

Article

The Generational Dimension in Transitions: A Theoretical Review

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Abstract: The aim of this article is to question the notions of ‘generation’ and ‘transitions’ from a theoretical perspective by making a brief historical incursion into the sociology of generations. This review will explore the latest ideas on youth transitions to establish theoretical bridges between the different authors, and between the classic and modern approaches. It also takes a deeper look at an emerging theoretical model that seeks to connect these two important issues, transitions and the notion of generation. The debate focuses on how youth transitions are conceptualised from a micro perspective as individual and individualised processes, underlining the idea that they are based on specific macro concepts of ‘youth’ in generational terms. The concept of social generation allows the micro aspects of transitions to be associated with the historical situation in which they occur. This theoretical approach proposes that young people’s transitional behaviours are subject to the mechanisms of intergenerational change, but also notes that transitions can be differentiated according to the position they occupy in the social structure. In summary, this article supports the idea that youth transitions are different in their manifestations, although they may have a similar generational basis. The aim is therefore to introduce a broader theoretical view that includes the predecessors and successors of the classics, and serves as a point of departure for an approach designed to understand the formats of the new ‘youth status’, and hence, offer a more accurate scientific explanation for examining the overworked notions of *generation* and *transition*.

Keywords: generation; transitions; youth; social class

1. The Concept of *Generation* in the Classics: Limits and Opportunities for the Study of Transitions

The concept of *generation* has been used recurrently in sociology. The fundamental premise of Mannheim’s approach to the generational issue is the idea that the shared experience (which goes beyond mere contemporary experience) of historical events of sufficient importance, lived collectively by a large group of individuals, inevitably produces in young people a *shift* from previous generations, which takes the form of a ‘first impression’ on their, as yet, unfixed and not *closed* consciousness [1] (p. 216). This initial variation can, in the long term, produce a change in the way these individuals perceive and react to the world, thus becoming transformed by this common and shared experience into a potential new generation, whose actual formation will depend on different factors. Changes in the world, to which they react, serve as the key trigger that causes the emergence of the generation.

Mannheim’s work can be directly linked to Dilthey, whose work marked a watershed in the study of the generational issue. Mannheim himself acknowledges this connection in his programmatic text, when he says that Dilthey represents a paradigm shift in the reflection on the problem of generations, insofar as he abandons positivism and its linear and quantifiable conception of time and places them—from a historical-romantic perspective—in an ‘inner time’ that can only be understood as something qualitative. Dilthey therefore raised the impossibility of determining the duration of

generations a priori, a matter that has long obsessed numerous authors throughout the history of the concept (see, in this regard, the almost cabalistic exercises of Ortega [2,3] and Mariás [4], for example). According to Mannheim, the temporal extension of a generation (always irregular and impossible to determine) is less important than its *spiritual* content. He highlights the irregularity and incalculability of the duration of generations, in a similar line to the position taken both by Wechsler [5–7] and Abrams [8].

In Dilthey, the idea of generation rests on the fact of contemporaneity; however, although he uses this term, he is in fact referring to coetaneity, a distinction clearly made by Mariás [4] following Ortega; individuals who not only coexist at the same time, but are also the same age. Here, it is worth introducing the refinement, highlighted by Wechsler (cited in Laín [9] (p. 258)), in delimiting the reference to age, as it is not the date of birth that is important, but the moment the individuals emerge on the social scene; “Much more than a team of coetaneous individuals, a generation is a group of men born simultaneously to historical life”. Similarly, it is worth introducing the distinction between ‘biological age’, ‘emotional age’ and ‘social age’ [10]; this last concept refers to the date an individual appears in the public sphere.

