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## Potentials of survivors, intergenerational dialogue, active ageing and social change

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### Abstract

**Problem statement:** Intergenerational dialogue is important for personality development in younger and older people, intergenerational solidarity, national and cultural identity, and social change. However, generations differ in approaches to society and history. **Research Questions:** Can intergenerational dialogues contribute to more effective use of older people's potentials of generativity in post-soviet societies? Do victims of war, younger generations, and society benefit from respective interventions? **Purpose of study:** Analysis of (1) predictors of generativity in older people (including differences between Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine), (2) impact of intergenerational dialogue on generativity development, life satisfaction, and perceived meaning of life in older people, (3) impact of intergenerational dialogue on generativity development and perceived old age potentials in younger people. **Research Methods:** Adaption of psychometric scales for assessment in Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine, cross-sectional multivariate analysis of relationships between socio-demographic variables and generativity in 404 older people (mean age 74.5 years), longitudinal analyses over a period of 2 years (4 points of measurement) in 287 older people (mean age 76.3 years) and 165 younger people (mean age 18.8 years). **Findings:** Generativity scores were highest in Ukraine and lowest in Russia. Socio-demographic variables and type of trauma explained for additional variance in generativity. Longitudinal analyses showed significant increases in generativity, satisfaction with relationships (lonely dissatisfaction), attitudes toward own ageing, agitation, self-acceptance, meaningfulness, and purpose in life in older people. Further results show increases in perceptions of old age potentials and generativity in younger people. **Conclusions:** Findings suggest that even in rapidly changing societies there is no insurmountable gap between generations. Encouraging self-initiated informal exchange on self-chosen historical and societal topics in the context of local intergenerational initiatives is a promising measure to support development and use of potentials of generativity in older people in the interest of the old, the young, and the whole society.

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## **1. Introduction**

The concept of active ageing signifies an understanding of ageing policy which considers demographic change as a manageable challenge for societal development. Focusing on individual development, the concept accentuates (1) that due to continuous engagement and use of competences age-related losses can be prevented or at least substantially delayed, (2) that maintenance and further differentiation of interests, competences, and activities in old age is a basis for satisfaction and well-being, (3) that most people experience opportunities to establish and maintain social relationships, to engage for the fulfilment of interests and preferences of self and others, to take responsibility and to actively contribute to further development of society as a source of belongingness, purpose and meaning in life, subjective well-being and quality of life (Kalache & Gatti, 2003; Kruse & Schmitt, 2012; Walker & Maltby, 2012). Focusing on societal development, the concept accentuates that (1) older people significantly contribute to human capital of society, (2) productivity in old age is expressed in numerous material and immaterial forms - societal usage of life competencies in older people must not be restricted to the area of work, paid or non-paid, (3) collective representations of old age and ageing have a sustainable impact on ageing processes, intergenerational relations, and societal opportunity structures. Generativity as a route to active ageing refers to a specific aspect of taking responsibility for others, i.e. 'concern in establishing and guiding the next generation' (Erikson, 1982). Already Erikson accentuated relatedness of the term to productivity and creativity. Today, generativity is no longer understood as a concept 'within' the individual but as a relational and multiply contextualized construct that links the person to the social world. Cultural demand for generativity can substantially change over time, e.g. against the background of demographic change, interest in possibilities and preconditions of development and effective use of strengths and potentials of old age has grown worldwide. But generativity is not only prompted by society, not only societies have benefit from generative action. Generativity concerns and generative action are an important part of adult identity (McAdams, Josselson & Lieblich, 2006). Adults construct and try to live out a 'generativity script' which not only reflects the past but is also important for current generative concerns and commitments as well as for an understanding of what is worth to outlive the self and what can and should be transmitted to others to live on through generative efforts (McAdams et al., 1997). Understanding generativity more as a lifelong concern than a life stage-specific developmental task is supported by two larger cross-cultural studies of our institute. In a comparative study we worked out together with colleagues from universities of Colima, Guadalupe, Juste and Madrid (Schmitt, 2013a), we analyzed relationships between generativity, optimism, and satisfaction with life in a sample of 3.308 subjects between 59 and 108 years of age. In each of the countries generativity was a highly significant predictor of optimism and satisfaction with life - regardless of the specific region considered, subjective health, financial resources and family status could explain only for a much smaller amount of variance in optimism and satisfaction with life. These results support Veenhoven's model of the four qualities of life (Veenhoven, 2000) which differentiates between 'utility of life' (i.e. relevance for others) as a quality from 'appreciation of life' (i.e. relevance for oneself), with these two qualities being independent predictors of subjective well-being. In an ongoing study in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania (Kruse & Schmitt, 2012) we analyze aspects of personal, social and national identity, generativity, and perceptions of old age and ageing in three generations, i.e. 15-25, 45-55, and 75-85 years old. Results of this study show highly significant relationships between generativity, age stereotypes, and satisfaction with life, with generativity being an independent predictor of satisfaction with life after control for country, age, gender, national identity, and age stereotypes. Going beyond theoretical contributions of Erikson and McAdams we argue that generativity is an important concern not only in third but also in fourth age, sometimes increasing vulnerability might even trigger individual motives for generativity (Kruse & Schmitt, 2010; Schmitt, 2013b). Even in the context of our research on quality of life in people suffering from dementia (Kruse, 2010) we found evidence for generativity as an important individual concern in a substantial number of participants. Generativity concerns in these people became apparent particularly in reports about the disease to give closely related people insight into vulnerability, and more

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