

## The Beta Generation and Other Nonsense

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### On the Limitations of Generational Logic

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#### **Abstract:**

**Introduction:** The lives of young people in the first place, but of all of us, are much more complicated than to immediately, almost automatically, pour the “generation sauce” on everything. However, it seems that today, in scientific, science communication and popular literature, the generational response often seems to be the only one.

**Purpose:** Our study tries to give a far from complete picture of how the generational logic, even if valid, is regularly overstretched by its research and expert users. Moreover, the problem is not only that the data supporting these generational concepts are, to put it mildly, incomplete, but also that unfortunately the formation of generations from current age groups could only be genuinely confirmed after many years of thorough, in-depth social science research, with much academic debate.

**Methods:** Traditional desk research, such as literature search, data mining and web search not using any support of artificial intelligence.

**Conclusions:** It shall be important to understand that, like all scientific theories, generational logic has its limitations and is not a panacea for all problems.

**Key words:** generations, alpha-generation, beta-generation, covid-generation, climate-generation.

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## **Introduction**

“Their focus on sustainability, managing the world’s largest ever ageing boom, and their deep technical skills will present Generation Alpha a cohort of people who think unlike any that have come before.” (What is Gen Alpha: Definition, stats, predictions) “Generation Alpha are specialists in multitasking.” (Pálinkás-Purgel, 2019) “Every generation from here on out will become more entrepreneurial than the next because they will have had more access to information, people and resources earlier in the life. We will see a lot of Alpha entrepreneurs starting companies before ten years old.” (Schawbel, 2014) “The Betas have a greater ease in accepting the increasingly common interactions with an artificial intelligence which now populates our transport, our communications, our offices.” (Pacific Ventury, 2020) “The last (likely) Beta generation focuses on complex learning processes with the help of surrounding artificial intelligence.” (Thaariq, 2023) “Generation Beta will strongly desire continuous learning and upskilling to remain relevant in a rapidly evolving job market.” (Unis, n.d.) - we may encounter such generational world interpretations every day. It is a surreal situation for the researcher, often hesitant, uncertain, faced with more questions than answers, when confronted with findings of those who give unquestionable answers, sometimes calling themselves “generational experts”. A few decades from now the subject entered the professional public consciousness, then the public sphere and finally the tabloid press, and now we are flooded with thousands of books, articles and interviews on the subject, in the style of the '10 things to get rich quick and easy...!' works, which tell us everything we need to know about the Y, Z, Alpha and even the yet-to-be-born Beta generations - and dozens of other labels.

The main problem is that these “experts” easily draw far-reaching conclusions from the lifestyle characteristics of young people in a particular part of the world, or in a particular social group. In general, they tend to attract attention by means of non-representative samples of a few hundred people, i.e. samples that cannot be generalised for cohorts, general conclusions drawn from individual interviews, categorical and spectacular statements based on experiences gained being an influencer. “We don't know, we can only guess” certainly does not look good in an interview situation, or on an online platform aiming to reach as many people as possible, or in a well-paying corporate consultancy, but unsubstantiated answers and opinions without evidence do not help to establish the facts or inform a part of the public that is even susceptible to science, not to mention that they can also result in misleading, generalised prejudices against certain members of society.

In this paper, we have tried to summarize the weaknesses of generational logic, partly by looking at its foundations and partly by reviewing its structure. This does not mean that we reject generational theory completely, but it does mean

that, like any scientific theory, we recommend it for use with its own limitations of validity.

### **1 Mannheim's wobbling theory**

Most generational "saviours" generously overlook the definition of generation, without which it is obviously difficult to form a picture. Apart from the fact that understanding the world, and society in general, is an exciting challenge, the question is first and foremost whether these generations exist, i.e. whether the difference in lifestyle between the various generations is the more significant, or whether the lifestyle between social groups and strata is the more different. Moreover, the issue has not only theoretical but also practical importance: if generational differences are the more significant, then that type of public policy response to social problems – i.e. access to housing - is needed; if the differences between social groups are the more significant, then the validity of targeted measures to address them is greater and thus to be adjusted.

