TRANS-GENERATIONAL REGIME OF LATE CAPITALISM: INTRODUCING A NEW SOCIOLOGY OF GENERATION

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The article attempts to revise the perception of the issue of generations which dominates in social sciences at the moment. It is also a critical review of the interpretations of the category of a generation, and of fixed periodization of subsequent generations. Additionally, a new sociological definition of this term, based on the transgressive character of generational breakthroughs, has been proposed. The generations which characterise the reality of late capitalism have been indicated based on this definition.

Keywords: Generation, transgression, The Greatest Generation, Traditionalists, The Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, Generation Jones, Generation X, Echo Boomers, Millennials.

Introduction

One of the basic determinants of the consciousness and behaviour of individuals – apart from their gender, race, ethnic background, religion, political views, education, knowledge, life experiences and socio-economic status – is their generational affiliation [Lancaster & Stillman, 2002: 13], or rather their generational identity, i.e. their individual choice of sympathizing with a specific cohort.[1]

Dissimilarities which result from age differences did not become a subject of social research until the turn of the 19th and 20th century, when an interpretation of the category of a generation was recognized as significant for this type of research [Wątroba, 2017: 19]. It was a consequence of the empowerment of the youngest members of the society, and above all, a substantially increasing interest in the categories of childhood and youth, which had been hitherto trivialized [Aries, 1962, as cited in Kamenetz, 2006: 10].

A specific generation is defined mainly by the extent to which it is different from the preceding generation. Its distinctness depends on its significance and its influence on social reality – it expects social institutions to adjust to its convictions and values [Winograd & Hais, 2008: 1-2]. It is characterised by common and distinct presuppositions concerning social reality, different from those of other generations, formed through the experiences of its members. Its specific and unique set of values, attitudes and behaviours implicates how it reacts, and also how it brings about changes in various aspects of its existence. A generation is characterised by a certain degree of predictability of its features, values and convictions, as well as skills, attributes, competences, interests, expectations and preferred behavioural patterns, which designate its place in the generational hierarchy [Pendergast, 2010: 1].

An individual's consciousness, in the same way as their religion, geographic residence, and convictions, is shaped by the cultural context of their existence, which integrates them with various groups of people. A significant component of this context is the period of time in which an individual was born. It causes them to share certain points of view and customs with other individuals who exist in the

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[1] In this article a cohort is understood as a group of people born in the same historical period.

same social surroundings at a given time. Also, the period in which a particular generation exists is a function of the rapidity of changes that occur in the world – and of a "community" of reactions of its members to these changes, reflected primarily in sharing common values and experiences [Heath, 2006: 3].

A generation builds its distinctness not only by manifesting the differences between itself and other generations, by its features, value systems and convictions, but also by its views, political and religious practices, consumption patterns, as well as by its perception of a family and collective life [Pendergast, 2010: 3]. The differences between generations are expressed in rituals and ceremonies, or rites of passage, which are marked with symbolism and which vary depending on a specific cultural context [Eisenstadt, 2003: 31-32].

However, it is occasionally the case that there is a significant number of people who do not identify with any generation. Such a situation may be identified as a peculiar generational interregnum. The said individuals, labelled as cuspers, were born on the cusp of two generations. They might feel connected with either the generation that precedes them or the one that follows them, but usually their identity straddles the identities of two generations [Lancaster & Stillman, 2002: 32, 38].

What a Generation is Not in Sociology?

The French sociologist François Mentré, a classic of theory of generations, believed that social history of humanity – apart from its other aspects – is marked by generations, which can be more or less distinctive, and which span over a period of about thirty years, i.e. the duration of the eternal war of sons against fathers [Mentré, 1920, as cited in Savage, 2008: 184; Wątroba, 2017: 19]. However, this view's value for the sociological interpretation of the category of a generation is highly questionable, although it is useful when analysing the categories of family, house, clan and tribe. In terms of sociology, it leads only to far reaching oversimplifications, and even degenerations of methodological research on generations. This is caused by researchers, driven by the Enlightenment imperative to organize reality, who analyse social history from the perspective of subsequent generation waves which supposedly complement each other. Their postulate of strict periodization, which they make downright imperative, stems from the Enlightenment dream to set reality in order, and make it devoid of ambiguity. But in the context of the intellectual construct of a generation it is highly inadequate, impracticable, and even harmful. The best known version of this postulate is the concept of dividing the history of the United States – reaching as far as their prehistory – drafted by classics of research on generations, i.e. William Strauss and Neil Howe, who identify 25 generations, starting from 1433 [Howe & Strauss, 1991]. This concept is utopian, radically deterministic, and unsupported by any reliable empirical research, provided that such research is at all possible in the case of an analysis that encompasses such a long period of time, with hardly any empirical material. This concept is eminently damaging, as it sustains the view that in research on generations, a homogenous time frame for subsequent generations should be determined, overlooking the historical context of their social existence. The proposal of Howe and Strauss, who follow Mentré, is wrong, first and foremost on account of logical premises. The point of view that they assumed is only justified when the term generation is used with reference to a family, house, clans or tribes, to specify the social roles of children, parents, grandparents or great-grandparents. This kind of periodization must not be used in the analysis of the development of a society, based on the sociological concept of a generation. It is impossible for the history of society to be forced into a fixed, homogenous time frame.

The pattern of a fixed generational periodization in the history of society should be forsaken, and the focus should be diverted to analysing the social distinctness of various generations that are not necessarily enclosed in homogenous time frames, and to researching generational identity, which can also be shared by individuals who, in terms of their date of birth, belong to a different cohort [Wątroba, 2017: 50]. Even if we are able to distinguish distinctive cohorts who play a significant role in the said history – they usually bring momentous social change on account of their transgressive nature – there are still some periods in the history of society which can be identified as times when neither generation prevails, a generational *interregnum* of sorts.

The idea which assumes a time frame of thirty [according to Mentré] or twenty [as proposed by Howe and Strauss] years when defining subsequent generations in the analysis of generational differences, is also unfounded. The assumption of regular periodization of history, of its sinusoidality or similar historical regularity is unacceptable, especially in the face of the tumultuous events the first half of the 20th century, and increasing dynamics of social, economic and political changes in its second half. The 20th century annihilated the deeply idealistic Enlightenment plan to assign the sociological meaning of a generation to cohorts which follow one another in equal time intervals.

In conclusion, from the sociological point of view, a generation is not a group of people born during a given period of time, usually postulated as 20-25 years. Moreover, social history of humanity is not divided into equal intervals of such length.

What a Generation Actually Is in Sociology?

