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## **What Did Older People Learn From the Movements in the 60s**

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### **Introduction**

The ECIL project finished, in the FORAGE project<sup>1</sup> I got additionally interested in the common characteristics of generations and their learning and I got inspired to examine what we, my generation have learned from the student movements in 1968, 1969. In those days I was a student in Paris in I participated as an observer in the May revolution 1968.

In this lecture I'll be dealing first with what generations can learn from engagement and ideology and second I'll be comparing the student and youth movements of the past and present and the learning they induced, dwelling mostly on my own research work and upon research and reflections by Mirjana Ule, a Slovenian sociologist.

### **Learning from engagement**

It has been generally admitted that identity can be best constructed through struggling and engagement. Through engagement one can find who one was, who one is and will become. Protesting actions support the construction of identity. They enable individuals to take public positions that classify them in their own eyes and in the eyes of others. Those who share collective ideas and collective doings meet their need to belong (Abraham Maslow). If, on the contrary, they do not have a clear individual identity, their lack of individual identity can block social movements and events.

### **Learning from ideology and practice**

Marx, Engels and Lenin argued that revolution in economic and political structures required also an ideological revolution. In order to understand the role of ideology in massive conflicts, one can go back to the movement called "revolution" of students and workers which took place in France in May 1968. There were conscious students' motivations to take part in this massive conflict and unconscious economic, political, cultural and other determinants behind their decision to take part in this movement. Students wrongly thought that they were protesting against the rapport of forces between themselves and the government, oppressing the

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<sup>1</sup> Both projects were supported by European Commission.

educational system and they did not understand that there was a struggle between social classes behind this massive social conflict. A struggle of classes that could be seen everywhere: in schools, families and elsewhere. This massive social conflict had a resounding impact on French society that would be felt for decades to come.

The revolution of May 68 was caught in ideology (supported by the French Communist Party). Because it was ideological, this movement could produce an impact on public institutions (schools in the first place) and it would have been important to educate the mass of secondary school students, students and young intellectuals about the ideology of the revolution in which they participated. Young participants in the revolution did not understand the ideology of the movement, precisely because they had an "ideological position" (ideals) towards their movement.

Ideologies of social movements particularly encourage learning of their active and passive participants. Ideology of social movements is necessary to make the participants in the movement "walk straight". Nevertheless now older people and once young participants in massive social conflicts and social movements learned mostly by doing, rarely on the spot but a posteriori when their motives and standpoints changed. They learned that uprising was possible, that massive participation in civil unrests, social movements, revolutions can be an extraordinary experience on several levels: on the level of knowledge and skills, on the level of understanding their own and other people's psychological reactions, doings and feelings (solidarity, engagement, betrayal, fear, courage, shame, joy, enthusiasm), on the level of building their identity.

### **Comparison of student and youth movements of the past and present**

Are there any common points between the student movements in the 60<sup>th</sup> and the today's unrests? Today there are youth unrests, as you know in Spain, Greece, Slovenia, and Portugal. These present unrests are being looked down; they are degraded by the political public and the media. The attitude towards student movements were much the same in the 60s argues Mirjana Ule, a Slovenian sociologist in one of her public recent public lectures.

At the end of the 60s young people started being considered, for the first time, as a social group and as such they attracted the attention of eminent sociologists, philosophers and social scientists. Why? Apparently there was no reason for young people to rebel. There were an increasing number of young people studying, young people were in the centre of the consumption society, and they had leisure time and so many advantages! Thus, sociologists like Helmut Schelsky, the author of *Skeptische Generation*, described the apolitical conformist young people, the forty fivers concentrated on the private world of work and family. But also Habermas, and Talcot Parsons. They considered young people as being a conformist and sceptic generation well embedded in the modern social trends of the consumption society. Since they were so much in the centre of the then society everybody was surprised

by the student movements. Since experts as well considered younger people in the same way as the media. Young people were thought of 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 somehow similar. Nevertheless, the student movements of the end of 60s were socially and politically progressive since they were the first to announce the end of the Fordist industrial society, they were the first to attract attention to the limits of the economic growth, the ecological issues. They animated movements of marginalised social groups- anti psychiatric, feminist movements. They were the forerunners of the coming post modern society, knowledge based society. (Mirjana Ule: *Mladinski upori v Parizu in Londonu*, Zofijini Ljubimci, 13. 4. 2012)

Being social movements, past and today's student/youth movements all reflect social changes.

### **Did learning by doing occur?**

The movements of the 60s were set up on generational solidarity, bonds, peer culture, subcultures. They were the last step towards the emancipation of young people that is cultural emancipation and for the first time graffiti appeared as a means of young people's public emancipation. These movements were changing the relationships among the different spheres: the private, the production sphere. In the 60s young people stepped out into the public sphere: they dismantled the dominance of the media. They dismantled the dominance of the bourgeois language (in France) habits, etc. Their slogan was Do not trust anyone who is older than 30. What did this slogan from the 60s mean? It meant peer solidarity and bonds, questioning generations, intergenerational clashes and disputes; the young generations which were not shaped, became shaped.

Young people of the 60<sup>th</sup> movements set up alternative schools, kindergartens, communities, alternative economy based on sharing profit, alternative farming. They refused heritage.

Young people developed new forms of society. Ant psychiatric movements and they changed the relationships between the genders. Young people of the 50<sup>th</sup> showed how society could be shaped. (Mirjana Ule: *Mladinski upori v Parizu in Londonu*, Zofijini Ljubimci, 13. 4. 2012)

### **New generations, new way of life**

The first products of electronic industry were not for public use, schools etc. They were meant to bring young people back into their homes... In a couple of years, young people left disco clubs, cinemas for their own rooms. And this development has not stopped since then. The result? Face to face contacts are less frequent. Communication is now possible through intermediate devices. These developments

brought the end of solidarity peer culture, bonds. Generational commitment and consciousness have disappeared ... (ibidem)

There is a deregulation and destandardisation of the life course: there are no tradition, no institutional constraints, we can shape our life course, we can choose. There is individualisation and individualisation of responsibility and everybody is responsible for their destiny which can be chosen but the choice is not real. There is not so many who can choose. So young people came back from public to their private environment equipped with new technologies. New technologies do not mean that we are really free. Because we have become solitary, solidarity, power has been ruined. In the 60s 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 fusal. There is a change of values, attitudes, practices; value orientations Young people's value orientation is very similar to the value orientation of the parents (ibidem)

Today's young people do not have social and generational consciousness.

In the 60s Talcot Parsons wrote an article saying that young people cannot be silenced for a long time. Passive generations are replaced by active generations. The generations of the 60<sup>th</sup> were active, hectic, they wanted to dismantle, to build, they wanted a lot and they could do a lot may be today's new young generations will resist the passive generations and change the world (ibidem).

## **Conclusion**

Social movements enable people to learn from engagement and to develop their individual and social identity. They also offer possibilities for learning from ideology. Today's older generations who participated in student movements of the 60s learned how to shape society and how to set up alternative forms of society, and economy. Older people learned that there were social issues which had to be pointed at and required common action. Today's younger generations have adopted a more passive attitude towards what is going on in society and have stepped back into the private sphere concentrating themselves on family and work. For them these are the environments they learn from.