

The Modern Cultural Intellectuals as a Generational Movement: Viewpoints on the Uses of a Societal Generation in History based on Finnish Intellectual History

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Abstract: This essay discusses the ideas of a societal generation through five Finnish generational movements of the intellectuals. The essay shows that although the ideas of societal generation can be a fruitful way to approach cultural-historical phenomena, it has its problems. The main difficulty in applying the theory stems from the fact that since the concept of a societal generation is modern, it can be problematic to apply it to the generations before the 1920s as well as to late-modern generations. Another challenge in using the theory lies in the fact that becoming a generational movement presupposes the self-consciousness of coevals as belonging to a generation in order to become one.

Keywords: societal generations, intellectuals, twentieth century, Finland, Mannheim, cultural periodicals, student activism

Introduction

As a sociological concept, the idea of a *generation* has been widely applied to societal and cultural movement studies. It could also provide useful insights into the dynamics of a cultural-history phenomenon. For instance, when applying the concept to a relatively small group rather than to a large societal movement, the concept can provide fruitful insights into an important cultural movement. On the other hand, if a generation consists of a small elite, the explanatory power justifying such a movement diminishes – especially if the goal is to explain the wider mentality of a given society.

In this essay, I look at how the sociological concept of a generation can be adapted to the historical studies of generational movements. My case studies concern the Finnish cultural intellectuals of the twentieth century. I have analysed the topic in my previous research project on the student magazine *Ylioppilaslehti* (est.

1913).¹ Particularly, the study looks at four Finnish societal generations from the point of view of student activism.² These included the inter-war right-wing nationalists, the post-war literary minded movement, the Sixties and Seventies left-wing activism and the 1980s postmodernists. I have been particularly interested in how these generational movements developed their worldview in their cultural periodicals and magazines, which can be seen as a marriage between literature and journalism.

I also want to locate the earlier Finnish literary cultural elite of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the chain of Finnish intellectual generations. These notions are based on another project titled “From Culture to Politics: The Dynamics between the Cultural and the Political Public Sphere in Finland in the Early Twentieth Century”.³ I discuss this early twentieth-century liberal intellectuals in the light of the later history of the Finnish cultural and societal generations: could this early nineteenth-century elite likewise be seen as a generational movement in the sense of a societal generation? Secondly, I discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the concept of a societal generation in studies on intellectual history.

A societal generation

A generation as a societal concept – other than in an ancient genealogical meaning – is as “old” as sociology. In the nineteenth century, Auguste Comte (1798–1857), John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) and Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911) were among the most important

¹ Jukka Kortti, *Ylioppilaslehdien vuosisata* (Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 2013).

² See also “Generations and Media History,” in *Broadband Society and Generational Changes*, L. Fortunati and F. Colombo (ed.) in the series *Participation in Broadband Society - Volume 5* (Frankfurt am Main, Berlin: Peter Lang, 2011), 69–93. This essay, particularly the present chapter, contains some material from the article, albeit edited and redefined.

³ The project is funded by The Finnish Cultural Foundation. Later, when I suggest more detailed information about the cases, I predominately refer to my articles written in English on the projects.

theoreticians who started to consider generations on the collective level and not only as being completely analogous to a family generation.⁴ However, the most important theories of the modern generation were formulated in Europe in the 1920s: the Spanish cultural philosopher José Ortega y Gasset and the French cultural philosopher François Mentré, for instance. At the same time German sociologists produced ambitious societal theories on the concept of generations.⁵ The most well-known of these generational theories of the 1920s is undoubtedly Karl Mannheim's article *Das Problem der Generationen* from 1928.⁶

The essential theoretical apparatus in Mannheim's sociology of knowledge was *Zeitgeist* (the spirit of the age), which was an important element in his generational theorising as well. It referred to the presumptions and unquestioned basic experiences of a certain historical era. What creates the *Zeitgeist* are societal changes. The mobilisation of generations is effected not only by the birth year and by the age of individuals, but also the epoch, which often contains societal crises.⁷ Crises have a particular effect on the youth. Mannheim speaks of formative tendencies and formative principles, which can bind groups together and which are capable of becoming the basis of continuing practice. These formative experiences and events may include wars, such as World War I in Robert Wohl's

⁴ See e.g. Julián Marias, *Generations: A Historical Method* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 1970), 18–80.