In the age of late capitalism, which is characterised by an increasing degree of empowerment of an individual, people quite often manifest different generational identifications in their actions – identifications that do not necessarily correspond to their age. Regardless of the attempts of conceptualizing homogenous generational groups, which is typical for the Enlightenment, this age is gradually becoming a period, in which the classical conception of a generation proposed by Karl Mannheim is widely applied [Mannheim, 1952]. According to him, the fact of being born during the same period does not automatically indicate an identical, or rather similar, perception of reality. He rightly came to the conclusion that it is the social and psychological processes that stimulate the process of shaping the identity and consciousness that are called generational, far more than being born at a given time. He stated that generational consciousness is not determined by date of birth, but by experiencing reality in a common social and political context. Moreover, belonging to a given generation is the outcome of state of mind and similar age [as cited in Morgan & Kunkel, 2011: 10; more in Wątroba, 2017: 22]. An individual's consciousness is predominantly shaped by events that happen around them during the period of their adolescence and in the early years of adulthood, since is it the early experiences that tend to merge into a single, natural image of the world [as cited in Gillon, 2004: 3; more in Wątroba, 2017: 23].

Intergenerational transformation is a continuous process in which cultural heritage, though frequently in a modified shape, is passed on to the next generations [Leeds & Hurwitz, 2005: 2]. A generation creates itself through the way its members react to social changes, as well as how their reactions shape their personalities. They fight for their own place in history, and they point to experiences that turned out to be of utmost importance for their generation at the time of its formation, especially in economic and social aspects. A generation is constituted by means of intergenerational transgressions. This process shapes the potential identification of an individual, which is relatively permanent thereafter, and is expressed for instance in sharing similar behavioural patterns [as cited in Gillon, 2004: 3; more in Wątroba, 2017: 23].

It is difficult to accept the view that the moment of birth determines the fact of belonging to a given generation, although such an assumption definitely makes analysing generational differences easier. Similar age is certainly the essential determinant of the perception of the world, and of the experiences of individuals. A common interpretation of events and their contexts, common value systems, similar process of socialisation, as well as common icons, that is characters, places, events and things that are assigned symbolic value, all shape a generation's identity, and determine intergenerational differences at the same time [Lancaster & Stillman, 2002: 13]. However, the interpretation of a generation on the grounds of similarity of age is to be recognized as fiction, just as calling a group of people a generation, solely by means of determining the initial and final dates that mark the birth of members of that generation, is merely a form of imposing a particular narrative, created only for the benefit of demographers, publicists, futurists and consumption market analysts [Chang, 2005: 1; Wątroba, 2017: 21].

In every historical period a dominating age group may be indicated. These groups constitute a kind of avant-garde which sets, or even imposes hopes, wishes and ambitions of contemporary individuals, and aspires to assume *leadership* in their realisation [Savage, 2008: 184; Wątroba, 2017: 19]. These groups are composed of the so-called transgressionists. They are the new participants in the cultural process in which the previous participants gradually disappear, as a consequence of changes of the social context. These changes stimulate transmission of accumulated cultural achievements [Mannheim, 1952: 292; Leeds-Hurwitz, 2005: 2; Wątroba, 2017: 24], and as a result, they differentiate the perception of social reality by different cohorts. Those who follow in the footsteps of transgressionists are called followers.

For the sake of the limited form of this article, we may simplify things and establish that generations are groups of people who share similar, but not identical experiences, and who live in the same historical period [Koller, 1974: 5]. However, we must remember that in the environment of an open society age is not a crucial determinant, although it does play a fundamental role. A highly empowered individual is free to choose their generational consciousness, especially in its behavioural aspect. It is particularly important for individuals who, in social history, had been *situated* by their date of birth between two cohorts characterised by strong *generational distinctness,* or who were born during a period of *generational interregnum* [Wątroba, 2017: 50].

Although cultural generations arise sequentially, they do not disappear the moment when the predecessors give way to the successors. Various generations coexist and are forced to interact in order to reaffirm the society [Schwartz, 1976: 2019]. Hence fixed categorization of generations determined by date of birth is not supported by any rational justification. After all, what is the difference between an individual born at the end of one year, and another individual born at the beginning of the following year?

There is not a clear boundary between historically adjacent generations, even if new generations noticeably question the value system, convictions and lifestyle of the previous ones, deeming them inadequate to the ever-changing reality. Even if they do defy the behavioural patterns of older generations, it is still a process whose subjects are individuals driven by their personal conviction, not *solidarity of the year* in which they were born. At the same time, by adopting some patterns or values of an older cohort, the younger generations endow them with a new nature. They *refresh* them, making them functionally better adjusted to the new reality [Strauss, Howe & Markiewicz, 2006: 47], thus accomplishing the intergenerational transgression.

To sum up, a generation is formed by individuals with common ways of experiencing historical events. It is their collective interpretation that is the key to constructing a generation [Erickson, 2008: 5]. Generations are made by history, they are not just born [Owram, 1997: xiii]. They differ in the way in which they adopt the social history of a community, setting their own social and cultural place in social reality. They can collectively feel nostalgic for the values of their youth, but also search for their ultimate destiny [Strauss, Howe & Markiewicz, 2006: 20]. They construct a new, unique peer personality, through which they experience events in their own way, and stimulate a revolutionary-mass quality change, which favours a sense of generational separateness [Świda-Ziemba, 2005: 15]. They do not appropriate their separateness only for their peers – they advertise it among both older and younger cohorts. A key statement in the social analysis of generations is the claim that generational differences exist because people believe in their existence, and generational groups become a self-consolidating structure [Benckendorff, Moscardo & Pendergast, 2010: x], mainly owing to the so-called generational legends, which are mythicised stories of the life of a given generation, typically created *ex post* [Garewicz, 1983 as cited in Fatyga, 2005: 196].

Intergenerational Transgression

There is not much of a difference between the sociological and psychological interpretations of the category of transgression. The latter recognizes transgression as a creative, innovative and expansive action, which is individual as well as collective, which oversteps the existing boundaries of material, symbolic, social and cultural achievements of humanity, through which an individual transcends their

limited opportunities, beyond their imperfections, and creates new values [Kozielecki, 2004: 24]. Transgression stands for overstepping the existing boundaries of social convention, breaking the standards that are in force, especially cultural standards, but also often sustaining a part of whatever remains beyond the said boundaries. Transgression is the ability to transcend oneself, to reach beyond oneself [Kozielecki, 2001: 18], and beyond what an individual is and what they possess, it is overstepping the boundaries that used to be accepted by the individual, and it is the individual's attempt at self-development [Kozielecki, 1987: 44].

Generational transgressions are aimed at other generations, usually the older ones. They are directed at things, people and symbols, as well as at themselves [thus facilitating an individual's self-development, creating its social uniqueness], which is why they are referred to as natural transgression, social transgression, symbolic transgression and autotransgression, respectively [Kozielecki, 1997: 170].

