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On the Social Representations of Intergenerational Equity

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Abstract

Social Representations describe the genesis of collective ideas, social norms and general moods. By capturing social perceptions of socio-economic change in times of crises, social representations allow predictions about future behavior of social masses during economic upheaval. The social representations of intergenerational equity were retrieved from 110 speeches, interviews and conversations with leaders, practitioners, experts and students representing academia, business, economics, finance, international organizations, media, politics, public affairs and religion at a European future conference during the late summer of 2011. Social representations on intergenerational equity comprised of unsustainable pension systems in the light of aging, shrinking Western populations, overindebtedness in the wake of governmental deficit spending and ecologic decline related to climate change and unsustainable consumption patterns. Stakeholder views of intergenerational equity included environmentalism on public officials' and international organizations' agendas. Politicians connected intergenerational justice to human rights. The 2008/09 World Financial Crisis impacted intergenerational equity by stressing overindebtedness and uncertainty. Nationalism and protectionism appeared to be growing in the finance and corporate worlds during the Eurozone Eurobond negotiations. Intergenerational environmentalism features associations on ecologic sustainability, climate change and sustainable consumption patterns. Global solutions for complex common goods dilemmas and international remedies back intergenerational justice. Promoting solidarity, ethicality and social responsibility but also innovations and future investment are intergenerational equity implementation prerequisites. Intergenerational equity is obtained by efficiency, humane values and behavioral changes regarding conscientious consumption. Long-term solutions hold institutional regulation and foresighted taxation but also open debates informing global leaders of complex intertemporal frictions.

Keywords: 2008/09 World Financial Crisis, Climate Change, Collective Decision Making, Environmentalism, Europe, Forecasting, Future Conference, Future-Oriented Governance, Globalization, Intergenerational Equity, Intergenerational Fairness, Intertemporal Decisions, Social Masses, Social Representations

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