This approach presents generation, understood as a set of contemporary (coetaneous) individuals, as a community of influences, and is composed of individuals who “in their impressionable years have experienced the same guiding influences” ([11] (p. 37) Cited in Mariás [4] (p. 64))¹. A closer look at this approach, which bases the definition of generation on a *community* of experiences lived by certain individuals who share a date of birth, takes us to the works of other German authors, such as Kummer, who in 1909 defined generation as a set of individuals “comprising all men living approximately coetaneously, born in the same economic, political, and social situation, and therefore equipped with a similar worldview, education, set of morals, and artistic sensitivity” (cited in Laín [9] (p. 240)). According to Wechsler [5–7], a new generation always expresses a clash between the youthful spirit and the *Zeitgeist*, the spirit of the time. Each generation is thus a proposal for the renewal of that prior historical life, so the inevitable influence of the past establishes a common element for all of the members of a cohort, and enables them to become an authentic generation. On this point, according to Laín [9] (p. 257), Wechsler draws from the work of Ranke, who describes the variation in the ‘human spirit’ in each period as the germ of the movement, which causes the flourishing of new generations that serve as a counterpoint to the previous configurations. For Laín, this orientation was also present in the work of Petersen [12,13], where the possibility of a new generation emerging is contingent on the possible contrast between the ‘spiritual disposition’ of the young people and the conditions established by their education (in other words, their socialisation).

Still within this same approach, but now moving away from Germany to France, Mentré [14] (p. 304) states that generation has to do with sensitivity, an attitude to life, “a generation is therefore a way of feeling and understanding life, which is opposed to the previous way, or at least different from it” (Cited in Mariás [4] (p. 115)). This issue, under another formulation, is also recurrent in Ortega, when he speaks of generation as the variation in the sensitivity to life (in the “radical sensation while contending with life”) of men in a certain period [2,3]. Indeed, for Ortega, the temporal and spatial community (sharing space and time, period and place) are the basis of his own definition of ‘generation’, which places particular emphasis on the fact that the members of this generation share space and time, and period and place, but do so in conditions of proximity of birth dates, or—in the terminology of Ortega—belonging to the same “date range”. They are not only contemporaneous, but above all, coetaneous, in view of the fact that at each historical moment—according to Ortega—there are always simultaneously three “todays” within each specific “now”: three ages, corresponding to the classic division (youth, maturity, and old age). The ebb and flow of human history is the result of tensions and the dynamic relation between generations.

¹ For a slightly different Spanish translation of Dilthey’s text, see Laín [9] (pp. 222–223).

For Ortega, the world of ideas in a period (“convictions are common to all men who coexist in their era: the spirit of the time” [3] (p. 43)), what is known as the ‘current world’, is imposed on individuals as a fundamental element of their *circumstance*. Although these pre-existing ideas may not be accepted by the individual, he or she must inevitably take them into account to be able to oppose them; they existed prior to the subject, who must react to the world of convictions that is now the social reality. The past is always there, overlapping and interweaving its constituent elements with the supposedly new elements introduced by successive generations, in their process of substituting and modifying (social change) the bases of society. This idea of the validity of elements from the past, the fundamental weight of history on the way societies function, was already present in Comte (frequently identified as the pioneer of the scientific study of generations) and in Stuart Mill (see Mariás [4] (p. 34)).

This vision of *tradition* as an element that agglutinates a generation’s collective consciousness, and hence, a resource that is mobilised to respond to the challenges of the current historical moment, is also found in Mannheim’s thinking and, in general, in all the authors who conceptualise history as a sequence—sometimes peaceful, sometimes conflictive—of generations that produce a constant and never-ending process (or *dynamic*) of social change. This approach can be seen in both Jansen [15], and—from a recreation based on Marxist theory—in Afanasieva [16]. In what was almost his first incursion into the issue of generations, Ortega [2] (p. 10) noted that, based on the degree to which the new generations accept or reject what they have received (the ‘inheritance’, cited by so many authors after the unrest of 1968—see for example Mendel [17]), we see either ‘cumulative periods’ or ‘eliminary and polemical periods’. Thus, stasis and social change can be seen as a succession of adaptations to recurring and unavoidable problems, and this is how we can conceive the integration of young individuals into adult life, through their transitional biographic processes.