A key role in shaping or intensifying intergenerational differences is played by microgenerations – the avant-garde groups which constitute a distinct stimulus to overstep the generational boundaries. These groups are the aforementioned transgressionists that acquire growing masses of followers, who follow in their cultural footsteps. These generational footsteps form a pattern which constitutes a type of generational identity, i.e. a product of an objective internalisation of the generation's spirit, which occurs when an individual grows up surrounded by peers in specified axionormative framework. However, other individuals, regardless of their demographic conditions, may also choose to follow this pattern, if they identify with an age group other than their own. Historical context is very important for declaring, manifesting, or even subconsciously following the pattern of generational transgression [Wątroba, 2017: 269].

Intergenerational transgressions reconstruct the social world, regardless of different cultural contexts and time perspective. Transgressionists are the subject of this reconstruction, but the question of why growing masses of individuals, called followers, find the transgressionists' proposals acceptable or not, remains unanswered. A transgression is not only overstepping social, cultural and ethical boundaries, but it is also an evident act of disapproval – though often unintentional – of the constitutive features of the preceding generation.

Intergenerational transgression is accomplished in two ways. It may be a transgression in the processual sense of the word, which carries all potential tensions that facilitate clear articulation of the main stimulus of transgression, its magnitude, its intensity, and also the area of its influence. Nevertheless, the category of a transgression also has a static sense, i.e. a specific state, a final result of the process of evolving into the new form [Wątroba, 2017: 269-270].

Intergenerational transgression may be intensified when a generation appropriates the values, attitudes and behavioural patterns that were manifested by older generations, usually their grandparents. Such a situation may be referred to as a generational echo, or rather a generational resonance. This resonance may ultimately come down to a longing for a sense of community. This longing may in turn initiate and stimulate tendencies for a modified intergenerational transgression, namely an inversed transgression [Wątroba, 2017: 270].

Intergenerational transgressions are a process of constantly negotiating and adjusting new meanings, values, attitudes and operating principles. However, what seems to be new, is not always something that the older generations did not know. Sometimes we encounter simply a new version of something that was already in existence. Nowadays, for instance, it is noticeable in the indistinct sociological boundaries between adolescence and adulthood. These boundaries become blurred, or they are constantly redefined and renegotiated.

The Generational Identity of an Individual

Generations are an important element of biological genealogy; but they are also an essential part of cultural genealogy. They are formed by individuals who share common attitudes, which are determined by historical events that they collectively experienced [Ossowska, 1963: 57]. Although the view that each

generation has its own identity intuitively seems right, it is actually a far-fetched generalisation. Especially in a democratic society which approves of pluralism and free choice, subgroups with different types of social consciousness can be found in one generation, mainly in the youngest one [Morgan & Kunkel, 2011: 11]. They frequently become an essential stimulus in the process of shaping generational identity.

The generational identity of an individual reflects the extent to which they accept the value system, attitudes, behaviours, or artefacts that are perceived as attributes of a specific generation. This identity is defined as the fact of an individual becoming aware of belonging to a given generation, and endowing that group with significance in the individual's life [Urick, 2012: 103].

An individual's identity generally refers either to continuation, i.e. to sameness, or to separateness, also called distinctiveness [Bokszański, 2005: 36]. The latter is articulated in transgression of attitudes and behaviours of an individual. Identity is a profoundly complex phenomenon which is based on the so-called identification, that is identifying with certain configurations of values, historical facts and cultural patterns [Misztal, 2000: 143] that are shaped through discourse [Bauman, 1998: 208]. In post-modern reality the individual is increasingly often allowed by the society to overstep the boundaries of social convention, also in terms of subjectively identifying with a specific generation, even if it is not consistent with their date of birth.

In the age of late capitalism, and in the post-modern atmosphere of fluidity and hybridity, identity is not only shaped in a discursive manner, but it is also a flexible and open system of identification [Misztal, 2000: 143], even in terms of such an objective framework as an individual's age. Age is losing its supreme importance. As a consequence, individuals more frequently identify with a different generation than their age would indicate, usually with the younger one. The post-modern society imposes the necessity to question and negotiate identity, since in the age of late capitalism almost everything that had previously determined the place of people and groups in the social world, is now subjected to deconstruction [Mach, 2008: 8].

Constructing an individual's generational identity primarily leads up to accommodation of intergenerational transgressions. Accepting transgressions that are brought about by peers is not too much of a challenge, as it basically bears the characteristics of demonstrating collective conformism. However, sometimes an individual, who is a representative of another age group, assimilates a transgression which generally rejects or defies the element that characterises the generation to which the individual is assigned by their birthday. Such a situation is called a multiplied generational transgression [Wątroba, 2017: 259].

Generational identity is manifested by an individual, but at the same time it must be acknowledged and accepted by a specified community, namely a generation, cohort or microgeneration. Generationality develops in everybody, but not everybody is a member of a generation [Garewicz, 1983: 77]. They become a member when they begin to identify with a generation. In the age of late capitalism, identity has become something that is acquired, as opposed to something that is given on the basis of the place that one has taken in an orderly and stable world [Jawłowska, 2001: 51]. It is a process of subjective auto-creation of an individual, rather than a state of being objectively situated in the society; more of a postulate or an aim than a property; a situation more than a state of ownership. This situation gives the individual the possibility to choose which generation they identify with.

An individual's generational identity is the auto-definition of their place in the cultural space, as well as the acceptance of value systems, attitudes, behaviours and artefacts that characterise the cultural context of a generation with which they identify. Identifying as a member of a specific generation comes down to experiencing a sense of obligation, trust, loyalty and solidarity. In other words, it means defining a "we" to which „I" belong, and it refers to the way I perceive myself, and what is of significance to me [Giddens, 2004: 52].

The generational identity of an individual is a cultural identity, also because the category of a generation, in spite of demographic conditions, is evidently a cultural category. Considering that, cultural identity should be perceived as a process in which individuals define themselves in relation to some elements of symbolic reality, and in relation to the cultural world, by means of which they can distinguish themselves from others [Jawłowska, 2001: 53]. In case of generational identity this process translates into

identifying with a culturally specified generation, and accepting, or more often internalizing intergenerational transgressions. These transgressions are manifested slightly less frequently, and they are socially implemented only in the case of creative individuals.

The concept of collective generational identity can be supported only in relation to microgenerations, or subgenerations, which inspired, stimulated and consolidated the characterization of subsequent generations. Nevertheless, it still remains nothing more than a communication construct which facilitates characterising and analysing generations, particularly referring to a group of individuals who identify with the cultural pattern of going through all stages of social existence, regardless of their age. If one insists on the existence of such an identity, one should accept that it is a generational identity shared by individuals, not the identity of a generation, which describes a particular state of collective consciousness [Wątroba, 2017: 266].