Generational theories have lain dormant for about 100 years in both professional and public discourse. According to Karl Mannheim's<sup>1</sup> theory (Mannheim, 2000 [1928]), which is by the way not very stable in terms of methodology, the interpretation of an age group as a generation requires (1) shared experience, (2) actual mutual orientation and (3) shared understanding of the situation, attitudes and forms of action. To put it simply: an age group becomes a generation if there is a common experience and a common evaluation of the situation, if the age group is forged together by a kind of community of experience. Such a community of experience could be for example the regime changes in Central and Eastern Europe in 1990, the fall of the Twin Towers in 2001, or the COVID-19 quarantine (whether the latter will actually be or has become such experience we cannot yet say for sure. This will be decided by the data that show how similar the life situation, lifestyle and perception of reality of the members of a given cohort are to that of other members of their generation, and which is the stronger bond: generational or social group consciousness).

Mannheim, however, created theoretical constructs and theoretical concepts, and spoke less about their measurement and interpretation. It is therefore possible that even in professional publications the concepts of community of experience, generational identity, consciousness, etc. are interpreted differently. Moreover, social events that are considered to have a global impact may be felt differently in different countries and regions. For example, the fall of the Twin Towers had

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<sup>1</sup> The real Hungarian fate of Károly Mannheim – who emigrated from Hungary in 1919 to Vienna, then to Germany, from where he had to move on to London in 1933. Thus he went from being a Hungarian sociologist to a researcher in Germany and later in England.

a dramatic impact on the daily lives of people living in the immediate vicinity and their relatives for years, while in a small town in Africa perhaps the related news may have barely reached the people. This does not mean, of course, that they are not indirectly affected by the events, but it does mean that, due to the different levels of development of societies, there are areas where the “Western”, generationally valued characteristics are hardly present. For example, people who live their lives without daily use of the internet, or certain ethnic or religious groups, are not affected in the same way. Cultural differences also mean that certain fashion trends and artistic styles, which are considered to be dominant, do not reach everyone in the same way.

A further criticism of the theory is that generational characteristics can never be true for every single member of a generation, since human behaviour and characteristics are always influenced by individual factors other than the generation, such as gender, marital status, socialisation and upbringing, education, or the labour market situation in a particular area. Generations are defined according to criteria of the past, but the year of birth and shared experiences are only loosely related to the members of a generation and there are many more components that determine the way of thinking, behaviour and decisions (Nemes, 2019; Csobánka, 2016).

Interactions and experiences between members of the same generation can lead to a shared consciousness and later similar recollection of events of a given period, but interactions are not only intra-generational and the micro-environment of the individual is very much dependent on who they experience, process and talk about events with. For this reason, memories of a particular event may even differ between people of the same generation.

Mannheim's generational link has been further developed, also controversially, by the American researchers Neil Howe and William Strauss, who interpret the concept of a generation as a group of individuals who, having been present in the same historical space and time, acquire collective characteristics, and whose generational behaviour is determined by when and how they participated in the defining socio-cultural changes. The authors postulate a close and symbiotic relationship between historical events and generations (Howe & Strauss, 1991; Howe & Strauss, 2000). They believe that these patterns repeat rhythmically, following each other every 15-20 years or so<sup>2</sup>. What defines, connects and distinguishes one generation from another is not simply that they lived in a similar historical period, but that they had similar attitudes towards family, values, risk, culture and citizenship. In addition, the defining periods of life may differ from one individual to another. For example, someone who does not have

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<sup>2</sup> Eighteen generations in American history are distinguished from the first settlers of the New World.

children will not have a period of life with children, or someone who lives off his property will not have a working life stage. But even for those who have children, or who work, the timing of this life stage may vary historically and culturally, which may have an influence of the repetition of what is thought to be a rhythmic 15-20 year (in some sources reported as 20-25 year) cycle.

In Hungary, Róbert and Valuch place the generations in the context of changes and key events in Hungarian political history, while also showing the phases of socialisation. This allows us to see exactly at which life stages the youth and adult socialisation influences may have been felt by Hungarians (Róbert & Valuch, 2013). Although there were Veterans, Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y in the country at the time of the Hungarian regime change in 1989, it is not possible to speak of a “common experience” for a citizen in his/her 30s and a citizen of kindergarten age: the latter also lived through the regime change, but it was not as decisive for them as for those who were in the labour market or already in retirement at the time.

The Howe & Strauss theory is based on studies of centuries of US society, often backed by few data. They can only be claimed as valid in Europe, or elsewhere in the world, if we make observations repeatedly, on many different samples, using many different methods. American studies cannot be transferred to other conditions without reservations. It is far from clear that these data would be valid everywhere in the world, and certainly not that the changes described there can be identified as characteristics and the basis for the formation of generations everywhere. And especially not that the very different age groups can be described as homogeneous. Indeed, the key to the formation of generations is shared experience and its acceptance as a kind of common identity.

