

SOCIAL GENERATION CONCEPT IN SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to show that the social generation concept, when accurately formulated, is an important tool, empirically as well as in theory, for academics who seek a richer, more methodical data of how and why societies are transformed through cohort substitution. Scholars, mostly outside the United States, have begun describing how the social generation as a cultural concept, provides new insights into the process of social change caused by cohort replacement. While theoretically compelling, these arguments still suffer from a lack of empirical evidence to support them, as did the older formulations of the generation concept. This illustrates the cultural resonance and power of the word generation because its meaning and usage have been almost entirely unaffected by academic efforts to dictate its appropriate boundaries. Academic and popular books on generations perpetuate the problems that have plagued the generation concept: the multiple definitions of the term, the theoretical richness of the concept combined with the lack of empirical evidence to support it, and the perpetuation of stereotypes based on a selective representative of facts. Academic works on generations are frequently focused on what Mannheim called generation units rather than any large or representative section of a cohort of people, as the word generation implies. I, therefore try to build on these efforts to theorize the “social generation” by defining the concept in light of Mannheim’s seminal essay in the sociology of generations. This definition then offers the chance to empirically evaluate this theory of social generational change.

Keywords: Social change, generation, cohort, social generation, social structures, social reproduction.