In short, accepting that it is difficult to define the concept of generation, cultural generations cannot be reduced to cohorts or age-groups in the terms of Eyerman and Turner [18]. On the contrary, it is necessary to explore the new perspectives that combine agency and the discursive character of generational practices, beyond the traditional concept of Mannheim’s social generation [19]. This paper is presented as an integrative theoretical discussion of developmental and generational perspectives, which are often depicted as a dichotomy.

2. The Concept of Generation in the Current Debate on Youth Transitions

The debate on transitions and generations has taken place in parallel, as two independent threads, with no unified reflection on the significance of the new youth condition. The transition to adult life includes various steps, such as finishing education, joining the workforce, leaving the parental home, forming a couple, and having children. Our question is to what extent are transitional processes due to the effect of age, generation, or both.

Empirical evidence shows that transitions, according to the literature, have tended to become delayed, more complex, and more individualised [20–22]. Several models have set out to explain youth transitions from a range of theoretical approaches, and numerous studies from the fields of sociology, economics, and demographics have analysed the transitional processes of young people from a comparative perspective [23–25]. These comparative analyses point to individualisation, destandardisation, and the second demographic transition as suitable theoretical contexts for interpreting today’s youth transitions, emphasising the existence of a common—although not convergent—pattern in the demographic and social events that define these transitions, which are typified by these researchers as complex, delayed, and prolonged over time [26–28]. In contrast, the theories that are more critical with these interpretations of youth transitions underline the importance and reproductive effects of the structural factors that conform the youth condition and identities, such as social class or gender [29,30].

Another line of research on transitions adopts the life-course theory as a context for interpreting generation and for analysing the different life courses. This theory suggests that the significance of transitions for young people differs depending on the moment at which they occur in the young

person's life (*timing*); how they occur, in terms of the intervals and durations of these transitions (*range*); and how they vary within a group or collective. The life-course theory allows us to incorporate into the debate reflections on how the generation itself can affect young people's expectations and their correlated life courses. In this interpretive context, Baltes [31] introduces a theory of life course with the premise that development is influenced by historical, evolutionary, and socio-cultural factors, which adds the dimensions of cohort-age, developmental approach, and a generational perspective.

The concept of generation is not an easy instrument to use in social research, because of its complex and multidimensional nature, as we described briefly in the previous section. However, Mannheim's minimalist concept of generation (in which, as we saw briefly in the previous section, generation is much more than an age group and represents a belonging to a *common destiny* in cultural and historical terms) allows us to explore the possible connection between the effects of individuality and structure on young people's life courses.

Thus, based on this integrated perspective, the interpretation of the socio-historical circumstances in people's lives depends on their position in social time and space, which leads to the configuration of similar expectations and motivations of socialisation. This idea connects with Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* [32,33]. In spite of Bourdieu's emphasis on the concept of generation as an explanatory factor of cultural change, this notion is relatively unexplored in his work, because of the importance of social class in his approach. According to Bourdieu, the members of a same generation not only share the same formative and life experience in their transition to adult life, which differentiates them from the older generation, but they also share the same and distinctive generational *habitus* [34]. In this interpretation, Glenn Elder's life-course theory overcomes these theoretical limitations by including the interactions and interdependencies between psychological characteristics, biological determinants, and socio-historical contexts within the life cycle, and focuses on the differentiated lifestyles of the different generations.

