Political attitudes in a generational perspective: The Netherlands, 1970-1992

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Paul Dekker and Peter Ester

1. Introduction

A classic approach to the explanation of cultural change is generation theory. In its most simple form generation theory stipulates that changes in cultural orientations and behaviour are a consequence of generational replacement through which new generations emerge who adhere to values, norms, ideas, and lifestyles that differ from older generations. Mannheim (1928-1929) was among the first social scientists who developed a more systematic theory – as part of his broader sociology of knowledge – of the nature and effects of generational replacement in terms of cultural change which inspired a since then firm empirical research program and tradition with respect to generational replacement and its relationships with cultural change. His theory can be considered a major step forward vis-à-vis primarily positivistic and biological (Comte) or romantic-historical (Dilthey) conceptualizations of generations and cultural innovation that were popular in the nineteenth century.[2]

Central to Mannheim's theory are three basic concepts: generation location ('Generationslagerung'), generation as an actuality ('Generationszusammenhang'), and generation units ('Generationseinheiten'). According to Mannheim the mere biological fact of succession of birth-cohorts is the basis of both similarities and dissimilarities between generations, but social events and developments during the formative years give momentum to the shaping of generations with distinctive characteristics. Individuals who are born at about the same time within the same socio-cultural space are called a *generation location*. But being part of the same generation location does not necessarily imply perceived feelings of alliance and solidarity. In its present definition a generation location is at best a generation *in spe*. Subjective generational identification or *generation as an actuality* will only occur when individuals socialized within a specific socio-cultural space are being exposed to the same 'Schicksale', i.e. when they experience the same major social, cultural, economic, and political events during their formative period such as wars, national crises, periods of economic and cultural recession or flourishing. In

short, they share a common destiny. Exposure to major societal events during one's formative years is of crucial importance as value orientations, political beliefs, social and cultural attitudes are being formed in this period with assumed lasting effects over the life-course. *Generation units* are located within generations as an actuality as they are formal or informal networks or subcultures in which styles, value orientations, social and political attitudes of a generation are reflected and embodied based on a distinctive and crystallized generational self-perception such as for example youth subcultures.[3] Particularly in times of intensive social dynamics and changes generation units are likely to emerge. Thus, central to Mannheim's understanding of cultural change are the effects of the 'Zeitgeist' on value orientations of cohorts during its formative years.

Several more recent theories and studies of intergenerational cultural changes are directly based on Mannheim's conceptualization of generations. One of the best known examples is Inglehart's theory and research on postmaterialism (Inglehart 1977, 1990) which a.o. stresses basic differences in several attitude domains between the pre- and post-war generation. More precisely, Inglehart observes a basic cultural shift from materialist to postmaterialist values, i.e. from values stressing economic self-interest to values that emphasise personal growth, self-development and social well-being. In the Netherlands the sociologist Becker has initiated and stimulated various studies on intergenerational cultural diversity in Dutch society based on Mannheim's generation theory (Becker 1990, 1991, 1992a and 1992b; Becker and Hermkens, 1994).

2. The generation model of Henk Becker

Becker defines a generation as 'a clustering of cohorts characterized by a specific historical location and by mutual features at the individual level (life-courses, value orientations and behavioral patterns) and at the system level (size and composition, generational culture and generational organization)' (Becker 1992b: 23). Becker distinguishes four generations within Dutch society each with a specific socio-cultural and political-economic profile: the pre-war generation (born between 1910 and 1930), the silent generation (born between 1930 and 1940), the protest generation (born between 1940 and 1955), and the lost generation (born between 1955 and 1970).[4] A distinction is made between core cohorts and boundary cohorts. Core cohorts are those cohorts which are most substantially exposed to major existential societal events during its formative period, whereas boundary cohorts mark distinctive transitions of generations.