Generations of Late Capitalism

The essential determinants of the category of a generation are:

- a high degree of its separateness from the preceding generation;
- distinctness that determines its significance and influence of social reality; the ability to adjust social institutions to its convictions and values;
- sharing the experience of historical events, and interpreting them collectively – a generation is not created by history, but by adopting the social history of community, especially during adolescence;
- a specific and unique set of values, attitudes and behaviours, which imply the generation's reactions to changes in various aspects of its existence, and the possibility to create new forms of its social surroundings.

Such an interpretation of the category of a generation induces an attempt to indicate the most important generations that are in existence in the order of late capitalism, which characterises the post-war societies that had developed on the foundations of Western Christian culture. The negation of generational periodization, which has been assumed earlier in this paper, makes it impossible to precisely mark out the periods in which the representatives of generations identified here were born, especially since contemporary generational identities are often very different from peer groups.

In the following characterization of generations it is essential to differentiate between the years of transgressionists, who constitute an avant-garde of intergenerational transgressions, and the years of followers, who internalize these transgressions. However, in the brief characterization of generations, years of birth are merely a general outline employed for the sake of generalization. Nevertheless, the legitimacy of the said generalization is easy to prove on the basis of abundant historical materials concerning the events of the past one hundred years - events that had stimulated generational changes.

Traditionalists – a *non-generation*

In many dissertations authors have adopted the term Traditionalists to define people who were born in the interwar period, as well as those born during World War II. However, this approach needs to be revised, or even rejected, as it recognizes individuals who present completely different generational characterizations as one generation, on the basis of the aforementioned definition of a generation. In fact, the term Traditionalists is used to define two generations who have earned this label by collectively, though not universally, opposing the subjects of the cultural revolution of the 1960s. Their opposition involved standing in favour of tradition. They are the two cohorts that distinctly antagonized the generation born after World War II, commonly referred to Baby Boomers, but also people born at the beginning of the 1940s, from whom the majority of authentic and spiritual leaders of the revolution originated.

A similar attitude to traditional forms of organizing social life is not enough to define such an abundant group of people as one generation, especially if we take into account the whole array of differences in perceiving the tumultuous events. Therefore it is more rational to divide this group into two generations: the Greatest Generation and the Silent Generation. The fundamental difference of life experiences between these two generations is visible in their perception of the Great Depression. The older ones remembered the moment when the economy collapsed in 1929, whereas the younger ones grew up during the crisis and the period of getting out of it. However, the most significant difference is in the way these two groups experienced World War II. The older ones were the primary age group fighting on the front line, whereas the younger ones were at their homes, in bunkers or in exile, in constant fear of death, trying to play as quietly as possible. Insofar as the older ones had built their image as heroes, fully earning the title of the Greatest Generation [which was given to them half a century later], the younger ones were constantly overshadowed, as they had nothing to offer that would have been of interest to historians, only playing quietly.

The Greatest Generation

1918 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27

For over one hundred years, the most distinctive generation has been The Greatest Generation, primarily because the events, of which they were the most important actors, were extremely dramatic. Perhaps Baby Boomers might be a match for them, but only in terms of their *ideological* and cultural power to influence social reality of the Western world, rather than being able to present any actual achievements that would be reflected in cultural and economic advancement.

Their childhood overlapped with the Great Depression – a time when their parents and grandparents were losing their businesses, land, jobs, and above all, their hope; a time when looking towards the future was limited to the period of the next few days. As they were growing up, an economic revival took place, but soon World War II broke out, and they were forced to abandon their workplaces and schools, but also places of entertainment, and above all else, their friends, loved ones and parents. They were required to put on uniforms and defend the world from ruthless and cruel totalitarian systems. A time in their lives which should have been full of love and learning the everyday routine, turned out to be filled with fighting, sometimes in extremely primitive existential conditions, in a landscape dominated by bloodshed. When the war came to an end, they celebrated their victory together with other generations, and almost immediately started rebuilding their private lives and the world in which they wished to live. They were exceptionally mature for their age; they were hardened by the events in which they took part, disciplined by the military drill, and ready to sacrifice themselves for the sake of others. After the war, they all but instantly began to make up for the time they had lost fighting, they were getting married, starting large families, thus laying the foundations for the next generation. They remained faithful to the values of personal responsibility, conscientiousness, honour, and trust in the future. At the same time, many of them attended schools and universities; they worked and studied, compensating for their insufficient education, which had been interrupted by the war. Equipped with diplomas and new qualifications, they became a new kind of army, which began to enter all areas of life, carrying with them the same passion and discipline that they displayed during World War II. In every stage of their lives they constituted the key power in meeting challenges that were new to the world. What is more, they did not expect, even in the slightest degree, any gratitude from others [Brokaw, 2001: xix-xxi, 11; Wątroba, 2017: 53]. They were not fighting on the front line, working in the arms industry, rebuilding the ruins of their homes, building a better, post-war world in order to gain appreciation, glory or a comfortable life. They were doing so because they believed in a positive perception of life, in purposefulness of sacrifice, and above all, in success that the future generations would benefit from [Wątroba, 2017, 65-66].

The Greatest Generation relied on the essential pillars of society: family, religion, and hard work. Their value system was based on religious and ethnic values, as well as the imperative of remaining

moderate in every situation. They got joy from sharing meals, gathering with family, and meeting with the members of their religious communities. They earned the title of the Greatest Generation with their ability of self-discipline and sacrifice for the society, their patience in postponing the gratification, and their readiness to fight until the victory in World War II. Although as time went on, they undeniably benefited from the significant improvement of living conditions in the post-war period, for most of them material goods were never as important as they were for the generation of their children [Wątroba, 2017: 54-55]. The trauma of experiencing the war made them more careful and conservative in all aspects of life. Relying on themselves became their most distinguishable feature [Angel, 2008: 66, 141].

The Greatest Generation believed that social institutions provided them with an exclusive opportunity to realize great aims, and fulfil dreams of victory over fascism and Stalinism, space exploration, as well as egalitarization of knowledge and inventions that made everyday life better. They displayed, and they still do, an unconditional trust in social institutions. Their attachment to tradition caused them to do their best to follow the conservative model of a family, with traditionally determined social roles of its members.

They became the first generation of retirees who experienced the pleasures of a decent pension, as well as gratitude and tributes occasionally displayed by younger generations. They actively engaged in all kinds of civil movements, in the activity of trade unions, religious organizations or political parties. They remained active until they reached an advanced age, and even then they became the most disciplined electorate, and the most attentive recipients of media coverage reporting affairs that are important for the world [Mettler, 2006: 3-4]. They were characterised by trust and respect for authority, which is why they fully accepted all decisions of the government. They turned to authority for guidance on how to act and inspiration for everyday existence.

