselves" (*ibid*). Cited segments reflect overall positive attitude to growth potential of social environments such as universities, contrary to the self-constructed development, which Erikson (1968) warned about as lacking guidance. However, as exemplified in type C, even institutionally framed development can lack in the perception of growth opportunities in cases when individuals show little personal investment and agency.

Higher education as a safe-zone for exploration processes found in type B, and as an interim phase leading to adulthood found in type C can be interpreted as a form of psychosocial moratorium (cf. Erikson, 1968). Moratorium effects in the two types are manifested through the perception of adult identity formation as either on standby, or a person being indifferent towards it. Côté (2002) argues that moratorium effect is observable in a delayed development, opposite to which is an acceleration effect, when development is enhanced. The difference between the two modes of manifesting moratorium can be explained in terms of differentiation between the moratorium and

waithood already explained by Cuzoocrea (2018). Based on the results from our research, moratorium is found in highly engaged, proactive students who are eager to experiment with different roles and experiences and who are not burdened by long lasting commitments. Concept mapping showed that moratorium in type B is enabled by the favourable objective circumstances and lack of responsibilities for the others. The dominant perception of higher education in this type is as an arena of myriad opportunities, including extra-curricular activities and participation in social events that student status gives access to. Individuals in this type are attracted by the overall experience of being a student and are able to see it as a source of inspiration for personal exploration. The only commitment that is observable in type B students is that to designing their own "choice biographies" (Furlong et al., 2006) engaging in whatever might sparkle their wanderlust spirit. In this sense, higher education's role is materialised in facilitating individual efforts by providing resources or, as Côté and Levine (2002) maintain, the "investment" that individuals make in their identity. Higher education as an investment and facilitator can be observed also in type A – even more intensively. The difference is that in type A higher education does not represent moratorium, since students are actively inclined to taking on some adult roles and commitments, even if it is in the given context only temporarily (e.g. job, committing love relationships, residential independence).

Waithood, on the other hand, is found in students who also originate from favourable family conditions, but report indifferent personal agency status and seem not to be concerned with adult identity formation as an important "personal development project". The role higher education plays in their lives is relatively similar to being a "parking lot", as Furstenberg (2013) formulates it in a different context. In the case of these students, a "parking lot" is needed since they do not belong to other socially recognised structures and overall, students' narrations contain an element of estrangement from the mainstream youth culture. Unlike type B, students in type C are more interested in study discipline and cognitive advancement than in cultivating their personality and putting effort in acquiring the adult-like qualities. This particular group

of students requires more focused attention from the social systems in order to prevent a possible convalescence and a lack of purpose once they leave university environments.

The fourth role of higher education identified in this research essentially speaks of its harmful effects on the self-image of students who have already attained adult identity. Higher education suspending adult identity formation, or even acting in contradicting manner is found in type D students. In the context of discourse on higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina, adults represent the invisible group, who even though formally have access to it, seem to be ignored and uncared for in the educational process and administrative procedures. On the more global level, results from this research urge for inclusion of atypical students to the existing discussions on non-traditional (OECD, 1987) and post-traditional (Soarez, 2013) students. Peculiarity of atypical students found in our research is that they are the same age as a typical student cohort, studying full-time, but at the same having fairly non-typical experiences in personal development (e.g. having taken on some of the adult roles and commitments) or assessing their adult identity as already formed. Results showed that the perception of obstructive role of higher education in type D students is from one side embedded in the organisational aspect of higher education institutions, and from the other, in the ruling didactical paradigm which seems to disregard self-regulation and multiple roles they bring along to the education process.

Summarising the discussion thus far, let us note that although the chronological age and institutional environment are the same for all the students participating in this research, their individual narrations revealed more differences between them than we initially expected. The differences were identified related to all research questions, which, to a certain extant confirms de-standardised and individual conceptions of adulthood in this sample, which was earlier discussed by Shanahan (2000), and Brückner and Mayer (2005) in different contexts. Variations in students' gains from higher education were related to individual differences given the fact that research was conveyed in a single University whereby faculties share more or less similar organisational and learning cultures. This, essentially, shows that adult identity

formation is relational in nature, which is in compliance with prior works indicating interactive nature of identity formation and development (Côté, 2002; Côté & Levine, 2002; Grigsby, 2009; Hendricks, 2012). Having identified varying effects of higher education in different student types it became apparent that higher education should reconsider its capacity to address diverse students and to be more open for their individual quests. It is fairly important to recognise the wanderlust found in certain groups of students, and to better address their diverse needs and creativity. As Erikson's (Erikson, 1959; 1963; 1968) and Marcia's work (Marcia, 1966; 1980; 2002) suggest, intensive identity exploration processes are an important prerequisite in forming firm identity structures. This research brought only a glimpse of students' development showcasing the need for gaining comprehensive knowledge of personal gains from higher education. Such knowledge is needed to design and implement programs that promise to enhance student experiences and improve student learning and personal development.

Given that the empirical research, data analysis and the major part of writing were completed before the COVID-19 crisis, while final text revision has been conveyed during the period of the crisis, new questions are open related to the relevance of social and institutional contexts for evaluating adult identity formation. The obtained results on developmental value of higher education experience should be further questioned in the face of remote instruction, which has moved students from campuses and reduced or completely closed access to a wealth of relevant elements of student experience (e.g. socialization with peers, activities in student unions, living in student dormitories, etc.). These new circumstances might lead to relativization of the concept of *higher education experience* and bringing to the fore the concept of *self-regulated learning* and its potential to prompt formation of more adult-like forms of learning and being.