The formative years of the *pre-war generation* are imprinted by the economic recession of the thirties and the Second World War. Members of the 1920 cohort are the core cohort of this generation. The pre-war generation holds conventional bourgeois moral beliefs and traditional ethics. As the members of this generation experienced major economic upheavals (resulting in mass unemployment and poverty) and war catastrophes in their formative years, they display a high work ethic, loyalty to authority and a general dislike of political extremism and disorder.

The formative years of the *silent generation* are marked by the end of the Second World War and the beginning of the post-war economic recovery. Members born in 1935 are core cohort members. Although its value orientations are quite similar to the pre-war generation, they generally met with better life chances and this is why according to Becker they had reason to keep silent. Members of the silent generation favour pragmatism, and law and order, are averse to idealism and anarchy, and are little inclined to political action.

The *protest generation* (core cohort: 1947) had their formative years in the late fifties, the sixties and early seventies characterized by general prosperity and security but also by massive social protest (Vietnam, university reform, extraparliamentary pressure groups). In view of the size of this cohort they are referred to as the 'baby boom generation'. The protest generation was actively involved in the cultural revolution of the sixties and shows marked differences in value orientations compared to the two previous generations: they criticize traditional religious beliefs, bourgeois values, conventional work ethics, authoritarianism, law and order, and sexual restrictions but favour new values such as redistribution of welfare and power, political engagement, civil rights, sexual freedoms, feminism, emancipation, democratization, etc.

The *lost generation* owns its name due to the economic stagnation and less favourable labour market situation after the late seventies which coincide with the formative period of this cohort. Members of the core cohort are born in 1960. They witnessed the results of the cultural revolution and the materialistic reaction that followed as well as a general support for 'no nonsense' politics and policies. Compared to the protest generation, members of the lost generation are less critical of the established political order and less engaged in social reform though they inherited its attitudes stressing personal growth and self-realization.

Two basic assumptions are characteristic for Becker's generation typology: a) a *socialization hypothesis* and b) a *scarcity hypothesis* which he directly 'borrows' from Inglehart's postmaterialism theory. The socialization hypothesis states that values and attitudes acquired during one's formative years (roughly between the age of 10 and 25) have lasting effects over the individual life-course. In line with this hypothesis, political psychological research

has shown that political values and attitudes tend to be rather stable over the individual life span (e.g. Alwin and Krosnick 1991; Jennings and Niemi 1981). The (relative) scarcity hypothesis refers to deficiencies in life chances (e.g. labour market position) of certain clusters of cohorts during their formative period and its consequences for attitude formation. This hypothesis resembles the economic notion of diminishing marginal utility: the greatest subjective value is placed on those things that are in relatively short supply (Inglehart 1990: 68). Individuals socialized during the post-war period of relative welfare are likely to express post-materialist values and attitudes compared to individuals socialized during the pre-war period of relative scarcity. The combination of both hypotheses is supposed to explain the formation of generations. The first hypothesis refers to the mechanism which creates stability in values and attitudes after formative years, the second hypothesis to the contents of values and attitudes and the differences between cohorts.

The distinction of generations according to Becker has been tested in several empirical studies of the Dutch population yielding mixed support. Van Berkel-van Schaik and Van Snippenburg (1991) observed some support for Becker's classification of generations in terms of social and political attitudes among the Dutch population, though the transition from the silent to the protest generation occurred later than predicted by Becker. In their study of generation specific effects of socio-economic deprivation on political attitudes among a random sample of the Dutch population Van Snippenburg and Scheepers (1990) found differences between the four generations in the expected directions though only to a limited extent. In studying female academics, De Jong-Gierveld and Beekink (1990) did not observe generational differences in value orientations between the silent and protest generation in the Netherlands. In a longitudinal analysis of differences in attitudes towards emancipation Neve (1992) found only weak support for the four generations as outlined by Becker. Using a three-generational model, Van Rijsselt (1990) observed significant inter-cohort attitude differences in correspondence with the Becker groupings of cohorts within the socio-cultural domain but not in the socio-economic domain. Van den Broek (1994a and 1994b) tested the plausibility of combinations of cohorts for political attitudes and behaviour but found no evidence for Becker's classification of generations.

