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19

Social generations and societal changes

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Introduction

'Generation' as a concept, both in popular and academic discourse, is highly contextual and often overloaded with different, problematic or even antagonistic meanings. According to a meta-level classification proposed by, among others, Semi Purhonen (2016), three basic ways to use the term 'generation' exist. The first, genealogical usage of the concept refers to familial generations and is dominant in anthropology, sociology of the family, studies on socialization and education, social mobility, migration and so on. The second meaning of 'generation' is synonymous with 'birth cohort' or 'age group', and designates a group of people born at the same time or during a certain period. The third use of the term is in the sense of social, or cultural or historical generations, where the very notion of a 'generation' depends on the existence of shared generational identity and self-consciousness (Mannheim, 1952). Although the three meanings are connected, they should be kept analytically distinct for the sake of conceptual clarity (Kertzer, 1983) and methodological implications. This chapter employs the concept of 'generation' mainly in the third sense, focussing on *social generations* in the sense of socially constructed collectivities produced by shared experiences, and being closely linked to the concept of social time and chronological consciousness (Lovell, 2007), as well as societal changes. In this chapter, 'generation' as a concept is clearly distinguished from the more neutral 'cohort' or 'age group', the latter signifying a group of people born in a certain time period without necessarily forming a generation in the social sense.

The relation between the concepts of 'generation' and 'societal change' is complex and ambiguous. Often, the notion of generation is used to signify different aspects of stability, either in terms of social time, or mental structures such as values or identity. In such cases, people refer to phenomena that have 'lasted through generations', or traditions that have been passed on across generations. At other times, the concept of 'generation' is meant to describe the collective identity and solidarity that have emerged in the past but that define the values of vast birth cohorts across time. Paradoxically, however, according to a widespread conviction and line of theoretical thought in social sciences, it is only during times of (exceptional) societal changes that generations come into being: when new birth cohorts have to negotiate their

way to adulthood in changing social conditions or, in other words, 'when a formative historical experience coincides with a formative period of people's lives' (Marada, 2004: 153; see also Mannheim, 1952).

This paradox of stability *versus* change is also evident in a corresponding fluctuation in theoretical and empirical studies on generations: while many authors concentrate on describing or measuring stable issues (generational values and/or identity, mnemonic patterns, transition routes etc.), others focus on how societal changes have affected the emergence of new generations (the 'economic crisis generation', the 'digital generation' etc.). Only a few authors have concentrated on more complex aspects of the relationship between generation and change, by looking at how some generations initiate and lead social changes, how existing generations are shaped by change, or how time changes generations and/or their conceptualization.

Although the concepts of 'generation', 'social change' and 'time' are inextricably linked, the complex relationships between the three of them remain under-theorised (see Woodman & Leccardi, 2015) and only fragmentarily studied. This chapter will focus on the multi-faceted role of generations in social transformation from a socio-cultural perspective. First, we will give an overview of the main conceptualizations of the linkages between social generations and societal changes, elaborating on some theoretically relevant aspects of those connections that have previously remained implicit or marginal in the literature. Secondly, the chapter will provide some further suggestions for conceptualizing generations within the framework of social transformation, based on generalizations from a selection of observations in Central and Eastern European transition societies.

Generations and social transformation

The classical sociological theory of generations by Karl Mannheim suggests that generations are formed when profound social changes coincide with personal development, as the determining influence of the 'first impressions' or 'childhood experiences' (Mannheim, 1952: 298) one gains during youth are predominant throughout life. In his famous essay 'The problem of generations', Mannheim implied that during profound social changes, rather than being objects of socialization, young people *could* become agents of social transformation. For Mannheim, generations were not static entities, as he pointed out that different generations are in constant interaction, influencing each other. Mannheim, thus, introduced the concept of the dynamics of generational change. He also stated that depending on the social dynamics, generational identity is also subject to change over time. The dynamics of generational identity and intergenerational influences, however, are not theorised in great detail in Mannheim's writings.