6.1 Limitations and open questions

With this research we attempted to come closer to understanding of the process of adult identity formation and the role of higher education therein, locating the research process in the specific social context of Bosnia and Herzegovina. As shown throughout this work, adult identity formation is intertwined with the conceptions of adulthood and transition to it. A wealth of prior research addressed the two phenomena in the context of the Western World (Buchmann, 1989; Arnett, 1994; 1998; 2001; Côté & Levine, 2002; Benson & Edin, 2005; Benson & Furstenberg, 2007; Andrew et al., 2007; Berman et al., 2008), while post-socialist societies have been gaining attention only recently (cf. Žukauskienė, 2015). Still, the topic of youth in higher education was not subject to a comprehensive research and analysis in societies of the western Balkans, which have rather specific *communist legacy* (Kwiek, 2014), war history and transitional present. This grants our research exploratory character, but at the same time sets a number of limitations. Local context of the research poses additional shortfalls given the fact that there is not much relevant empirical research providing for valid descriptions of the regimes by which youth makes transitions to adulthood, reducing thus possibilities of formulating more comprehensive and researched-based contextual interpretations of the obtained results. Furthermore, the presented results speak only for the context of students studying at the University of Sarajevo leaving beyond its scope students studying at other public and private universities. Some peculiarities could be expected to occur in private universities due to their prominent emphasis of student-centredness, and provision of various curricular and extra-curricular opportunities.

Certain limitations are related to the qualitative approach and the corresponding methods of data collecting and analysis. As discussed in Section 4.3.1, there are various instruments constructed for researching identity formation processes, some of which are grounded in the Eriksonian psychosocial tradition (e.g. *The Identity Status Interview* or *The Ego Identity Incomplete Sentence Blank*), as well as in the concept of emerging adulthood, such as Reifman et al.'s (2007) *Inventory of the Dimensions of Emerging*

Adulthood. However, it was not possible to find theoretically grounded and validated research instruments for investigating adult identity exclusively. The PCI as the data collecting method enabled evoking elaborate narrations, especially given that students ofttimes expressed uncertainty and the need to provide additional explanations, which could have compromised the validity of research results in the quantitative method. This gives emancipatory and awareness raising dimension to this research. The use of the PCI allowed to keep the focus on the topic of adult identity formation, but also to maintain *planned openness* when conducting interviews. Yet, the utilised methodological tools did not allow for rigorous variable control or correlation analysis. "Reminiscence bump" (Thorne, 2000 cited in Meeus, 2011: 89) already discussed in Section 4.4.2, which is manifested in overemphasising some temporally and emotionally closer events was sometimes difficult to control from the part of the interviewer, which in certain occasions resulted in reduced narrations about more distant developmental antecedents.

The qualitative thematic analysis enabled preserving individuality of interviews, and also opened the way for the comparison and contrasting characteristics encountered in research participants in order to identify regularities and patterns. The whole process of data analysis was an epistemological journey of questioning of our prior theoretical and intuitive knowledge on the topic in order to feed the existing conceptions with empirically-based results. This affected the nature of knowledge gained, as sensitising concepts with which we started are "loosely defined, general concepts, rather than those that have specific, precise definitions" (Charmaz, 2015: 405). The obtained results are formulated so as to illustrate patterns and regularities bound to the context of the research, but their actual value for wider student groups should be further complemented with large-scale research projects that would provide more controlled insight into the developmental process, such as longitudinal or cross-sectional research design.

Further limitations stem from theoretical sampling strategy and selecting the research participants based on their pre-assumed fittingness to the research intention and

their high academic achievement. Eventually, students were selected on the basis of nominees' judgments and assessment of their fittingness to the described criteria. There was no possibility to control nominees' personal biases and possible favouring certain students over some others. Given the fact that research participants are highly educated individuals possessing higher cognitive abilities and operating with sophisticated vocabulary, it was possible to initiate discursive dialogue and discussion. Based on this, the obtained results speak only for a rather small and highly selective research sample, while academically less successful freshmen, sophomore or junior students remained beyond the scope of this research. On the other side, given the qualitative analysis methods, interviewing 40 individuals resulted in a voluminous empirical material, which was at times difficult to embrace in all its niceties and subtleties. In this sense, rationalisations through categorisation or typification – although giving order and meaning to the empirical material – also led to reduction of certain elements that did not fit to the overall pattern. In the case of a smaller research sample, it would be possible to pay more attention to every single detail, and maybe examine adult identity formation factors more minutely in each research participant. However, in that case, it would be more difficult to have students from diverse backgrounds.

With the use of the type-building and concept mapping as data analysis methods, we intended to enable groupings of similar cases on the basis of manifestations of adult identity forming factors and meaningful relationships between them. Reconstructing the meaningful relationships was conducted on the basis of students' narrations and the relevance they assigned to certain events an influences. Self-assessments might bear subjective biases and tendencies to overrate certain factors and to underestimate the other ones. In order to provide more accurate assessments of certain developmental paths and influences it would be methodologically justifiable to include mixed-methods data collecting approaches.

In the closing remarks, it is just to note that this research has opened more questions than has offered answers. We assume that further research combining quantitative and qualitative approaches is needed. For obtaining more sound results on

the role of higher education in students' adult identity formation, it would be important to include a control group of young people – those who did not pursue higher education but entered labour market after completing secondary school. Also, the voice of teachers should be included in further research asking them about whether they are aware of their role in students' adult identity formation and how they can act supporting and enhancing development and growth.

