Intergenerational Dialogue for Democracy

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Intergenerational Dialogue for Democracy

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Foreword

Democratic societies are inclusive: ideally, all citizens would be part of the policymaking process. However in practice, some citizens participate more than others, and certain groups remain largely underrepresented. When political underrepresentation concerns entire generations, the democratic process risks becoming seriously flawed. This is currently the case for the younger and older generations. Considering that a number of important contemporary policy concerns reveal a divide between age groups, I believe finding adequate, sustainable solutions is impossible if the voices of these age groups are not heard in the decision-making process. It was therefore very exciting to see, during the roundtable events organized in the framework of this initiative, how the young and elderly sat together and engaged in the discussion on intergenerational dialogue. The participants were enthusiastic to contribute to the debates and came up with very useful proposals.

When the Office of International IDEA to the European Union started this initiative on intergenerational dialogue for democracy in 2015, I took it as an opportunity to explore the relevance of the question in more depth, as well as the political space for the implementation of solutions. The expert roundtables provided a sounding board and practitioner input to the background research conducted by Professor Tomaž Deželan of the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. This publication includes a set of policy recommendations that surely will generate the interest and enthusiasm of politicians at all policy levels.

Recent political events, such as the Brexit referendum in 2016, illustrate very well how the participation (or lack thereof) of citizens of a certain age group in policymaking can have a decisive influence on a society's main political choices. Although many young people wanted the UK to stay within the European Union, they didn't get out to vote. So the older generations defined their future for them. As a Member of the European Parliament until 2014, I have worked extensively on civil rights of people belonging to minorities, and youth against racism. Together with FC Barcelona, we wanted to make the voices of young people in Europe heard in the fight against racism in football. They developed very good recommendations about combating racism. One of them was to put anti-racism clauses in the contracts of professional football players, which was put into practice by FC Barcelona. This story illustrates the value of dialogue, in light of a sound intergenerational equity. In this case, the participation of young people led to better decision-making for older generations.

A democracy should be people centred, and bring benefits to everyone. I am therefore especially convinced of the need to introduce an intergenerational impact assessment mechanism into policymaking, and to explore the possibility of introducing quotas for young and old people's political participation, including their presence in key bodies of political parties. Other important issues for the dialogue are the role of emotion and the pursuit of equity, and the need for the inclusion of general human rights education

in the school curriculum. Also, to embrace the technological opportunities of our times, I believe investments in web-based applications in support of intergenerational dialogue will largely pay off, and help to improve policy-oriented interactions between generations.

I would like to thank Professor Deželan and the Office of International IDEA to the EU for this meaningful contribution to a debate that is finally getting more traction. Policymakers should become more aware of the notion of intergenerational equity, and invest in ways to integrate intergenerational understanding into democratic processes. Bringing the young and elderly generations back into the democratic process will have long-term benefits. I believe intergenerational dialogue has a place in the discussions of the Board of Advisors of International IDEA as well as in the programmatic work of the Institute, and, by extension, in global democracy building.

Emine Bozkurt

Member of International IDEA's Board of Advisers and former Member of the European Parliament (2004–14)

Preface

Democracies bring hope and the expectation of preserving freedom and dignity, while securing a sustainable future for generations to come. Democracy is fundamentally about people—people's participation in governance, and democracy delivering sustainable development and welfare for the people. Citizens play a fundamental role in improving the quality of democracy, and all generations have an equal responsibility to participate—and the right to be represented—in a democracy that delivers for future generations.

In many parts of the world, democracy, as a political system, is challenged. This is not new, and during past periods of backsliding and recovery, democracy has always managed to endure due to its high level of legitimacy. We can enhance democracy's resilience by establishing and strengthening accountable political institutions capable of delivering on sustainable development in an inclusive manner. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides such a framework to address the long-term hopes and expectations of all people.

For democracy to endure, the active participation and representation of young and old generations are required. To promote the inclusive participation of all generations in democracy, the Office of International IDEA to the European Union started an initiative to develop modalities for an intergenerational dialogue to address the democracy deficit between generations. The initiative held three roundtables on 16 November 2015, 31 May 2016 and 15 November 2016.

At the first roundtable, stakeholders identified key priorities for an intergenerational dialogue framework. The second and third roundtables served as feedback discussions on the **Discussion Paper** that was written by Professor Tomaž Deželan of the University of Ljubljana based on the previous meetings. The feedback obtained provided input to the revision process of the Discussion Paper, which frames the intergenerational democratic deficit. It explores ways to bring the young and elderly into the political process and to find cooperation mechanisms within democratic governance processes.

The **Dialogue Paper** draws from global examples, but focuses on the European Union. It provides practical advice for policy formulations that could help establish a new solidarity between generations. Key recommendations include the need to integrate this intergenerational dialogue within European Union social and economic policies, redefine citizen education in European countries, and to establish a platform for dialogue on democracy between the younger and older generations that would develop inclusive transformative strategies and perspectives for the benefit of all citizens.

For all democracies, including those in Europe, key requisites are to foster and produce socio-economic benefits for all, inclusive participation and meaningful representation. A people-centred, intergenerational dialogue for democracy can contribute to the

delivery of sustainable benefits for everyone. In this regard, Europe can lead the way in addressing the intergenerational democracy deficit.

Democracy is about intergenerational equity, while a state of intergenerational equity strengthens the resilience of democracy.

Andrew Bradley

Director and Head of the Office of International IDEA to the European Union
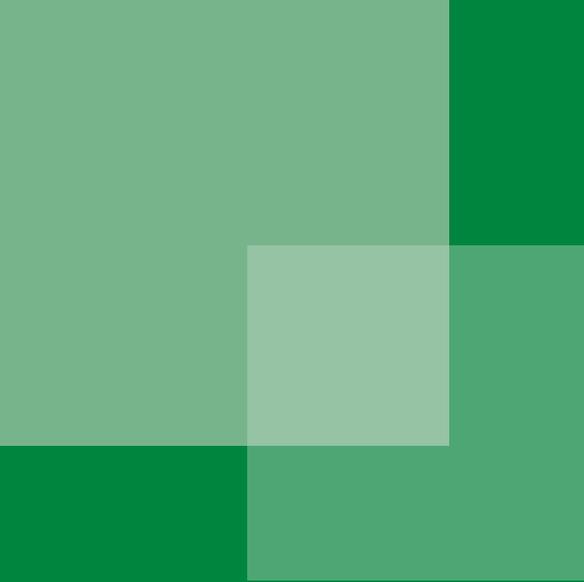
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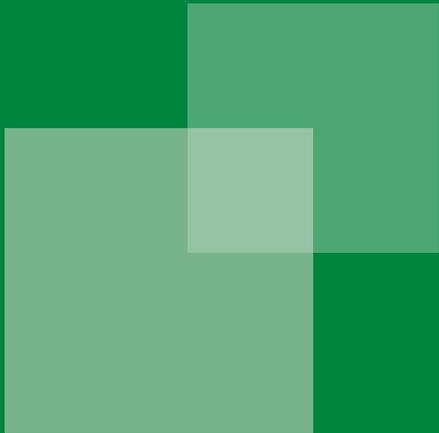
1. The urgency of the intergenerational dialogue for democracy

The segregation of people based on age differences has resulted in the serious breakdown of interactions among generations. People's daily lives are infused with age prejudice, which stigmatizes both the old and young with negative stereotypes and facilitates ageist attitudes. Institutional barriers created by laws and policies also limit interactions between individuals as a result of the dependence on age-based social institutions, which is an integral component of developed societies. Because community relationships, which used to be established through mutual understanding and generalized reciprocity, are less common, various social groups lack the ability to connect. While it is difficult in modern societies to talk about the shared identities and experiences of internally diverse social groups such as the youth or elderly, individuals within these groups share common challenges that impede their ability to participate on an equal footing with other groups in society.

Young people face severe pressures in their social environments to build careers and organize their lives. They experience fractured, precarious, lengthened and uncertain transitions into the world of work and adulthood. Many elderly citizens live in poverty or are at risk of poverty. Many feel socially excluded and lonely, or lack proper care. They are stricken by uncertainty and fear, which reduces their agency and reinforces the factors that prevent them from connecting with others in society. Compared to the young generation, the proportion of elderly people in the European Union (EU) has increased significantly as a result of low birth rates and increased life expectancies. Furthermore, young people today do not participate in institutional politics as much as other age groups. If one takes into account the fact that some political actors have begun to take advantage of this situation by overwhelmingly focusing on the elderly vote, and that government policies generally favour those who elect them, there is a great urgency to prevent conditions that would spur intergenerational conflict. In addition, in high-income countries with low fertility rates, the traditional flow of resources to the young is now reversing. Therefore, the conditions seem ripe for an intergenerational dialogue for democracy in order to explore mechanisms to bring young people back into the world of institutional politics, to address the issue of the 'generational democratic deficit', and to find forms of cooperation between young people and the elderly in the processes of democratic governance.

