

# Editorial

## Clash of generations?

Shining a light on intergenerational (co-)living



Demographic changes and migration have had a significant impact on the relationship between different generations in Europe over the last decade. This issue of [LIMINA](#) predates the coronavirus crisis in Europe. However, the measures put in place to stem the spread of COVID-19 also demonstrate a common thread with relevant issues in intergenerational discourse: Discussions on disease characteristics, challenges faced by the health care system and strategies to tackle the pandemic always circle back to generational differences. Instructions by the government to particularly protect the elderly as a category of vulnerable people and to practice social distancing also effect relational shifts between generations. Additionally, while many older people feel uncomfortable to be thrust into the public spotlight in this way, others welcome the level of attention and care they receive. The impetus for this edition of [LIMINA](#) is a change in intergenerational relationships, which have undergone a significant transformation over the last decade in Europe – even before the emergence of the new coronavirus. Demographic changes and migration have triggered a shift away from intergenerational living under the same roof in favour of much more heterogeneous generational relationships. This diversification in the societal makeup poses challenges for the government as well as social care and health care systems, but also for individuals. Often, these challenges are only discussed in the context of affordable care and associated implications of an ageing society. Despite this being a simplistic approach, the fact is that the numbers are shifting and there will be more older people in comparison to middle-aged and young people in future. The current issue of [LIMINA](#) on “intergenerational (co-)living” investigates the relationship between different generations, sheds a light on the implications for social, health and nursing sciences as well as gerontology, and explores theological perspectives on relevant issues:

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- The general consensus appears to be that a continuously higher life-expectancy compared to previous generations is a positive and desirable development. However, this raises questions of quantity (lifespan) and quality (subjective experience). “Age” comes with a variety of different associations and expectations. Some people imagine a “typical” old person as someone who is trying to stay young but who can draw on a well of life experiences to guide themselves and others, making them a “wise person”. Other people see age as a stage of life defined by dementia and loss of memory.
- Similarly to the gender-gap, generations often face an economic divide in the form of an age-gap, redefining and imposing an external framework on generational relationships. On an individual level, people need to assert and (re)assure themselves. On a societal and institutional level, this requires rethinking and readjustment across the whole of society.
- From an economic and socioethical perspective, it has long been evident that the traditional “intergenerational contract” relying on pensions being paid for by insurance contributions of the younger generation is not sustainable long-term. This raises the question how the economic relationship and mutual responsibility between generations can be redefined.
- Beyond mutual responsibility and economic aspects, intergenerational relationships are also shaped by traditions, attitudes and narratives that are passed on from generation to generation. The notion of tradition needs to be investigated through the lens of the present.
- Religion also plays an important role in the relationship between generations. Research is required to examine how specific religious beliefs may differ between generations and how these differences are related to each other. Also often under-researched is how individual concepts of God change throughout a person’s lifetime. Additionally, multireligious societies face yet again a different set of challenges resulting from vastly different concepts of intergenerational relationships embedded in their respective religions.
- Finally, the finiteness and fragility of human life links to the issue of dignity in different stages of life. Especially within the medical sector, there is disagreement on what preserving human dignity throughout life means in today’s world.

In the first article of this edition, *Richard Storn* investigates “climate policies” and the “pension system” from an economic perspective. He questions the individualistic approach to evaluation criteria and proposes to instead base them on more general and comprehensive aspects that encourage a reconciliation of interest between generations.

*Jochen Ostheimer* also addresses climate change as an example to explore how narratives shape our vision of the future. Looking at Anthropocene discourse, he analyses how ideas of the future are communicated through narratives and considers their potential to enter public debate through the method of storytelling. The focus in particular lies on how such future scenarios are created and in how far they encourage people to take action.

The subject of *Şenol Yağdı*’s article are students in Austria who are second-generation immigrants with Turkish parents. Their experiences demonstrate that it is possible to succeed academically and thus achieve upward mobility despite challenging circumstances and having parents with a lower educational background. Based on interviews with them, he highlights resources – particularly within an intergenerational context – that play an important role for academic success despite or precisely because of the impact of migration experiences. Yağdı thus contributes to a growing body of international research that shows that the educational attainment of children, adolescents and adults depends not only on their own intellectual ability but on generational influences.

*Edith Petschnigg* examines the Jewish-Christian dialogue in Germany and Austria after 1945 and finds that interlocutors can represent different generations characterised as separate communities of shared experience. These common experiences have shaped and continue to shape this dialogue and raise different questions, issues and topics.

*Johannes Thonhauser* looks at cross-generational transfer of behavioural and thinking patterns on the occasion of the centenary of the Carinthian plebiscite on 10 October 1920. Drawing on cultural science and sociological methods, he exposes a narrative of threat and resistance that has been passed down generations and is still relevant for the establishment of identity today. Alongside elements of conscious transfer, he also reveals a set of unconscious memories that constitute a formative element in Carinthia’s collective memory from past to present.

*Martina Schmidhuber* puts the spotlight on intergenerational (co-)living in multi-generational houses. Older people can be prone to loneliness and associated health issues. Thus, living within a community becomes ever

more important for them. Schmidhuber investigates whether living arrangements with a focus on intergenerational exchange are beneficial for persons in vulnerable situations and whether this is a viable model for the future.

*Anna-Christina Kainradl* and *Ulla Krieburnegg* take Margaret Atwood's short story "Torching the Dusties" as a starting point to study the relationship and overlap between discourses on climate change and discourses on age. The investigation will address questions about fault and responsibility as well as the issues of resource equity and intergenerational justice. The aim of this gerontologic approach is to heighten awareness of the intersections and interdependencies between climate discourse and generational discourse.

*Roberta Maierhofer* looks at lived intergenerationality through an aesthetic lens on the example of the film *VISAGES VILLAGES* (FR 2017) by Agnès Varda in collaboration with the photo artist JR. She compiles hermeneutic aspects of the presence of human existence through an "anocritical" approach. For her, age and youth are not characteristics of an individual or of society as a whole but rather challenges in creating an authentic experience of being human.

We hope you find our articles interesting and engaging and that [LIMINA – Theological perspectives from Graz](#) is an enriching resource for you.

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Issue Editors, on behalf of the editorial team