Further recommendations are related to some aspects of practice and research;

- reconsidering the role of higher education as the main social institution shaping young people's transition to adulthood
- critical questioning of higher education's role in developing adult-like forms of acting and thinking in students, e.g. autonomy, independence, critical thinking, (self)responsibility
- actualising ethical dimension of higher education, which bears personal relevance and integrates knowledge with values
- promoting identity formation as the main objective of higher education instead of preparation for labour market
- promoting student-centred learning in higher education in the sense of establishing more symmetrical relations with teachers and imposing higher expectations upon students and asking them to play a more active role in the educational process
- promoting more sensitivity towards differences among students, their living conditions and expectations from higher education
- nurturing didactics of empowerment that will address students' developmental needs better
- opening higher education to atypical students, especially to adults by designing relevant programs and didactical models fostering self-regulated learning
- implementing more flexible and non-traditional approaches in the teaching process in order to come closer to non-regular and atypical student groups
- reconsidering the student experience in the context of remote learning and deprivation of the direct student experience lived at university campuses.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

Dear **______________**,

I would like to invite you to participate in the research study titled *The Role of Higher Education Experience in Students' Adult Identity Formation.* The purpose of this study is to describe experiences related to university education senior students cite as helping them in the process of their adult identity formation.
I am inviting you to participate in this research because you are registered as a senior student at University of Sarajevo and have been nominated by your professor, supervisor or a colleague as a person who can contribute to the given research subject.
If you agree to participate, I would like to invite you for an interview that will take place in the time most suitable for you, so please feel free to express your preferences. The interview will last no longer than 90 minutes, and you are fully free to withdraw at any stage.
There are no known risks from being in this study, and may be no direct benefit for you. However, I hope that the overall findings from this study will add to our current understanding of student identity and the role of higher education in its formation.

If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact Amina Isanović Hadžiomerović via e-mail: amina.hadziomerovic@outlook.com.

Looking forward to receiving your response.

With kind regards,
Amina Isanović Hadžiomerović
Researcher

Appendix 2

INFORMED CONSENT FOR INTERVIEW

Title: *The Role of Higher Education in Students' Adult Identity Formation*

Purpose:
The purpose of this study is to describe experiences related to their university education senior students cite as helping them in the process of their adult identity formation.

Procedures:
You will be asked to participate in a 90 minute interview and review the transcript of your interview to ensure the accuracy of the data collected throughout the research process. In total, this process should take no longer than two hours for the participant. The interview will take place in a quiet room at Faculty of Philosophy, unless different arrangement is agreed.

Benefits:
Overall findings from this study will add to our current understanding of student identity and the role of higher education in its formation, enabling educators to enhance the university experience and its relevance for students personally.

Risks and/or Discomforts:
There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research.

Confidentiality:
Any information obtained during this study which could identify you will be protected and viewed only by the primary researcher. The data will be stored in a password encrypted folder on the investigator's computer and will only be seen by the investigator or PhD Committee during the study and for 6 months after the study is complete. The information obtained in this study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings but the data will be reported as aggregated data.

Opportunity to Ask Questions:
You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study. Or you may contact the investigator Amina Isanović Hadžiomerović at amina.hadziomerovic@outlook.com, or at the phone: 00387 33 253 139.

Freedom to Withdraw:
Participation in this study is voluntary. You can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researcher or in any other way receive a penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Consent, Right to Receive a Copy:
You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

I, _________________________________(participant name), agree to being audio recorded for this interview. I understand that this recording will be used only for research purposes.

Signature of Participant: **Date**

_______________________________________ ____________________________

Signature of Researcher:

____

Appendix 3

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Pseudonym:
Date:
Beginning:
End:
Place:

Thank you for accepting to participate in this research dedicated to students' identity formation during higher education. I am looking forward to hearing your thinking and experiences. It is planned to organise this interview as a conversation and I would like you to feel as comfortable as possible during this session. I deeply appreciate your contribution to my research!
See Informed Consent.
I would like you to choose a name or acronym that I can use throughout the interview.
Do you have any questions for me before we continue our conversation?

Turn on audio recorder.

I. Short questionnaire

1. What is your study field?
2. At what age did you start university?
3. How old are you now?
4. Are there any other members of your close family to complete any form of post-secondary education?
5. How did you decide to study this particular area?
6. With whom have you been living for most of the time during your studies?
7. Are you married (with or without children) or in a firm love relationship?
8. How did you finance yourself during the study years?

II. Interview

A) Pre-formulated opening questions

1. How would you describe the living conditions in the context from where you originate (e.g. your family of origin)?
2. Have you attended any non-formal program during your studies?
3. How involved in extra-curricular activities have you been during your studies?
4. What does it mean for you to be an adult person?
5. Do you consider yourself an adult? Why?
6. Do your family and friends see you in the same way?

B) General exploration questions

1. Imagine yourself at the beginning of your studies and tell me about the most important events that happened to you over the past four/five years that you spent in higher education.
2. What things have changed in your life during your higher education years? How different and how the same are you now compared to the time before your studies? Have you become an adult in higher education?
3. In which sense you think higher education experience shaped that change?
4. When you go back to the years of our studies, can you identify one particularly influential experience that had an important formative impact on you, in the sense that it helped you develop adult-like thinking and acting? Can you describe that experience?
5. What other experiences have helped you in forming your adult identity?
6. Tell about significant others during your university years who helped you develop some of adult-like characteristics?
7. How important as persons you feel to be for your teachers?
8. Which aspects of the instruction process, if any, have supported your adult identity formation processes?
9. Identify a unit, content or activity that helped you in your exploration processes.
10. What do you see as your largest benefit for you personally during the studies?
11. What are the most important lessons that you have learnt during the studies?
12. What is your attitude – does higher education support students on their path of developing adult identity features? Why yes and why not?
13. Are there any questions that you had expected me to ask, but I hadn't?
14. Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you for your time. I shall make a transcript of this interview and shall send you via e-mail. Thus, you will have an opportunity to correct the possible errors or further explain some of your answers. If you do not reply to my e-mail in seven days time, I shall consider you agreeing about the content of the interview transcript and shall proceed with the process of data analysis.

