# GENERATIONAL RELATIONS – LIFE PATHS AND EXPERIENCES OF SOCIALISATION

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*The contributions presented in the thematic issue Generational Relations: Life Paths and Experiences of Socialisation deal with the interplay between generational relations on the one hand and life paths and socialisation experiences on the other. The topic is explored by using empirical examples from different political systems and social contexts as well as from different fields of migration. The issue contains five articles – two in German and three in English – and one book review, with contributions coming from Switzerland, Germany, Portugal, and Brazil.*

Human beings are involved in generational relationships "from the womb to the tomb," interacting with other generations in most circumstances of their lives. The way in which generations relate and interplay with each other shapes the structural dynamics of social coexistence and social change as well as the life courses of individuals and collectives. In a *horizontal* dimension, in line with a social- or life-historical perspective, generational relations transmit cultural heritage and promote social change (Mannheim 1952; Pilcher 1994); furthermore, at the level of families or communities, they initiate socialisation processes and mechanisms of individuation and biographical self-interpretations. In a *vertical* dimension, in line with a power and inequality sensitive perspective, they (re-)produce historically and socially specific generational order(ing)s, both on a level of socio-political systems and in relation to families and other institutions (Alanen/Mayall 2001; Mayall 2009; Olk 2009; Punch 2020). These dimensions interplay with one another, bringing out specific social dynamics.

The multifaceted meaning of generational relations thus opens up a broad and differentiated field of research. There are differing conceptualisations of the term *generation*. According to Hagestad (2008), for example, three understandings can be analytically distinguished: (i) a generation in a *historical* sense in which individuals from the same age cohort that went through related significant experiences during their life course and underwent a similar socialisation process share similar characteristics; (ii) a generation as an *age group* or *age category* which is characterised by people being in the same life phase – such as childhood, youth, adulthood, or old age; (iii) and generation as the position in the *descending order within the family*, i.e. as a child, a parent, or a grandparent. Although encompassing different generational relations – and creating fuzziness and interchangeability in their different meanings (see Attias-Donfut/Arber 2000 for further differentiation) –, a main and common idea of all these concepts is the vertical connection between individuals with a different embedment in time – historical time, biographical time, and family time (Hagestad 2008).

Even if the character of intergenerational relations changes over time and space, they are reciprocal processes in which generations create different arenas of action with other generations and within different opportunity structures (Fattore et al. 2016; Szydlik 2012). The ways in which generations bring their agency to bear and use their power opportunities, especially in situations of vulnerability, dependency, and responsibility shape their relations.

Due to demographic, socio-political, and technological developments, new research questions regarding generations have emerged in the recent past. The increase in longevity and the decrease in the fertility rates that can be observed in many industrial societies raise questions about the structural organisation as well as the distribution of rights and economic resources between age groups (Qvortrup 1994). They also lead to generations spending a long time of their lives side by side and taking on several family roles at once (Mayall 2009). This phenomenon is

experienced in connection with an institutionalisation and segregation of age groups in social life, which means that generations coexist but do not necessarily spend meaningful time together (Vanderbeck 2007).

Generational relations are also becoming more diverse as families are experiencing a pluralisation of life forms and arrangements, shaped by the increase of number of divorces, remarriages, and co-habitations that create challenges but also new forms of intergenerational contact (Ramos 2011). A shift in the relationship between public and private educational responsibility, which can be observed in many Western countries, is expressed in a (re)structuring of generational relations (Richter/Andresen 2012). Based on these reflections, it is of interest where generational interactions take place in the present and which practices can be observed in their daily routines. How are these relations experienced by members of different generations? How do different generations put their agency into practice and what do they bring to the intergenerational exchanges? How do power and inequality shape generational constellations and to what extent do politics play a role in this?

Furthermore, migration processes are changing intergenerational relations in different social contexts. Families are learning to deal with different values between first and second generations (Merz et al. 2009) and to create new transnational family roles (Nedelcu 2007). New possibilities have arisen for practising generational relations – also with the use of multiple forms of information and communication technologies, applied to both empowerment and control (Nedelcu/Soysüren 2020). At the same time, generational relations in the host and home societies have changed through migration processes. In connection with this, the social positions of migrants become the subject of social negotiations (Faist et al. 2021). How do these processes affect intergenerational dynamics, e.g. in terms of social and cultural (re-)production? How exactly do they shape experiences of individuation, socialisation, and integration/exclusion?