Generation is therefore understood as the set of people who belong to an age cohort and share a subjective narrative, and is determined by the political and socio-economic context in which their personal and social circumstances take place; this is the context that differentiates one generation from another. In the scenario of these changes, the inequalities originating in the transitional processes must be analysed and interpreted, with reference to the generation and the events that characterise this cohort. This definition is somewhat removed from the standard classifications of generations offered by the communications media and the market. A rereading of the classics, as recommended in the previous section of this article, provides a comprehensive theoretical framework for the study of generations, which contemplates the differential positions occupied by young people in these generations when undertaking their transitional processes [1,2]. Mannheim indeed reflects deeply on the concept of generation through three dimensions (position, connection, and generational unit), which he uses to explain how young people are bound together by a shared socio-historical space and time because of their being born in the same cohort. However, this does not guarantee that they will belong to the same generational context, as people belong to different social classes, cultures, and differentiated identities that depend on socio-structural determinants, such as gender adscription, which accompany us from childhood. The classifications of generations made in recent decades are therefore somewhat reductive, as they homogenise the lifestyles of all of the young people belonging to a supposed same generation. It should be noted that there are differentiated subjectivities in how the world is interpreted, depending on the actual lived experience and the impact of the interpretations of historical facts. This, in turn, depends on the social, economic, and cultural space from which they are lived, implying that we cannot speak precisely of a 'uniform generational thought' [35]. This is directly connected with the debate on meaning and change in youth transitions in different European countries. Through the generation effect, individuals interiorise a series of expectations and values that are manifested in transitional behaviours towards work, residential independence, or forming a family. In short, generations are the cultural product of characteristic historical moments in each country, which would explain the different transitional tendencies in the different national contexts.

The research on transitions to adult life in young people reveals their complexity and the difficulty of designing an interpretative framework capable of integrating the determinants underpinning the transformation and diversity of these transitions. The most recent research highlights the importance of economic context in the different transitional events, as this is the background that shapes the young people's expectations and plans in terms of independence, forming a family, and their entry in the workplace [36]. The increasing divergence of young people's transitional patterns is more evident in less favourable economic periods, suggesting that the effect of historical, cultural, and institutional events assumes greater importance in these circumstances. This finding links with theories of individualisation, which demonstrate how the uncertainty that characterises individuals' life courses in times of crisis leads to more individualised behaviours [37,38]. This interpretation also connects with the possible *generational effect*, a concept that includes both the transitional event by population cohorts (life course), and the historical and contextual dimension in which the events occur (economic situation, social policies, etc.). In summary, this underlines the importance of incorporating the concept of generation into the study, as well as an analysis of youth transitions, in order to account for the complexity and multidimensionality of the transitional process.

3. Intergenerational Relations in Transitions: The Need to Introduce Social Class

To this debate on transitions and generations must be added the question of intergenerational relations and the unequal position occupied by young people when embarking on their transitional challenges, beyond the standardised principles of the traditional definitions that tend to consider all individuals of the same age as belonging to the same generation. According to Murdoc and McCrom [39], sociological theory has paid limited attention to social class as a structuring factor of each generation. However, the emergence of youth subcultures in certain historical contexts has been associated with social class in times of institutional rupture, economic crisis, or social disorganization as a generational expression. Parsons [40] refers to the 'youth culture' as a culture of the generation that consumes without producing. In the same line of interpretation, Laufer and Bengtson [41] consider that a key aspect of generational analysis is class grouping. These researchers highlight the need to examine how class groups mediate the historic experience of age-cohort membership.

It is precisely from this critical approach that Martín Criado sustains the idea that it is not generational but class differences that really drive history ([42–45]). According to Urraco [46], who takes the same approach, it is not age or generation, but belonging to one or another social class that marks the distance between the different social positions and thus conditions the individual's possibilities of action. This calls into question the assumed *liberation* of the subjects' actions from their structural determinants, as defined by methodological individualism. According to Martín Criado [43] (p. 15), young people do not form a social group, as this label (regardless of whether this is the 'youth' or 'generation' label)¹ groups subjects and situations that only share the accidental fact of their date of birth. The key question is how to interpret the transition from an identity based on biological age to an identity based on the formation of 'opinions', 'attitudes', and 'situations', an identity of 'subjects'. This theoretical problem links to Bourdieu's analysis of how social groups, and in this case young people, respond to discursive and behavioural groupings that are differentiated by age, gender, ethnicity, social position, or 'social generation' [33] (p. 14).