Appendix 4

POSTSCRIPT

Name and pseudonym of the interview partner:

Background information (refer to the questionnaire):

The first impression:

The appearance of the interview partner:

Behaviour of the interview partner:

The flow of the interview:

Moments of discomfort or disagreement:

Specific remarks:

Appendix 5: PROFILE MATRIX

LABEL	STUDY FIELD	AGE	FAMILY EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND	FAMILY STRUCTURE	RELATIONSHIP/ MARITAL STATUS	LIVING ARRANGEMENT	WORK COMMITMENTS	SOURCES OF FINACES	SPECIAL REMARKS	MOTTO
M01	English language and literature	22	Parents with high school qualification; older brother completed university	Parents, two sons	In Stabile relationship	With parents	Working full time in the final year of studies	Scholarship; parents' support; own salary		*"Day by day I upgrade my personality and become more mature in every sense"*
M02	English language and literature	23	Parents and sister completed university	Parents, a daughter and a son	In a relationship	In students' dormitory	Seasonal work	Parents' support; occasional honorarium	Originating from a small town	*"Right now, I want to do a lot of different things and not worry about making commitments."*
F01	Turkish language and literature	22	Father completed higher education; brother and sister both attending university	Parents, two daughters and a son	Stable relationship	Living with brother and sister separated from parents	Working full time in the final year of studies	Scholarship; parents' support; own salary	Originating from a small town	*"Higher education grants me opportunities to act like an adult but not to be fully responsible."*
M03	German language and literature	21	Parents with high school qualification; older sister completed university	Parents, a daughter and a son	Single	Living separated from parents in a rented apartment	Seasonal work; currently applying for job	Parents' support; occasional honorarium	Originating from the neighbouring country	*"I just want to partake in everything that interests me. Eventually I shall find something that suites me."*

F02	Education	24	Parents with high school qualification	Parents have passed away, no siblings	Married, expecting a child	In own household with husband	Not working and no work experience	Husband's salary; social support and scholarship	Lost her father to war; mother passed away during the last year	*"I see higher education as my opportunity to have better future."*
M04	Science	23	Parents with university degree, sister attending Gymnasium	Divorced parents, a daughter and a son	Single	With mother and sister	Occasionally giving classes in Chemistry to high school students	Scholarship; parents' support; own honorarium		*"I still don't know what I exactly want from my life. It's good not to be too exposed as a person is when having job or having a family."*
F03	Veterinary Medicine	24	Parents with university degree	Divorced parents, a daughter	In a relationship	With mother and stepfather	Not working and no work experience	Parents' support		*"I am not concerned with the adult world. I think I am not ready for that yet, to be an adult and no, I am not trying to be one."*
F04	Veterinary Medicine	24	Parents with high school qualification; older brother completed university	Parents, a daughter and a son	In a relationship	With parents and brother	Not working and no work experience	Parents' support		*"I am still searching for myself. I develop day by day, become more mature and self-*

										conscious.”
F05	Education	23	Parents with high school qualification; older sister completed university	Parents, two daughters	Single	With sister separated from parents	Seasonal work, but not much	Parents’ support	Originating from the neighbouring country	*“Yes and no. I am an adult in one sense, but not in all. I still depend on my parents in everything.”*
F06	Education	24	Parents and sister with high school qualification	Parents, two daughters	In a relationship	With parents and sister	Seasonal work, table waiting	Parents’ support, own honorarium		*“While in higher education a person develops in every sense and becomes more mature, more an adult”*
M05	Science	22	Parents with university degree	Parents, and a son	Single	With parents	Working in Chemistry club in the Gymnasium; giving classes to students	Scholarship, own salary		*“Honestly, I would never start higher education if I had a good opportunity for job after graduating from high school.”*
F07	Criminology	24	Parents with high school qualification, sister attending university	Divorced parents, two daughters	Single	With mother	Not working volunteering	Mother’s support		*“By the end of my studies I want to be a complete person, ready to confront with adult world”*

F08	Forestry	23	Parents and brother with high school qualification,	Mother, a daughter and a son	Engaged	In students' dormitory	Occasionally babysitting	Social support, mothers' salary and personal honorarium	Lost her father to war	*"I definitely started to feel like an adult ever since I came to Sarajevo for my studies."*
M06	Medicine	25	Parents and two sisters with high school qualification	Father, two daughters and a son	In a relationship	In students' dormitory	Earning money giving classes in Science and writing essays	Scholarship and personal earning	Mother pass away 7 years ago; originating from a small town	*"Higher education has granted me an opportunity to build my views, standpoints and to think autonomously as adults think."*
M07	Medicine	26	Parents completed university	Parents and a son	Married	In a rented apartment with wife	Occasionally working in a hotel	Scholarship, parents' support, wife's salary, own honorarium	Originating from a small town	*"I think of myself as a full adult. I have now my wife, my own household, I have to make money for the two of us and study at the same time."*
M08	Mechanical engineering	23	No known data	Was raised in orphanage	In a relationship	In students' dormitory	Occasionally working, giving classes in Maths	Social support, scholarship, own honorarium		*"I am independent, through most of my teenage life I was independent. Now I am*

										thinking about how to make my own family, find job and live decently."
M09	Psychology	25	Father completed university, mother with high school qualification, sister and brother attending high school	Parents, two daughters and a son	Divorced; single	With a flatmate in a rented apartment	Occasionally working with children with special needs	Scholarship, parents' support, own honorarium	Originating from a small town	*"Higher education helped me a lot in finding my way. It is nice to have some time to build yourself before making long term decisions."*
M10	German language and literature	24	Parents with high school qualification; younger brother in elementary school	No known data	No known data	In a rented apartment	Not working	Parents' support	Born and raised in Germany, as a teenager moved to a small town in BiH and was living there with grandmother; parents still living in Germany	*"I can notice that as days pass by I become more confident, more independent and closer to my goals."*
F09	Education	24	Parents with high school qualification; sister also studying	Parents, two daughters	Married, with a child	With husband and a daughter	Occasionally working in children's playground	Husbands' salary, own honorarium	Originating from a small town	*"I see higher education as a way of not giving up on my personal*