2. How should intergenerational conflict be prevented?

Intergenerational dialogue and solidarity have been on the EU's agenda for a long time (e.g. Green Paper on Confronting demographic change: a new solidarity between generations). However, the scope was generally limited to the better integration of youth into the labour market, active participation of the elderly in society, and the provision of care and support for the growing number of elderly people. These intentions also resulted in active aging, lifelong learning initiatives and integration of the intergenerational dialogue in various policies (e.g. importance of youth volunteer work for the promotion of intergenerational solidarity in the EU Strategy for Youth).

The EU and its institutions also demonstrate some level of commitment to the principles of intergenerational justice, most notably in pursuing a sustainable development

agenda. For example, Goal 16 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development seeks to promote inclusive sustainable societies with inclusive institutions by providing access to justice for all individuals and groups. These commitments provide foundations for the debate and the promotion of an intergenerational dialogue for democracy in the EU and globally.

In terms of governance processes, article 11 of the Lisbon Treaty represents an important step forward in the prevention of intergenerational conflict. It provides a legal basis for civil dialogue and recognizes the active participation of all citizens as instrumental in achieving good governance and democratic processes in the EU. Civil dialogue is thus one of the most appropriate vehicles to include the intergenerational perspective in EU policymaking and implementation.

The response to the increasing age segregation, which is exacerbated by increasingly age-segregated social policies, is thus to promote the intergenerational perspective to connect the elder and younger generations by providing opportunities to develop meaningful and productive relationships and mutual understanding. Activities that involve members of all generations could be organized to foster cooperation and promote attitudinal change. Abundant empirical evidence has demonstrated that initiatives based on the intergenerational perspective improve wellbeing and develop social cohesion (see the Discussion Paper). Moreover, they foster shared meaning, cultural continuity and awareness, and they facilitate the recognition of similarities between disenfranchised generations.

Activities infused by the intergenerational perspective present a breeding ground for sustainable and just social change to be engrained in policymaking that better reflects changes in society and secures the future wellbeing of all generations. Since all groups in society should directly influence the policymaking process, such policies should be accompanied by participatory mechanisms for resolving the legitimacy issues of representative democracies.

In order to achieve the participation of all, citizens' opportunities need to be enhanced, the capacity of societal self-regulation should be improved, and both citizens and public servants need to be educated on these issues. Intergenerational dialogue at all policy levels can play an important role in achieving the overall goal of intergenerational understanding, reciprocity and interdependence. In the context of insufficient resources and fierce competition between various social groups, less powerful generations have little agency. The distribution of power in society prevents less powerful generations from having an equal voice in the political process and benefiting from fair policies that do not favour more privileged groups. The principles of intergenerational justice embedded in a broader framework of intergenerational dialogue for democracy could promote the balanced distribution of resources and life opportunities between generations.

3. What are the appropriate measures?

The institutionalization of the intergenerational perspective will help safeguard the interests of disadvantaged and future generations. The political framework of contemporary democracies relies heavily on electoral cycles, which prevent the meaningful pursuit of long-term goals. Including the intergenerational perspective in

programmes and institutions will create equal benefits for young people, the elderly and society as a whole.

Intergenerational initiatives to promote civic engagement and improve the quality of democratic governance can be grouped into three categories: (1) strengthening the ties between generations by integrating intergenerational principles into public policy processes at all levels; (2) promoting an intergenerational vision by educating society about the message, rationale and importance of the intergenerational perspective and (3) encouraging citizen participation in communities by developing the infrastructure for intergenerational activities. The following list of proposed mechanisms takes into account bottom-up (grassroots-level) and top-down (systemic-level) approaches to facilitating intergenerational dialogue for democracy.

Key recommendations

Strengthen intergenerational ties through governance

Introduce intergenerational impact assessment mechanisms into policymaking

In order to establish a framework for reviewing public policies, intergenerational principles should be developed and applied to guide policymakers and other leaders. Similar to environmental impact assessments, public authorities should introduce assessments that provide *ex ante* evaluations of the potential effects of all government measures on intergenerational concerns and interests.

Establish intergenerational committees and commissions at the EU level

Intergenerational committees and commissions within EU institutions would allow for the systematic monitoring of EU policies and programmes to advocate intergenerational dialogue and justice. This monitoring role should include the power to propose, develop, and implement mechanisms and projects that promote intergenerational dialogue and justice. Examples of such structures are an intergenerational committee of the European Parliament (EP), an EP intergroup for intergenerational dialogue and a special group within the European Economic and Social Committee.

Establish intergenerational councils

Governments and political authorities at all levels should demonstrate their commitment to the intergenerational dialogue by establishing functioning intergenerational councils that are based on open democratic principles, which provide permanent platforms for intergenerational participation in the policymaking process. To this end, the establishment of a European Intergenerational Council with a relevant role in the European policymaking process is of particular importance. Intergenerational councils could be composed of democratically selected representatives of different generations at the sub-national, national and supranational levels. A European commissioner responsible for the intergenerational dialogue could chair such a council. The councils should provide a permanent platform for the dialogue between generations, and should have the power to influence the EU policy agenda.

Appoint high-level executive and legislative representatives to mainstream the intergenerational dialogue

Creating a ministerial position responsible for mainstreaming the intergenerational dialogue would signal the importance of the intergenerational perspective. The minister should be charged with reviewing policies to ensure that they adhere to the principles of intergenerational dialogue and respect intergenerational justice. Members of parliament could be held responsible for the intergenerational dialogue in relevant committees to safeguard the interests of these age groups.

Establish young and old people's political participation quotas and the presence of both in key bodies of political parties

Quotas have proven to be a valuable instrument for improving the representability of institutions and executive organs within political organizations, and participation in the political process. Quotas are a 'fast-track' mechanism for improving the position of various disadvantaged groups in the political process, and they have a visible record of accomplishment for women, ethnic minorities, vulnerable and other minority groups. They could also be applied to improve the political participation of young and old people. The most important areas in which quotas may boost intergenerational dialogue are party executive organs and programme committees.

Promote an intergenerational vision

Establish a European Intergenerational Centre

A European Intergenerational Centre could be established to guarantee the implementation of policies aimed at promoting the inclusion of the intergenerational perspective. This centre would also develop teaching methods, train educators, and serve as a reference point for intergenerational programmes and initiatives. The centre could foster intergenerational cooperation and develop a network of initiatives related to the subject. Based on the intergenerational perspective, it would develop systems to collect relevant data, monitor EU activities and design mechanisms to introduce the intergenerational perspective into the EU institutional architecture. This centre would also analyse data acquired through focal points within EU institutions, publish the results and propose changes based on them.

Redefine citizenship education in curricula to encompass the school and wider community

The intergenerational dialogue could be promoted through the holistic concept of citizenship education, which includes the corpus of human rights education and explains the role of emotions in the political process. Creating and strengthening links with the community, and offering students experiences and intergenerational contacts outside school, should be prioritized. Schools should provide students with opportunities to discuss the intergenerational perspective. Civil society organizations, however, should be supported in their quest to instil intergenerational citizenship norms through non-formal citizenship education programmes. Cooperation between formal and non-formal education providers should be encouraged.

Support programmes and measures to strengthen the competence of teachers, school heads and other educators in the field of citizenship education

The dearth of educational and professional development programmes for educators to improve their knowledge and skills to teach the intergenerational dialogue is a serious obstacle to successful citizenship education in formal and non-formal educational environments. Policymakers should prioritize the stable financing of such programmes, as well as measures to support school heads.

Develop web-based applications that support the intergenerational dialogue, voice mutual concerns and facilitate online discussion

Developing interactive digital tools that facilitate connections between the younger and elder generations could help revitalize the political process. Such tools could include applications that inform the two age groups about the political process, facilitate their participation in relevant areas, apprise them of the programmatic stances of political parties and candidates, promote consultation, facilitate political deliberation, encourage the collaborative creation of political content and monitor the activities of elected officials ('vote watch initiatives'). These online applications could serve as an integral part of broader civic and voter education campaigns conducted by responsible public authorities.

Promote issues related to intergenerational justice and dialogue by political parties and other relevant actors

In order to increase awareness of the intergenerational perspective, political parties, public authorities, and the mass media (and particularly public broadcasters) could promote and devote extensive attention to these issues, particularly those that impact the young and elderly the most, and issues that both groups are likely to be more knowledgeable about.