Generation and change are both complex notions and, thus, the dynamics of generational developments during societal changes pose a huge challenge for sociological thought. As Stephen Lovell (2007: 4) has suggested, generation 'offers both mechanism of change and source of solidarity and cohesion (though, of course, it may also bring rupture and conflict)'. In the following, we will give a brief overview of how aspects of stability and change have been conceptualized in different generational theorizations.

The dialectics of stability and change

As many theorists (in line with Mannheim) argue, during the socialization period youth's dispositions and values crystallize (Corsten, 1999; Eisenstadt, 1988). Generational change, then, appears when the crystallized values or cultural beliefs of the older generation are not compatible with changed social reality, and the young have to develop new dispositions to be able to

cope in the new society. The new dispositions, once crystallized, remain quite intact throughout these people's lives. Consequently, the new collectively shared understandings help to transform the society further.

Consistent with these assumptions, Ronald Inglehart has developed his theses of intergenerational value changes. According to him (Inglehart, 1997), one would expect to find substantial differences, even disruptions and discontinuities, between the older and the younger generations in societies that have undergone crucial changes in economic and political conditions (see also Kalmus & Vihalemm, 2008, for the specificity of young generations in three transitional societies). Individuals are more likely to adopt those values that are consistent with their own experiences during their formative years and reject values that are inconsistent with first-hand experience. If younger generations are socialized under significantly different conditions from those that shaped older generations, the values of the society will gradually change through intergenerational replacement.

In all these conceptualizations, the new generations (though initiated by change and potentially changing the societies), are actually a source of future stability. Their values and shared understanding of social reality provide resources for self-reflexive identity building (Corsten, 1999; Misztal, 2003; Nugin, 2015) and solidarity that may have a synchronising and harmonising influence for a number of decades.

The dialectics of structure and agency

Not every generation is capable of developing a reflexive identity or of realising the potential of being in the forefront of social change: some remain more passive objects of transformation (Gloger, 2012; Mannheim, 1952; Nehring, 2007; Weisbrod, 2007). In his canonical essay, Mannheim distinguished generations as 'potentialities' and 'actualities' (Mannheim, 1952). He referred, in the first case, to birth cohorts, who, due to having been born within the same historical and social conditions of dynamic destabilization, have the potential to form a historical generation while failing to create a strong generational identity. To become an actuality, a potential generation needs to participate actively in its 'common destiny' (Mannheim, 1952: 306): in social and intellectual currents of its society and period.

This aspect of Mannheim's theory has inspired researchers in different ways in terms of the weight they impute to the social structure or generational agency, or the dialectics between the two. Elaborating upon Mannheimian concepts, June Edmunds and Brian S. Turner make a clear distinction between passive and active generations, describing the latter as those who 'make a generative contribution to a social community or polity' (2002: 16–17). Furthermore, within the concept of an active generation, Edmunds and Turner specify the development of a strategic generation: one that 'can create a potent generational consciousness or ideology of political change that is sufficient to bring about significant social change' (2002: 17). By comparing the rotation of passive and active (particularly strategic) generations with Vilfredo Pareto's circulation of elites (wherein one elite group replaces another), Edmunds and Turner also touch upon the issues of intergenerational dynamics and relations. They argue that successful strategic generations are reluctant to surrender their historical advantages and accumulated social, economic or cultural resources to rising generations, which may easily lead to intergenerational rivalries or conflicts (Turner, 2002).

Furthermore, in relying on Pierre Bourdieu's concepts, Edmunds and Turner (2002) have noted that certain age cohorts develop generational *habitus*: a set of dispositions, manners and behavioural patterns that are characteristic to the people born around the same time, who are influenced by the social or cultural epoch in which they were socialized. Depending on the

extent a generation is capable of developing a sense of its own culture and identity through a shared habitus, it has a smaller or greater agentive potential to mobilize its members to transform societies.