										development.”
F10	Architecture	25	Parents completed university, brother studying	Parents, a daughter and a son	In a relationship	With a flatmate in a rented apartment	Giving online interior design solutions	Own honorarium scholarship	Originating from the neighbouring country	*“Of course I am an adult. I live here alone, go to university, work online and earn money.”*
M11	Architecture	24	Parents completed high school, brother completed university	Divorced, a daughter and a son	In a relationship	With father	Not working, no work experience	Scholarship; father’s support	Reporting as not having well relationship with mother, from whom he has been separated from the age of 12	*“Nothing special happens in higher education. Things are more or less the same all the time. One just gets additional years before embarking to the real adult world where has to find a job, earn money and take care of family matters.”*
M12	Political Sciences	25	Parents completed university; younger sister in elementary school	Parents, a daughter and a son	Single	With parents and a sister	Volunteering	Scholarship; parents’ support		*“I am not concerned with anything special now. I just have to finish my studies and then I get prerequisites to become an adult and gain other roles that*

										go with it."
F11	Political sciences	24	Parents completed high school	Mother and a daughter	Engaged	With mother	Working part-time and studying	Own salary; social support for mother	Lost her father to war; mother having severe disease	*"I was at times suprised how teachers were cold and distanced and did not care about students as persons."*
M13	Political science	24	Mother completed university, father with high school qualification	Parents and a son	Single	Alone in a rented apartment	Working in an NGO	Own salary and scholarship	Living quite independently from the age of 15, when he moved from his small town to attend the prestigious International School in Mostar	*"I think I started to think of myself as an adult much earlier than normal persons do. As a teenager, I left my parents and lived in another town."*
F12	Economics	23	Mother completed university, father with high school degree, sister studying	Divorced parents, two daughters	Single	In students' dormitory	Working part-time while studying	Own salary, support from parents	Originating from a small town	*"My adult identity is work in progress. I am not there yet."*
F13	Economics	23	Parents holding high school qualification	Parents and a daughter	Engaged	With flatmate in a rented apartment	Working part-time while studying	Own salary	Originating from a small town	*"Without higher education I would have stayed in my small town and worked in a grocery. I would have stagnated in the routines of*

										everyday life. Eventually, I would probably try to migrate to Germany or elsewhere."
F14	Librarianship	22	Parents holding high school qualification, brother completed university	Father, a daughter and a son	In a relationship	With father	Occasionally babysitting	Scholarship, social support, father's salary	Originating from a neighbouring town and travelling every day to classes	*"Higher education granted me opportunities to become more self-aware"*
F15	Biology	25	Parents holding high school qualification, younger sister and brother in high school	Parents, two daughters and a son	Divorced with a child	With parents, sister and brother	Occasionally working	Support from parents and ex husband		*"Higher education is not a place where an adult person feels welcome. It is more like an advanced version of high school."*
F16	French language and literature	23	Parents holding university degree	Parents and a daughter	Single	With a flatmate in a rented apartment	Occasionally translating	Support from parents and own honorarium		*"I can see that I am gradually becoming an adult, but I still have a lot to learn about myself and the world around."*
M14	History	25	Parents holding high school qualification;	Parents, a daughter and a son	Engaged	In students' dormitory	Not working	Support from parents		*"I see my higher education as a*

			sister studying							*growing up process. It helped me build myself.”*
M15	Law	24	No known data on parents; sister also studying	Raised in orphanage, has biological sister	Single	In students’ dormitory	Occasionally working in restaurants and shops	Social support; scholarship and own salary		*“Higher education helps in the sense that I gain respect for myself and have better opportunities later. Honestly, I started to feel like an adult even in high school.”*
M16	Law	22	Parents completed university; brother and sister holding university degrees	Parents, two sons and a daughter	In a relationship	With brother in private apartment, separated from parents	Not working and no work experience	Support from parents	He describes his SES status as above average	*“I am so happy that I didn’t pursue employment after graduating from high school. I now feel like I had some additional years to grow up.”*
F17	Law	22	Father holding university degree, mother completed high	Parents and a daughter	In a relationship	In students’ dormitory	Not working and no work experience	Support from parents; scholarship		*“I am happy the way it is. Legally, I am an adult, but I*

			school							*don't feel like one. There is much more to achieve to become that."*
M17	Agriculture	24	Parents holding high school qualification; brother completed high school	Divorced parents, two sons	Engaged	In students' dormitory	Working full-time in final year	Own salary		*"I think this is crucial time for becoming an adult and higher education helps you build yourself as a respected person."*
M18	Economics	22	Parents with high school qualification, brother completed university	Father and two sons	Single	With father and brother	Not working	Father and brother's salary	Mather passed away a year ago	*"Well, I feel more adult now at the end of my studies, but I don't see the role of higher education in that."*
F18	Education	24	Parents and sister with high school qualification	Parents, two daughters	In a relationship	With parents	Working full-time in the final year of studies	Salary and parents' support		*"Through higher education I became aware of my capabilities and how strong I am to face the life challenges."*

F19	Social Work	25	Parents with high school qualification, brother in high school	Divorced parents, a daughter and a son	Divorced	In a rented apartment with brother	Working full time in the final year of studies	Salary and social support	Taking care of her brother; parents living in another town	*"I guess higher education helps us think independently, but it does not prepare us for the life in the real world, not in the professional domain and even more in personal domain."*
F20	Sociology	23	Father holding university degree, mother with high school qualification	Parents and a daughter	Single	In students' dormitory	Having seasonal jobs	Scholarship and support from parents	Originating from a small town	*"I am so open to many things and I think there is so much to be done before I start considering myself fully an adult person."*
F21	Sociology	25	Parents holding high school qualification, sisters in elementary and high school	Parents and three daughters	Single	With parents and two sisters	Not working and no work experience	Parents' support		*"I feel like there is no pressure on me that I have to become an adult now. But as soon as I complete my education things will become different."*
F22	Veterinary	25	Parents holding	Father, two	Single	With father	Not working	Support	She reported	*"I see higher*

	Medicine	university qualification, brother and sister also completed university	daughters and a son			and no work experience	from working sister and brother; fathers' pension	of being caretaker to her senior father	*education as my refugee. I feel worth and like I am doing something significant."*

(yellow)	Proactive students (N=8)
(green)	Explorers (N=10)
(orange)	Comfort-zone students (N=11)
(light blue)	Atypical students (N=11)