⁵ Robert Wohl, *The Generation of 1914* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 2–3.

⁶ Karl Mannheim, "Das Problem der Generationen," in Karl Mannheim: *Wissenssoziologie. Auswahl aus dem Werk* (Berlin: Luchterhand, 1964), 509–565. I use the English translation of the article: Karl Mannheim, "The problem of generations," in *The New Pilgrims: Youth Protest in Transition*, eds P.G. Altbach and R.S. Laufer (New York, NY: David McKay, 1972), 101–137.

⁷ Alaminos, Antonio & Clemente Penalva (2012) "The Cognitive Mobilization Index: Crises and Political Generations" *SAGE Open* 1–12. Published online 5 March 2012,

<http://sgo.sagepub.com/content/early/2012/02/28/2158244012440437>.

generational study – the seminal account of the birth of the modern concept of a societal generation.⁸

In this way, different generational units, which were also important in Mannheim’s generational thinking, were born. And although these units could be very different, even opposed to each other, they eventually articulate a destiny that unites the whole generation. The spirit of the time for Mannheim was the “spirit of an epoch” or the “mentality of a period.”⁹ In other words, the same era is different for people of varying ages and thus experiencing the spirit of a common era is only achieved between coevals.¹⁰

Consequently, the formation of a generation depends upon the relative speed of social change. When it is very rapid, generational differences are magnified. In other words, the emergence of a new generation depends entirely on the trigger action of the social and cultural processes in question.¹¹ Societal, cultural and particularly political turmoil have been the driving forces for the Finnish societal generations of the twentieth century.

The Finnish generations from two intellectual extremes of the twentieth century

I have previously analysed Finnish generational movements from the point of view of the young intellectuals of the twentieth century. My empirical data has mostly consisted of my project on the 100-year history of *Ylioppilaslehti*. The student magazine, still published today, was founded in 1913 as the arena for all Finnish-speaking regional student associations – so-called student nations. After the Second World War, the Student Union of the University of Helsinki, which

⁸ Wohl, *The Generation of 1914*; Mannheim, “The problem of generations,” 120.

⁹ On the role of mentality in creating the worldview of a generation, see Kortti, “The Problem of Generations and Media History,” 74–77.

¹⁰ Mannheim, “The problem of generations,” 129.

¹¹ Marvin Rintala, *The Constitution of Silence. Essays on Generation Themes* (Westport & London: Greenwood Press, 1979), 8–9; Mannheim, “The problem of generations”.

soon became one of the richest student unions in the world due to its properties in the heart of Helsinki, took possession of the paper. Overall, *Ylioppilaslehti* is not just “any student paper”; it is a significant Finnish cultural and political institution. Through its editors, it has borne witness to the lives of the majority of the Finnish political and cultural elite of the twentieth century.

Through its history, I analysed four generational movements. Accordingly, I further compared cases concerning the interwar right-wing nationalists and Sixties and Seventies left-wing activism.

As in many European countries, a strong right-wing nationalism arose in Finland during the interwar period. The activities of the young Finnish elite concentrated specifically on the Academic Karelian Society (AKS). The association emerged from the revenge-spirited Karelian idea. The original main idea was to reclaim the Eastern Karelian parts abandoned to Soviet Russia in the “Shame Treaty” of Tartu (1920). Finland became independent from Russia in 1917, but the borders were not clear until the Treaty of Tartu. The bloody Finnish Civil War (1918), the Estonian War of Independence (1918–1920) and particularly the so-called Kindred Nations Wars (1918–1922) – all consequences of the Russian Revolution of 1917 – were the formative experiences for the first generation of the AKS. Besides the Karelian idea, the association favoured Russophobia, the idea of a “Greater Finland,” and, later in the 1930s, fascist-minded right-wing nationalism. The AKS was unfavourable to liberalism, pluralism, socialism and communism, stock jobbing, foreigners, urbanity and “snobbery”.

