

## MODERN GENERATIONS – CONCEPTS AND PREDICTIONS

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**ABSTRACT:** IT IS THE PERCEPTION OF GENERATION THEORIES THAT IS OF CRUCIAL IMPORTANCE IN UNDERSTANDING THE INTERDEPENDENCIES IN SOCIALITY-COMMUNICATION CORRELATION AND IN DEVELOPING MODERN COMMUNICATION MODELS WHICH HAVE TO ADAPT AND ENHANCE THE VALUES OF MODERN SOCIAL TIME AND SPACE CONTENT.

**KEY WORDS:** GENERATION THEORIES, SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS, GENERATION, COMMUNICATION

THE social context in which the notion of generation is interpreted today arose in the middle of the 19th century. Of course, there always has been tension between young and old generations but it was interpreted only in terms of age differences.

W. DILTHEY discusses generations in terms of temporarily units which exist in mutual chronological overlapping. The author says that different generation representatives form one generation unit because they are influenced by one and the same intellectual, social and political factors no matter of their actual age. (Kohli 1996: 2)

ACCORDING to W. Pinder different generations live in one and the same chronological time but as life experience is the only real time that actually matters it means that these generations live in different epochs from subjective point of view. One and the same time is perceived in different ways by people in different ages. The research of the author is concentrated on the notion spirit of time (Zeitgeist) that is considered to be a prerequisite for different generation formations.

THE generation problem finds its place in French positivists` works like A. Comte, J. Dromel, F. Mentre. A. Comte is the first one who defines the objective historical generation replacement rhythm as a fundamental basis of social change. His followers define generation notion as a collective consciousness implemented in a given human group that exists definite time. They believe that during their first 30 years humans learn and during their middle ages humans apply in practice what they have learned. After their 60 years humans are supposed to leave social life. The positivists think that generations are those that drive the progress force.

THE "lost generation" theme and young people after World War I theme turns to be one of the dominants in European social paradigms during the 20s and 30s years of 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is influenced mainly by the works of the social thinkers of that era. The generation theme presents in works of the Spanish philosopher J. Ortega y Gaset, His theory incorporates several major facts: age is not considered to be a pure mathematical date; contemporaries do

not involve peers meaning; generation is a fundamental notion in history. He explains generation term as community of people of one and the same age who live in a concrete period of time, in a definite "here" time and in one and only "now". (Ortega y Gaset 1962: 43-44). He explains that people who live isolated do not belong to one generation with their peers living other "world". Each generation brings universal history. *Relations between different generations create history the way it happened*. It is one of the factors that move world forward and create opportunities for radical changes. Generation changes are a constant process of vertical change and not a horizontal one. It means that generations overlap in one another and it is history itself and not human being that decides to which generation he/she belongs.

**ACCORDING** to Ortega y Gaset the borderline between generations is 15 years. It is that limit of time that world changes rhythmically. In one and the same time there are 5 separate generations that exist not only as a mass but as a complete social body:

- ⇒ children (up to 15 years) whose life is coming;
- ⇒ young people (15-30 years) who lay the fundamentals of social leadership;
- ⇒ people between 30 - 45 years old who discover their main ideas, who formulate their essential principles, values and personal ideology. These strive for their beliefs (in terms of laws, institutions and etc.). This very period is full of creativity and conflicts.
- ⇒ 45 – 60 years old who possess the real power in society. They are those who apply the knowledge acquired in practice. In late maturity human dominates over the world he/she created. The last two generations are the active ones in a given historical moments who work on one and the same agenda and resolve one and the same problems. However, different ages imply different understanding of what is happening.
- ⇒ People over 60 years who are already in battle with modern passions and beliefs. These are only few and do not play a significant role in the historical process.

**ACCORDING** to the author „the borderline” for the 20<sup>th</sup> century is considered to be 1917. It is the end of the World War I. It is the time when Bolshevism and Fascism appeared in political realms. It is the time when cubism entered the realms of art.

It is K. Mannheim who has a crucial role in discussing the problems and phenomena of generations. He insists on the thesis that generations are factors that determine the dynamics of the historical development. However, he criticizes the French positivists who state that younger generations possess absolute progressiveness and older generations possess ultimate conservatism. According to Mannheim young generations just initiate definite tendencies and their expression depends on the dominating social and cultural contexts. He emphasizes on the crucial distinction between generation and community. Community involves certain groups – family, tribe, sects which are specifically organized and have specific aims. Membership is based on existential tribe bonds or on conscious rational choice. Generation is not a concrete group because (unlike community) its members have no idea of each other and its existence (mental and spiritual) is not affected by bond damages.