Develop infrastructure to promote intergenerational activities

Promote the shared use of facilities and spaces to foster formal and informal dialogues across generations

With the increased commercialization and gentrification of urban areas, greater support for the creation and maintenance of open and safe civic spaces that are available to both young and old is a priority. These spaces, such as intergenerational clubs and centres as well as community media centres, provide individuals from diverse backgrounds with opportunities to build competences that enable them to participate in various realms of public and private life. They could also serve as venues for regular community-wide events, which could provide a link to decision-makers. The provision of free civic spaces for groups to debate relevant topics and engage in discussion could create an inclusive atmosphere for all generations. It is particularly important for those at risk of exclusion to have access to programmes that facilitate the acquisition of relevant skills, knowledge and competences (media literacy programmes, etc.) to equip them to participate in the political process.

Collect data and conduct research on the intergenerational perspective

Public authorities and regulatory bodies at various levels should support continuous and systematic research on intergenerational justice. This support could be achieved by creating focal points within public institutions that would be required to collect, archive and periodically publish research findings on the intergenerational perspective.

Create funding opportunities for projects that address the intergenerational perspective

Parallel or supplementary funding opportunities for civil society projects and initiatives that promote the intergenerational perspective are pivotal, particularly in the current challenging era of austerity and budget reductions.
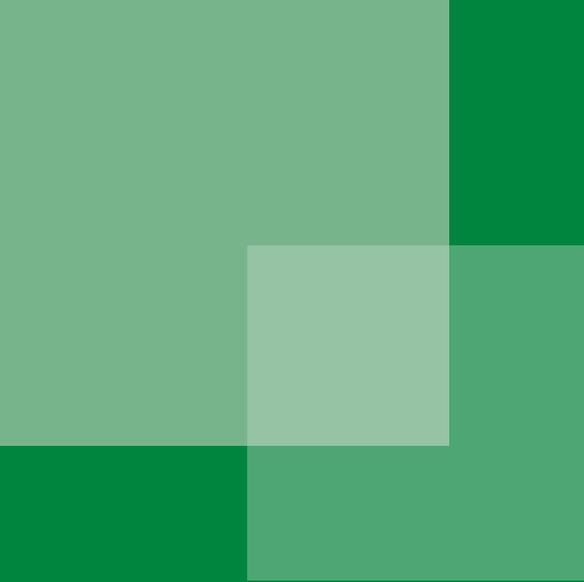
Discussion paper
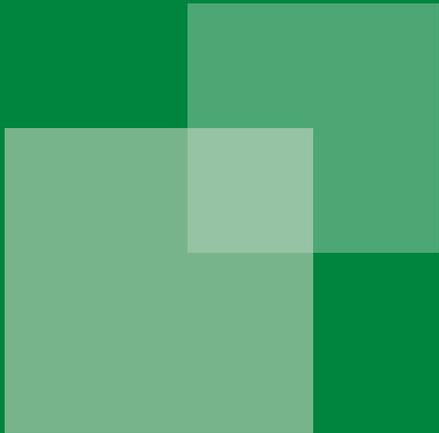
Executive summary

The elder generation comprises the fastest-growing age group in the developed world; the proportion of elderly and middle-aged people has increased significantly compared to the younger generation. Changing demographic trends have forced people to prolong their professional careers. For young people, the changing demographics reduced influence on the political process and consequently less favourable public policies. Similarly, the elder generation is increasingly confronted with poverty, social exclusion and inadequate care. The elderly fear various reductions in social entitlement, which can be an important source of discomfort, particularly if it is coupled with a lack of appreciation of their wisdom and experience. Because both the young and the elderly are increasingly disconnected from institutional politics and democratic life, the competition for insufficient resources is bound to result in an intergenerational conflict.

This paper explores ways to bring members of both age groups into the political process and to find mechanisms for cooperation within democratic governance processes. It first describes the emerging social conflict between young people and the elderly, and then warns against the reversed flow (i.e., from the young to the elderly) of intergenerational transfers in high-income countries with lower fertility rates. Inclusion barriers prevent both the young and the elderly from fully participating in institutional politics. Therefore since politicians tend to listen to those who participate, the interests of some generations are not always fully respected when important decisions about the distribution of resources are taken. Higher levels of participation across generations are therefore not only crucial for the legitimacy of contemporary democracies and democratic governance, but are also instrumental in preventing such conflicts from arising. To address this problem, the political process needs to adapt to changes emerging from developments in information and communication technology (ICT) and its appropriation. Moreover, programmes need to be developed that seek to improve the agency of the population that is beyond the purview of institutional politics (e.g., educational programmes and mobilization activities). Both are vital prerequisites for establishing the grounds for a true and meaningful dialogue between generations on democratic governance that is based on the principles of intergenerational justice. The inclusion of the intergenerational perspective would benefit young people, the elderly and society as a whole.

This paper concludes by proposing three clusters of intergenerational initiatives to promote civic engagement and the quality of democratic governance. These clusters involve strengthening the ties between generations through governance, promoting the intergenerational vision and infrastructure development. The paper also explores potential measures to create opportunities to promote an intergenerational dialogue at the European Union (EU) level.

Demographic challenges of contemporary democracies

Even though some societies are confronted with an aging population, today young people (aged 10–24) represent the largest generational demographic in history, comprising 1.8 billion individuals worldwide (ICPD, 2014: 1), 85 per cent of whom live in low- and middle-income countries (*The Economist* 2016). Similar to their peers in the developing world, young people in developed states are exploring strategies to

overcome the challenges of meeting the needs of preceding generations. Since the social conditions of the members of these generational groups are different, they can hardly be viewed as cohesive or homogeneous. Moreover, intragroup differences are sometimes even greater than diversity between groups. However, significant general patterns based on age may be observed as individuals from different age groups share some distinct challenges that impede their ability to participate in society on an equal footing. Although young people are better educated, more equipped to harness the information provided by advancements in ICT, and enjoy, in many parts of the world, freedoms and opportunities their predecessors could barely have imagined, they are less likely than previous generations to be employed (more than 15 and 25 per cent of young individuals in high- and middle-income countries, respectively, are not in education, employment or training) and are likely to have labour market rules rigged against them (*The Economist* 2016).

In contrast to the developing world, the elder generation in developed states is generally the fastest-growing age group, and young people are losing their demographic importance. The number of elderly (aged 60 or above, which often coincides with retirement age) and middle-aged people in Europe has increased significantly, whereas young people comprise a diminishing group compared to the adult population (Kohli 2010). From 1970 to 2000, the number of minors (aged 0–18) decreased by almost one-fourth in Europe. This demographic trend[1] (see Figure 1), combined with the increased life expectancy of the elderly, presents structural challenges that differ significantly from those faced by the working-age population and young people in the 1960s or 1970s. Hence, younger generations are increasingly required to prolong their professional careers, are projected to enjoy shorter retirements with fewer benefits and currently experience severe barriers in their search for even the most precarious jobs (Samek Lodovici and Semenza 2012).

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1   In Europe, the youngest age group decreased by almost 9.6 per cent, the young people group decreased by 1.2 percent, the middle-aged group increased by 4.2 per cent and the oldest group increased to around 6.7 per cent of the total population (see Kohli, 2010).

Figure 1. Population structure by five-year age groups and sex, EU-28, 1994 and 2014 (% of total population)
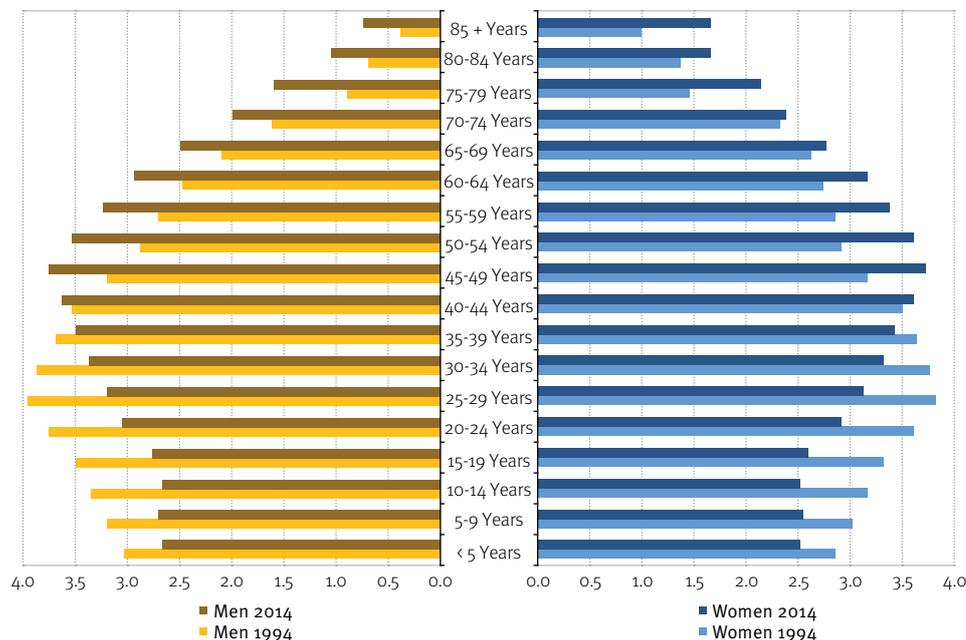
(¹) Data refer to 1 January of each reference years. 1994: EU-27.2014: provisional data given the non-availability of detailed data for Greece.
Source: Eurostat (online data code: demo_pjangroup)

Young people face severe social pressure to build successful careers and lead accomplished lives even though they may still be in school, university or early in their professional careers, and thus only partially embedded in the labour market (Kohli 2010). Bradley and van Hoof (2005: 246) discuss the fractured, precarious and lengthened transitions of young people into the world of work, which were caused by changes in the structure of labour market opportunities, policies promoting labour force flexibility, rapidly rising housing costs and other relevant factors that are related to uncertainty during the transition to adulthood. Because of economic and temporal uncertainty, young people are unable to form long-term binding commitments related to partnership and parenthood (Mills and Blossfeld 2009: 106–08).