The AKS soon became a hegemonic movement among the university students, and the first institution it took over within student circles was *Ylioppilaslehti*. Besides disappointment with what an independent Finland looked like, the AKS was also the conservative reaction of the agrarian middle class to modernisation. The uncertainty about the future, due to the economic situation after the First World War, made the youth anxious. The association was highly Finnish-minded and felt that the Finnish speakers were always

slowed down by the arrogant Swedish-speaking upper class. According to the ideas of “True Finnishness”, this was particularly carried out in the enduring campaigning for the finnicisation of the University of Helsinki. The AKS managed to mobilise petitions, mass demonstrations and orchestrate other means, such as infiltrating other associations, to use not only extra parliamentary but also parliamentary pathways in the campaigns that were launched in the provinces as well.¹²

If one considers that, in order to call a generational unit “a generation”, it should create at least some kind of hegemonic discourse among coevals, the AKS undoubtedly achieved it among the Finnish academic youth during the 1920s and the 1930s.

The same could be said about the Sixties’ generation – or in the Finnish case discussed here, the Seventies’ generation. As is well known, during the 1960s, traditions and institutions were on a collision course with the baby boomers when they managed to challenge the old “bourgeoisie hegemony”. The Sixties was an intellectual revolution, “the great age of Theory” as Tony Judt puts it.¹³ Before 1968, Finnish student activism was mostly in the hands of liberal and left-wing radicals. Nevertheless, when the Western New Left started to build a “collective intellectual” – a framework independent of party, state, and university,¹⁴ the Finnish New Left took another direction after the Soviet Union occupation of Czechoslovakia in August 1968. It soon became a formative

¹² For more on the finnicisation of the University of Helsinki in the mid-war period from the point view of *Ylioppilaslehti*; see Jukka Kortti, “Ylioppilaslehti and the University’s Language Struggle in the 1920s and 1930s,” *Kasvatus & Aika* 3 (4) 2009, 7–23.

¹³ Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 398, 403, 407.

¹⁴ Dick Flacks, “Making History and Making Theory. Notes on How Intellectuals Seek Relevance,” in *Intellectuals and Politics. Social Theory in a Changing World*, 5 Key Issues in Sociological Theory, ed. C. C. Lemert (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1991), 17.

experience for the generation together with diverse forms of student activism in “the year of the barricades”.¹⁵ Unlike in other Western countries, the Finnish intellectuals for the most part turned pro-Soviet in choosing a Leninist authorized centralism and proletarian dictatorship instead of Trotskyism or Maoism, as in most other radical movements in the West at the time. So-called *Taistoism* was a Finnish version of the Stalinistic, orthodox communist movement in the 1970s.

As the AKS, *Taistoists* managed to mobilise large masses of students – and not only students but high school teenagers as well. Likewise, the AKS had a strong hold among the youth during its fascist period in the 1930s. And whereas the AKS wanted to finnicise the University, left-wing radicalism of the Sixties and Seventies pled for university democracy. *Taistoists* similarly infiltrated sections of society other than the university; actually, it was one of the main strategies of the movement in their “world revolution”.

Taistoists also had another element of the societal movements that was obviously stronger than with the interwar right-wing nationalists: the generational conflict with their parents. These “children of the soldiers”¹⁶ went so far on the political spectrum from their parents’ generation (including admiring the former enemy of war, the Soviet Union) that the conflict was inevitable. The nationalistic ideology of the interwar period instead stems from the same bourgeoisie patriotic grounds as the former generation, yet the AKS attacked the conservatism of the older generations. Both movements also embittered those who were opposed to their ideology and activities and were the object of their terror.

However, it must be emphasised that although these influential intellectual societal movements managed to have a

¹⁵ David Caute, *Sixty-Eight. The Year of the Barricades* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1988).