The assumption of the existence of generational *habitus* has inspired a line of research focussing on generation-specific practices or consumption preferences. In these analyses, the main stress lies on the effects of social or technological changes on generational lifestyles and/or the social positions of particular cohorts in the overall social structure. Researchers focus on particular time periods, and explore how people cope, thrive or live their everyday lives within different socialization contexts, distinguished by cultural, political, economic or technological turns.

Numerous conceptualizations of 'media generations' are based on the same type of reasoning: the media technology and its dominant uses which individuals get used to during their childhood and youth can be expected to be things that 'one keeps a special relation with for the balance of one's life' (Bolin & Westlund, 2009: 109). A prominent international study of news media memories, for instance, distinguishes between the radio generation (born in 1924–1929), the black-and-white TV generation (1954–1959), and the internet generation (1979–1984; Volkmer, 2006). Some approaches, particularly the *cultural conception* of media generations (Aroldi & Colombo, 2013; see also Kalmus et al., 2013), however, treat media generations as a complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon that needs to be analysed as closely related to different factors, including positioning in the lifespan, the development of the media system and technological innovation, broader structural changes that affect society, and identification with a set of values shared with other members of the same generation.

Another tradition of sociological research has applied the notion of generation to study the impact of social change on various age cohorts without deeply pondering their shared generational identity, or generational consciousness as a potential agency to initiate social change. In such cases, researchers have focussed, for instance, on the birth cohort effect on positions in the social hierarchy (see e.g. Chauvel, 2006 and Titma, 1999). Interestingly, the problem of who defines a generation becomes crucial in this respect.

Discursive struggles in generation formation and social change

Along with structural aspects that change socialization patterns, the discursive formations and reflexive capability of defining a generation become important. Several theorists have pointed out the discursive aspects in generational genesis. Michael Corsten has stressed that generational identity is based on discursive patterns, shared 'interpretive and formative principles relating to their biographical and historical horizon' (1999: 259). For Corsten, discursive patterns, how generations understand the events in the past or talk about the future, form the core of generational identity. Though for Corsten these discursive patterns, once formed, are rather stable, his idea of the relationship between generations and discursive patterns also becomes important in the context of social transformation: social time and generations are created, labelled and reproduced in discursive fields and constructs.

Abrupt social changes transform the social structure. The ways those changes are noticed and verbalized in discursive fields affect, in turn, the emerging generational consciousness, discourse and conceptualization. Sometimes, the changed social reality helps the older generations verbalize their distinguishing traits compared to the younger generations, with their changing patterns of social behaviour and socialization. For instance, the age of marriage or child-bearing is constant in times of stability and not worth paying attention to. Only if these characteristics change among younger cohorts can the older cohorts create discursive cultural constructs that help them reflexively draw the borders of their own generation, based on social criteria

that were unnoticed before. Paraphrasing Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) characterization of class, Radim Marada (2004) has suggested that the generation-based categorizations of behaviour and thought can remain unnoticed by social actors, thus leaving generations 'unconscious'. In these cases, reflexive generational constructions appear *ex post* (see also Weisbrod, 2007), referring to changed socialization patterns or past events that are experienced retrospectively as defining a distinct generation (see Edmunds & Turner, 2002).

Discourses, however, are always arenas of battles over power or scarce cultural resources (see e.g., Bourdieu, 1993). Therefore, the discourse of labelling a generation and verbalizing its qualities is also a question of setting a hegemonic agenda, and can be used as a weapon in political debates (see also Marada, 2004). Depending on the course of change and the social position of young cohorts, emerging generations can be presented as being in the forefront of positive change and thus gaining symbolic capital, or as the 'losers' of transition. In the first case, the discourse can be initiated by young people themselves to strengthen their symbolic position in the changing society. This enables young people to create unique subjectivities, helping them to navigate through their lives (Andres & Wyn, 2010). In this case, the discourse about young people as losers is most likely initiated by the older generations. However, as pointed out by several researchers (e.g. Hoikkala et al., 2002), people need positive self-identification for their generational consciousness to emerge. Thus, the young generation may reject negative discursive labels (created by those who hold hegemonic positions in discursive fields) as a basis for self-reflexive identity, pick up other constructs, or fail to form a generational identity. Furthermore, discursive constructs are subject to change over time; thus, emerging labels may change previous generational constructs.