Another criticism of the theory of generations is that different authors often use different intervals for generational birth dates, which makes it sometimes seem more like a set of ideas that have been thrown together than a scientific theory based on data. It is also difficult to take seriously the rule of thumb that if someone was born on 31 December of a given generation boundary year, he is still of one generation and if he was a New Year's baby ten minutes later, then he belongs to another generation. The generational common experience is not primarily due to years of birth, but rather to the life situation and lifestyle of a young person. Together, these can be interpreted as trends and characteristics at the societal level, manifestations of which - social events and processes - form a kind of shared consciousness or canon. Moreover, in a clear demonstration of the blurring of generational boundaries, the so-called microgenerational terms used to describe transitions between two generations (e.g. Xooner - between baby boomers and X; Xennial - between X and Y; Zillennial - between Y and Z) also indicate that no sharp boundaries can be drawn between generations (Csutorás, 2021).

Moreover, while differences and trends in the characteristics of generations are indeed discernible - and in the case of generations it would be more useful to look at these differences and processes for identification - but the summarized and simplistic explanations, while very impressive and easy to understand, are by no means necessarily true. One example is when the generational expert ex cathedra states that members of Generation X are loyal to their employer and have difficulty changing jobs, while Generation Z are flexible, quick to make decisions and have low workplace commitment. It is possible that this statement is true, but its reason is not necessarily because one is Generation X and another is Generation Z. In the present case, we are talking about age and, more importantly, life situation differences and the unprecedented acceleration of social time as generational characteristics. In this case, simply a wrong conclusion is drawn from apparently interrelated factors.

David Costanza and co-authors conducted a meta-analysis of more than 300 studies available online between 1995 and 2009 specifically on generational differences in jobs. In short, they concluded that there is a lack of sufficient scientific evidence to justify generational grouping. That does not mean they cannot exist at all, but it cannot be stated that some differences are clearly due to generation and not to age, maturity or other individual characteristics (Costanza, Badger, Fraser, & Severt, 2012).

Conflicting research findings were also identified by Woodward et al. in 2015 in a systematic review of the literature, in which they reviewed 50 studies on the topic and found clear evidence of generational differences in only 17 of them, 31 studies found both differences and similarities between generations, while 2 studies provided no scientific evidence of differences (Woodward, Vongwasdi, & More, 2015).

Generational theories would have survived as a group of even more social science theories if they had not been exposed (partly because it is easy to understand) to the more popular - sometimes not that strictly scientific - turbulence in youth sociology. But this has happened, and so the popularity is growing; the theme of generations has enjoyed its renaissance in the last decade.

## **2 The evolution of generational theories**

This universalism of Mannheim's and Howe & Strauss's theories is problematic because the social, historical, geographical and cultural context in which generations are formed certainly cannot be ignored. One need only think of 1968, one of the defining events of the baby-boom generation: for those living behind the Iron Curtain, it was the year of the "fraternal assistance" in Czechoslovakia, and for those living outside the Iron Curtain, the Paris student uprising. But there are many more examples: Finnish people call those born between 1955 and 1969 the welfare state generation, Armenians call those born

after the 1991 break from the Soviet Union the independent generation, Poles call those who had a generational experience of the death of John Paul II in 2005 the JP II generation, while Chinese call those millennials who are living off their doting parents a generation that “eats their old”. Some generation labels refer to significant historical events or social phenomena at an international level or in a particular country, while others refer to some human characteristic, but there are also fancy names with no particular meaning. For example the so-called veterans of the pre-baby boomer era are also known as the builders, traditionalists and the silent generation and the “letter generation” approach, which seems to be canonical, is actually more of a cacophony, as Generation Y is also commonly referred to as Millennials, digital natives, or even Cyberkids, often overlapping with Generation Z (e.g. E-generation) (Csutorás, 2021). In fact, the use of generational labels is far from consistent, and generational labels that are not scientifically supported, that single out one characteristic, or that may carry a negative connotation, leave room for harmful stereotyping, generalisations and the formation of prejudices against different members of society in public thought. Csutorás has therefore structured a total of 124 different generational labels found in online sources, thus setting up a kind of nomenclature that systematically presents the wide range of labels used today in order to support a more considered use of terminology in further discourse (Csutorás, 2024).

