

MAGYAR GERONTOLÓGIA

16. ÉVFOLYAM 43. SZÁM (2024)

On-line verzió: ISSN 2062-3690

[www.https://ojs.lib.unideb.hu/gerontologia](https://ojs.lib.unideb.hu/gerontologia)

-BOOK REVIEW-

Battle of generations – How shall we understand each other?

Andrea Toldi

University of Debrecen, Faculty of Health Sciences

- ORCID: 0000-0001-7154-4441

Keywords: generations, generational gap, stereotypes, conflicts, communication

Generációk harca – Hogyan értsük meg egymást?

Toldi Andrea

Steigervald Krisztián (2024): *Generációk harca. Hogyan értsük meg egymást?* Partvonal Könyvkiadó, Budapest. ISBN 978-615-6058-14-0

Kulcsszavak: generációk, generációs különbség, sztereotípiák, konfliktus, kommunikáció

It is almost certain that the expression "generation gap" is familiar to the majority of readers. Reading this term communication difficulties and barriers to understanding come to the mind of the readers. Have you ever wondered what can cause misunderstandings between generations?

Krisztián Steigerwald is an economist, founder and qualitative researcher of a market research and marketing agency, mentor and coach and a nationally recognized researcher of generations. He has been studying generations for more than twenty years. As an expert in this field, he primarily studies the characteristics of generations and the way how the generations manage to live together. Through his books and presentations, he helps his audience to place themselves and the other generations on the generational map. His first book, the first in the *Generációk harca* (Battle of Generations) series, *Generációk harca – Hogyan értsük meg egymást?* (Battle of Generations – How shall we understand each other?) tries to destroy the barriers between generations. He provides explanation of how the different eras influenced and are still influencing the way of thinking and the behavior of the different generations.

As the author writes in the preface, his aim with writing this book was *”to make the readers understand that each generation has their own history. Neither the parents nor the children should feel guilty because everyone has done the best they could do in a given situation”* (Steigerwald, 2024:10).

When people sit down to read a book, the introduction is usually skipped. Why is it worth reading the introduction of the *Battle of Generations*? The author, in a very clear and understandable way, guides the reader through the process of how age was losing its respect, how the coming of the individual to the fore pushed the community into the background. Additionally, he summarizes what the reader can expect from the book.

The book is divided into three big sections.

The title of the first part: *”Angry For And Not Against You”* is borrowed from a Hungarian poet, Attila József. While reading the chapters of this part the reader acquires more information about the different generations and the factors influencing their life and behavior. This section presents the characteristics of each generation and the historical events affecting them. By stating that he does not believe in generational differences *at individual level* either, the author takes the wind out of the sail of those who do not believe in generational differences in general. He argues that each era is determined by certain, typical characteristics, which influence people’s life. According to the author the most important goal of his book is *”to clear the untrue stereotypes off the generations and to switch the focus on their values. This way, everyone can recognize their own generational limitations, and instead of the battles raging between generations, the readers will be able to look at themselves from outside and understand as well as accept other people easier”* (Steigerwald, 2024: 26-27).

What does the term “generation” mean? As the author explains, people who are born roughly at the same time experience the same world around them: the structure of the state, the school system, the operation of the services, the mentality of people, what values they had, their work ethic, their way of life, etc. These factors all influenced their childhood and their future way of thinking.

The second part, entitled “*Six Generations*”, starts with a table that contains the listing of the six generations, the year of birth when the members of the given generation were born and their age in 2020. The table is followed by a short but very clear explanation of the history and the characteristics of the members of the different generations. The reader can become familiar with the meaning of terms like experience domain, basic experience, juvenile basic experience. As the author defines “*generational affiliation is not limited to the category people belong to based on their year of birth: it can be colored by the experiences of all other age groups, and it is up to the representatives of the different generations what and how much they accept from it*” (Steigerwald, 2024:63). Generational behaviors stem from the events that influenced people who were born in the same period of time. The remaining chapters of the second part give very detailed explanations of the different generations: veterans, baby boomers, generation X, generation Y, generation Z, generation Alpha. The explanations are supported by interesting examples, sayings, proverbs that are familiar to every reader, regardless of the generation they belong to. Short summaries at the end of the description of each generation highlight the most typical features of the era and the members of the given generation.