In emphasizing the power of discourses and representation in his theorizations on social classes, Bourdieu has suggested that sociology should concentrate on 'classification struggles' rather than on 'class struggles' (see Purhonen, 2016). Inspired by Bourdieu's thesis, Semi Purhonen (2016) asks whether the 'sociology of generations' should focus more on the issues of discursive representations, i.e. 'generations on paper'. He suggests that similarly to social classes, generation as a concept is used actively to gain and legitimate hegemonic positions in society. In a similar vein, Sofia Aboim and Pedro Vasconcelos (2014) claim that the discursive approach enables sociologists to study social change in society, as well as among and within generations. In their definition, 'more than historical locations, generations are discursive categories used for social differentiation and conflict' (Aboim & Vasconcelos, 2014: 168).

Discursive constructs, furthermore, may generate real social consequences according to the Thomas theorem (Thomas & Thomas, 1928). If, for instance, older generations are consistently represented as being barely capable of using new media technologies and, thus, coping with rapid technological changes, the celebratory discourses on new 'digital generations' (e.g. Prensky, 2001; Tapscott, 1998) may become a self-fulfilling prophecy as older cohorts are, in effect, marginalized in the labour market and social arena. In further borrowing from Bourdieu's conceptual heritage, we may, thus, speak of 'generational capital' (as a form of symbolic capital) and its exchange value in the economic, political or cultural field.

Acceleration of the social dynamic

The symbolic value and social status of generations and their impact on intergenerational relations became paramount in the late modern era, characterized by an acceleration of social change (Rosa, 2013). Mannheim, too, conceptualized the relationship between what he called the 'strengthening of the social dynamic' (1952: 302) and the interaction of generations. According to Mannheim (1952: 302), 'Static conditions make for attitudes of piety', and the younger

generations tend to follow and imitate the older. When the tempo of social change increases, however, 'the older generation becomes increasingly receptive to the influences from the younger' (Mannheim, 1952: 302). In other words, 'social acceleration' (Rosa, 2013) evokes fundamental changes in the intergenerational transmission of knowledge and culture, i.e. in the very nature of the process of socialization.

This, in turn, poses new questions for theorizing about the relationships between generations, social transformation and time. We may ask, for instance, how social acceleration influences intergenerational relationships, and the construction of generational identities and self-consciousness. What kind of scenario – an increasing pace of the emergence of new social generations (Edmunds & Turner, 2002), or a levelling of barriers surrounding different (subcultural) generations (Giesen, 2004) – will prevail? How do the processes of uneven acceleration and institutional desynchronization (Rosa, 2013) influence cultural reproduction and socialization? Who will transmit knowledge and experience to the next (or previous) generations, and how will they do it? Might potential tensions across the generations further accelerate social change (Ferraro, 2014)?

Without currently having much empirical knowledge to answer these questions, we may hypothesize that the increasing speed of social and technological changes, by surpassing the pace of turnover of generations, is generating what we suggest calling 'social supersonic speed'. Generations differ, due to dissimilar locations in life span, in their speed of adapting to rapid social changes, leading to asynchronous entrainment of different generations by transformation. To maintain continuity and avoid rupture in cultural reproduction, older generations have to make significant efforts to synchronize the processes of social transformation and socialization.

We can assume that these questions are particularly acute and intriguing in societies that have recently experienced radical political and social changes, and are still undergoing intense and partly conflicting transformational processes. The latter are sometimes characterized by the concept 'double movement', proposed by Karl Polanyi (1944) in his theory of economic transformation and referring, basically, to liberal reforms and ideologies and more or less spontaneous reactions to them. Central and Eastern European transition societies serve as an exemplary arena for observing such developments.