On the methodological level, research on (inter)generational relations also needs to consider the question of which generation it is anchored in

(Hagestad 2008). The experiences made by individual generations can be very different and sometimes contradictory, allowing for different perspectives on power relations and generational order(ing)s. Moreover, generational relations change over the life course, which means that being "the child" is a different experience, depending on whether an individual is a child, an adolescent, or an adult (Mayall 2003). Regarding this aspect, it seems useful to look at generational relations from a biographical approach – among others –, as subjective perspectives and courses of actions (Rosenthal 2004) can be reconstructed based on different positions in relation to time and space. Bringing the individual life courses into focus signifies that their trajectories are seen as dynamic – responding to both social changes and opportunities – and that their phases in life are not seen as isolated but as intertwined stages (Attias-Donfut/Arber 2000).

The contributions presented in the thematic issue *Generational Relations: Life Paths and Experiences of Socialisation* deal with the interplay between generational relations on the one hand and life paths and socialisation experiences on the other. Using empirical examples from different political systems and social contexts, as well as different fields of experience on migration, some of the questions raised above are taken up and answered by way of examples. The issue is composed by five articles – two in German and three in English – and one book review, with contributions coming from Switzerland, Germany, Portugal, and Brazil.

In their German-language article, *Rebekka Hahn* and *Christine Demmer* examine the transformations and transmissions of values from a biographical-analytical perspective, using the example of young woman from Russian-German families with Free Church connection. They point out that the religious community represents an important context of socialisation and values that is associated more with the intention to transmit than with the intention to transform. However, value committed behaviour and affiliation practices are no longer shared and continued unquestioningly by the younger generation.

Generational relations in migrant families are also the focus of the English-language paper written

by *Susanne Benzel* and *Niels Uhlendorf*. Examining cases of German-Iranians who migrated to Germany during childhood with their families and that are defined as educational climbers in relation to their parents, they analyse the intergenerational relations and tensions between parents and children in regard to educational achievement. In their paper, the authors analyse two contrasting biographical narratives, showing the psychosocial effects of intergenerational dynamics on individuals and their life paths, especially during adolescence.

In their German-language contribution, *Nadine Gautschi* and *Andrea Abraham* explore how political and social reappraisal of compulsory social measures (CSM) in Switzerland changed the way families dealt with the parents' biography. Biographical interviews with the children of those affected show that, on the one hand, political and social reappraisal contributed to the resolution of personal and family burdens. However, on the other hand, it also created areas of family tension that found expression in new constellations of silence.

Likewise, the political context is a central aspect in the English-language article by *Frank Beier*. Analysing biographical narratives of women who grew up in the autocratic system of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR), he points out that political regimes only had limited control over private family structures. In his study, Beier identifies three different types of family backgrounds regarding the importance of generational transmission of shared values and perspectives. The author shows that these family backgrounds are related to different socialisation patterns that influenced the strategies used by these women on how to deal with the autocratic system and balance public and private lives.

The last English-language article in this thematic issue focuses on generations from the perspective of age cohorts and age groups. Taking the example of a Brazilian service company, *Eduardo Danilo Schmitz, Natalia Viega de Souza Schmitz,* and *Johannes Doll* discuss the topic of age diverse workplaces. Having different age groups working together can be challenging, especially when classic hierarchical patterns are reversed, as it is the case for older workers and younger

bosses working together. The authors show how questions of ageism appear in relation to both old and young people and how age intersects with body and gender as categories of difference.

This thematic issue also contains a book review on the topic of generational relations and migration. *Liliana Azevedo* offers us insight into her reading experience of the anthology *Processus de transmission dans les familles de migrants ou issues de l'immigration: Regards croisés*, edited by Gwénola Sebaux (2019). The book deals with the key-concept of transmission and analyzes it from different disciplinary and methodological perspectives, national contexts, and temporalities.

We hope that this selection of articles will provide you with revealing insights into current social science research on intergenerational relations and that you enjoy reading them!

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