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About Intergenerational Learning and Education about Generations

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My input into this workshop will be basically about intergenerational learning and education about generations as well as generational characteristics. I hope that later on there will be a discussion among us and a critical reflexion.

Introduction

During Slovenian Presidency the topic of intergenerational ties in European societies was raised. It was underlined that there were many divisions in our societies (layers, social groups, ethnic groups, religious groups, etc.) one of them being *the division into generations, and that more solid social ties were needed.*

Now, if we unite generations around the same topic of their concern, we get aware that living in the same society generations have similar worries and even similar values, but different knowledge. On this basis they are able (1) to exchange knowledge and (2) to construct knowledge together, and (3) they can even employ knowledge working in community or for community.

On the other hand there is education about generations, their similarities and dissimilarities, common generational characteristics if and when they exist.

Within different EU projects and undertakings (EMIL, ECIL, FORAGE, CINAGE) in which my institution Slovenian Third Age University participated the issues of generations/cohorts and learning among them was approached.

It was found out that generations are not a chronological concept but a result of different shared impacts (political, historic, cultural etc.). They are a product of social changes and different types of socialisation.

Generations are most linked by cooperation and much less by intergenerational solidarity.

It has been further found out that there is no active ageing nor is there silver economy possible without co-operation of generations.

One of the basic findings was that intergenerational learning is about learning together and from each other about the same topic and about co-operating, whereas education about generations is their learning about each other or several generations.

It has been found that intergenerational practices and intergenerational learning are dependent on the topic which is its turn dependent on the context and issues (family, local community, work place etc.)

It has been found out that the topic of intergenerational learning is less important than creating generational ties. So, an important accent is put on methods: cooperational, reciprocal, mutual learning, etc.

What can younger generations learn for themselves from older generations who participated in massive social movements

In the FORAGE EU project supported by European Commission my colleagues from Portugal and Hungary inspired me to examine what we, my generation learned from the student movements in 1968, 1969. In those days I was a student in Paris.

Similarities

One of the slogans of the new student movements is: *The world dwells upon young people*. But I would like to say: "Yes, but what do young people dwell on today?"

Are there any common points between the student movements in the 60th, and the today's movements in France, Slovenia etc? What is characteristic about these unrests is that they are looked down, they are somehow degraded by the political public and the media. The attitude towards student movements in the 60's was the same claims Mirjana Ule, a Slovenian researcher.

At the end of the 60's young people started being considered, for the first time as a social group and they attracted the attention of eminent sociologists, philosophers and social scientists. Namely, there was an increasing number of young people studying, young people were in the centre of the consumption society, they had leisure time and o many advantages! Thus sociologists considered young people as a conformist and sceptic generation well embedded in the modern social trends of the consumption society. Who were these scientists? (Helmut Schelsky: Die skeptische Generation where he described the apolitical conformist young people, the forty -fivers concentrated on the private world of work and family) Jürgen Habermas, Talcott Parsons. And consequently everybody was surprised by the student movements. Thus also experts considered younger people in the same way as the media. Young people were thought off as spoilt children, conformist individuals concentrated on the private sphere of work and family, who were well off and did not know what they really wanted. This was the situation at the end of the 60s the situation today is to some extent similar.

Then student movements of the end of 60s announced the end of the Fordist industrial society and were the forerunners of the coming postmodern society, knowledge based society.

Past and today's student movements have in common that they both reflect social changes. In the 60's student movements were the first to attract attention to the limits of the growth, ecological issues. They animated the movements of the marginalised social groups- anti psychiatric, feminist movements.

Differences

The differences? There is a difference in the basic orientation of the past and present student movements.

The movements of the 60's were set up on the generational solidarity, bonds, peer culture, subcultures. They were the last step towards the emancipation of young people: cultural emancipation, graffiti appeared as a means of their public emancipation. These movements were changing the relationships among the different spheres: the private, the production sphere.

It seems that today's young people have gone back to the private sphere. In the 60's young people stepped out into the public sphere: they dismantled the dominance of the media (In Slovenia Radio Student in the 70's and the 80's). They dismantled the dominance of the bourgeois language (in France) habits, etc.

Do not trust anyone who is older than 30. What does this slogan from the 60's mean? It means peer solidarity and bonds, questioning generations, intergenerational clashes and disputes, the young generations which were not shaped, became shaped. Today's young people are anchored in the private sphere. Who do they trust most? Parents, especially mothers.

What happened in 30 to 40 years? Young people became a social group, a strong group. To illustrate this point: German student movements were very powerful insisting on new, alternative politics. Joschka Fischer... young people penetrated the parliament. Joschka Fischer entered the Parliament in jeans and pullover...

Now, when I was in the secondary school we were struggling to wear jeans. We did not yield in. Our grammar school wanted us to have robes. And we found jeans fabrics and cut out robes in jeans. We struggled in this way. But what happened? Jeans were a symbol of

youth rebellion, but consumption society integrated the symbol of jeans...into requiring young people to wear jeans of certain trademarks...

Young people used to set up alternative schools, kindergartens, communities, alternative economy based on sharing profit, alternative farming. There were reactions coming from parents against their sons and daughters who did not want to take over their property...

Young people developed new forms of society. Anti-psychiatry movements, the movements changing the relationships between the two genders. *Young people showed how society could be shaped.*

What happened

At the end of the 80th electronic industry rose up with computers etc.

In those days young people had Commodores, the first products of electronic industry were not for public use, schools etc. They were meant to bring young people back into their home. In a couple of years, young people left disco clubs, cinemas for their own rooms. The result? Face to face contacts are less frequent. Communication is now through an intermediate. This was the end of the solidarity peer culture, bonds, generational commitment and consciousness have disappeared.

There is a deregulation and destandardization of the life course (no tradition, no institutional constraints, life course is shaped individually) Responsibility has become individual. We are responsible for our destiny but the choice is not real. There are not many who can choose.

So young people came back to their private environment. New technologies do not mean that we are really free. Because we have become solitary, the power of solidarity has been ruined. In the 80's there was a generational power.

What has happened? New paternalism over young people has happened. Family has become very protective, the relationships between young people and parents are fissional.

There is a change of values, attitudes, practices, value orientations Young people's value orientation is very similar to the value orientation of their parents. Young people even internalised the fears of their parents: illness, unemployment etc.

At the end of the 2000 young people said: I trust my mother, my sister, not institutions.

Summarising what has been discussed

Adolescence is not a natural phase in the life course. It is socially is constructed. In the traditional societies there was no youth.

Young people were not allowed to have fun, to drink alcohol, to smoke... these were the plays between young people and older people. So, young people created *their* own space of culture, their ways of dressing- this was the emancipation of the youth.

But paternalism went on. Young people can go to university, can study longer... massive studying means that young people are kept quiet and calm... They are not on the labour market... they do not question society...

Today's young people do not have social and generational consciousness- They have become rivals.

Young people are in the same boat... we do not know what the new movements demonstrate—are they for particular interests or are there new bonds, a new questioning of society?

Youth goes beyond thirty. Are young people young if they cannot get a job? Some people would like to have a job and to be supported by their parents. Some would not like getting employed and would travel. Young people can reflect society. Are their movements a partial mirror, a cry of those who do not have power? We do not know yet...

In the 60's Parsons said that young people cannot be silenced for a long time since passive generations are replaced by active generations. Our generation was active, we were hectic, we wanted to dismantle, to build, we wanted a lot and we could do a lot. May be today's new young generations will oppose the passive generations and change the world.

Literature

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