Loyalty was one of the most prominent features of the Greatest Generation. By means of it, they could realize even unimaginable aims. They had learned that partnership in great institutions ensures achieving supreme goals. Most of them remembered the 1950s as the nearly perfect past, which made them critical about the cultural revolution of the 1960s. A significant part of them demanded that authorities intervene, even physically, in the revolution. They entirely supported the actions of the police during the riots, and they also called for introducing censorship in pop culture, thus ultimately manifesting their conservatism [Steinhorn, 2006: 37].

The Greatest Generation perfectly seized the opportunity that History had given them, even though they had no influence on it during their childhood and adolescence. On the verge of adulthood, they proved themselves as executors of the directives of History, in combat as well as in organic work, when they took the reins of power. The world that they left for future generations might have been far from perfect, but, from today's perspective, it was the finest so far [Wątroba, 2017: 77].

The Silent Generation

1928 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39

The Silent Generation, significantly less numerous, and definitely less influential than the Greatest Generation, was an extremely creative cohort. The majority of its representatives have fully earned their label [Butz, 1958], but its avant-garde, occasionally referred to as the Lyric Generation [Ricard, 1994: 22-25], or the Lucky Few [Carlson, 2008: 11-12], has become one of the loudest microgenerations in modern history of the Western world, and has been setting the main directions in the world's cultural development over the past seven decades. Perhaps considering the fact that the first generation who entirely accepted the visions the Lyric Generation were Baby Boomers, the Lucky Few should also be classified as members of this generation, disregarding the original *circumstance* for forming that term, which was the baby boom that had begun in 1946. From the sociological point of view, the cultural revolution of the 1960s should be considered the constitutive factor for Boomers, which is why individuals born during the war are undoubtedly an integral [though avant-garde] part of this generation. All things considered, the Silent Generation should be defined as all those who remember their *silent* childhood during World War II.

The Silent Generation is situated between the self-sufficient, assertive Greatest Generation, and insubordinate, self-actualizing Boomers. Since there were not many of them, due to a small number of births during the Great Depression and the war, they turned out to be dominated both by the Greatest Generation and Baby Boomers. As a minority, they pragmatically adopted the values of the older generation, hoping to become the beneficiaries of the post-war economic boom. Education, career, and social advancement were supposed to be History's gift to them and open their path to succession. However, History had fated them to being the Silent Generation, and their calculation turned out to be futile when confronted with the next generation. Actually, there was no confrontation at all, as they were downright blown away by the demographic avalanche of Boomers. All that was left for the Silent Generation was to assume the role of mediators between two remarkably numerous and distinctive cohorts [Starr, 2009: 353].

The members of the Silent Generation were born too late to become war heroes, but at the same time too early to fully experience the atmosphere of free youth. They assumed conformism as their way to personal, and especially professional success. Their adult life became an uncertain existence of being caught between the generations of reliable seniors and passionate juniors [Strauss, Howe & Markiewicz, 2006: 18]. As a consequence, they had no ambitions to conquer the post-war world, and they did not take up any new challenges. Instead of changing the system, they only wished to function in it. They were, like no other generation before them, withdrawn, careful, unimaginative, indifferent, avoiding any risks, even meek [Howe & Strauss, 2003: 12]. The motto of their everyday existence was "save a little, spend a little" [Sutherland & Thompson, 2003: 8].

However, many representatives of the Silent Generation succumbed to the post-war myth of the youngest generation's rebellion against traditional popular culture. This rebellion was aimed at the pathologies of the traditional education system, and at the same time it was an answer to the erosion of the traditional model of social life [Wątroba, 2017: 62]. Their revolution, however, turned out to be merely a quiet harbinger of the revolution of the 1960s, just like their existence was quiet compared to the existence and rebellion of the generation of Baby Boomers.

The initial pragmatism of the Silent Generation was imposed on them as a result of their small numbers, compared to the younger generation. However, it turned out to be a wrong strategy in the face of cultural changes of the 1960s and new economic reality of late capitalism, but above all else in the face of the Baby Boomers' ambition to take the reins directly from the Greatest Generation, thus excluding the cohort situated between the two. The members of the Silent Generation were forced to replace their pragmatism with conformism. All that was left for them was to make the most of the consumptional horn of plenty, in humble silence [Wątroba, 2017: 76].

The feeble generational distinctness of the Silent Generation is a result of how varied the life experiences of its representatives were. The older ones were closer to the world of the Greatest Generation, which they defended during the rebellion of the second half of the 1950s and in the 1960s – a rebellion that was led by their younger kinsmen. The Silent Generation did not get the historical opportunity that was given to the Greatest Generation and Boomers; an opportunity in the form of events which would have granted them generational distinctness, and which would have allowed them to integrate individuals, shaping a strong generational identity in them - an identity different from those of the older and younger generation.

The Golden Baby Boomers

1940 **41** **42** **43** **44** **45** **46** **47** **48** **49** **50** **51** **52** **53** **54** **55** **56**

The Lyric Generation was the elite avant-garde of the forthcoming wave of Baby Boomers, in spite of the aforementioned views. As the older siblings, who had grown up in the post-war atmosphere of optimism and economic development, they became the leaders of the greatest generational revolution of the 20th century, as mentioned earlier. However, without the great wave of Boomers, the Lyric Generation would

have never gained such a great, now historical, significance. It was this wave that carried them to its front as its elite division. Without it, they would have remained an insignificant episode in the cultural history of the Enlightenment world [Wątroba, 2017: 60-61].

The Lyric Generation was the first microgeneration to have experienced economic development, cultural advancement, and the commodification of nearly every aspect of human existence. Thus they became the first to have fully benefited from the egalitarization of the consumption that was once elitist. They were the first cohort whose childhood was subjected to an unparalleled evolution, which had turned this stage of their lives into a time of safe, even idyllic fun among peers, and of cinema screenings and TV programmes, which later turned into an important subject in the process of their socialization and upbringing [Ricard, 1994: 56]. Nevertheless, they remain merely an avant-garde microgeneration in the cohort of Baby Boomers.

Although the term Baby Boomer was first used in relation to the sudden increase in the number of births after World War II [cf. Wątroba, 2017: 78], nowadays it is mainly associated with the generation which, in such a short period of time, managed to change the [not only] capitalistic world to an extent that was unparalleled in the history of mankind. This is the generation which constituted the essential subject of radical cultural revolution, which even for a moment did not let anybody question their leadership, which considers itself timeless.