Construction of generations in Central and Eastern Europe

Although several authors have problematized the assumption of the similar character of social change within Central and Eastern European (CEE) geographical and cultural borders in recent decades (for discussion, see Blokker, 2008; Stenning, 2005), we still find it useful to point out the special position of CEE as a region undergoing post-communist change. While acknowledging the diversity in the region, we feel that there are general common factors in the character of these changes (Nugin & Trell, 2015; Stenning, 2005). One such common factor is the overall importance of the issues of representation and discursive battles over generational constructs during the social changes preceding and following the collapse of the Soviet bloc.

According to Radim Marada, 'without hope in new generations, there can hardly be talk of revolution' (2004: 149). The social and political turmoil of the 1990s in CEE surfaced strongly in several discourses on generations, either in terms of bringing forth change, or being the ones the change was made for, or sometimes talking about generations who stand in the way of (positive) change. In any case, both the hegemonic and suppressed discourses used the notion of generation to legitimize their positions or downgrade the symbolic positions of some age groups. Moreover, not only did the change make it possible for new generational labels for those who were socialized during the change to surface but it also changed the meanings and

symbolic positions of some generations whose generational identity was already formed. Thus, new generational identities were formed *ex post* as the change brought many dispositions into a new light (Weisbrod, 2007: 22).

This is not to say that the turmoil of changes in CEE brought forth new generations everywhere; rather, it changed many perspectives on how generations were seen and conceptualized. As suggested earlier, generational identity often emerges when some kind of positive identification is possible. Hence, in many regions where age cohorts could not identify with positive changes, the generational labels did not emerge during the change, or did not last very long (for discussion, see Gloger, 2012; Nehring, 2007; Weisbrod, 2007).

As this chapter has its limits, we will not attempt a deep analysis of generational identities in the entire region. Rather, we will concentrate selectively on some examples in CEE countries (mainly in Estonia) to advocate for four inter-related theses:

1   Social change affects the discursive fields that construct and label generations, and the respective discursive battles not only create new generational constructs, but also redefine the established ones.
2   The generational constructs that emerge in the course of change are dynamic in nature, and the potential for crystallization is only sometimes realized.
3   Similar socio-political contexts can create different generational labels and, vice versa, similar generational labels can lead to various definitions and interpretations in different socio-historical contexts.
4   Social change can create several discursive labels; thus, it is justified to talk about generations of transformation in the plural.

The social scene keeps changing, producing and reproducing discursive constructions about generations. Although the concluding section of the chapter will provide a quick glance at the most recent developments, our aim is not to give a thorough picture of all of the generational labels and constructs available today. Instead, we will mainly focus on three carefully selected periods, marked by vast social and political changes, to show how transformation can affect generational construction. These epochs – the post-WWI period, the 1960s and the 1990s – serve as empirical illustrations of our theoretical claims.

The post-WWI generation

The twentieth century was characterized by a high number of political turnovers and wars. The label 'war generation' has been actively exploited all over Europe to signify a vast array of birth cohorts with heterogeneous connotations and, thus, referring to all kinds of wars (beyond the world wars) that tormented the area. Due to the political and ideological character of every change, the meanings of these labels are subject to change over time. The labels can change dramatically when different historical periods are re-evaluated under new political regimes. An interesting example is the notion of the 'lost generation', a label coined in the discourses inspired by Ernest Hemingway's novel *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), which depicted a post-WWI disillusioned generation who had fought in the war during their youth as having lost their collective ideals during the war and having to cope with the difficult social situation of economic crises after the war.