Many in the elder generation live in (or are at risk of) poverty. In many countries (e.g., Estonia, Latvia, Bulgaria and Switzerland), those aged 65 and older are at greater risk of poverty than other generations (Eurostat 2014). Many feel socially excluded and lonely; have poor access to social services, IT and transport infrastructure; and lack proper care (Hoff 2008). They often do not connect with young people or other generations in a mutually beneficial way. With a shrinking working-age population, the skewed population pyramid has led to concerns about the quality, availability and financial sustainability of care for the elderly. Although more individuals require assistance, the tax revenues are shrinking. The fear of reductions in social entitlements can therefore present an important source of discomfort, particularly if they are combined with insufficient measures to ensure a positive incremental transition from the world of work. Specifically, radical measures taken to intervene in the labour market (e.g. by increasing flexibility of contracts without taking care of job security of employed individuals with

specifically designed job-schemes) have frequently left individuals feeling undervalued and abandoned. Rather than being acknowledged for wisdom and experience, the elderly are often portrayed as a burden to their employers or society.

Because of these challenging demographic trends, researchers have investigated intergenerational conflict (e.g. Bengtson 1993; Kohli 2010; Tremmel 2010; Goerres 2010; Lee and Mason 2014). For instance, the 2016 Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom demonstrated intergenerational differences on important political issues that may spur intergenerational hostilities due to a breakdown in communication between generations on their key needs and preferences. The changing conditions arising from a rapidly changing economy, labour market and education system have made it necessary to explore whether contemporary political and social systems are aligned with the principle of intergenerational justice. Since both young people and the elderly are less connected to the political process than the middle aged (Deželan 2015; Hoff 2008), political actors may try to abuse the situation in order to acquire the electoral support of one group or the other, or they may simply disregard the needs of all groups that do not participate in the political process. If certain groups are absent from key democratic processes, their interests are less represented, which limits their potential to influence public policies, thus reducing the legitimacy of the entire political community. In the context of the fierce competition for insufficient resources, the result could be intergenerational conflict.

This paper has two main aims: (1) to explore ways to increase the involvement of young and older people in institutional politics, since their absence has negative consequences for the functioning of the entire political community and (2) to identify mechanisms for cooperation between young people and the elderly in the processes of democratic governance. Based on the principle of intergenerational justice, such mechanisms would promote the intergenerational dialogue for democracy. The key mission is to galvanize two important forces of society—young and elderly people—to build an effective alliance that would improve the quality of democratic governance.

The brink of a new super (social) conflict?

The altered situation described in the previous section has led many to believe a new social conflict is imminent between the two age groups that are largely excluded from contemporary economic and political structures. After the class conflict was mollified by granting workers certain assurances of social stability, including the institutionalization of retirement funded through public social security funds (Kohli 1987), age became pivotal for public entitlements and obligations. Public redistribution is built on a sequence of clearly delimited periods of life (Kohli 2010), and the elderly have become the main beneficiaries of the welfare state. This concentration of public funds is not problematic, because all individuals live through their life stages according to institutionalized schedules (Kohli 2006: 458). Therefore, treating different age groups differently can be morally justified due to their distinctive needs (Daniels 1988).

Some commentators have claimed that the 21st century heralded the replacement of class conflict with generational conflict (Bengtson 1993; Kohli 2010). Despite the traditional model of the old supporting the young, this is changing. Although intergenerational transfer of resources continues to flow almost entirely from the oldest to the youngest

members of families, Lee and Mason (2014) warned that in high-income countries with lower fertility rates, the net flow of resources has begun to reverse. In these countries, public spending policies favour pensions and health care for the older groups over education for the young (*The Economist* 2016). Moreover, this trend will continue in developed countries, as these societies are ageing.

Unlike age group distribution (e.g. children, youth, adults and elders), generational redistribution similar to that described above is problematic because societal generations have a fixed membership that is determined by individuals being born in a certain period and by sharing the same historical experience (Kohli 2006: 458). Because there are no legitimate grounds for unequal treatment, the sharing of burdens is fair and just when each generation can expect to receive the same treatment as the preceding and following generations at each life stage (Kohli 2006: 463). Such burdens are shared differently over time, because each generation has unique needs (Kohli 2010). Moreover, the unequal positions of generations in the distribution of burdens increasingly create grounds for new conflict. Therefore, it is imperative to design and implement mechanisms to promote ongoing, systematic intergenerational dialogues for democracy. Such measures would require a genuine commitment to searching for answers to the most difficult societal questions through collaboration at the highest possible political levels. Thus, different generations would have the right *and* the duty to participate fully in (and commit to) this process.

The relevance of political participation for the new super cleavage

As briefly discussed, the participation of young people and the elderly in decision-making about their common fate has been neither fully granted nor exploited. Participation is crucial, as an abundance of evidence indicates that political institutions are more responsive to those who mobilize (Macedo et al. 2005: 6).

Trends in political participation

Traditionally, political participation is lowest among the youngest and oldest groups of the electorate. However, this normal distribution is rapidly changing as young people become increasingly disengaged from the formulation, passage and implementation of public policies. Because high participation rates, regardless of ideological viewpoints, are vital for the health of democracies (Held 2006), many are concerned about the general decrease in political participation throughout the democratic world, particularly among young people. The gradual drop in voter turnout of a few percentage points per decade has accelerated dramatically since the 1980s, which presents a major challenge to democracies around the world (López Pintor et al. 2002).

The lack of political participation does not affect all societies, nor does it equally affect all sub-groups of the population. Age has proven one of the strongest predictors of political participation (Zukin et al. 2006; Stolle and Hooghe 2009). The 2014 European Parliament Election Study (Schmitt et al. 2015) revealed a shocking landscape of voter non-participation across Europe, particularly among the youngest cohorts of eligible voters. In the EU-28 region, the level of non-participation in EP elections was higher than 70 per cent in the 16/18–24 age groups, as applicable, and only fractionally

under 70 per cent in the 25–29 group. This disparity is staggering compared with the 47.9 per cent turnout of voters aged 65 and older, and it indicates the widespread absence of young people from EU institutional politics. The problem is similar regarding voter turnout in national elections: nearly 60 per cent of eligible voters aged 16/18–24 did not vote in their last national parliamentary election (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Voter absenteeism in elections to the EP and national parliaments in the EU-28 region
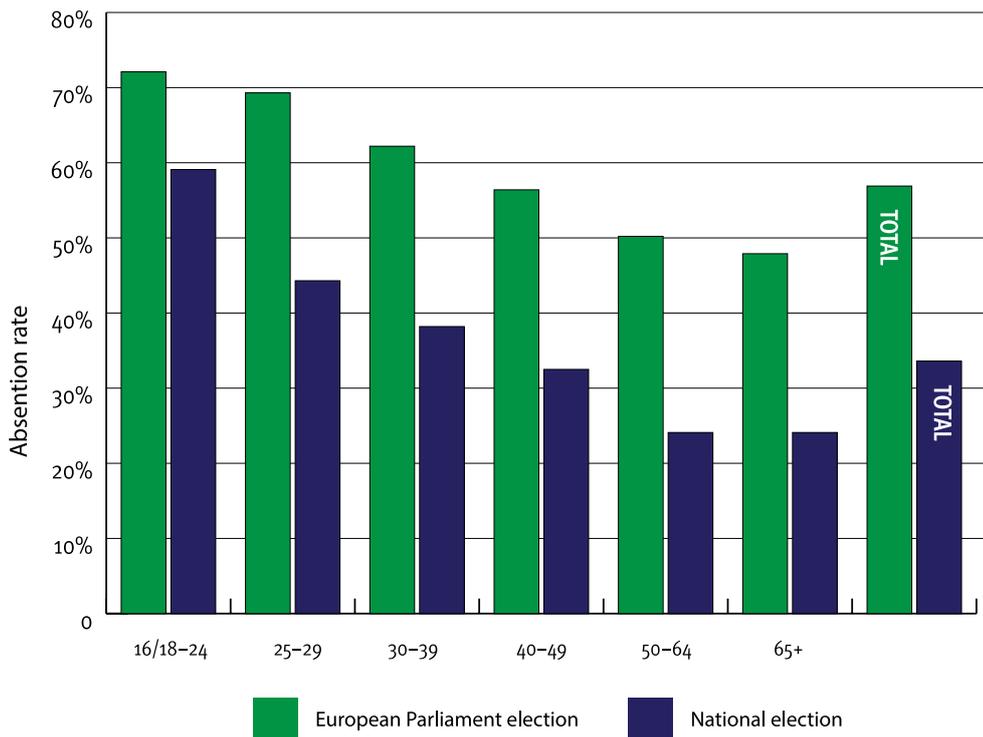
Source: Schmitt et al. (2015)

Note: Respondents answered 'Did not vote' to the following questions: 'Did you yourself vote in the recent European Parliament elections?' or 'Did you yourself vote in the [national elections]?'