Age, "the perfect variable", according to Martín Criado, as an ap problematic notion (as also emphasised by Bauman [47]), is an element that establishes a natural (inevitable) division between young and old people, quite apart from any other less *natural* underlying conflicts. Of course, the roots of this focus by the Spanish sociologist can be found in the Marxist theory of conflict, which denounced the fact that the class struggle had been supplanted by a generational struggle. Moskvichov [48] (p. 19), from the standpoint of Soviet sociology, criticised the various "bourgeois theorists" including Ortega,

¹ For a slightly different Spanish translation of Dilthey's text, see Laín [9] (pp. 222–223).

Dilthey, and Mannheim, who sought to demonstrate from this Marxist approach, that the history of social development is, above all, the history of the generational struggle and not the history of the class struggle.

From our own particular perspective, we believe it is necessary to reiterate the importance of the differences in the class position in the general context of differences in *generational position*, in Mannheimian terms. We recognise the validity of the generational approach, in its hypotheses of presenting a generation of young people whose characteristics are different from the preceding generation as a result of a process of adaptation to the inevitably changing conditions of the present, and we propose the need to introduce the component of social class. The empirical evidence appears to confirm that social challenges are not experienced in the same way by individuals in society, but that their *degree of exposure* to a certain experience depends on the position they occupy in the unequal social structure. This position will condition the resources, possibilities, and margin of action for responding to the various crises that trigger generational responses.

Our reflection on this point is similar to that described by Abrams [8], based on a relatively standard definition of generation (in this case influenced by Heberle [49])¹, but has affinities with Mannheim, in stating that within each society, certain groups or categories of people are more exposed to experiences that are liable to generate new ‘sensitivities’ and new ‘identities’, therefore leading to differences not only between one generation and another, but also within each generation. These discrepancies within each generation (attributed by many other theorists to the division between elites and masses—see Jansen [15], following Ortega [2]), are very sharply defined by Mannheim when he establishes the differentiation between ‘generational unit’ and ‘generational connection’, highlighting the fact that each ‘spirit of the time’ is based on a permanent tension between different currents. It is frequently overlooked that Mannheim sensibly counsels caution in the use of the terminology, and distinguishes between the potential (the possible, the uncertain) and the effective (the real, what is definitely put into action), by distinguishing between ‘generational position’, ‘generational connection’, and ‘generational unit’ [1] (p. 221 and following). Ortega was also conscious of this dialectic, and suggested that the same generation may incorporate opposing elements, which, because they share the same ‘typical character’, are the children of a same time. In fact, “the reactionary and the revolutionary of the 19th century are much more similar to each other than to any of us” [2] (p. 8). This interpretation recalls Mannheim’s conception of a ‘generational unit’ [1] as a group that uses the contents of the “life span” (p. 218), of the “accumulated cultural heritage” (p. 211), the inherited tradition in a different way to *respond* unequally to the same set of historical conditions (which are what places them all at the core of a ‘generational connection’). These theoretical considerations on the unequal social position of young people in the same generation may explain the different transitional trajectories followed by young people in very similar social, economic, and cultural circumstances.