¹⁶ This refers to the seminal Finnish study on the Sixties’ generation by cultural historian Marja Alaketola-Tuominen, *Kaikki me ollaan sotilaitten lapsia* (Helsinki: Otava, 1991).

hegemonic role among the younger generations, they were only factions of the cohort – also among the elite. During the 1920s and 1930s, there was an influential generational cultural movement called *Tulenkantajat* (The Flame Bearers). This generation of writers and poets adapted modern European ideas of literature and culture. However, during the 1920s, *Tulenkantajat* was not actually in opposition to the AKS, because some of the intellectuals operated in both movements. It was in the 1930s, when the group turned to the left as the political climate changed. Unlike in many European countries, for example as in Sweden, in Finland a cultural left during the inter-war period barely existed. This was mostly due to the fact that the rise of right-wing politics managed to make the communist party illegal in Finland during the 1930s, although fascists never managed to come to power. Nevertheless, the Finnish minor left intellectuals of the 1930s, who had to operate mostly underground, criticised the AKS heavily.

Taistoists never had a majority anywhere – not in The Communist Party of Finland SKP (more of a Euro-communist faction had a majority), nor in the student world, except in certain associations at the University of Helsinki and the University of Tampere for a short period in the 1970s. However, *Taistoists* had an influence on the Finnish public sphere. They were a small but vocal minority among the cultural and academic elite, and they had a powerful ally, the Soviet Union, which had a habit of getting involved in Finnish internal affairs during the Cold War era. *Taistoists* often branded as anti-Soviet those who said anything against the politics of the Soviet Union. Particularly the influence of *Taistoist* on Finnish cultural life, as well as among journalists, made them look much more influential than they actually were.

Defining “modern” among the young intellectuals

After the Second World War, Finnish political as well as cultural life had to separate from the right-wing nationalists that dominated the public sphere before the war. Finland remained unoccupied after the

Second World War, but it was feared that Finland would follow in Czechoslovakia's footsteps – that the Soviet Union might turn Finland into a communist Soviet satellite. During these “Years of Danger” after the war, communists resurfaced and regrouped themselves. However, while they managed to enter the government of Finland, to gain power in the security policy of Valpo¹⁷ and to increase their power in cultural institutions, such as the national broadcasting company Yle, Finland remained a Western capitalist society.

Nevertheless, the bourgeoisie had to temper the nationalistic tones of its activities – or at least quiet them down somewhat. For instance, student activists were forced to concentrate on cultural issues. One solution was to found organisations such as the Academy of Finland for cultural activities to flourish after the war. On the surface, these activities appeared to be non-political. The underlying motivation of the prime movers of the traditionalists behind the Academy of Finland, however, was to resist that people, particularly student youth, would fall under the influence of the communists.

Meanwhile, another faction emerged among the bourgeoisie-educated class that was more liberal and international. This new generation of modernists, whose important forum *Ylioppilaslehti* became in the 1950s, reached beyond Finnish ethnological national issues and out into the international currents. But, unlike in many other Western cultures, Finnish modernism was apolitical: the Finnish liberal writers, poets and critics of the 1950s were predominantly interested in modernist aesthetics rather than

¹⁷ Valpo (in Finnish: Valtiollinen Poliisi, in English: State Police) was called “Red Valpo” during the years 1944–1948. After the Second World War, the State Police was substantially re-organised. A majority of the old staff was replaced by the left-minded officers. The Soviet Union, especially the leader of the Allied Control Commission in Finland Andrei Ždanov, had a significant effect in the forming of “Red Valpo”. After communists suffered a defeat in the July 1948 parliamentary elections, Valpo was abolished and replaced by Supo, the Finnish Security Intelligence Service.

representing any political agenda.