The label has been used every now and then, and its meaning has stretched across borders and time. Though initially a concept used in Western Europe, it also has resonance in Eastern European cultural fields, which, however, tend to be dynamic. For example, during the time of

the Soviet regime in Estonia, the hegemonic depiction of the same age group coincided with Hemingway's notion of 'lost' (though the label itself was not actively used). After the collapse of the Soviet empire, however, the post-WWI period gained the meaning of a 'golden age': in 1918, the independent Estonian Republic had been established, and retrospectively the post-WWI generation was considered one that was happy to be able to enjoy the realization of the national dream – an independent state – and its progress until 1940. The label 'Children of the Republic' (Raudsepp, 2016) gained more popularity in hegemonic fields in Estonia during the 1990s.

This example confirms that discursive generational constructs are dynamic and apt to change when historical periods are re-evaluated. It also illustrates that generational labels are used and re-conceptualized across cultural borders, as discursive constructs circulate in a broader cultural exchange.

The generation of 1968

Generational labels, however, may not have the same connotations in different cultural contexts. One such ambiguous label is the 'generation of 1968', which has wide resonance both in the Eastern and Western European contexts (and in the United States). Though the meanings sometimes overlap, signifying emancipation and liberation, the varied cultural contexts are still noteworthy. In Eastern Europe, the label mainly refers to the atmosphere of the political thaw in the Soviet bloc that peaked with the 'Prague Spring', when the leader of Czechoslovakia, Alexander Dubček, introduced a number of reforms, which were interpreted by the Soviet Union as jeopardizing the communist rule. As the political leadership of Czechoslovakia refused to give in to the Soviet pressure to abolish the reforms, Soviet tanks invaded the country in August 1968, suppressing the Dubček regime and the active protests by Czech civilians. This event has diverse interpretations in terms of generational conceptualization: while some refer to the generation that failed in their ambitions and then prudently 'played the game' with the oppressive regime to avoid personal difficulties (Marada, 2004), others refer to the event as evoking the hope of 'new thinking', which eventually led to the collapse of the Soviet Union (English, 2000).

In many other post-communist countries, such as Estonia, the label 'generation of 1968' has not been widely used, yet somewhat similar notions occur in the discursive fields. In Estonia, the closest label is the 'Thaw generation', characterized as the generation that initiated several cultural movements in the Thaw era, but also the generation that started to believe in the possibility of changing the system 'from within' (see also Aarelaid-Tart, 2006; English, 2000; Nugin et al., 2016). In the overall Soviet Union context, too, the label 'Thaw generation' is sometimes used (Levada, 2005), along with several others, such as the 'Sputnik generation' (Raleigh, 2006) and the 'sixties generation' (Voronkov, 2005). The borders between these constructs and their interpretations are, no doubt, rather blurred and, depending on the discursive context, sometimes overlap with the meaning of the 'generation of 1968', while at other times contrasting with it. From the perspective of this chapter, it is noteworthy that the political developments in similar sociocultural contexts evoked a change that was heterogeneous in its political and cultural outcomes, yet it rather homogeneously produced generational labels that referred to the softening of the severe Stalinist regime and the Khrushchev Thaw.

The notion of the '1968 generation' is also interesting due to its wide usage in Western European and Anglo-American contexts, referring to various youth protests and emancipatory movements in the United States, Germany and France (cf. Gloger, 2012; López, 2002; Weisbrod, 2007), ranging from the fights for racial and feminist rights to the sexual revolution, from political protests against the Vietnam war to student protests calling for modernising university

curricula. Thus, the 1960s illustrate how, on one hand, different phenomena (even those that emerged in the Eastern and the Western contexts) can be accommodated under a single label (the '1968 generation') and, on the other hand, how similar phenomena emerging at the same time can be described with multiple labels in discursive fields.

Another meaningful difference between the East and West regarding the generations of the 1960s is the time of their discursive emergence. In the case of CEE, the labels began to gain prevalence only after the collapse of the Soviet bloc, as these generational concepts often contain an intrinsic characteristic of being oppositional to the ruling socialist regime. Thus, the heroization of resistance to what today is generally regarded as the prison of CEE nations is often highlighted in hegemonic discursive fields when constructing the 1960s generations. These claims, however, are not universal: along with or instead of national 1968ers, the respective Western movements are re-evaluated and heroized, and, in the case of Russia, opposition to the Soviet regime is not always unanimously glorified in hegemonic discursive fields.