BIOGRAPHY OF THE CANDIDATE

Name Amina
Surname Isanović Hadžiomerović

Citizenship: Bosnian

WORK EXPERIENCE

2015-2021 Senior Teaching Assistant, Department of Education, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Sarajevo

2011-2015 Teaching Assistant, Department of Education, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Sarajevo

EDUCATION

2014-2021 Doctoral student Technische Universität Kaiserslautern. Dissertation title: *The Role of Higher Education Experience in Students' Adult Identity Formation* (Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. Rolf Arnold)

2008-2011 Master of Education
Faculty of Philosophy, University of Sarajevo Thesis title: *Human Relations Management as a Problem of Education Management*

2005-2011 Bachelor of Arabic Language and Literature, and Education
Faculty of Philosophy, University of Sarajevo

2001-2005 The First Bosnian High School in Sarajevo

PROJECTS

Expert group for preparation of Guidelines for Student Assessment and Evaluation, Ministry of Education, Sarajevo Canton. Period: May-June 2021.

Qualitative study on Adult Education, DIE & DVV International. Position: National Expert. Period: October 2020-Febraury 2021.

Expert group for preparation of *Methodology for Implementation of Online Learning in Schools of Sarajevo Canton,* Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of Sarajevo Canton. Position: expert for evaluation in education. Period: June-September 2020.

InterReg project (Danube Transnational Program) Work-based Learning in Vocational Education. Chamber of Economy of Sarajevo Canton and Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of Sarajevo Canton. Position: external evaluation, moderating workshops, reports writing. Period: May 2017-June 2018.

Erasmus+ projekt „Support for small and medium sized enterprises engaging in apprenticeships: Getting SMEs on board") – WP4 based on the Contract between „ALDI" and CEDIT-a (Centro Diffusione Imprenditoriale Della Toscana), and Contract No. 2016-2047/001-001 between CEDIT and European Commission.
Position: Consultant/trainer for mentors of practical instruction in MSMEs. Period: March-April 2018.

Time made of Stories (*Life Stories of Women born between the two World* Wars). Center for Education and Research, Nahla. Period: March 2018-ongoing. Position: Team coordinator and book editor.

Consultant for preparation of Strategy of Adult Education in Sarajevo Canton, Ministry of Education, Science and Youth. Period: July 2016-March 2017.

Consultant in project "Adult Education in the Context of Lifelong Learning", financed by EU (IPA Funds 2009/II). Project activities: preparation of strategic documents in adult education in Tuzla Canton, for the period 2015-2020.

Program for education of SOS Caretakers. Organisers: SOS Kinderdorf in Sarajevo and Faculty of Philosophy. Position: trainer, period: October 2013-March 2014.

Program for professional Child Caretakers. Organisers: GIZ, Nahla, DVV International & Savršeni krug. Position: Curriculum designer and Guidebook editor, period: March-September 2013.

Program for employees at Sarajevo International Airport. Organiser: Sarajevo International Airport & Faculty of Philosophy in Sarajevo. Position: Trainer. Period: January-Febraury 2012.

Research project "Presence and treatment of faith in university programmed and areas", Center for Advanced Studies, Lead researcher: Prof. Dr. Ešref Kenan Rašidagić. Position: junior researcher, period: December 2013-September 2014

International research project „Translation in the Mediterranean", Next Page Foundation based in Sofia (Bulgaria) Transeuropeens, Ann Linh Foundation; EU-supported project.
Position: main researcher for researching research activity from Arabic and Turkish to Bosnian in the period 1989-2010.

BOOK REVIEWS

Isanović Hadžiomerović, A. (2019). Escape from teaching [Rolf Arnold, *Escape from Teaching*], *Proceedings of Faculty of Philosophy in Sarajevo,* No 22, pp. 322-326.

Isanović Hadžiomerović, A. (2019). Život kao inspiracija refleksivnoj andragogiji [Life as inspiration to reflexive andragogy], *Adult Education,* XIX/1, pp. 121-128.

Isanović Hadžiomerović, A. (2016). Emancipacijska moć kvalitativnih istraživanja [Emansipatory power of qualitative research], *Adult Education,* XVI/2, pp. 135-142.

Isanović, A. (2010). Prema kurikulumu po mjeri bolonjskog visokog obrazovanja [Towards curriculum aligned with Bologna higher education], *Obrazovanje odraslih,* X/1, pp. 129-136.

Isanović, A. (2010). Odgojno-obrazovna vizija Naquiba al-Attasa [Educational though of Naquib al-Attas], *Novi Muallim,* XI/42, pp. 130-131.

ARTICLES

Camović, Dž. & Isanović Hadžiomerović, A. (2021). "Razvoj funkcionalni znanja I vještina studenata: primjena Kolbovog modela u inicijalnom obrazovanju nastavnika." *Značaj nauke/znanosti u razvoju funkcionalnih znanja i vještina učenika i studenata.* Mostar: Federal Ministry of Education and Science, pp. 287-303.

Isanović Hadžiomerović, A. (2020). “Conceptualising Adult Identity Formation in Higher Education Context”, *Adult Education,* 1-2/2020, pp. 37-55.

Isanović Hadžiomerović, A. (2020). “Higher Education in Challenging Times”, *Context,* 7:2(2020), pp. 7-18.

Isanović Hadžiomerović, A. (2018). „In Search of Identity: Adult Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina between the Socialist Legacy and Neoliberal Tendencies“, *Studies in Adult Education and Lifelong Learning,* Vol. 24 No 4, pp. 37-52

Dizdar, S., Isanović Hadžiomerović, A. (2018) „Časopis *Obrazovanje odraslih* – bibliografska opremljenost i sadržajna analiza objavljenih članaka (2001-2017)“ [Journal “Adult Education” – Bibliographic Data and Content Analysis of Published Articles (2001-2017)], *Adult Education,* Vol. XVIII, No. 1, pp. 73-101.