However, this group was very small (ten to fifteen individuals) and exclusive. Although the period lifted up many important young critics and artists, the age range of this rather small group was fairly large. There were “angry young men” in their twenties, but also war veterans such as Eino S. Repo (born 1919), who became the controversial head of the Finnish broadcasting company Yleisradio in the mid-1960s. Nonetheless, these two generational factions, the traditionalists and the modernists, locked horns in the 1950s in many areas of culture.¹⁸

Defining the modern¹⁹ was a case also in the 1980s when a new generation of young intellectuals emerged in Finland. For instance, in journalism this certain postmodern attitude was realised in highly subjective, provocative and often ironic “gonzo journalism” that was fashionable among Finnish journalists in the early 1980s.²⁰ They wrote ironic articles about those in power, whether they were Finnish cultural figures of previous generations or politicians or even – which was the most provocative during the Finnish Cold War era – Soviet leaders. This new postmodern attitude was manifested also in the provocative aesthetics in the magazines’ layout and photojournalism, for instance. The overall change in the Finnish media sphere with the coming of independent commercial radio, free papers and other deregulation of media increased the possibilities for an experimental and anti-authorial “postmodern” attitude. DIY (do it

¹⁸ For more about this struggle, see Jukka Kortti (2011), “Building the New Cultural Finland. The Student Magazine *Ylioppilaslehti*, The Public Sphere and The Creation of the Finnish Cultural Elite in the Post-War Era,” *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 36:4 (2011), 462–478.

¹⁹ For more on defining the modern among the Finnish intellectuals, see Jukka Kortti, “Media, the Elite and Modernity. Defining the Modern among the Finnish Cultural Intelligentsia in the Twentieth Century,” *International Journal for History, Culture and Modernity*, 2:1 (2014), 1–24.

²⁰ For instance, *The Great Shark Hunt* by Hunter S. Thompson was translated into Finnish in 1981.

yourself) ideology, which was one of the core ideas of the punk movement, and was popular among the young intellectuals in the freer societal sphere of 1980s Finland.

This 1980s generation has had many names, such as the ‘punk generation’, the ‘79-generation’, the ‘suburban generation’, the ‘in-between generation’, the ‘media generation’ etc. Besides media, this new attitude, whether one calls it postmodernism or something else, can also be found in literature and other arts (the rise of performance art, for instance). As Anthony Giddens²¹ puts it, postmodernism, “if it means anything” is most a relevant concept when it “concerns aspects of *aesthetic reflection* upon the nature of modernity,” meaning not only styles, but especially movements in the arts and architecture.

Nevertheless, those cultural activists, who were the prime movers during the era, were also people in their twenties. If one considers that, in order to become a generational movement, the coevals need to have certain formative tendencies. For the 1950s modernists, it obviously was the Second World War, even though the younger members of the movement did not participate in the fighting. However, if we try to find similar tendencies among the 1980s generation, the idea is hard to match. Yet, there was an influential and visible faction of this generation – the environmentalists – who established the political party of the Finnish Green League later in the 1980s. The catalyst that launched Finnish environmental activism was the so-called Kojjärvi Movement of 1979. The objective of the movement was to prevent the draining of a lake in southern Finland, and for many environmental activists it certainly was a formative experience. Nevertheless, these activists were only one rather minor faction of the generation although many of them were visible figures in periodicals and commercial radio mentioned in the 1980s. However, what was common for this generation – from the green

²¹ Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1990), 45.

activists to post-punk rockers – was the new “city culture” that flourished especially in the capital of Helsinki in the 1980s. The change in the media sphere was the most obvious sign of that.

However, as well known, postmodernism did not create any coherent theory, but arguments were often contradicted in ‘the cultural logic of late capitalism’²² and ‘the culture of narcissism’.²³ The ideas of playing with identities in an ever-changing subjectivity, to use irony, pastiche etc. are difficult to apply to the ideas of a societal generation that would call a coherent worldview into play. In the movements of the 1980s, the same people were often concerned with both the environment and posing. In other words, the idea that “we” has atomised in the postmodern society²⁴ does not fit in with the ideas of the Mannheimian generational unit.

Two generations of nineteenth-century liberal intellectuals

So if a societal generation as a modernist theory might be difficult to adapt to late-modern generations, what about the generations before the First World War? Let us now look at the Finnish liberal intellectuals of the nineteenth century from the viewpoint of a societal generation.

