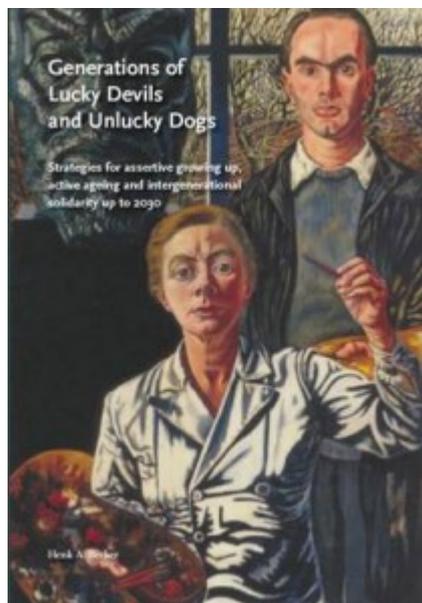


# Short Alert Concerning The Discussion About Generations



## *Introduction*

We come across the word 'generation' nearly every day, in various places. In discussions, in the media, in books. Often we know immediately what it is about, which is odd, as generations are extremely complex phenomena. This complexity causes discussions about generations in social sciences to remain fierce. This short alert is an attempt to give a concise summary of the discussion.

Starting point for this alert is the book *Generaties van Geluksvogels en Pechvogels* (Generations of lucky dogs and the unfortunate), which I had published in 2011. As the pattern of generations changes continuously, I made this book a 'living document'. This implies that I frequently publish supplements to this book. These supplements appear on the website of the publisher of the book.

In this short alert I summarize the current discussion. This summary is particularly important as the pattern of generations is about to change intensively worldwide. By the end of July 2016 a report will be published, indicating in what way recent innovations in the IT sector influence the pattern of generations.

As this concerns extremely complex phenomena, it is essential to involve three areas of knowledge in the discussion. The first knowledge area are the descriptions of the generation pattern and are dynamics. This is mainly about the research reports and scientific reflections. The second knowledge area ensure the necessary idealisations. Especially a typology of generations is indispensable. The third knowledge area informs us about the discussion with regard to generations occurring in our society. What do TV, newspapers and magazines bring forward?

## *2. Descriptions of the pattern of generations*

Our society has over one hundred years of birth. The higher the age of the people involved, the smaller the 'cohorts'. This clearly applies for the members of society who are over one hundred years of age. The more than one hundred cohorts shift in time annually. Often this shifting is accompanied by changes in the structure of the cohorts. These processes are for example shown as the movement of a rabbit that was eaten by a snake. Slowly the rabbit sinks into the bowels of the snake, while it is being digested.

In addition it is important that every time some cohorts cluster into a generation. Such clusters are formed under the influence of great social changes ('major events'). There is no official acknowledgement of generations. As a result the social and scientific discussion decides about the question whether there is a generation. In any case these debates ensure an extensive flow of books and articles.

### *3. Idealisations of the pattern of generations*

Studying and discussing such complex phenomena does not only require detailed scientific and generally social texts. In addition simplified models are essential. Therefore a typology of generations is available. A stereotype of every generation within the typology is assimilated.

The idealisations of the pattern of generations changes over the years. After all they are required to correspond with the changes that the generations themselves undergo each time. In connection with these changes I adjusted the typology of generations time after time in my book. Below I indicate how I presented the typology in 1992 and in 2011.

#### *Cohorts born between 1910 and 1930*

Name in 1992: pre-warGeneration

Name in 2011: pre-warGeneration

#### *Cohorts born between 1930 and 1945*

Name in 1992: Silent Generation (During the Cultural Revolution of the sixties, and later the struggle was between the mature adults and the rebellious youth over the heads of the Silent Generation. The Silent Generation largely remained silent).

Name 2011: Silent Generation (The name remained unchanged)

#### *Cohorts born between 1945 and 1955*

Name in 1992: Protest generation (See above about the struggle during the Cultural Revolution)

Name in 2011: Early Baby-boom generation (Protests have escaped the attention. Baby-boomers are currently relatively very confident. The start of their working life went relatively favourable. Gradually the extent of their cohorts has shown relatively many social effects).

#### *Cohorts born between 1955 and 1970*

Name in 1992: Lost Generation (The term 'lost' could imply 'losing the way' but also it mean 'prospectless', for instance in terms of finding a job).

Name in 2011: Late Baby-boomgeneration (Less great effects on the great extent of cohorts, therefore: Late).

#### *Cohorts born between 1970 and 1985*

Name in 1992: Pragmatic Generation.

Name in 2011: Pragmatic Generation, Generation X

#### *Cohorts born between 1985 and 1995*

Name in 1992: Generation Y;

Name in 2011: Unlimited Generation, Generation Y

#### *Cohorts born after 1995>*

Name in 1992: None

Name in 2011: ICT-Generation (Also: Generation )Z. By the end of June 2016 it will become clear from which year this generation can be observed).

As far as the 'Patatgeneratie' (Fish 'n Chips generation) is concerned, I refer to Wikipedia. I, myself do not use that name.

#### *4 Generations in society*

Time after time research takes place, based on the question: what generation names are recognized by members of society? Investigating generations and drawing up typologies of generations is systematically done in accordance with these society customs wherever possible.

A fascinating example of this is the article 'Vrijheid blijheid voor altijd?' ('Freedom and happiness for always'). This appeared in Elsevier magazine on 21 May 2016. The youngsters in the article, presented as an illustration, are all between 17 and 30 years old. In secondary school they were prepared by means

of the idea: 'Do whatever you like, and you will be alright. Follow your heart. The world is at your feet. You can be whatever you want to be'.

In the 'Introduction' to this alert it was announced that soon the generation pattern worldwide will experience a shock. By publishing the effect of the break-out of the IT-revolution on youngsters, who are at that time in their formative timeframe. Think about the grandsons of grandfathers, who give their granddads the required assistance while dealing with a computer or another digitally functioning device. This will concern a cluster of young cohorts of such an apparent feature that the generation sociology will finally obtain a categorically convincing example of the emergence and survival of a generation.

### *6 Finally*

Ever since the rise of the generation sociology some hundred years ago, this specialism has been facing continuous fierce criticism. In our day and age we still hear the statement: 'Henk Becker's generation sociology is too vague'. The generation sociologists should not only refute the criticism, but also benefit from it as much as possible. The attention for generation sociology are very much alive, due to fierce debates. This attention will also be retained because of the aforementioned announced break in the trend and the consequences in society.

Henk Becker

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### *Literature*

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