The relevance of political participation for the shape of democracy

Numerous studies (e.g. Dalton 1996, 2009) have indicated that the participation gap between young and elderly voters has widened considerably in democracies all over the world. Goerres (2010: 215) observed that young people are the least active age group across virtually all participation areas. This finding is particularly evident in the decrease in party membership among young people (e.g. Cross and Young 2008; Hooghe, Stolle and Stouthuysen 2004; Seyd and Whiteley 2004), which hinders political parties' recruitment and mobilization functions and negatively affects the political representation of young people. Furthermore, inadequate participation of all generations in the political process and the consequent 'generational democratic deficit' increasingly challenges the legitimacy of established democracies. Since by definition,

democracy is rule by the people, then the question of who participates in political decisions affects the nature of democracy itself (Verba and Nie 1972: 1).

Democracy is a form of government in which the people rule on an equal footing. It entails a political community in which there is some form of political equality among the people (Held 2006). In its various forms, democracy has been defended because it comes closest to achieving one or more of the following fundamental values or goods: rightful authority, political equality, liberty, moral self-development, common interest, fair moral compromise, binding decisions that take everyone's interests into account, social utility, satisfaction of wants and efficient decisions (Held 2006). A leader who needs to be re-elected in order to maintain political power is also more inclined to act in the people's interest (principle of accountability). Democracy offers the consent of the governed as the most compelling principle of legitimacy and the basis of political order (Held 2006: ix). Where important groups of citizens are substantially less active and influential than others, the conditions of collective self-rule are eradicated, which decreases the legitimacy of the political order.

Although there have been debates about the most appropriate model of democracy (Held 2006), the broad political participation of the electorate is (and always has been) a prerequisite for every democratic system. The notion that 'the more participation there is in decisions, the more democracy there is' (Verba and Nie 1972: 1) directly links participation to democracy. Thus even in the most elitist or 'thin' conceptions of democracy, the political participation of citizens is necessary (O'Neill 2009: 7). Most contemporary models of democracy rely on high levels of citizen participation and encourage the participation of a knowledgeable citizenry with a sustained interest in the governing process. Such models provide the best mechanism with which to articulate interests and educate citizens, and are an essential mechanism of citizens' influence on decision-makers, which is directly linked to government responsiveness (O'Neill 2009: 7).

Participation also enhances the quality of citizens' lives because it has inherent value. Self-government of the people is supposed to involve the exercise of distinctive human capacities, which is an intrinsically noble enterprise. Participation is a form of learning together, because making binding public decisions strengthens citizens' active faculties, exercises their judgement and gives them knowledge about subjects that are relevant to their societies (Levine 2007: 41). Macedo and others (2005: 5) have also stressed the importance of participation in voluntary and non-profit organizations. Membership in groups and involvement in social networks correlate with higher levels of satisfaction with the quality of individual and community lives. Thus, participation and engagement in society spur a responsibility for decision-making that is adapted to each citizen and their commitments to society, thereby fostering public political competences and enhancing the quality of collective participation (Nekola 2006). Participation in such activities builds trust and allows for the open resolution of latent or manifest conflicts between social groups in a non-zero-sum manner (Pierre and Peters 2000).

Building trust through political representation

The assumption 'If you do not vote, you do not count' directly relates to political representation. It indicates that as long as one group participates less than others, it should expect less from the elected government. However, declining levels of participation

affect elders' ability to influence policymakers less than other age groups: due to their large numbers, they are becoming a political force in many countries. Consequently, politicians have few incentives to focus on policies that benefit young people if their participation rate stays at the current level. Nevertheless, political parties across Europe have increasingly begun to recognize the voting power of elder generations, either by completely focusing on their support (e.g. Democratic Pensioners Party of Slovenia) or by broadening their key target groups. Particularly during intense election campaigns, this tends to create the impression of a zero-sum game, which facilitates intergenerational conflict. Empirical evidence has shown that although representatives of different ages *can* represent the interests of other age groups, they rarely do (see Macedo et al. 2005; Martin 2012).

Mansbridge (1999) stressed the importance of descriptive political representation for marginalized and disaffected groups, which distrust others and feel that only those like them can represent their political preferences. Young people's great distrust in institutional politics has exacerbated their growing alienation from electoral politics and representative democratic institutions. If this group had political representation, its members would find it easier to relate to (and engage in) the political process. It would also prevent them from seeing others as inherent adversaries in a zero-sum political competition for resources.

The low numbers of young national parliamentarians also demonstrate that young people are detached from traditional politics. The percentage of parliamentarians younger than 30 years in national parliaments across the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries is higher than 2 per cent only in exceptional cases (Tremmel 2008: 211). Deželan (2015) confirmed this representation gap on a smaller set of European countries by revealing that 0.1 per cent of national parliamentarians are below the age of 25 and only 3.4 per cent below the age of 35. In addition, only 0.1 per cent of parliamentarian were women below the age of 30. The exclusion of young people from representative politics thus not only hampers their prospects of inclusion, but also severely damages the health of democracy because the largest population cohort in the history of humankind is beginning to shape a parallel political reality according to its political imaginary, by utilizing different agents, repertoires and targets of political action.

Two generations, two political imaginaries

Individual political participation has become increasingly heterogeneous due to broad societal changes in advanced democracies (Goerres 2010: 209). In liberal democracies, citizens are free to participate in politics, which encompasses an array of political actions, but in practice, not all actions are equally likely to be successful. Although the conventional forms of political actions that were widely popular at the dawn of the liberal democratic era are somewhat in decline, other forms of participation (clicktivism) are emerging (e.g. participation in single-issue organizations, non-institutionalized forms of participation that do not require long-term commitment and Internet activism) (Norris 2002). Inglehart (1995) and some others have argued that post-modernization caused these changes, and that because of the shift towards post-modern values, individuals strive for post-material goods. The declining control of the state as a bureaucratic authority and the weakened social control of religion have promoted individualization

(Goerres 2010: 210), which goes hand in hand with a declining trust in government and identification with political parties (Dalton 2004). Changed participation patterns and citizenship norms have clear generational implications: younger generations are more likely to engage in elite-challenging behaviour (Goerres 2010), whereas elder generations tend to legitimize institutional politics.

Although some believe that the decline in participation is a sign of political apathy (Wattenberg 2012), and that declining engagement in civic life is caused by depleting social capital (Putnam 2000), there is substantial evidence that participation patterns are changing as younger generations utilize alternative participation channels (e.g. Norris 2002; Dalton 2009; Rosanvallon 2008). Young people are becoming increasingly detached from traditional politics and structures (Riley et al. 2010). The sheer numbers of people participating in various modes of unconventional political participation suggest that this is not an age of political apathy in which citizens have withdrawn into the private sphere (Rosanvallon 2008: 19). On the contrary, there is a growing wave of protest politics (see Norris 2002; Dalton 1996, 2008), in which citizens challenge conventional political participation.