In recent years, the concept of generational identity has been added to the generational theory, according to which if an individual is aware of belonging to a generation, he or she also associates some emotional and value significance with the presence in this group. According to this approach, the classification into a generation does not emerge independently of the individual, but rather one can belong to a generation through self-definition (Ng & Parry, 2016).

Generational identity is, in fact, a social identity that emerges from a mixture of age and socio-historical situation through self-categorisation into a generational group, cognitive and perceptual recognition and appreciation of the fact of belonging to a group, its distinctive features and significance, feelings and beliefs about the group and its distinctive features in relation to other generational groups (Lyons, Schweitzer, Urick, & Kuron, 2019). When analysing research findings, it is also worth bearing in mind that, as a result of generational discourse, individuals may now consciously adopt generational traits, while there are, of course, those who are less familiar with generational issues and do not address the issue of self-classification.

Nowadays, more and more researchers are moving away from a cohort-based generational approach towards an identity-based approach, which is seen as more suitable, for example, for interpreting multigenerational relations in the workplace (Van Rossem, 2018). It is also natural that changes in values and attitudes take a long time and can occur gradually (between generations), while

some change sooner, others later, and some never change at all. The theory of generational fuzziness, for example, was developed in view of the above. According to that, completely denying the existence of generational differences is incorrect, but it is necessary to be very careful when examining them, as they are the result of cultural changes (Campbell, Twenge, & Campbell, 2017).

### **3 Alpha generation as “poster children” – a practical example of misunderstanding**

One litmus test for understanding the logic of generation is to understand the concept of Alpha generation. There is no end to the number of world explanations that are thrown around, almost all experts refer to the under-10s as the Alpha generation, talk about Alpha generation students, Alpha generation application use or their consumption habits. But there is simply no Alpha generation (yet). Previously, according to the 15-20 year generation shift, members of Generation Z were “due” to be born before 2010, so the idea came up to consider those born from 2011 onwards as the next generation and calling them Alphas starting with the first letter of the Greek alphabet due to the phasing out of the Latin alphabet. However, at that time (assuming constant population growth) 93-95% of the indicated age group were not even born. We just wonder what kind of broad generational characteristics, common experiences characterised the 5-7% born when the term was coined? The 5-7%, who obviously could not even have developed proto-concepts of society and at the age of one, and the concept of a community of experience is not even applicable in their case (Nagy & Kölcsey, 2017). Today, the oldest members of this age group are about 14 years old, but we have essentially no substantiated, representative, generalisable data on them (since a third of this age group still only exists in dreams). Interviewing them, observing them, studying their characteristics is rather haphazard - not to mention the legal and ethical difficulties of studying children of this age. We do not have representative data needless to say that interviewing three groups in a kindergarten is not enough (and certainly not possible either). Nevertheless, while the oldest members of the so-called Alpha generation are supposed to be secondary school students now, some studies are already dealing with adaptation of corporate HR strategies to them (Jaiswal, 2023).

However, “past profits are no guarantee of future profits”. Even if there has been an intergenerational alignment and changes of characteristics every 15 to 20 years, we cannot state that the process will continue the same way in the future. What has been the case in the past is certainly worth investigating, but, for example, the age of childbearing in Western societies may be increasing, or the time span between generations may be decreasing due to the acceleration of technological change in society. We do not know whether there will be an Alpha



generation in the foreseeable future since we can not foresee whether there will be a separate generational characteristic, common experiences, an identity that differs from that of the zoomer generation (Generation Z), so that they could be described as a separate generation in the Mannheim sense.

Perhaps it is no wonder that if the existence of the Alpha generation is in question (of course we are not saying that there will not be one, only that there is not one today), the “discovery” of the Beta generation is very much like that of the astronomer who has not yet looked through his telescope but has already named the planet he hopes to find. We don't know which technological or other achievement will bring about such societal breakthrough that will define a generation. Maybe self-driving cars will completely restructure people's time management, maybe we are heading towards a society like *Surrogates* (Touchstone Pictures, 2009), or maybe some dystopian vision will come true. All we know is that today, AI is unlikely to have a major impact on the daily lives of the born - which may change over the years - but we have no real measurements of them at present and no sense of a common interpretation, common experience or shared generational identity, and without any data the unborn people are at best a matter for futurology.