**ACCORDING** to Mannheim generation involves people from one and the same age who live in one and the same social and historical space and who experience one and the same public challenges (war or post-war times, public crisis or prosperity, political system changes or stability, dominant ideologies). These people actually form the generation itself. This very fact implies their conceptions of world and similar beliefs, their lifestyle and models of behavior. All these develop the sense of generation identity which is one of the major components in the emotional status of personality. Mannheim introduces the *location* term,

place in history (Lagerung) which is supposed to point specific situation of individuals in the continuum of social time and space. Mannheim introduces the *location* term, place in history (Lagerung) which is supposed to point specific situation of individuals in the continuum of social time and space. According to him representatives of given generation are connected in a certain way, and namely they have common location in social structure that means they are part of the temporarily limited place from the historical process. Thus, generation should be considered as an entire unit only in case of same historical and social contexts. (Mannheim 1952 : 292-296)

**THE** profile of one generation fixes the norms of social and cultural experience, as well as reaction types and symbols that outline its limits. Single representatives, however, have various demographic (race, gender, residence) and social (profession, education) characteristics. Moreover, their similar age is also a relative term. It is their common social behavior that actually matters. It is that very behavior which distinguishes them from other generations. According to L. Kirova people who belong to one generation may have common prototype identity characteristics but it does not mean that all of them possess these characteristics. „Generation is not only self-definition but it is also a classification made by others. Therefore, the parameters of a generation depend on permanently changed attitudes on a society and not on years past themselves. Moreover, the vague notion of generation phenomena, the lack of unity and solidarity in a certain social group or/and in a social and territorial community requires us to underline that a certain generation could be defined as such only if there is a conscious choice of affiliation. If such conscious choice is available it presupposes a sense of generation identity and sense of unity and solidarity. In such case a certain generation reveals its identity in struggle with social practices and in this very struggle generation aims to impose its model.” (Kirova 2012)

**THE** perception of generation theory is a major factor in the process of making sense of interrelation and correlation between sociality and communication. It is a key force that develops modern communication models which are able to adapt values and add a new meaning to social time and space contexts. The new era of digitalization and the replacement of analogous culture with digital one make people to acquire different communicative skills. These people develop their personality depending on the nature of information environment and recreate communication channel models they use. The invasion of new information technologies in everyday life crosses the continuum of generations and opens a gap between youngest generations and older ones. These gaps are of a mobile and static nature; digital and analogous nature; and of radical and conservative nature. The so-called “information gap” tends to spread and absorb older generations. The middle generation will be forced to adapt to the current paradigm. (Dermendzhieva 2004 : 24)

**EACH** concrete process of social changes supposes different status of generations involved. There are differences in the level of their inclusion in social system management. Generations differ in economic status and in personal opinions reflecting social norms, structures and relations. These differences lead to two main problems in generation interrelations:

- ⇒ The first one is the problem of continuity and reproduction of the social system by the means of generation interrelations. Each next generation accumulates the gained social experience and follows the paradigm of already started social activities. Of course it is not a mere execution of the paradigm. Each generation makes improvements to some extent. These improvements make social progress possible. Actually the mechanisms of the social

progress involve generation interrelations. Even if there are unexpected crashes in social and political systems and in ideological and ethical norms there is always continuity between generations. It is in tribal and family communities, as well as in ethno-cultural communities where the sense of self-preservation rules, that the continuity reveals itself in most striking way.

⇒ The second one is the problem of differences and conflicts between generations. In such cases older generations are more conservative and stucked to traditions. Younger generations bear creativity, innovation and dynamic beginning in a society.

**THE** differentiation between generations is due to the fact that different age representatives experience in different way one and the same social conditions and circumstances in a certain public situation. Different generation representatives differ in their communication and behavior models. The continuity between generations is a factor for social change in itself. Moreover, the change in generations leads to change in value system and behavior models. Young people are naturally considered to be bearers of radicalism in social changes. They are considered to be more flexible and have no nostalgia to past. Young generation is the active power that adopts and sets the new forms in social life. The opposition between "old" and "new" culture should be solved not by the means of contradiction but by harmonization between different generations. It is not merely an ideological cliché applied to explain an important strategic act of transformation in a social and cultural situation. The basic error that conservatives do is to oppose out-of-date models to each new wave of behavior models and trends. They used to react against new reality by an old fashioned system of models. Margaret Mead distinguishes several culture categories in a public system context which determine respective generation interaction types (Mirchev 1996 : 56):

1. „POSFIGURATIVE" culture is mainly past oriented. This culture category requires at least three interacting generations. Young consider elders as source of wisdom and authority. The category is typical for groups where the information is not only homogeneous and strictly ordered but also requires accurate performance of many rituals which affect whole human's life – from the birth to the death.