4. Towards a Plural Theoretical Model That Integrates Generation in Studies on Transitions

There has been increasing interest in recent years in the study of transitions in young people and the adaptation of their normative expectations to the structural determinants of the socio-economic environment [50]. Numerous frameworks for interpretation have sought to analyse the youth condition through the lens of the concept of transition. Transitions have traditionally been defined as the stages in which young people acquire the status of adults, by living independently, entering the workplace, forming a couple, and having children [51]. Authors like Arnett [52] have applied the concept of *emerging adulthood* to refer to transitions as a process that is prolonged over time, in which the young person experiences and defines their identity based on their individuality. Other researchers describe transitions as a delayed process, in which young people must adapt to the determinants of the social structures by testing a series of reversible itineraries [53,54]. There is a very interesting debate under

¹ For a slightly different Spanish translation of Dilthey’s text, see Laín [9] (pp. 222–223).

way on the pertinence of considering the transitions from the generational perspective, as a theoretical and analytical model to explain the current changes in the youth condition, and as a contextual framework to develop and apply youth policies that favour the social inclusion of young people. The position of Woodman and Wyn [55] (p. 82) is key in this recent debate, which holds that the new transition to adult life cannot be interpreted solely as the result of changing trajectories and events, but as a path marked out by a generation with its new discourses and meanings. Indeed, this approach considers that the current conceptualisations of young people in merely transitional terms, fails to offer an adequate interpretive framework to explain how young people respond to the risks generated by social processes, as the analyses of the transitions are limited to identifying successful or failed events in terms of events and trajectories [56,57]. In short, they note that the conceptual orthodoxy on youth transitions defines generational rather than as a symptom of failed transitions.

There have been criticisms of this interpretation, which holds that the transitional approach is not necessarily linear, as to analyse the youth condition, there is no need to choose between the analytical categories of generation and transition, which are presented as being mutually exclusive [58]. According to Roberts [58], researchers should continue using the transitional approach to make comparisons between generations that provide indications of the interdependencies between biogeographical and historical changes. The generational typologies developed from Mannheim's pioneering work [1] are not supported by sufficient empirical evidence on the generational changes from a subjective interpretation, due to the scarcity of sources and the very few qualitative analyses available. In view of this lack of empirical evidence, the question that arises is whether the generations are really so different in their normative expectations, with regard to basic transitional events, such as their entry in the workplace, independence, and forming a couple or a family.

Key to this debate is the theory of the *structure of opportunities* (interrelation between family capital, education received, and employment opportunities), according to which the opportunities available to young people have changed over time, as there has been greater emphasis on their ability to act based on reflection and on individualisation in defining their life paths [59]. According to this theory, employment, and educational and family transitions, both failed and successful, are not homogeneous, as the structures of opportunity and the expectations of those opportunities can be explained based on the group to which the young people belong, their social class, and the opportunities open to each group. This in turn conditions the capacity for individual and reflexive action in response to these opportunity structures that determine the possible choices and actions in young people [59]. This interpretation is associated with the theory of generations, which places young people in a specific historical and symbolic context, in which they build their choices based on the structuring opportunities available in their environment, depending on their membership of a certain group and on their social position.

In this interpretative approach, a priority area of research in recent years is the analysis of the interaction between the structural determinants and young people's individual capacity for action, in what has been called agency and biographical choices, within the framework of the *life course* theory [60,61]. This interpretative model is based on the fact that the different changes in people's life experience, such as finishing education, joining the labour market, leaving the family home, forming a couple, and having their first child, all form part of broader trajectories that determine and impart meaning to the transitional sequence at the historical time and in the specific place in which they occur [62,63]. This interpretation links with the concept of *life course* [24,54]. According to Sepúlveda [64], young people's life courses are connected to the time and place in which they live, and condition their specific experiences, and actions.

In the same line of interpretation, Longo [65] considers that the notion of life course highlights the multiplicity of factors involved in the young person's biography, and incorporates the time dimension, which is inexorably linked to the generation to which they belong, and to factors such as gender. This implies considering the geographic, socio-economic, and cultural context in which the young people live, as the subject's personal biography, is a reflection of the social determinants that transcend their

own individuality [62]. The analysis of these life experiences in terms of the moment at which they occur and the way each individual deals with them has been linked to belonging to a generation that shares a common socio-historical time and space. Here, it should be noted that the life-course perspective introduces the concept of agency through what Elder calls 'flexible coupling', according to which individuals are active subjects of their own biographies within the context of the structural conditions of their environment. This means that individuals of the same age live in very different structural contexts, and therefore do not transition in the same way in the different statuses. Significant differences can be seen in the time of transition and in the causes that drive every transitional decision, based on variables such as sex, economic situation, and nationality.