The rise of Web 2.0, and particularly social media outlets, has made new forms of mass communication more appealing to young people, who are more willing than their elders to experiment (Martin 2012: 102). The way that young people stay informed about political issues, and the way they communicate with others, differ from other age groups. Young people are much more likely to find political information on the Internet, and edit as well as collate different news sources (Martin 2012: 105). The Internet has significant potential to mobilize groups of individuals in issue-oriented campaigns, as it connects disparate groups with diverse and fragmented political identities (Chadwick 2006: 29; Martin 2012: 108). It facilitates the formation of issue-based organizations of young people due to the reduction in communication costs, easier access to official sources and the emergence of crowdfunding, crowdsourcing and networking practices enabled by technological innovations (Martin 2012: 110). Therefore, the political identity and attitudes of young people are shaped less than previously by social ties to their family, neighbourhood, school or work, and more by the manner in which they participate in the social networks that they co-create. A phenomenon of networked individualism can be observed, in which the Internet plays a central role in individuals' political engagement (Rainie and Wellman 2012). In this political context, the Internet has to be harnessed as a tool to improve the political participation of young people not only to allow them to stand on an equal footing with other age groups, but also to promote dialogue with other generations because their social experience online is equally important to that of offline.

Why is the idea of a path to gerontocracy built on a false binary?

The previous sections clarified that in Europe, demographic trends and higher participation rates compared to youth have given the elderly greater influence over the political process (Binstock 2000). The same pattern is observed in party membership and other modes of institutional participation. Some have therefore warned about the closing window of opportunity to reform the welfare state, because the elderly increasingly dominate the political arena and may eventually block any attempts to

reduce their benefits, even at the expense of decreasing the wellbeing of other population groups (Kohli 2010). For example, Kohli (2010) notes that, taking into account the demographic image of society and age-specific voting participation, welfare reforms in Germany could be blocked after 2016 by the elderly if they feel the proposed reform packages are unfavourable to them (Kohli 2010).

This line of thinking produces sensationalized debates about the 'war of generations', 'grey power' and 'pensioner's democracy' in European countries (Goerres 2010: 207). Although such rationales are outrageously simplified and based on a limited view of representative politics (Tormey 2015), some political actors are attempting to bring elder groups into a cohesive one-dimensional voting bloc, which would have an immense influence on the policymaking process. Such a move could provoke artificial hostilities in the political arena, and more importantly in political communities as a whole, because of false interpretations of the fact that young people's influence through democratic participation is weakening.

Goerres (2010: 216) offers detailed data on the relative strengths of the young, middle-aged and elderly, showing that the participation rates are weighted by their relative demographic sizes. These calculations revealed that middle-aged voters had greater influence over elites and the political system than both other groups combined for all measured dimensions, particularly voting. This finding casts new light on the declining institutional participation rates of young people and the robust rates of the elderly, indicating that intergenerational cooperation is a precondition of intergenerational justice and protection against the disproportionate influence of the middle-aged population. Considering their weighed participation power, middle-aged voters use this potential to influence political elites in both institutional and protest politics. The political preferences were statistically significantly different among the three groups (Goerres 2010: 219), suggesting that these differences could have an important effect on the content and scope of public policies.

The evidence discussed above demonstrates that the discourse about the new social super cleavage needs to be downplayed. Competition between different age groups over scarce resources is not new: it is a common theme in historical and anthropological accounts of pre-modern societies (Kohli 2010). However, more important than the context, form and arena of this alleged conflict is the fact that it frequently masks the continued existence of the cleavage between the privileged and unprivileged, and tends to draw attention away from other inequalities (Kohli 2010). The key challenge is therefore to assess the real extent of generational inequalities and then promote an intergenerational dialogue for democracy that takes into account the preconditions of financial sustainability and social justice, while maintaining a balanced generational contract that would protect the elderly and invest in the young (Albertini et al. 2007: 319).

Towards a model of intergenerational dialogue for democracy

Larkin and Newman (1997) suggested that segregating people by age has resulted in a serious breakdown in interactions and communication among the generations, which could have devastating long-term effects on the functioning and organization of

society. Because community relationships that used to be established through mutual understanding and generalized reciprocity are more or less outdated, various social groups lack connections. This situation is exacerbated by the prevalence of age prejudice, which stigmatizes both the old and the young by promoting negative stereotypes and perpetuating ageist attitudes, thus limiting intergenerational contact and creating a vicious circle of mutual isolation (Fletcher 2007). Families can play an important role in improving this situation, as they act as important mechanisms of intergenerational dialogue, justice and redistribution. However, the general trend of the nuclearization of families, particularly in industrially developed urban areas, prevents modern families from performing this function.

In addition to informal norms and stereotypes, the institutional age barriers created by laws and social policies (Torres-Gil 2003) limit interactions between individuals. Indeed, the dependence on age-based social institutions (such as social entitlements) is an integral component of Western societies (Fletcher 2007). Larkin and Newman (1997: 7) suggested that increasing age segregation may be countered by promoting an intergenerational perspective in order to connect elder and young generations by giving them opportunities to develop meaningful and productive relationships. Organized activities conducted by members of both generations would foster cooperation and promote attitudinal change (Cummings, Williams and Ellis 2002: 93). The results of the above-mentioned studies demonstrate that initiatives taken to promote intergenerational perspectives have produced positive attitudinal changes, improved wellbeing and developed social cohesion. Such measures also fostered shared meaning, cultural continuity and awareness. They therefore constitute a successful model of sustainable social change (Fletcher 2007).

Ellis and Granville (1999) stressed that the intergenerational perspective facilitates the recognition of intergenerational similarities in disenfranchisement of the young and old from mainstream social activities. Because of its potential to be a powerful model for just social change, the intergenerational perspective has been recognized as a good way to foster policies that better reflect social change and secure the future wellbeing of all generations (Larkin and Newman 1997: 6). Based on continued research and high-quality professional preparation and practice, such frameworks are likely to strengthen the fabric of the entire society (Larkin and Newman 1997: 6).

The move from the 'steering' concept of governance, in which the state drives society, to the new paradigm in which society can coordinate common interests (see Nekola 2006) has accentuated the importance of participatory mechanisms for resolving the legitimacy issues of representative democracies. Based on the assumption that the public should increase its direct influence on governance processes to higher levels than are typically offered by representative democracy, participatory approaches confer on the individual the right to participate in decisions about the shared future through individual or collective actions. In order to achieve more and more direct participation, citizens' opportunities need to be enhanced, the capacity for societal self-regulation needs to be improved, and citizens and public servants must be properly educated. Butts (2011) observes that democratic leadership and policymaking would improve if policies and decisions were enacted and implemented in line with intergenerational and interdependency policies that promoted and enhanced the ways in which generations depended on and supported each other. Thus, intergenerational dialogues play an important role in generating intergenerational understanding, reciprocity and interdependence.

In the context of insufficient resources and fierce competition between social groups, less powerful generations have little agency. The principles of intergenerational justice and democratic dialogue could promote the balanced distribution of resources and life opportunities between generations. Tremmel (2008: 191) identified the need for such an approach to be codified in written law. Institutionalizing the intergenerational perspective would help safeguard the interests of disadvantaged and future generations. The political framework of contemporary democracies relies heavily on electoral cycles, which hamper the meaningful pursuit of long-term goals. Hence, based on an intergenerational dialogue, intergenerational justice for present and future generations could be enshrined in constitutions and treaties or explicit clauses (e.g. financial or ecological), or take the form of specialized institutions with competencies (e.g. legislative agenda power to veto or propose) to safeguard future generations (e.g. ombudsman for future generations and a future council).

According to Newman and Goff (2006: 156), incorporating the intergenerational perspective into programmes and institutions creates mutual benefits for young people, the elderly and society. Kingston and colleagues grouped intergenerational initiatives that promote civic engagement and the quality of democratic governance (e.g. intergenerational dialogue for democracy) into three categories (Newman and Goff 2006). The first category strengthens the ties between generations through public policy by establishing the groundwork for integrating intergenerational civic engagement into the public policy agenda at all levels. The second category educates society about the message, rationale and importance of the intergenerational perspective. The third category encourages citizen participation in communities primarily by developing an infrastructure to promote intergenerational activities. This paper considers all three strategies to introduce an intergenerational dialogue to promote democratically substantive and generationally just democratic societies.

Steps to facilitate the intergenerational dialogue for democracy

This section introduces a set of measures that fall into the three categories discussed in the previous section. This extensive list of mechanisms for facilitating an intergenerational dialogue for democracy comprises an early framework for reaching a consensus among stakeholders and takes into account both bottom-up (grassroots-level) and top-down (systemic-level) approaches.

Strengthen intergenerational ties through governance

Improve cooperation between generations and political authorities

Political authorities should establish a system of cooperation with both young people and the elderly that goes beyond regular consultation procedures and has co-management characteristics. This system could be developed by improving the competencies, structures and cooperation between generations and public authorities at all levels (e.g. government councils), particularly with regard to the development and implementation of the most relevant policies. This cooperation could take different forms, such as:

a) consultation (representation with consultative power, where non-institutional partners give their opinion on questions raised);

b) concertation (equal participation by all members in examining an issue in order to achieve a consensual decision);

c) co-decision-making (works like concertation, but the minority always has to accept the decision of the majority); and

d) co-management (direct management of the implementation of the decision and the subsequent evaluation within an enlarged authority in which all members are partners).