Although from a strictly demographic point of view, Baby Boomers are generally regarded as people born between 1946 and 1964, their historical significance that was discussed above justifies a revision of this approach. Therefore, Boomers, or rather the Golden Boomers, should be understood as people born during World War II, but who do not remember it, and those who were born in the first decade after the war. They were all united by social perception of the cultural, or as some prefer to call it, youth revolution of the 1960s, and by the social aura that derived from radical improvement of the economic situation and social advancement, which were especially visible when members of this cohort were growing up. Until the end of the 20th century, the Golden Baby Boomers constituted the most numerous, the most educated and the most expansive generation in history, hence they are sometimes referred to as the Leading Baby Boomers [Morgan, Kunkel, 2001: 274] or Alpha Boomers [Henig & Henig, 2012: 9].

The Golden Baby Boomers rejected, or redefined traditional values that the previous generations used to cultivate. They felt historically privileged, and they expected, or even demanded an improvement of the world which, according to them, should be dominated by advancement. However, they only accepted the said advancement on the basis of social revolution against the traditional world. Their whole life path is characterised by cultural accomplishment [in spite of their partial divergence from the original slogans of the revolution], but most of all it is distinguished by economic accomplishment. This accounts for the term Golden Boomers. For the past few decades they have crucially influenced the image of contemporary world. At the same time, they constitute the most powerful consumer group, financially as well as culturally, and they still determine the post-modern models of consumer culture [Wątroba, 2017: 81]. However, their utmost achievement is the general recognition of the rights and liberties of the individual. They were the leaders of movements in favour of civil liberties, gender, racial and religious equality, respecting the rights of non-heterosexual and disabled people, and above all, the privacy of the individual [Cochran, Rothschadl, Rudick, 2009: 2].

From and early age they considered themselves the perfect generation [Metcalf, 2015: 148], and they have always considered self-fulfilment to be one of the most important life goals. Their faith in achieving this goal stimulated their strong individualism, ambition to question authority figures and arbitrarily established rules, as well as their disdain for beaurocracy [Gillon, 2004: 12]. In every stage of their lives they have left a clear and distinct imprint on the society: they contributed to rapid suburbanization; they created youth culture, hitherto unknown in the history of social advancement; as the beneficiaries of rapidly developing higher education, they influenced the society as its most educated generation with remarkably high ambitions [cf. Monhollon, 2010: xiii].

They are an exceptional generation because their generational distinctness was revealed as early as in their adolescent years. Whereas the preceding generations were characterised by commonness of life experiences, on the grounds of which their generational identity was loosely shaped, the Golden Baby

Boomers, as they endeavoured to have an impact on events, were the first generation to have their own, clearly specified awareness of themselves as an independent entity [Gillon, 2004: 4]. They have become the most spatially mobile and geographically liberated generation [Goldsmith, 2008: 13].

Being the well educated and gifted young optimists that they were, Baby Boomers began to question the ideals of their parents' generation, and object the existing order. They also began to question community and collectivity of actions, at the same time manifesting their strong will of competition, which was a consequence of their abundance and their constant necessity to compete with peers. Their parents had given them the privilege of focusing on themselves, and the possibility to orientate their needs on themselves, without having to care about the general interest. This reaffirmed their conviction that they can, or even should question the position of older generations, and take the reins as soon as possible [Lancaster & Stillman, 2002: 22-23; Wątroba, 2012: 68; Wątroba, 2017: 86-87].

They claimed their right to freedom of behaviour, and to establishing rules and abolishing them as they pleased, the right to embrace in public, to experiment with drugs, or to overstep the boundaries between genders. They believed that nobody was more talented or wiser than themselves, nobody had higher principles, and nobody was better fit to lead the world to its better future. Not only did they know what was best for them, but they still believe that they know what is best for others [Rosen, 2001: 64-65].

Television, which recorded and publicized the Boomers' existence, was the medium which shaped their generational identity to the highest degree. It reported their social and political activity. Right before their eyes television transformed youth into a cultural phenomenon [Tapscott, 2009: 14], it shaped their common language, and it presented their favourite music and films, creating their shared culture. Boomers were bombarded with television commercials filled with images of prosperous life abounding in new consumer goods, which could satisfy their innermost, though increasingly often exposed, desires and appetites [Gillon, 2004: 9]. Television had become their source of knowledge about popular culture, and for many of them also about everyday life [Adams, 2010: 119; Wątroba, 2014: 19].

Although they are endowed with high political awareness, though active participation in social and political movements had shaped their value system to a large degree, they are characterised by a significant mistrust for politicians, which largely stemmed from their negative experiences of the 1960s and 1970s [Goldsmith, 2008: 13, 18], and most of all from their lost illusions of the possibility to realise the Enlightenment project.

As they grew older, they began to fear the consequences of cultural anarchy which they initiated in their youth. This fear triggered a wave of nostalgia, which causes an increasing number of them to judge the past as being better than the present. They began to feel nostalgic about their parents' world, which admittedly was a world of limited choices, but it also was a world of solid social relations [Gillon, 2004: 287]. They grew up in a world of unlimited possibilities, and when a discrepancy between their expectations and reality appeared, they have begun to immerse in scepticism and cynicism [Gillon, 2004: 312-313].

When they look towards the future, the Golden Baby Boomers grossly fear: the lack of money; dangers to personal safety which may emerge from the increasing crime rate, as well as their own decreasing physical fitness; low self-acceptance due to their appearance in old age; dissatisfaction with life achievement, often resulting from exaggerated expectations, which stem from their youth. But first and foremost, they fear losing what they value so much – their subjectivism and independence [Moschis, 2007: 21-22]. These fears, or the wish to overcome them, make many older Baby Boomers come back to the traditional religions that they abandoned in their youth.

Generation Jones

1957 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65

The characterization of Baby Boomers assumed in many dissertations identifies them as people born between 1946 and 1964, which is based on the duration of a significant increase of the number of births.

However, from the sociological point of view it is entirely baseless [cf. Gillon, 2004: 14; Wątroba, 2017: 79], not only because it excludes people born during World War II, which was mentioned earlier, but it also requires a distinct demarcation in the middle of this historical period. The demarcation line separates the Golden Baby Boomers, who were characterised above, from the cohort born in the second decade after the war, generally referred to as Generation Jones. Although the social consciousness of Generation Jones was not very different from that of Baby Boomers, their life experiences were completely different. The young members of Generation Jones, sometimes called Shadow Boomers, almost entirely shared the ideas of the older generation, as well as their value systems, convictions, interests, idols and interpretation of History, but they did not share their enthusiasm and commitment to the endeavour to fix the world. They grew up in better economic conditions, largely getting their knowledge of the world surrounding them from rapidly developing media, mainly television. Hence their perception of events demonstrated more insight and comprehensiveness, and they were shaped by different products of mass culture. Above all else, their experiences already focused on different events, as they were too young to genuinely participate in the cultural revolution, which was constitutive for the generation of Golden Boomers. Later, as they entered adulthood, they were under an impression that they were too *late* to benefit from the post-war economic prosperity. Even if they did go to the Beatles' concert with their older siblings, they only remembered the shrieks of fans, just as even if they got a job in a corporation, their career path always involved *chasing* after the Golden Boomers, who were always in the lead.

