



EDITORIAL

The term intergenerational solidarity is frequently linked to a specific quantitative approach employed in the »SHARE – Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement« project (e.g. Albertini, Kohli and Vogel 2007, also Kohli and Albertini 2007). The focus of the analysis in the SHARE project is intergenerational transfers from the young to the older generation and vice versa in a comparative perspective. Researchers utilise three levels of inquiry (micro, mezzo and macro) in order to emphasise the direction of intergenerational transfers on the micro level as opposed to those occurring on the macro level.

The macro level chiefly relates to systems of social security and national policies where the principle of solidarity is implemented (transfers from the younger to the older, from the healthy to the ill, from the active to the inactive) and where the direction of transfers is usually from the young and active population to the older generation. Findings of the SHARE project for 10 European countries show that the total financial transfer and social support on the micro (family) level goes from the older to the younger generation (these include transfers between the living, but not inheritance – that is one additional transfer going from the older to the younger). Transfers from grandparents to their children are more often and more intensive than the other way around. The difference between the transfers decreases with age, but overall older people also continue to be support givers after the age of 70. These findings show how important the role of older people is, people who in the perceptions of the general population are often passive receivers of help.

While the SHARE project focuses on reports of older people (aged 50+) about intergenerational transfers on the micro level (parents and their adult children), there are also other ways to explore intergenerational solidarity. A variety of methodological approaches is available to study intergenerational solidarity, from cross-sectional to longitudinal research, or from studies in which the respondents are the elderly (e.g. aged over 50), their children, or both. It is also possible to use one or more dimensions of the intergenerational solidarity model (Bengtson and Roberts, 1991 define six dimensions of intergenerational solidarity: associational solidarity, affectual solidarity, consensual solidarity, functional solidarity, normative solidarity and structural solidarity). The intention of papers in this special issue is to show that the exploration of intergenerational solidarity does not need to be focused solely on parent-adult child dyads, but can be defined more flexibly and broadly.

First, we validate a conceptual and operational definition of intergenerational solidarity within ego-centered social support networks, where the proportion of intergenerational ties (within and outside the family) is used as an indicator of intergenerational solidarity in the provision of social support (Hlebec, Šircelj, and Mrzel). We use this approach to study the role of the degree of emotional closeness and conflict as mediators of the provision of emotional support in intergenerational ties (Šadl and Hlebec). Further, the exploration of intergenerational solidarity is broadened beyond the family setting as the role of community education (Kump and Jelenc Krašovec) and social work (Mali) are presented as opportunities for the creation of intergenerational ties in community settings. The question of the potential of assistive technology for developing and maintaining intergenerational solidarity within the family and the community is elaborated in two papers (Nagode and Dolničar). The role of intergenerational ties in managing the social and individual risks of older people is studied (Mandič, Kavčič) through co-residence as an option for care in old age and by exploring the risk-related coping strategies of old people. Body work, specifically, care work by an adult child performed for a frail parent is as much an opportunity to strengthen intergenerational ties as a threat to intergenerational ties within the family (Šadl).

The papers included in this special issue show that, while Slovenia is a family-oriented society and that intergenerational solidarity is very important for the quality of life in old age, other opportunities for initiating and maintaining intergenerational ties within the extended family, community or workplace should be taken into account when studying intergenerational solidarity.

The last paper in this special issue relates to the quality of survey research designs (Müller and Toš).

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Guest Editor of the special issue