In the last decade a fruitful debate has arisen around how different generations of young people respond to the challenges of each historical moment. Numerous models have been developed to explain their consumption patterns, their political and social identity, their social participation, or their different forms of expression based on their belonging to different generations. However, very few analyses have incorporated the generational viewpoint into the transitional processes. The theoretical framework of generation not only contributes content to the structural changes that mark the transitions, but also provides models for explaining the cultural significance of transitions beyond the linear, psychologistic, economicist, and evolutionary perspective of human development, which permeates the debate on these transitional issues [66]. We start with the idea that the significance of generation goes far beyond the mere definition of a succession of birth cohorts or their conception as an evolutionary or psychological stage [58,67]. In spite of these limitations, researchers have defined different interpretative models to refer to generational types, considering generational cohort, lifestyles, socio-structural determinants, and cultural socialisation processes [68–72].

However, this generational typing does not look at transitional processes in a sufficiently differentiated way, nor does it consider how young people understand, relate to, experience, and develop these transitional processes from their personal and life determinants. Therefore, although these theoretical models serve to examine the diversity of lifestyles, expectations, and general tendencies in young people's behaviour, they tell us very little about the possible observable differences in the transitional processes of the different generations. To be able to respond adequately to this question, we need to distinguish between *transition* and *life course* [64]. Although all young people must undergo the process of transition to adult life, and this will be influenced by the generation to which they belong, not all young people in the same generation have the same transitional paths, as these depend on socio-structural factors such as gender, social position, and nationality. In other words, all young people transition through a common generational socio-historical context, but they do so with different life courses, depending on their position in the social structure and on the differential processes of socialisation in which they have developed their biographies [46]. Here, it is interesting to note the proposal of Bidart et al. [73] to incorporate integrated process analysis modelling, according to which the researcher must identify the most important contextual elements that characterise the events in the process and combine them in a consistent interpretative framework with an explanatory capacity. In our case, these events are the young people's transitional milestones, defined according to their individual circumstances, linked by the historical-economic context of the generation that binds them together, relating them to each other and to the social determinants in the same time, same place, and same *period*.

5. Conclusions

This theoretical reflection has examined the emerging theoretical models according to which youth transitions can be linked to the generational effect, beyond the category of age. We have also sought to recover the role of class differences to reinforce the generational approach, in order to dispel the notion of the linearity of the transitions and the idea of a smooth succession of generations, which appears to contrast with the reality of *transitional blockage* experienced by so many young people today. The aim has therefore been to question and reflect on the concepts of transitions and generations by

taking a theoretical journey from the classics to the most recent interpretations; to take a closer look at interpretative models and categories of analysis for transitions that have yet to be explored; and to integrate the contributions of classic authors into the most recent developments on these issues. This exercise of theoretical review serves to pinpoint concepts that can provide keys to understanding transitional processes today, linked both to the ‘class situation’ and to the ‘generational situation’, both of which are elements that limit young people’s possibilities of action and cause them to manifest different experiences and behaviours, despite their shared ‘generational connection’. In short, the reflection we present here derives from classic interpretations of the concept of generation and takes an in-depth look at the analysis of the current youth transitions from the generational perspective, seeking to transcend the traditional view of transitional events. In conclusion, our aim has been to incorporate transitions and historical generational contexts in a single theoretical model, in order to interpret how far young people’s differentiated transitional processes respond to the age effect, institutional contexts, individual determinants, or generation. Only interpretative frameworks that can accommodate a convergence of several approaches and theoretical concepts can provide an approximate response to the complex reality of the factors that explain transitions in young people today.

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