

The Concept of Generation in Sociology, Intergenerational Relations, and Generational Theories

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Abstract

Although the concepts of generation, generational differences, intergenerational relations, and especially intergenerational conflict are well established in the literature of the social sciences –particularly in the fields of labor relations, business, economics, organizational studies, demography, psychology, and psychiatry– the discussion of these themes in everyday life, in processes of social change, and in contexts of modernity, technology, and culture is relatively recent. The ways in which the phenomenon of generation is defined, the search for broadly accepted definitions, and the classification of its political, economic, cultural, and chronological characteristics are all determined by the researcher’s field of study, social characteristics, even the country they live in, and inevitably, their own lived experiences. Since the phenomenon of generational conflict presupposes the existence of generations, and because the social, cultural, political, and economic events that shape generations have not been the same for every society –at least until the beginning of the 20th century– it is difficult to speak of a universal concept of generation specific to age groups. However, today, technological advancements and communication opportunities have fostered increasingly uniform patterns of production and consumption, while transforming societies from relatively isolated social structures into more permeable ones. These developments appear to have created a shared literature on generations and intergenerational conflict. Based on a review of the Turkish- and English-language literature, this study analyzes the concept of generation, the types of intergenerational relations, and the ways in which these relationships emerge through explanation, evaluation, and comparative analysis where appropriate. It also examines the treatment of the phenomenon of generation within social theory chronologically and thematically, briefly discusses workplace conflict as an arena of conflict, and reviews several emerging generational categories that have only recently begun to receive attention in the literature.

Keywords

Generation, Intergenerational Differences, Intergenerational Conflict, Intergenerational Relations, Generational Theories

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