In his dissertation,²⁵ social scientist Matti Virtanen defines the Finnish societal generations as “the successors of the Fennoman movement” (*fennomanian perilliset*). By this, he means that all the Finnish societal generational movements up to the present are rooted

²² Fredrick Jameson, *Postmodernism – Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

²³ Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism. American Life in An Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York & London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1991).

²⁴ See for example Scott Lash, “Reflexivity and its Doubles. Structure, Aesthetics, Community”, 143–156 in *Reflexive Modernization. Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order*, eds Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens and Scott Lash (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1994), 110–173.

²⁵ Matti Virtanen, *Fennomanian perilliset: poliittiset traditiot ja sukupolvien dynamiikka* (Helsinki: SKS, 2001).

in the nationalistic Fennoman movement that originated in the mid-nineteenth century. Yet it came into existence from within the Swedish-speaking elite, whereby the Fennomans pushed for the promotion and strengthening of the Finnish language and Finnic culture – to distance it from Swedish or Scandinavian culture. The idea was to distance it from its peasant-status to the position of a national language and national culture. The whole movement, as well as its successors, was highly influenced by the Hegelian philosopher and statesman J.V. Snellman (1806–1881).²⁶

In the 1890s, the Fennoman movement divided into two separate branches: the conservative and moderate “Old Finns” and the more liberal and radical “Young Finns”. Politically, the main dividing factor was the attitude towards the Russification policies implemented by the Russian Empire in the late 1890s. The artistic faction of the Young Finns was formed by the major figures of the “the Golden age of Finnish art”, who were born in the early 1860s: the painters Eero Järnefelt (1863–1937), Akseli Gallén-Kallela (1865–1931), Emil Wikström (1864–1942) and Pekka Halonen (1865–1933), the composer Jean Sibelius (1865–1957) and the authors Juhani Aho (1861–1921) and Arvid Järnefeldt (1861–1932). The two last-mentioned belonged to the founders of the newspaper *Päivälehti* (later *Helsingin Sanomat*), which became the chief organ of the Young Finns.

Of the cultural periodicals, the main publication of this generation of intellectuals was *Valvoja*, established already in 1880 by historians, philologists, philosophers and linguists, who were or became major figures among the Finnish-speaking academics, some of them made their marks as politicians as well. One of the active contributors of *Valvoja* was the writer Juhani Aho who has been called “the first Finnish professional author”. He also worked as a

²⁶ See Jukka Kortti, “Intellectuals and the State: The Finnish University Intelligentsia and the German Idealist Tradition,” *Modern Intellectual History*, 11 (2014), 359–384.

journalist and published, together with his brother Pekka Brofeldt (1864–1945), the magazine *Uusi Kuvalehti* (New Pictorial Magazine) (1890–1903) from 1892. *Uusi Kuvalehti* was, as its titled indicates, a pictorial magazine. A great portion²⁷ of the content of the articles were about geography and travel. Yet the Young-Finn-minded *Uusi Kuvalehti* was not political until the Russification started at the turn of the twentieth century. Russification, so called “the first years of oppression” largely created both passive and active resistance all over the country. The Young Finns, who were constitutionalists, fiercely opposed the changed policies of the Mother country.

The key societal encouragement for Aho’s generation was the radical Fennoman movement KTP of the 1880s. This student-based movement was an ardent nationalist and eager social-reformist organisation that pushed through Finnish language and culture, as well as democracy and liberalism, without involving individualism. The movement was very influential among the student generation of the late 1870s and the 1880s.

Another later ‘great man’ of Finnish literature, the poet Eino Leino (b. 1878–1926) belonged to a younger generation of the liberal Young Finns. Leino, likewise, was an active newspaper writer, who contributed to cultural periodicals and magazines. He founded the cultural periodical *Nyky aika* (Modern Times, 1897–1899), together with his older brother Kasimir Leino (b. 1866–1919). Although the periodical outlined in its sample issue that it would be “a popular periodical for literature, art, science, commerce, industry, and societal issues”, and that politics did not belong to its editorial policy,²⁸ “the years of oppression” forced *Nyky aika* to take a stand on the political