The last part, “*What is Life Like with Six Generations in the 21st Century?*” includes chapters that, based on their titles, apparently do not, or only very slightly belong to the main topic. This part maps several areas, general life situations where stereotypes might appear, and where the members of the different generations understand each other the least. Instead of delving deeper, these chapters merely highlight the very real problems arising from the coexistence of the different generations and their lack of understanding of each other. The world of games is an example the author uses. Games have different meanings. First it can refer to the different games the older and the younger generations played and play nowadays. It reflects to one aspect of the generation gap: how much the members of the older generation cannot understand what their children and grandchildren play. One possible solution is to be brave enough to ask in order to not only patch the gaps between parents and children but to make parents learn the games of the children to be able to communicate with them. It is about

understanding the benefits of online games. Children can learn new techniques from online games and these new skills may be useful in their adult life. Online games have other advantages, too: children can remain invisible. Instead of being judged by their appearance or abilities, the basis of their judgement is their skills and comments. Online games, *"where subordination and supremacy are not based on age but on achievement"* (Steigerwald, 2024:172). However, this chapter is about something else, too: It shows different types of games people play in the society. One example is the games, parents play to try to protect their children from failure. *"Today's children do not learn how to cope with difficulties, and it will negatively impact their adult performance, their relationships at work, and their lives in general"* (Steigerwald, 2024:167). Another trending topic of this chapter is how much the value of usable knowledge has changed. Previously lexical, encyclopaedic knowledge had value, today it has shifted to soft skills like problem solving, adaptation and communication abilities, however, the way of communication has changed for the generation Z. The members of this generation have not learnt how to solve personal conflicts, they worry about their future and as the future is unpredictable, they do not know if they can or how they can adapt to its challenges.

The next chapter is about the effects of social media: how it has changed life and what generational traits it left on those who were born into this space. People tend to share a positive image about themselves, but *"the difference between the visible, posted and shared self and the real self causes frustration"* (Steigerwald, 2024:191). Social media is thought to be the platform of aggression, however, the author does not agree with it. He believes that social media will still respect the boundaries that are necessary for living together and the balance will not be upset between love and aggression.

The next chapter explains the difference between influencers and role models. Role models are placed on a pedestal, they can be admired for a long time, while the influencers live in the world of ordinary people, they reply to the messages, but they can be forgotten from one minute to the other.

Workplace-related problems are in the centre of the next chapter, focusing on the tensions between the older and the younger employers/employees. The members of the X and the older Y generation are loyal employees, they follow written and unwritten rules, while the members of the younger Y and Z generations, *"who were brought up in online games where they always had a second, third, etc. possibility, regard the world as the store of countless possibilities. They enter a workplace only with the goal to acquire new skills that will help them to find an even better workplace"* (Steigerwald, 2024:211).

The next two topics are related to each other: eating and celebrating Christmas. Have you ever thought that eating can cause conflicts between generations? Health awareness, environmental awareness and the change in beauty ideals drastically changed the eating habits of the youngest generations that may cause conflicts with grandparents and parents. This is how it may affect celebrating Christmas with the members of different generations. *”Elderly people respect and keep traditions, the members of the X generation are torn between traditions and new unusual possibilities while traditions and any loyalty means simply commitment to the youngest generation”* (Steigerwald, 2024:231).

The next chapter contains advice to the female members of the X generation. Forty-year-old women often feel insecure because they are balancing between being a mother, a career woman and a wife while trying to perform at the same level in each of these roles. The author encourages women to believe in themselves, to believe that they are good at what they do.

Studying and teaching are in the focus of the last, thought-provoking chapter. Today, as the author says, *”all the knowledge of the world is in our pocket”* (Steigerwald, 2024:239), but it raises a very important question: if everything can be googled on smart phones, what should be taught to the children? Although schools are trying to keep up with technology, students were born in the world of the Internet while, as the age pyramid of the teachers shows, a significant number of teachers were born in an offline world. There is another very serious dilemma, which reflects back to the previously mentioned uncertainty of the young generation: What will the future bring? Who knows what professions will be useful in some years? What professions should they be prepared for? Instead of lexical knowledge, the author argues, skills like being able how to search on the net, how to find the essence of the information, how to check sources, communication skills, foreign language, etc. should be taught. Skills, that can be used in any situation. Children have to learn how to study and they have to know themselves but this knowledge and the method how it can be taught have to be tailored to the *”adventure seeker and conflict avoidant generation Z”* (Steigerwald, 2024:246). According to the author digital pedagogy seems to be the future.

The cover of the book (made by Andrea Földi) grabs the essence of the topic: to find a key not only to the different generations but also to ourselves. The illustrations of Dóra Matyus support the message of the book and reflect the characteristics of the different eras that played significant roles in the life of generations.

The style of the author is clear, easy to read, his vocabulary is close to the readers. Although the book is the result of several years of research, the author does not often use professional terminology in order to make his book enjoyable and understandable even for those who are encountering this topic for the first time. The most important information is highlighted within the text and at the end of the chapters on each generation. The subtle humor that permeates the book makes reading enjoyable. The book is recommended to everyone who would like to learn more about themselves and who would like to work on how to bring different generations closer in order to foster understanding, to facilitate communication and to make living together easier.

Author:

Andrea Toldi

University of Debrecen, Faculty of Health Sciences

Pécsi Tudományegyetem Interdiszciplináris Doktori Iskola Politikatudományi Program

toldine.andrea@etk.unideb.hu