Introduce intergenerational impact assessment mechanisms into policymaking

It is necessary to develop intergenerational principles for policymakers and other leaders to help establish a framework for reviewing public policies and to recognize how different generations can (and should) be engaged as resources for each other. Public authorities should introduce instruments to assess intergenerational influences (akin to environmental impact assessments) by utilizing ex ante evaluations of the potential impacts of all government measures.

Establish intergenerational councils

Establishment functioning intergenerational councils would demonstrate a true commitment to the intergenerational dialogue for democracy. The influence of local, national and supranational politics on the composition of these councils should be limited by introducing democratic instruments to select representatives (if possible by direct election). Intergenerational councils formed by authorities at the local, national and supranational levels should provide a permanent platform for dialogue between all generations, as well as an input point for issues regarding entry into the political process.

Appoint a minister responsible for mainstreaming the intergenerational dialogue

Creating a ministerial-level position with the task of mainstreaming the intergenerational dialogue would signal the importance of the intergenerational perspective. The minister could be charged with reviewing policies to ensure that people of all generations are considered and engaged and have the resources and opportunities to participate fully in society.

Include representatives of different generations in working bodies of representative organs and nominate representatives responsible for the young and the elderly in representative organs

The authorities could include democratically elected or appointed representatives of different generations in their working bodies (e.g. committees) in addition to traditionally elected representatives in order to ensure adequate attention is paid to the intergenerational dialogue in their usual activities. The presence of political

representatives responsible for both the young and the elderly perspectives in relevant committees and representative organs would safeguard the interests of these groups. In addition, reserved seats for the representatives of young people and elder generation could be directly elected by their respective generations to guarantee that these age groups are treated fairly and responsibly.

Allow participatory budgeting for intergenerational programmes

In democratic deliberations about the allocation of the public budget, participatory budgeting allows ordinary citizens to participate in decision-making through powers delegated to them by public authorities. This process can guarantee that the interests of particular groups are addressed. The allocation of municipal budgets for intergenerational programmes presents an excellent opportunity for randomly selected interested individuals in a given demographic group to decide on the most appropriate programme or service, and to consult the political leadership and administrative authorities on the best solutions and strategic issues.

Lower the voting age

According to recent evidence from Scotland, the youth voter turnout would improve by lowering the voting age to 16. Turnout appears to be higher among 18 year olds than 19 to 21 year olds (Bhatti, Hansen and Wass 2012). The results of the Scottish referendum showed that young people are interested in politics and engaged in political conversations. Moreover, the facilitation of open classroom discussions elevated the political confidence of students (Eichhorn 2014), which contributed to the high youth voter turnout in the referendum. The recognition that young people are not only a valuable part of the electorate but also one of its most informed segments is also seen as a consequence of the wider Scottish Vote at 16 campaign (McNeill 2015). Consequently, lowering the voting age would also remedy the imbalance in the relative voting power of young people compared to other age groups.

Introduce young and old people's quotas (and the presence of both) in key political party bodies

Quotas could be a valuable instrument for improving the representability of institutions and executive organs within political organizations, and participation in the political process primarily in terms of the right to stand for election to different posts. Quotas are a 'fast-track' mechanism to improve the position of various disadvantaged groups in the political process, and they have improved the representation of women as well as ethnic and other minority groups. The most important areas in which quotas may boost intergenerational dialogue are party executive organs and programme committees.

Prepare political party action plans to include and mainstream the intergenerational dialogue

Preparing an action plan to introduce and maintain the intergenerational perspective in content and processes would help equip political parties to tackle this problem. Such action plans would also serve as clear signals to young people, senior and young party members, external supporters and sympathizers that a given organization takes the

intergenerational dialogue seriously.

Expand e-voting and other alternative modes of voting at home and abroad

Although e-voting has not improved voter turnout as much as its enthusiasts expected, it is a convenient method of voting. Furthermore, it lowers the cost of voting for individuals familiar with ICT, especially young people, and can extend the number of voting days (e.g. early and advance voting), distribute voting hours over more than one day, and include working days and weekends in the voting period.

Promote an intergenerational vision

Convene conferences on intergenerational dialogue and justice at all levels

Holding a conference on generations with the support of government at all levels would signal the importance of the intergenerational dialogue, and gather leaders of all ages to debate policies and programmes.

Redefine citizenship education to encompass curricula, schools and the community

The intergenerational dialogue could be promoted through the holistic concept of citizenship education, which includes the corpus of human rights education and explains the role of emotions in the political process. Creating and strengthening links with the community, and offering students experiences and intergenerational contacts outside school, should be prioritized. Schools should provide students with opportunities to discuss the intergenerational perspective. Civil society organizations, however, should be supported in their quest to instil intergenerational citizenship norms through their non-formal citizenship education programmes. Cooperation between formal and non-formal education providers should be encouraged.

Support programmes and measures to strengthen the competences of teachers, school heads and other educators in the field of citizenship education

The dearth of educational and professional development programmes for educators to improve their knowledge and skills to teach about the intergenerational dialogue is a serious obstacle to successful citizenship education in formal and non-formal educational environments. Policymakers should prioritize the stable financing of such programmes, as well as measures to support school heads.

Create an index to measure intergenerational issues

Creating an index to track intergenerational patterns (e.g., an intergenerational justice index) would increase the transparency of the political process and provide grounds for various advocacy organizations to advance the intergenerational point of view. In order to ensure the validity of this information, support should be provided to initiatives and institutions that collect relevant information and perform a 'watchdog' function.

Promote issues related to intergenerational justice and dialogue by political parties and

other relevant actors

In order to increase awareness of the intergenerational perspective, political parties, public authorities, and the mass media (and particularly public broadcasters) could promote and devote extensive attention to these issues, particularly those that impact the young and the elderly the most, and issues that both groups are likely to be more knowledgeable about.

Support community media programmes that promote the intergenerational dialogue

Community media have proven to be an important part of non-formal educational activities. They are instrumental in framing public agendas that benefit young people and the intergenerational perspective. They could also be utilized to encourage both age groups to engage in common activities. Because technological advancement allows for the confluence of various platforms (radio, the Internet and TV), community media offer inexhaustible opportunities to connect both age groups and policymakers, as well as to address contentious social issues that are relevant to them. Hence, support should be provided to community media and initiatives to establish such platforms.

Develop digital tools that support the intergenerational dialogue, voice mutual concerns and facilitate online interaction

Developing interactive digital tools that facilitate connections between the younger and elder generations could help revitalize the political process. Such tools could include applications that inform the two age groups about the political process, facilitate their participation in relevant areas, apprise them of the programmatic stances of political parties and candidates, promote consultation, facilitate political deliberation, encourage the collaborative creation of political content and monitor the activities of elected officials ('vote watch initiatives'). These online applications could serve as an integral part of broad civic and voter education campaigns conducted by responsible public authorities.

Voter education programmes

Voter education programmes could significantly boost the political participation of younger and older generations by presenting group-centred content, for example on the functioning of the political system. Public broadcasters and community media could support these efforts by frequently addressing the needs and interests of both age groups.

Develop infrastructure to promote intergenerational activities

Establish and fund intergenerational centres

Providing stable funding for intergenerational centres could help develop cohesive communities through the promotion of intergenerational dialogue to improve understanding and relationships between people of different generations. Capacity-building activities for individuals and organizations should be provided, and platforms for their cooperation, networking and exchange of best practices should be supported.

Promote the shared use of facilities and spaces to create the opportunity for formal and informal dialogue across generations

With the increased commercialization and gentrification of urban areas, greater support for the creation and maintenance of open and safe civic spaces that are available to both young and old is a priority. These spaces, such as intergenerational clubs and centres as well as community media centres, provide individuals from diverse backgrounds with opportunities to build competences that enable them to participate in various realms of public and private life. They could also serve as venues for regular community-wide events, which could provide a link to decision-makers. Structural public funding for open civic spaces, where young and older people could come together to discuss public issues and participate in various community projects (e.g. educational, training and volunteering) would improve the chances of the successful reintroduction of the intergenerational agenda into community life.

The provision of free civic spaces for groups to debate relevant topics and engage in discussion could create an inclusive atmosphere for all generations. It is particularly important for those at risk of exclusion to have access to programmes that facilitate the acquisition of relevant skills, knowledge and competences (media literacy programmes etc.), to equip them to participate in the political process.

Create funding opportunities for projects that address the intergenerational perspective

Parallel or supplementary funding opportunities for civil society projects and initiatives that promote the intergenerational perspective are pivotal, particularly in the current challenging era of severe austerity measures and budget reductions.