From an early age, their existence was a life in the shadow of their older brothers and sisters. Only in their early childhood, in the golden 1960s, they could have been convinced that they were the most important generation. However, it was merely the result of their older siblings treating them instrumentally, like a kind of a domestic toy, and from the traditional overprotectiveness which parents typically display towards their youngest child. This is why they have been labelled Generation Jones, which reflects their longing for this time, since *to jones* informally means to have a longing, a wonderful memory of something that is irretrievably lost. For their whole lives they have had a feeling of always being late for the feast. When they entered adult life, they could not rely on the economic situation which was found by the older Boomers, mainly due to the decreasing rate of economic growth, and especially because of more competition on the job market, and all the best positions having already been taken by their older kinsmen [Morgan & Kunkel, 2011: 273-274]. They were not as optimistic as the previous cohort, but not because of being more and more disappointed with the world in which they grew up, but because they did not benefit from the post-war boom to such an extent as the Golden Baby Boomers did [cf. Wątroba, 2014: 17]. This is why many of them oppose being labelled as Baby Boomers [Heath, 2006: 8].

The members of Generation Jones did their best, though not very effectively, to emphasize their distinctness and independence from the older Boomers. The said distinctness was primarily expressed in their attributes related to spending their leisure time, in their fashion and hairstyles, and especially in their musical taste [cf. Gravett &Throckmorton, 2007: 67]. Some of them listened to a heavier kind of rock, others preferred disco music, and often did not share the musical preferences of their older siblings who grew up listening to the music of the 1960s, and kept listening to it almost until old age [Wątroba, 2017: 80].

The historical position of Generation Jones in relation to the Golden Boomers is similar to that of the Silent Generation in relation to the Greatest Generation. Both minor generations generally shared the value systems, convictions and attitudes of the older cohorts. Hence the Silent Generation and the Greatest Generation are often referred to as the great generation of Traditionalists, and the two following generations are simply called Baby Boomers. Nevertheless, for both cohorts that followed the two most distinctive generations in the previous century, it was not possible to genuinely experience the events that were crucial for shaping the characterization of the Greatest Generation and the Golden Baby Boomers.

Generation X

1966 67 68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75 76

Generation X was initially referred to as *Baby Bust* [demographic decline, a "bust of births"], but the current name, popularized by Douglas Coupland, was adopted rather quickly. The X stands for the unknown, the uncertainty of the future and of the course of history. It refers to individuals who feel excluded from the society, who entered the job market only to discover that all the lucrative posts had already been taken by the older generations [Tapscott, 2009: 14]. This generation was recruited from apathetic, professionally dissatisfied, overeducated individuals who exhibit a high sense of self-worth. Due to the small size of the cohort, they have no chance to articulate an audible protest, or to find themselves in a new form of culture, one that would suit them [Wątroba, 2017: 131].

A high divorce rate, their mothers taking up work, and insufficient funds in their families to hire someone to look after the children who were left at home, caused many representatives of Generation X to spend most of their time, after coming home from school, alone. It all contributed to changing, distorting, or even perverting the existing models of socialisation and upbringing of the youngest members of society. Hence this generation is sometimes called the generation affected by the lonely child syndrome. It is also referred to as the Latchkey Kids Generation [Ryan, 2007: 16], A Tribe Apart [Montgomery, 2007: 6], the Drifting Generation characterised by bitterness and a sense of being rejected [Heath, 2006: 8], the Invisible Generation, Shadow Generation or the Indifferent Generation [Van Den Bergh & Behrer, 2011: 8], as well as the Children of the 80s [Sujansky & Ferri-Reed, 2009: 65-68].

The consciousness of the representatives of this generation is characterised by scepticism, aversion to politics, and recurring anxiety about the possibility of further advancement. Concurrently, they also feel the lack of a generational identity, as well as lack of a clearly defined vision of their future. They are devoid of ambition and social vitality, but also of arrogance and pride that characterised Baby Boomers. They are a highly heterogeneous generation, especially in terms of race, class, religion and sexual orientation [Wątroba, 2017: 132, 135].

Generation X marks the first generation of the post-modern meritocracy. Its representatives are well educated, they exhibit broad intellectual horizons, and they are usually materially affluent. In spite of that, they deliberately emigrate to the outskirts of *mainstream*. They constitute the first digital and satellite generation, who grew up with the new technologies of mutual communication, and whose childhood games and playthings were transferred from yards to the world of satellite television and computer games, and with time also to the Internet. What they find there is another life – a life that is extremely different from their everyday routine. They are responsible for applying new technologies in the social domain and the commercial existence of contemporary individuals [Wątroba, 2012: 34; Wątroba, 2017: 135].

As they were growing up in the atmosphere of rapidly occurring political, economic and social changes, they learned to rely solely on themselves. They are willing to set up their own businesses, they want to make decisions concerning changing their career paths, and modify their expectations freely, as well as the realisation of these expectations [Falk & Falk, 2005: 63]. But at the same time it is important for them to satisfy the need to belong. Trust, competences, professional and personal achievements, professionalism, independence and freedom are values that are substantial to them. They see the key to achieving high status, especially economic, in these very values [Wątroba, 2017: 137]. They are principally characterised by individualism and a sense of independence [cf. *Generation X*, 2006: 1].

Although it is difficult to point out one event that the members of Generation X collectively experienced and which would be constitutive for them as a generation, they are definitely more than merely a demographic category – they have personal and collective experiences which shaped the way they perceive the world, and the way they live their lives in this world [Henseler, 2012: 1]. They are characterised by rational exuberance, because they believe that the course of events must be in accordance with their expectations. They also have faith in their own abilities. Although they seem to be confident, behind the facade of *a tough guy* they conceal a sense of insecurity, or even fear of a catastrophe which may happen at any time [Rosen, 2001: 42]. It might be a consequence of them lacking emotional support

and advice of the adults with regard to issues that were important to them when they were growing up [Little, 2009: 125]. Presumably it is also caused by the fact that this resourceful generation, which relies solely on itself, does not trust social institutions [Alsop, 2008: 6].