The 'winners' and 'losers' of the 1990s

Another overarching change shaking the CEE region was the collapse of the Soviet bloc. As mentioned earlier, hegemonic discursive fields changed dramatically in most of these societies: the generations were re-defined and the generational lines re-conceptualized, along with the evaluations of the past. In the Soviet Union's official propaganda,[1] the generational lines were largely set around WWII (or the Great Patriotic War). Accordingly, the positive heroes or 'strategic generations' were those who either participated in the war, or were involved in reconstructing the new socialist world (especially in the countries that were incorporated into the Soviet Union after WWII), or were those 'happy' to live in the world of peace their ancestors had fought for.

After the dissolution of the Soviet bloc, in Estonia the generational 'hubs' emerged around other phenomena, associated with (a) the 'golden era' of the inter-war independent republic, (b) opposition to the regime (the 1960s generation), and (c) the political and social turn of the 1990s. By 'hubs' we mean that the generational identities are often defined in relation to certain events and phenomena, either by defining oneself as being part of the phenomenon or in opposition to it, or being torn apart by certain events (e.g. the victims of the occupational regimes), or being successful because of certain political processes. One 'hub' can generate multiple labels, depending on how the social phenomenon has affected different age cohorts or potential generations. For example, the social transformation of the 1990s made it possible to label some age groups as 'winners' (Saar & Helemäe, 2006; Titma, 1999) and others as 'losers' (see Nugin et al., 2016). To complicate things further, the 'winners' as well as 'losers' discourse could occur within the same age group (Saar & Kazjulja, 2016).

The changes that started in 1987, after Mikhail Gorbachev launched *perestroika*, and led to the dissolution of the Soviet bloc were followed by the emergence of new democracies and the restructuring of the social and political arenas of the former Soviet republics. These reconstruction processes were conducted at different rates in the diverse post-socialist social space, leading to shockingly rapid changes in some states and more stable developmental routes in others. Regardless of the pace, however, the period of rather substantial changes lasted for at least a decade. Thus, those who came of age during the early stage of changes may have experienced radically different effects from the transition compared to those who were socialized into adulthood at later stages of transformational developments (Nugin, 2013). As a result, the political change in CEE created multiple generational labels among those coming of age during the processes associated with the fall of the Berlin Wall. Yet, one has to note that these changes are highly

contextual and sometimes the nuances of transformation were noted only by the contemporaries, while in retrospect the nuances tend to be missed.

One example is the label 'suit-and-tie generation', which surfaced in Estonia in the 1990s and signified yuppies who had just reached adulthood but already occupied important positions in newly established social structures (Funk et al., 1995; Nugin, 2015). This label was meant to signify a small group of young (and mainly male) people born in the 1970s who had just entered the job market and became visible through their quickly achieved high positions and office-style clothing. This age group, however, was distinguished from another – the 'winners' – generation, which had been born a decade earlier and whose representatives dominated in the business world as a prominent part of the new owner class. Although the label 'winners' generation' remains prominent in discursive fields, having broadened its meaning across birth years and occupational structures, the term 'suit-and-tie generation' has disappeared. The reason probably is that this kind of label is often created *ad hoc* and is inspired by a small though quite visible group of the cohort (or 'generational unit' in Mannheim's terms). Their visibility, however, may be connected to something particular and highly context-specific that often fades over time. The label, thus, fails to gain the traction necessary to form a more lasting generational identity. Yet, the disappearance of the label does not necessarily mean that the age group has no potential to form a coherent generational identity. Those born in the 1970s often share reflexive understanding of their own generation, distinguishing themselves from those born in the 1960s or 1980s (Nugin, 2015).