Collect data and conduct research on the intergenerational perspective

Public authorities and regulatory bodies at various levels should support continuous and systematic research on intergenerational justice. This support could be achieved by creating focal points within public institutions that would be required to collect, archive and periodically publish research findings on the intergenerational perspective.

Opportunities to promote an intergenerational dialogue for democracy in the EU

Article 11 of the Lisbon Treaty represents an important step forward in promoting the intergenerational dialogue because it provides a legal basis for civil dialogue and a clear obligation of EU institutions. The article recognizes that the active participation of all citizens is instrumental in achieving good governance and democratic processes in the EU. Civil dialogue is thus one of the most important mechanisms to ensure the inclusion of the intergenerational perspective in EU policymaking and implementation. The EU and its institutions also demonstrate a high level of commitment to the principles of intergenerational justice, most notably in pursuing an agenda of sustainable development. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (particularly Goal 16), aims to build inclusive societies and effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. These commitments provide foundations for the debate and the promotion of the intergenerational dialogue for democracy in the EU. The following ideas are

relevant to achieving this goal.

Introduce an intergenerational impact assessment mechanism into EU policymaking

In order to establish a framework for reviewing public policies, intergenerational principles should be developed and applied to guide policymakers and other leaders. Similar to environmental impact assessments, public authorities should introduce assessments that provide *ex ante* evaluations of the potential effects of all government measures on intergenerational concerns and interests.

Establish a European-level intergenerational centre

A European Intergenerational Centre could be established to guarantee the implementation of policies aimed at promoting the inclusion of the intergenerational perspective. This centre would also develop teaching methods, train educators and serve as a reference point for intergenerational programmes and initiatives. The centre could foster intergenerational cooperation and develop a network of initiatives related to the subject. In addition, the centre would include a system for collecting data, monitor EU activities and design mechanisms to introduce the intergenerational perspective into the EU institutional architecture. It would also analyse the data acquired through focal points within EU institutions, publish the results and propose changes based on them. The development of an EU intergenerational justice index could improve the transparency of the political process from the intergenerational perspective, provide grounds for evidence-based policymaking and allow various advocacy organizations to defend the intergenerational perspective based on evidence.

Appoint a commissioner or key political figure responsible for mainstreaming the intergenerational perspective and introduce an ombudsman for the interests of future generations

Appointing a key political figure at the EU level in charge of mainstreaming the intergenerational dialogue would raise awareness of the importance of intergenerational cooperation and the intergenerational perspective at the highest political level. This individual should be responsible for setting the agenda to promote intergenerational dialogue, introducing mechanisms to review policies to ensure intergenerational justice and acting as an ombudsman for the interests of future generations.

Establish an EU intergenerational council

The EU could demonstrate its true commitment to the intergenerational dialogue by creating its own intergenerational council. This council could be composed of democratically selected representatives of sub-national, national and supranational levels of different generations. The European commissioner in charge of the intergenerational dialogue could chair it. This council should provide a permanent platform for a dialogue between generations, which would include positive and negative agenda-setting powers in the EU policymaking process.

Establish intergenerational committees and commissions at the EU level

Intergenerational committees and commissions within EU institutions would allow for the systematic monitoring of EU activities in terms of the intergenerational justice and dialogue, including the power to propose, develop, and implement mechanisms and projects that promote the intergenerational dialogue. Examples of such structures could be an intergenerational EP committee, an EP intergroup on the intergenerational dialogue, and a special group within the European Economic and Social Committee.

Nominate representatives responsible for intergenerational dialogue in the EP

Members of the EP could be held responsible for the intergenerational dialogue in relevant committees in order to safeguard the interests of these groups in all EU policies.

European parties should prepare action plans about including and mainstreaming the intergenerational dialogue in party life

An action plan to introduce and maintain the intergenerational perspective in policymaking would equip political parties to address this challenge. This plan would also serve as a clear signal to party members and to young voters.

Fund projects that address the intergenerational perspective within EU programmes

In addition to the need for stable and long-term support for civil society organizations that are active in the field, which is usually provided by national or sub-national governments, parallel or supplementary funding by the EU may prove pivotal in the current era of severe austerity measures and budget cuts by targeting all activities politically classified as above standard. Funding for intergenerational programmes from EU financial instruments such as Erasmus+, Europe for Citizens and Horizon 2020 could help address these issues.

Create an EU-wide citizens' platform for intergenerational dialogue

Creating an EU-wide platform for intergenerational dialogue supported by stable and predictable funding would allow young and elder generations to voice their concerns in the EU. This platform could facilitate dialogue between different generations and stakeholders through various mechanisms (e.g. surveys, meetings, round tables, citizen panels and advisory councils) (Koorneef 2013), thus achieving high levels of informed citizenry, shared decision-making and the integration of intergenerational justice principles into EU governance.

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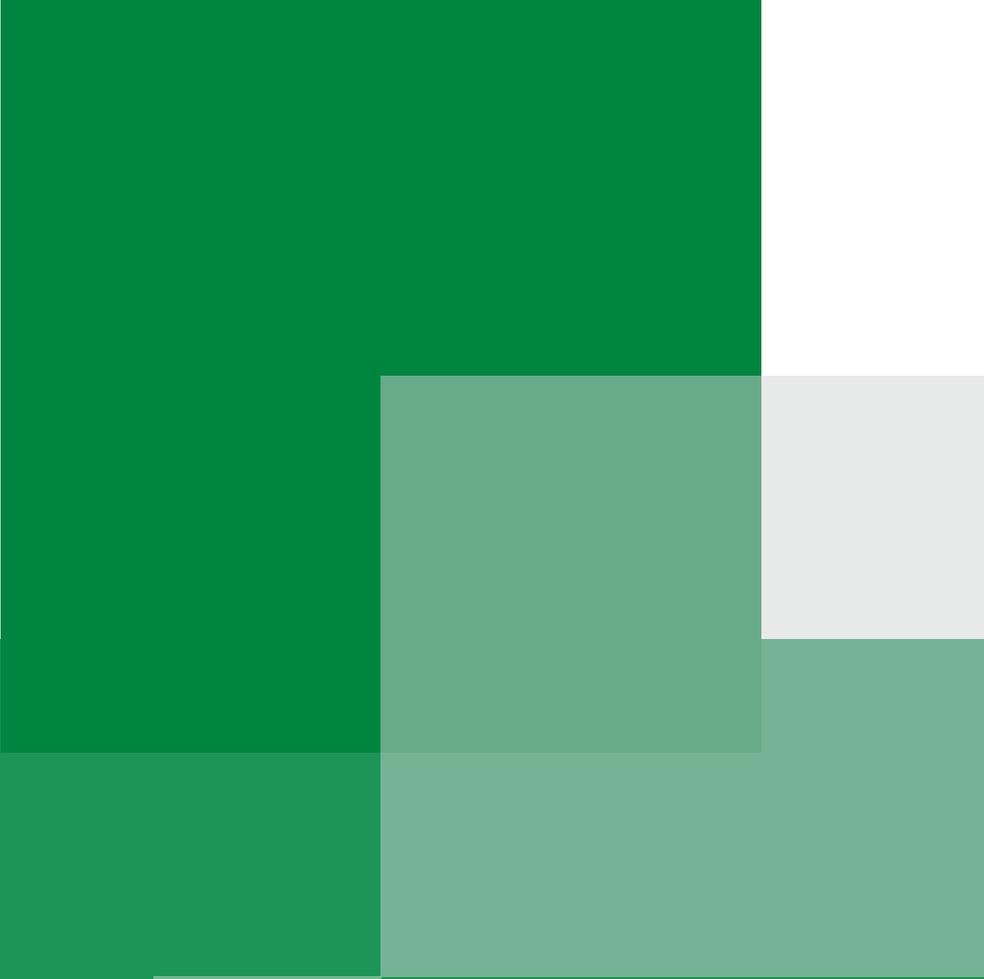
The elder generation comprises the fastest-growing age group in Europe; the proportion of elderly people has increased significantly compared to the younger generation. For young people, the changing demographics has reduced their influence on the political process and consequently resulted in less favourable public policies. The elderly fear reductions in social entitlements, which can be an important source of discomfort, particularly if it is coupled with a lack of appreciation for their wisdom and experience. Because both the young and the elderly are increasingly disconnected from institutional politics and democratic life, the competition for insufficient resources may result in an intergenerational conflict.

This paper explores ways to bring members of all age groups into the political process and to find mechanisms for cooperation within democratic governance processes. The inclusion of the intergenerational perspective would benefit young people, the elderly and society as a whole.

This publication builds on research done in preparation for, and the discussions at, three roundtable meetings organized by International IDEA in Brussels during 2015 and 2016. It comprises a concise Dialogue Paper, capturing key recommendations for policy development and a Discussion Paper that provides a contextual overview of the Intergenerational dialogue for democracy.