²⁷ According to my content analysis, almost a quarter of the article content concerned geography and travel in 1897–1903, when it was usually no more than 5 per cent in the cultural periodicals of the era. See Jukka Kortti ”Kulttuurista politiikkaan: Aho, Leino ja kulttuurilehdet estetiikan ja politiikan rajoilla,” *Ennen ja nyt* 5/2016. <http://www.ennenjanyt.net/2016/12/kulttuurista-politiikkaan-aho-leino-ja-kulttuurilehdet-estetiikan-ja-politiikan-rajoilla/>

²⁸ “Nyky aika”. *Nyky aika* Sample issue 1897, cover.

turmoil.

Later in the mid-1900s, Leino was a driving force behind the cultural periodical *Päivä* (1907–1911), yet he did not belong to the editorial staff, but published articles and particularly poems in the paper. First of all, he was a central figure in the circle of *Päivä* – the group on cultural intellectuals that gathered regularly in the editorial office of the periodical. These intellectuals included, again, the main figures of “the Golden age of Finnish art”, but the group was mainly formed by the younger generation of artists, writers and academics. For this generation, at least for those born in the late 1870s and early 1880s, the formative years were the “the first years of oppression,” the Russification period from the October Manifesto by Tsar Nicholas II (1894–1917) to the General Strike in Finland as a part of the Russian revolution of 1905. Already in the 1890s, the division of the Fennoman movement had meant that the cultural faction of the “Young Finns” saw that the previous generation did not push Finnish culture forward. During the Russification period, the liberal ideas of the Young Finns were mixed with nationalism, which differentiated Finnish liberals from Scandinavian and other Western European liberals.

Nevertheless, from the point of view of cultural activism, it is difficult to find themes and issues that were common, particularly for intellectuals of the same age. For instance, the critical relationship to religion, especially towards state-church Christianity, was an important issue amongst the Finnish liberal intellectuals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – just as everywhere in the Western “republic of letters”. It was important for Juhani Aho’s generation of the radical Fennomen of the 1880s, but also for Eino Leino’s generation alike. During the most critical period towards state-church Christianity in the 1900s and 1910s, one of the most eager critics of the era was educator and writer Ernst Lampén (1865–1938), who belonged to the older generation of the liberal Young

Finns.²⁹

Overall, generation was not an underlining force that united the liberal cultural intellectuals of the era. More important than an age or even a “formative experience” was *Zeitgeist*; the societal turmoil and internationalism that fuelled the cultural activists.

Conclusion: A Societal generation is a modern concept

According to the Swedish cultural theorist Johan Fornäs, modernity is comprised of three dimensions: a diachronic dimension (*early, high and late* modern); a synchronic dimension (the modes of the modern such as modernization, modernity and modernism) and a series of levels of the modern (the vertical social, cultural and subjective aspects of the modern).³⁰

The societal generation can unquestionably be characterised as a high modern concept. All of the most important modern generational theories were formulated in Europe between 1910 and 1933.³¹ Particularly, the 1920s was a golden age of modernist theories, as well as modernism in intellectual societal and cultural movements that actively respond to the modern condition. In general, the period from the 1910s to the early 1930s can be called the classical period of the European intellectual.³² The post-Second World War was the second era of the high modern.

²⁹ See Kortti, “Religion and the Cultural Public Sphere. The Case of the Finnish Liberal Intelligentsia during the Turmoil of the Early Twentieth Century” *History of European Ideas* 44: 1 (2018), 98-112.

³⁰ Johan Fornäs, *Cultural Theory and Late Modernity* (London: Sage, 1995), 18, 32, 39–40.

³¹ The Germans mainly produced ambitious societal theories on the concept of generations, whereas the English wrote poems and novels, which articulated the conscience and destiny of generations. French descriptions of the characteristics of generations were created by different organised writer groups and the Italians, first and foremost, analysed generations in their political essays (Wohl, *The Generation of 1914*, 2–3).

³² Ron Eyerman, *Between Culture and Politics. Intellectuals in Modern Society* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2004), 72.