#### **4 If not alpha, then climate-generation**

Many approach climate change from a generational perspective and assume that certain groups in society - also defined by age - are more concerned about environmental issues. This may be based on the idea that the interests of today's generations are not necessarily the same – and not as prominently represented – as those of future generations when it comes to climate policy. It is reasonable to assume that members of the future generation would certainly prefer (if they could be represented by a real presence in, for example, legislative processes) to reduce emissions more strictly, for example, as this could have a greater impact on their lives (Farber, 2020). Thus, some have labelled today's young people as the climate change generation, but the research results so far suggest that this category is also too simplistic. Hungarian researchers have, for example, analysed whether there is empirical evidence of generational tensions between younger and older generations on this issue and concluded that there does not seem to be any evidence of a growing tension. Parents and teachers, i.e. the representatives of the older generation, have the greatest influence on young people in this respect, and research shows that young people bring an environmentally conscious attitude from home (Kovács-Magosi & Székely, 2022).

In addition, it has been found that not the youngest people are the most active in climate change issues: the older age group (25-29) is far more active than the younger age group (14-18) (Tóth et al., 2022). Another study analysed German

and Austrian teenagers climate change awareness and according to the results young people were assigned into four groups depending on their cognitive, affective and conative aspects of climate change awareness. It therefore appears that even among the youngest age group measured by data, there is no uniformity in this topic that would indicate a generational characteristic (Kuthe, Keller, Körfggen, Stötter, Oberrauch, & Höferl, 2019).

## **5 What about the COVID generation? - Another non-existent interpretative framework**

If generation is defined by the commonality of experiences, the question arises: do the crises of the recent past, separately or together, form a generation from the young people of our time? We have no data so far, only expert estimates of whether the global events of 2020 will also have such fateful impact on young people. We did not know whether the temporary restriction on social life is a “passing fad” for young people, which hardly affects them and does not later become a fateful memory, or whether it is a life-defining turning point, a life event that fundamentally shapes their way of life, their vision of the future, their problem-solving, and thus their generational characteristics. More specifically, we need to examine whether the pandemic created the conditions that underpin the possibility of generation formation and, if so, to what extent young people internalise for themselves the generational identity that they derive from it.

Indeed, COVID-19, which joined the climate challenge as a potential generational global crisis, has shattered previously fixed frameworks for some time. It is a question to what extent are these radical - partly temporary - transformations in education and the labour market, the unprecedented speed of the forced transition to digital education and the home office, the quick loss of jobs in many sectors, the severe restrictions on offline social contacts and the move of social life to the online space shaping the character of today's young generation?

A Hungarian study looked at the chances of a generation forming in the Mannheim sense as a result of the coronavirus pandemic shock. The question was whether young people, as an autonomous generation living together in society, separate from the other generations, identify themselves in the social space defined by the virus. Three focus groups were used to find out which issues and topics young people are sensitive to, which was studied using a big data-based methodology, so-called social listening - by scanning about 3 000 000 text items - and validated with an online control questionnaire of 1,000 young people in Hungary (Böcskei, Fekete, Nagy, & Szabó, 2023).

Their results suggest that a self-reflecting orientation to generations is accepted among young people. According to the focus group interviews conducted, young people, regardless of age, agreed that generations exist: they perceive that there

is some kind of variation and difference between people of different ages. The common generational experience was digitalisation, the transformation of personal relationships and experiencing the pandemic. The Ukrainian-Russian war also emerged organically, but not prominently, as a potential generational experience.

The online questionnaire shows that more than two-thirds of 16-29 year olds accept the generational divide as a way of looking at things, but that the proportion of sceptics increases with age. And social listening has shown that generational tensions that already existed during the pandemic have increased. For example, young people often thought that the reason they break restrictions was the poor example of older generations. At the same time, they felt the least at risk compared to other generations, and perceived quarantine and the pandemic as a special and strange experience. During the second wave, narratives in the online space that increasingly began to blame older generations and illogical state measures for the prolongation of the pandemic gained strength.

However, the generational divide among Hungarian young people does not seem to be an identity, but rather an imprint of cultural and knowledge capital or a media effect<sup>3</sup>. The data show that although Hungarian young people are well aware of the negative effects of the pandemic and other (world) political events (such as war) in their lives, and of the changes in their lifestyle and personality, most of them do not think that they should be considered as a new, post-epidemic COVID generation. Many of them are aware of the fact that during the pandemic period they missed out on or experienced in a different way many of the things that previous generations had experienced in their own lives, but most of them feel that, since they have no experience of these events, their absence or non-existence cannot come as too much of a shock. The data also indicate that the assumptions about the emergence of a COVID generation should be treated with caution: there is little evidence of a COVID generation self-identity. This also indicates that the fact that several classes have dropped out of education for a period of time, during the period of acquiring skills and competences