Concluding remarks

The relationships between generations, social transformation and the time map form a complex pattern of interdependencies that offers a vast yet largely unexplored territory for theoretical and empirical explorations. In this chapter, we have highlighted some conceptual hubs in the existing literature on generations, demonstrating the importance of the dialectics between change and stability, and between agency and structure in academic discourses and research traditions. Furthermore, we have emphasized the essential quality of discursive constructs and representations within the 'sociology of generations', and their symbolic power in intergenerational discursive struggles. We, thus, support the concept of 'generational capital' as a form of symbolic capital, and call for a further examination of its analytical potential. Also, we have considered the hitherto under-explored area of the relationships between the phenomenon of 'social acceleration', generations and socialization processes, and have proposed some questions and hypotheses for further studies and conceptualizations of these linkages.

This chapter has emphasized, in various instances and particularly highlighting the 1960s, the importance of socio-historical contexts (such as the Soviet bloc versus Western democracies) in forming diverse generational experiences, meanings and symbolic values associated with the respective generation groups, often accommodated under a single label (e.g. the '1968 generation') in different countries. As a direction for further studies, we suggest focussing on the interplay of local socio-cultural contexts versus global processes in defining social generations and their symbolic loadings in the discursive fields.

In exemplifying CEE transition societies as a superb arena for studying the interplay between generations and social transformation, we have demonstrated how generational labels are constantly defined and redefined in discursive fields, contributing to the dynamics of generational change. We have suggested four inter-related theses regarding the complex, multidimensional and dynamic relationships between social change and generational constructs. Those theses

highlight the high importance of generational labels and representations as they are often used as symbolic cultural tools to marginalize some groups, while attributing prominence to others in the continuing generational dynamics within social transformation.

Taking a glance at the 2000s and beyond, the formation of generations in CEE countries and in Western Europe has become more similar due to the prevailing influence of homogenising political and institutional frameworks and global processes (technological development, social acceleration, increasing mobility and migration, expansion of higher education, changing employment structures, etc.). As in Western societies, politics has practically ceased to be a source of identification for new generations in CEE, and most of the generational labels on both sides are connected to values, consumption preferences, lifestyle, or economic or technological development (e.g. 'Generation Me', the 'Facebook generation' and 'Generation 700 euros'; see also Lovell, 2007). Time will show whether significant political changes in the EU (such as Brexit) and elsewhere create new politics-based social generations.

Future research might also provide fruitful insights into the role of emerging media technologies and social acceleration (Rosa, 2013) in the formation of generations and inter-generational relationships in the CEE countries vis-à-vis the Western world. Previous representative surveys in Estonia (Kalmus et al., 2017) demonstrate that the younger generations have adapted to rapid transformations, particularly the digitization and acceleration of social time, faster, more flexibly and to a greater extent than have older age groups. The age-specific patterns of new media use found in those studies justify the discursive construction of the young as the 'digital generation'. Nevertheless, the boundary of the 'digital generation' is vague, extending as far as those born in the late 1960s. One reason may be that the cohorts born in the late 1960s and in the 1970s experienced very rapid changes and different social conditions during their formative and early adult years in transitional Estonia, which may have fostered their adaptability to all kinds of innovation (Kalmus, 2016). Thus, it may be fruitful to abandon the view of the role of the media in generation formation 'as a kind of technological imprinting that took place in a precise, defined moment' and see it 'rather as a diachronic, cultural process' (Aroldi & Colombo, 2013: 180) in which broader structural changes that affect the social and cultural system are properly taken into account.

In addition, we urge future researchers to delve more deeply into the processes of how generational constructs change and how these changes reshape power relations, how a generational construct and reflexive identity crystallizes and what constructs disappear over time and why, the reasons behind using similar labels to signify different generational constructs, why similar processes sometimes evoke generational constructs in some societies but fail in others, and how to distinguish different phases in continuous change that give rise to different generational identities.

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Note

1 This is not to suggest that these hegemonic generational labels were unanimously used as the basis for self-reflexive generational identities by people living in the Soviet Union.

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