Generation X is to be considered the principal social subject of the post-modern aesthetics, as it has a taste for eclectism, pastiche and assimilation, and in popular culture it prefers dystopian topics. This preference might stem from their pessimism, as well as from the sense of shortage of perspectives, or lack of an optimistic vision of the world which characterised the older generations [cf. Navajas, 2007: 3-14]. However, generally speaking, the culture represented by Generation X is more of a renaissance of the culture of Boomers than a negation of it. Not only did Generation X adopt the ethos of self-realisation, which was typical for Baby Boomers, but it also endowed it with a qualitatively higher dimension. They expressed their individualism in new ways, which unfortunately was often marked with cynicism and apathy [Gillon, 2004: 264; Wątroba, 2014: 23].

Echo Boomers

1977 78 79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86

The majority of research on contemporary generations refers to the people born during the last two decades of the 20th century as Millennials. This term was coined as early as in 1988, and was initially used in relation to children who were beginning their education [Strauss, Howe & Markiewicz, 2006: 17]. However, for such a young cohort the term generation could have hardly been used in the sociological sense, though this kind of proposal undeniably presents a certain arranging value from the point of view of research on pedagogy or psychology. The term Generation Y, which emerged later – in 1993 – and concerned school-aged youngsters, became equally popular. However, with time the latter has given way to the former. This was due to a clear disapproval of the cohort defined with these two terms [cf. Alsop, 2008: vi; Johnstone, 2013: 2; Wątroba, 2017: 157], who decidedly opposed any attempts to being associated with Generation X, which was suggested by using the next letter in the alphabet. Millennials strongly prefer to be associated with Baby Boomers, and not with Generation X.

Nevertheless, also the name Millennials is only slightly less unfortunate than the term Generation Y. The turn of the millennium is not an event significant enough to be a constitutive factor for a new generation; actually, it is downright marginal. Nonetheless, it is extremely difficult to point out such an event in the lives of individuals born during the last quarter of the 20th century. Therefore the only sociologically valid determinant, which characterises the members of this generation, is their perception of the surrounding world, or rather their social consciousness. Among other labels proposed for this generation [Millennial Generation, Generation Next, Generation Net, Web Generation, Echo Boomers], it is the name Echo Boomers that seems to be the most suitable, but provided that it is used only in relation to the individuals born during the significant increase of births in the families of Baby Boomers. This cohort was born in the decade of the turn of the 1970s and 1980s. They are different from the next cohort in their perception of development and egalitarization of digital technologies in the 1990s. The digital revolution was not something that was already in place when they were born – as it was the case for the next cohort. Echo Boomers grew up together with the development of digital devices, as well as with popularization of the Internet and mobile phones. Their experiences in this matter were entirely different than those of the next cohort.

What seems to be the essential determining factor in considering this cohort the generation of Echo Boomers is their sociological portrait, which is so remarkably similar to that of Baby Boomers. Objectively speaking, Echo Boomers, who in many cases are the offspring of Baby Boomers, their demographic echo, constitute the most numerous generation in history [Tapscott, 2009: 11-13]. They also echo Baby Boomers in terms of the role that they ascribe to themselves in creating that history, as well as in their expectations and plans for their lives. However, the term Echo Boomers does not necessarily mean that all of them are children of Baby Boomers. The offspring of older members of the latter

generation are representatives of Generation X [cf. Sujansky, Ferri-Reed, 2009: 58-59]. The term associates the two very abundant generations in categories of their characterisations and their generational identities.

To simplify, for the sake of the limited form of this analysis, the portrait of Echo Boomers is consistent with the portrait of the Golden Baby Boomers. What distinguishes them from the older generation is their ability to express their feelings, more flexibility in realizing the goals they have chosen for themselves, presentistic approach to life, as well as the necessity to sustain balance between professional and private life, and as a consequence assigning more significance to family life. These differences are in accordance with the spirit of post-modern age, they emphasize this cohort's separateness from the most *enlightened* generation of the past two hundred years, namely the Golden Boomers. Furthermore, there are visible objective differences, which arise from civilisation advancement and egalitarization of its results. These differences are reflected in the Echo Boomers' level of education, their knowledge of the contemporary world being derived from abundant sources, as well as from their own experiences, and above all in their fluency in using the latest techniques and technologies of communication and data processing.

Millennials, or Rather the Internet Generation

1987 88 89 90 91 92 93 94 95 96 97

If we come to the conclusion that it is difficult to indicate any events in the lives of Echo Boomers which would give them a status of a socially distinct generation [and the new demographic boom is hardly such an event], it turns out to be even more difficult in the case of the next cohort. Of course, it may be assumed that this cohort is still young enough to face events that might endow it with the said distinctness. However, the view that it is a case of the aforementioned generational interregnum is far more likely. The only distinct feature that distinguishes Millennials from the older cohort is the fact that they have been dealing with the latest technologies virtually since the moment they were born. Another, less distinct feature is their feeling of being in the shadow of Echo Boomers, which, however, is not as strong as it was in the Silent Generation, Generation Jones, or Generation X. Nonetheless, this feeling is being increasingly stimulated by the reality of economic world of late capitalism, by narrowing professional perspectives, which also affects the life prospects of young people entering adulthood. The piling of problems of the contemporary world may result in this generation eventually being labelled as the Lost Generation, from the historical point of view, or it may earn another nickname in case a political, economic and social eruption occurs.

The Next Generation

1998 99 2000 01 02 03 04 05 06 07 08 09 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17

The oldest representatives of this cohort are just now entering adult life, in the formal sense. However, since the threshold of adulthood in economic, and especially in social terms, has been significantly moved in the past few decades, it is difficult to compare this moment in the lives of the representatives of the this age group with the oldest generations characterised here. Therefore, in sociological terms, it is definitely too early for an attempt to characterise this cohort as a generation. Even the previous generations, whose social adulthood began earlier, created their generational distinctness at an older age; the oldest representatives of the Greatest Generation were slightly older when they were mobilized to the army fighting in World War II; the oldest Boomers at this age still seemed to be good kids, and were just entering the universities in which they were destined to initiate the cultural revolution; Generation X graduated from universities and began to wonder if they had any perspectives of professional fulfilment;

and Echo Boomers were prolonging their youth by choosing several fields of study, or travelling around the world, entering the reality of professional and family life at an even older age.

Much more time is necessary to attempt to outline the sociological portrait, to articulate distinct intergenerational transgressions, which would distinguish this cohort from the previous one. And all suggestions to name a generation which, in sociological terms, is not yet a generation, seem to be merely feeble attempts at making one's way into the world of pseudoscience. The future will verify whether this cohort should be labelled Postmillennials, Centennials ["The Centennials," 2015; Casella, 2015], the New Silent Generation [Yaney, 2011; Joseph, 2012; "Meet Generation Z," 2016], the Homeland Generation [Howe, 2014], iGen [Pollack, 2013: 1995], or the Heads-Down Generation [Jontong, 2013]...

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