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<sup>3</sup> Generation Z is the most prevalent "self-definition" of young people, confirmed by both social listening and focus groups, and the questionnaire shows that a relative majority (35%) accept Generation Z as a valid label (Generation Y is 15%, other labels - e.g. COVID generation (7%), crisis generation (6%), climate generation (4%) - is even lower, and the alpha generation has not even gained ground among them (2%). The findings of the interview phase are in line with those of the questionnaire survey. Young people agreed that the pandemic period was very stressful psychologically, but it is not perfectly clear to them whether these changes would have such a dramatic impact on their lives that they would have to consider themselves as part of a new "COVID generation". This is confirmed by the fact that young people ranked the pandemic in the bottom third of the 14 potential threats listed in the survey.

appropriate to their life cycle, is not in itself a sufficient argument for the COVID generation.

We can be sceptical about the caesura character of COVID for the time being, if only because, although the results of our study undoubtedly show a new experientiality of young people, the interpretation of the data reveals a sense of discomfort among young people rather than the emergence of a new structure of thinking. The COVID-effect should therefore not be confused with the effect towards a COVID generation consciousness. It is also noteworthy that although the COVID-effect was felt by young people in their "formative years", the experience of quarantine may have also been a formative one for older people, who have experienced anything similar before. In addition, they have tended to remain more "cautious" than young people for longer after the pandemic, and in this sense it is possible that elders lives were even more affected than those of young people.

If young people are generally labelled as the COVID generation on the basis of not verified assumptions, for example that they are a generation with somewhat deficient social skills, this may, on the one hand, implies the risk of age discrimination in their attitudes, values and behaviour throughout their lives, and on the other hand, it may even evolve to be a so-called self-fulfilling prophecy (Rudolph & Zacher 2020).

## **Conclusions**

Generational experts try to make a quick success by statements that immediately assume technical-technological changes as ones that form generations, but the introduction of a new technological tool itself is far from being enough to form a new generation. The formation of generations may be primarily the result of changes in the social environment, but this is much more difficult to identify and formulate into data than the spreading of a technological tool.

We ourselves regard the development of conceptual structures and their more realistic representation - although many people are sceptical about this - as explicitly scientific work, since our thinking helps us to understand reality through concepts, and the more accurate the conceptual structure, the easier it is for us to use it to understand and even change the world with it. However, the test of the conceptual structure is the extent to which it actually fits with the social facts in our case. We speak out against it when, without data, we not only assume, but immediately justify what we say.

Some critics of generational theory, for example, suggest that it would be better to combine two alternative theoretical models: a so-called social constructivist approach and a life-cycle approach rather than generational logic. These researchers emphasise that generation is a simplistic category because ageing is a multi-directional, multi-dimensional developmental process, and researching it

would require a much more critical approach (Costanza, Rauvola, Rudolph, & Zacher, 2020).

Moreover, when we talk about generational research, there are several ways to look beyond opinion to facts and data about the life situation and lifestyle of young people. There are ways to build a nuanced, data-driven picture of youth, but also to understand that one age group does not necessarily make a generation, but certainly not if we want to impose our own conceptual structure on it. Moreover, it is not worth proposing a generational cure for a social problem that has nothing to do with generations.<sup>4</sup>

When analysing differences between generations, it may be worthwhile to take an approach whereby the self-image and opinions of members of a particular generation are presented alongside the opinions of members of other generations about that given generation. A more realistic conclusion can be drawn by comparing and evaluating the two together and a more complete picture of a hypothetical generation can be obtained by comparing the self-assessment of those who are considered to be one of them and the responses of those who are not. However, if we want to analyse a so-called Generation Beta – not only in the context of futurology – it is advisable to wait until its members are born and have developed their concept of society. In the meantime, a no less ambitious but more realistic objective would be to for example look deeper into the case of Generation Z (ideally by means of a longitudinal study), whether their characteristics can still be identified a few years from now, whether a new generation has really arrived with them. That is, of course, if we can resist the pressure expected in the close future, which suggests starting research on Generation Gamma.

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<sup>4</sup> For example, when social strata with less access to material and cultural goods buy certain consumer goods (say a smartphone, smartwatch, tablet) simply because they are a status symbol that makes them feel like they belong to the coveted reference group, this is typically not a generational issue, although often cited, but a problem of social inequality.

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*Acta Educationis Generalis*  
*Volume 15, 2025, Issue 1*

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