If one looks at the generation of Finnish intellectuals discussed here from the point of view of a societal generation in a Mannheimian sense, the most suitable for the theory are the inter-war nationalists and the baby boomers. Besides having clear “formative experiences”, both intellectual movements attracted a rather wide stratum of young people and managed to generate a hegemony among them to a certain degree. Both were also definitely products of the *Zeitgeist*.

However, one must remember that neither generation managed to acquire a total hegemony even among the young intellectuals of the era. Although both movements often explain the whole generation, there were many kinds of factions in the generations that certainly did not identify with the radicals.

The main problem when applying generational theories is indeed that any age cohort in its entirety is often interpreted as using a theory-based approach. In other words, the activities of the small, loud vanguard of the youth are identified with the entire coeval masses. It is very common, for instance, that those baby boomers explain that they certainly did not belong to a certain group. One must also remember that although baby boomers formed a mass of students never seen before, not the whole cohort went to university, not to mention being radicalised. The interwar students were elite in the main, since those who went to university comprised a small portion of the cohort before the 1960s. It is also noticeable that, although culture played an important role in both generational movements, they were first and foremost ideological and political movements.

The Fifties modernists, instead, were apolitical – except on cultural policy issues – and distinctively cultural. Hence, because they were also a very small elitist group, consisting of people of different ages, can we call them a generation at all? One dimension of their activities was that they often made certain generational statements. For instance, they had a distinctive new approach to narrative (broken into pieces) and causality (which was avoided) in their aesthetic literary sense. These statements were realised

particularly in the critique (not only literature, but significantly also film), which was an important arena of the movement. In these statements, they wanted to distinguish themselves from the older literary generations. The same kind of attitude can also be discerned in the *Tulenkantajat* movement of the interwar period; that is, their idea that: we may be elitists, but we are very conscious of our mission to reform culture and to obliterate the ideas of the older generations.

And, if one looks at the writings of the “postmodernist’s” generational thinking – that we are here to reform everything and it starts this year – becomes even central in their writings. However, if one looks at early twentieth century activism, one cannot find that kind of generational consciousness. What really pulls the liberal intellectuals together is not an age but a *Zeitgeist*. That is, one must fight against oppression with cultural tools, follow international currents and create our own unique features. But, this is a programme for all the enlightened, not particularly for the people of our age. As Robert Wohl states: “Historical generations are not born; they are made. They are a device by which people conceptualise society and seek to transform it.”³³ In order to be a generation presupposes consciousness of its own uniqueness and pride in its intellectual superiority.

On the other hand, the fact that the Eighties generation goes under so many different names indicates the circumstance that the ideas of a modernist societal generation in the Mannheimian sense are also difficult to adapt for the late modern world, where identity is atomised in an age of reflexivity³⁴ and the collapse of “grand narratives”.³⁵ In other words, the young generations began

³³ Wohl, *The Generation of 1914*, 5.

³⁴ Stuart Hall, “The Question of Cultural Identity,” in *Modernity and Its Futures*, eds Stuart Hall, David Held and Tony McGrew (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press & Open University 1992), 273–326; Lash, “Reflexivity and its Doubles”.

³⁵ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition. A Report on Knowledge*, trans. by Geoff Bennington (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1989 [Fr. 1979; Eng. 1984]).

fragmenting so much in the 1980s that coherent generalisations of them feels, at the very least, artificial. In addition, a generation acquires the sense of historical continuity, to originate in the past and to extend into the future. The loss of this kind of belonging was noticed already by the early theorists of postmodernism.³⁶ Yet, the actual sense of belonging never really vanished – as we have seen in the rise of nationalism in the 2010s, for instance – but adhesive ideological movements were at least questioned when entering into the era of the late modern.

To sum up, generational theories are not appropriate for all times and places but can be fruitful in analysing cultural history. In addition, since a societal generation as a social theory simplifies and stereotypes multidimensional phenomena, it must be used carefully, recalling that it is a concept created by theorists in the 1920s, who themselves identified with a new modern consciousness.

³⁶ Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism*, 5.