Isanović Hadžiomerović, A. (2018). Nadolazeća odraslost kroz prizmu odnosa unutar edukološkog sistema, [“Emerging Adulthood” from the Perspective of Educological System], *Zbornik radova sa 2. međunarodne znanstveno-stručne konferencije „Ka novim iskoracima u odgoju i obrazovanju“.* Sarajevo: Filozofski fakultet Univerziteta u Sarajevu, pp. 502-512. http://www.ff-eizdavastvo.ba/Books/SerialPubl/ped/Zbornik-radova-2018.pdf

Camović, Dž., Isanović Hadžiomerović, A. (2017). Nove paradigme porodičnog odgoja i roditeljstva [New paradigms of family upbringing and parenting], *Zbornik radova.* Sarajevo: El-Kalem, pp. 19-30.

Isanović Hadžiomerović, A. (2016). „Lifelong Learning Provision in Higher Education“, in: Milan Matijević & Tihomir Žiljak (Eds.), *Who Needs Adult Education,* Zagreb: Hrvatsko andragoško društvo i Agencija za srednje strukovno obrazovanje i obrazovanje odraslih, pp. 123-131. Available from: https://epale.ec.europa.eu/de/node/32560

Isanović Hadžiomerović, A. (2016) „Obrazovanje odraslih u Bosni i Hercegovini – stanje i perspektive“ [Adult Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina – State of the Arts and Future Prospects], *Proceeding of Department of Education,* Vol. 1, No. 1 (2016), pp. 319-331

Isanović Hadžiomerović, A. (2014). Teorijska polazišta i metodološki pristupi izučavanju religije u okviru iniverzitetskog kurikuluma [Theoretical assumptions and methodological approaches to researching religion within university curricula], *Context,* Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 75-96

Isanović Hadžiomerović, A. (2013). Model za procjenu kvaliteta udžbenika mektepske nastave [Model for evaluation of maktab textbooks], *Novi Muallim,* No. 55, pp. 33-44.

Isanović, A. & Hodžić, L. (2012). Planiranje univerzitetskih programa neformalnog obrazovanja temeljeno na analizi potreba: Doprinos profesionalizaciji prosvjetnog poziva [Planning of university non-formal educational programs based on needs analysis: Contribution to professionalization of teacher career], *Proceedings Sixts Conference on Higher Education.* Sarajevo: University of Sarajevo, pp. 131-143.

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Isanović, A. (2006). Izbor recentnih djela socijalne pedagogije za englesko govorno područje" [Selection of recent works in social pedagogy written in English], Zbornik radova sa znanstveno-stručne konferencije *Sistem preveniranja socijalnog isključivanja mladih,* IPF, Zenica, 2006, pp. 415-421.

BOOK CHAPTERS

Isanović Hadžiomerović, A. (2018). „Islamic Education in the Balkans", in: Holger Daun & Reza Arjmand (eds.), *Handbook of Islamic Education. International Handbooks of Religion and,* Vol. 7. Springer: Cham.

Isanović Hadžiomerović, A. (2018). „Publicly Funded Islamic Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina", in: Jenny Berglund (ed.), *European Perspectives on Islamic Education and Public Schooling.* Sheffield-Bristol: Equinox, pp. 120-135.

ARTICLES IN MAGAZINES AND WEB PORTALS

Isanović Hadžiomerović, A. (2020). Univerzitetska nastava opstala u internetskom prostoru [University instruction survived in online space].
http://balkans.aljazeera.net/vijesti/univerzitetska-nastava-opstala-u-internetskom-prostoru

Isanović Hadžiomerović, A. (2016) „How Can Media Mittigate Refugees' Transition?", *European Lifelong Learning Magazine.* Available from: https://elmmagazine.eu/articles/how-can-media-mitigate-refugees-transition

RESEARCH REPORTS

Isanović, A. i Duranović, M. (2011). Translations from Arabic in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1990-2010. in: *Translations of Books from Arabic in Six East European Countries after 1989.* Sofia: Next Page and Foundation and Open Society Institute, https://dokumen.tips/documents/translation-activity-from-arabic-to-bosnian-1989-2010.html

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TRANSLATIONS

Lowe, R. & Yasuhara, Y. (2016). Korijeni visokog obrazovanja: vrijeme za novu historiografiju? [The origins of higher education: time for a new historiography?] (translated from English by Amina Isanović Hadžiomerović). *Context,* III/1, 89-104.

Good, J.A. (2011). Tradicija njemačkog bildunga [German *Bildung* tradition] (translated from English by Amina Isanović), *Odjek*, No. 1-2, pp. 72-76.

TRAININGS, EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS AND SUMMER SCHOOLS

TRAIN program (Training and Research for Academic Newcomers), organiser: Rectorate, University of Sarajevo (January-February, 2020)

Seminar "How to Mentor Graduate Students" held by Dr. Jorgen Nielsen, organised by Center for Advanced Studies and IIITB (April 2015).

"Training of reflexive practice in intercultural adult education", Sarajevo, May 23-24 2014; organised by DVV International – Office in Sarajevo and Andragogical Association from Belgrade (Serbia).

"Benchmarking as a tool for improvement of higher education performance", trening sessions:

- Benchmarking – theoretical foundations and approaches (April 22, 2014)
- Creating benchmarking document base (May 15, 2014.)

Organised by Rectorate of University of Sarajevo, as a part of TEMPUS program

Andragogical Regional Academy in SEE, 6th workshop Curriculum GlobALE Ohrid (Macedonia), 18.-22. 09. 2013., organised by: DVV International – Office in Skopje (Lead lecturer: Dr. Susanne Lattke)

"Systemic adult education", Educational program in 10 modules. Lecturers: Prof. Dr. Rolf Arnold and Beatrice Arnod-Haecky. Organised by GIZ and Systhemia (Germany), 2011-2013.

Summer School "Muslims in the West" at University of Erfurt (Germany), August 14 – 29, 2010; supervised by Prof. Dr. Jamal Malik. Organiser: University of Erfurt and DAAD.