2. „COFIGURATIVE" culture – there are distinctive differences between generations in their lifestyle, value system and models of behavior which are generated not in the past but in present. Prevailing model for members of that type of society is the behavior of their contemporaries. Distinctions between generations are considered to be something normal. Anyway, elder generations are dominating and they define the limitations of youth innovation.

3. „PREFIGURATIVE" culture – elders learn from their children. Elders' mode of life is not a model for children. There is a conflict, even a gap, between generations. The conflict between generations during radical social changes finds elders in a position of a marginalization. They are supposed to adapt to a new system of values. It is young generation that is the bearer of the new beginning. They become a dominant factor in social value system. It is not elder generation or young generation that outlines the main social problems but the human himself/herself. This category is typical in periods of global social and political changes. This category prevails in times of dynamic and technological innovation, information exchange and mass migration processes.

**PEOPLE** from 21<sup>st</sup> century are doomed to go through long and hard way that involves postfigurative culture oriented to models from the past, configurative culture where contemporary social model prevails and prefigurative culture that presupposes a new phase of cultural development marked by belief that nothing from the past matters.

**THE** representation of existing generations in social life characterizes their communication practices. A generation that sets models to be applied in a society is considered to be of a significant issue. In this sense, the change of generations follows the institutional change and marks historical borders. The process of imposing a new culture which contradicts to existing heritage is due to process of reorganization of values and the establishment of new needs. The new situation is undoubtedly a reality where young generation is a subject differentiated and united by its own caprices and chaos of senses. The young generation is characterized by spontaneous reactions and by adequate practices available in the changing world.

**THE** problems of continuity and conflicts in generations' interactions have been always presented but the contemporary socio-cultural context requires the problems to be discussed in terms of cross-reacting flows of information and communication. This flow is specific in transmit/receive system of knowledge and values. Usually, the flow is oriented from parents to children but for the first time the transmission is turned back and young generation sets values, skills and knowledge to be dominated in a society. In nowadays, the rapid update of social forms requires young generations to expand their influence via value dominants and avant-garde youth subculture. The influence is expanded also by the boom of IT technologies and mobility that was not known up to these days. The young generations' interpretation of current situation is essential and vital for older generations. This very fact is especially valid in case of high-tech communication and its derivatives.

**SUCH** periods of intensive and qualified social changes are characterized by two processes:

- *Accelerated domination of young generations that differ significantly from elder ones (in certain cases this differentiation is radical);*
- *Rapid change of all generations' stereotypes.*

**IT** is a well-known fact that in periods of social cataclysms or accelerated technological development differences between generations increases significantly. Differences affect crucial characteristics and sometimes radically change lifestyle, value dominants and etc. Sometimes severe crises between generations take place. As a result, gap between generations ("intergeneration step") shortens. That "step" is usually considered to be 20-25 years. In case it is shortened the gap between generations is 10-15 years. Moreover, individuals from marginalized zone usually possess characteristics that are typical for one or another group.

**THERE** are seven generations interacting in the first decade of 21<sup>st</sup> century according to the classification made by Australian social researcher Mark McCrindle. He investigates characteristics of a generation from the transformations in communication process point of view. The eldest generation is called Fathers generation. Its members were born before 1925. The youngest generation is "Alpha" generation (2010) and it signifies a new phase in human's evolution. Those who were born between 1925 and 1946 were called "builders" because they set foundations of the new world after the two World Wars. Next generation was called "baby boomers" because birth numbers in various countries set new records after World War II. Baby boomers are considered to be the first prosperous generation in the past century. Next generations that follow are marked by the digital revolution. These three generations were named as X, Y and Z.

**THE** differentiation between generations is due to the fact that actually they exist in different social and political circumstances. Each one of them is characterized by a unique

profile that makes distinctions between them. Undoubtedly, it is the computer literacy and information technologies skills that are the accelerators that constantly feed up the generations' conflict. Generations that welcomed the new century have difficulties in communication. This very fact should not be denied and should not be used as a threat. It is only needed to make study and know the differences.

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