Evaluation Workshop on Building and Running an Organization, November 13-15, 2009
Organiser: The Norwegian Women and Family Association in cooperation with Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Seminar "Jugendpartizipation in Europa", Berlin (Germany), February 13-19, 2006 Organiser: NGO Schüler Helfen Leben.

CONFERENCE, SYMPOSIA, ROUND TABLES

Symposium „European Perspctives on Islamic Education and Public Schooling ", University of Stockholm, Sweden, December 2-3, 2018.

2nd International Conference *Stepping Towards New Challenges in Education.* Faculty of Philosophy, University of Sarajevo. Paper topic: "Emerging Adulthood" from the Perspective of Educological System, 5-6 October 2018.

2nd Regional Conference EPALE – Quality in Adult Education. Paper title: EPALE as a platform of transformative learning. Banja Luka, 9-10. 11. 2017.

International Conference on Talented and Gifted Students. Paper title: „Teachers' Implicit Theories about Students' Giftedness" (coauthored by dr. Dženeta Camović), Ankara 4-6 May, 2017.

International Conference „Who Needs Adult Education?". Paper title: „Lifelong Learning Provision in Higher Education", Zagreb-Vodice, September 2016.

Conference *Family and Socity.* Paper title: New paradigms of family upbringing and parenting (co-authored by Dr. Dženetom Camović), Sarajevo, April 2016.

International Workshop “Islamic Education and Public Schooling”. Title of the paper: “Publicly Funded Islamic Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina”, Warwick, United Kingdom, April 6-8, 2016.

International Conference “Building Bridges in Adult Education”. Paper title: “Adult Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina” (co-authored by prof. dr. Mirjana Mavrak), Ljubljana, Slovenia, 7-8.12.2015.

European Educational Research Association Conference “Education and Transition – Contributions from Educational Research”. Paper title: “University Reform as a ‘Didactic Challenge’”, Budapest, September, 7-11, 2015.

Scientific Symposium *Freedom of Faith in Public Sphere.* Paper title: Theoretical assumptions and methodological approaches to researching religion within university curricula. Organised by Center for Advanced Studies, Sarajevo, 4. 11. 2014.

4th International Conference on Foreign Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics *Intercultural Linguistic Competence and Foreign/Second Language Immersive Environments* (FLTAL). Paper title: “Motivation of Adults for Participation in Foreign Language Non-Formal Learning”. Organiser: International Burch University, May, 9-11, 2014.

1st International scientific-professional conference *Stepping Towards New Challenges in Education.* Paper title: Adult Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina – State of the Arts and Future Prospects. Organised by Department of Education, Faculty of Philosophy, Sarajevo, 11-12. 10. 2013.

International conference „Pedagogy, Education, Teaching“. Organised by University of Mostar. Paper title: Fenomenologija obrazovne promjene i mogući pravci istraživanja reforme u visokom obrazovanju [Phenomenology of Educational Change and Possible Directions of Researching Reform in Higher Education]. Mostar, 21-23. 3. 2013.

International Symposium „The Idea of University“. Organised by: Croatian Philosophical Society. Paper title: Poimanje ideje obrazovanja unutar univerzitetskog prostora u kontekstu filozofije obrazovanja R.S. Petersa [The idea of education within the university context as reflected in R. S. Peters' philosophy of education]. Cres (Croatia), 23-26. 09. 2012.

2nd International Conference on Foreign Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics
Organizer: International Burch University, Sarajevo
Paper title: Developing teacher identity: Acquiring pedagogical competencies through pre-service English language teacher education. Sarajevo, 4.-6. 05. 2012.

6th Conference on Higher Education Reform “Continuity of Higher Education Reforming”. Paper title: Planiranje univerzitetskih programa neformalnog obrazovanja temeljeno na analizi potreba: Doprinos profesionalizaciji prosvjetnog poziva [Planning of university non-formal educational programs based on needs analysis: Contribution to professionalization of teacher career]. Organised by Rectorate of University of Sarajevo, Sarajevo, 13-14. 04. 2012.

International Conference „Andragogical Profession and Competencies of Experts in Adult Education“. Paper title: Osobni narativi i implicitne teorije u kvalitativnim istraživanjima s odraslima [Personal narratives and implicit theories in qualitative research with adults]. Organised by Agencija za strukovno obrazovanje i obrazovanje odraslih & Hrvatsko andragoško društvo. Murter (Croatia), 9-10. 06. 2011.

Contemporary Identities Paris International Conference (CIPIC 2011)
Organised by *Ars Identitatis* & École Pratique des Hautes Études. Paper title: “Developing Personal Identity during Wartime Childhood”, Paris, 13.-16. 04. 2011.

XIV World Congress of Comparative Education Societies *Bordering, Re-Bordering and New Possibilities in Education and Societies*
Organised by: WCCES (World Council of Comparative Education Societies)
TŰKED (Turkish Comparative Education Society)
Boğaziçi University
Paper title: „The Role of Human Relations Management in Education Quality", Istanbul, 14.-18. 06. 2010.

INTERNATIONAL ACADEMIC MOBILITY

Erasmus+ Mobility KA107- ICM (International Credit Mobility) to Karl Franzens Universität, (Institut für Erziehungs- und Bildungswissenschaft, Erwachsenenbildung /Weiterbildung) Austria, March, 24-29 2019

Erasmus+ Mobility KA107- ICM (International Credit Mobility) to The Polytechnic Institute of Santarém, Portugal, April, 16-21 2018.

MEMBERSHIP IN PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS AND BOARDS

President of Assembly of Center for Education and Research "Nahla", Sarajevo. Period: December 2017-December 2021. Website: https://nahla.ba

Member of Editorial Board of *Journal Adult Education.* Period: December 2017-ongoing. Website: https://ccu.bkc.ba

AWARDS AND RECOGNITIONS

Rector's award for scientific-research paper "Linguo-didactic characteristics of mother tongue and foreign language instruction". University of Sarajevo, November 2009.