Thus, empirical support for the validity of Becker's four generation model is limited, to put it mildly. However, the studies considered appear to differ in design (cross-sectional versus longitudinal approaches), number and nature of generations (full replications of the Becker model versus more limited detection of cohorts) and number and nature of dependent variables (broad value orientations versus single attitudes).[5]

In this article we will not try to reach a final conclusion by a comprehensive test of Becker's generation model. We will focus on what distinguishes Becker's theory from other generation theories: the assumed pattern of four clearly separated and recognizable generations encompassing all year-of birth cohorts from 1910 until at least 1969. The elaborated combination of cohorts into generations is the most typical feature of the Becker model in mainstream generation research and distinguishes Becker's theory also from Inglehart's theory on cultural shifts which indeed differentiates between pre- and post-war generations but notes a more smooth transition of generation replacement related to developments in welfare and social security, educational levels etc. Macro effects of generational replacement (cf. Abramson and Inglehart 1992) are not central in Becker's model. The persistence of differences between cohorts is the conditio sine qua non and a stumbling block for every generation theory, but here we will overlook this problem. It must be stressed, however, that students of political attitude change find only limited evidence for strong cohort effects compared to period and/or aging effects in Dutch society.[6]

3. Data and methods

In this article we will further analyze Becker's typology by examining a variety of political attitudes reflecting a broad range of value orientations. Data base is the longitudinal Dutch survey research project entitled *Cultural Changes in the Netherlands* (CCN), conducted by the Dutch Social and Cultural Planning Office (SCP) since 1975. Surveys have been conducted annually or bi-annually using face-to-face interviews among representative samples (N= ± 2,000) from the Dutch adult population. Besides the CNN modules of 1975, 1980, 1985, and 1992, use is made of the preceding *Progressiveness and Conservatism* module from 1970.[7]

From the collection of scales available for all five years-of-survey, ten scales were selected to pairwise cover five attitudinal political 'domains' that are at the heart of the generation specific political profiles as proposed in Becker's typology: a) authoritarian attitudes, b) traditional attitudes, c) democratic attitudes, d) welfare state attitudes, and e) liberal self-perceptions:[8]

a1 *Authoritarianism*: shortened F-scale of items 12, 21, 23, 26, 31, 34, and 43 of Adorno et al. (1950: 255-257).

a2 *Nationalism*: 'the Netherlands is a better country', 'education should contribute to love of one's country', 'respect for the flag and the national anthem', 'national identity should be retained in international cooperation'.

b1 *Traditional upbringing*: 'it is for the best of teenagers to do what their par-

ents say', 'it is essential to teach children total obedience to their parents', 'it is only natural for children to have respect for their parents'.

b2 *Traditional sex roles*: 'women are best suited to looking after small children', 'women in charge of men at work is unnatural', 'good education is less important for girls', 'boys can have more freedom than girls'.

c1 *Freedom of expression*: support for 'freedom to demonstrate', 'open criticism of the royal family', 'strikes', 'conscientious objection to national service', 'occupying buildings', 'freedom of speech', 'freedom of the press'.

c2 *Democratization*: support for 'greater opportunities for citizens', 'workers,' 'students' and 'pupils' to make their views known.

d1 *Welfare state expenditure*: government must provide for 'extra tuition at home', 'student grants', 'good housing', 'free education', 'art subsidies', 'inexpensive day care centres'.

d2 *Equality policy*: support for government policies to 'reduce income differences', and to reduce 'differences in ownership'.

e1 *Leftist self-identification*: self-assessment, 'very right-wing – very left-wing'.

e2 *Progressiveness*: self-assessment, 'very conservative – very progressive'.

Together these ten scales cover a broad range of political attitudes which are directly related to the generational political profiles as outlined in the Becker typology. The underlying five domains are a fair operationalisation of attitudes that are attributed to each single generation. The pre-war generation, for instance, will support authoritarianism, nationalism, traditional upbringing and traditional sex roles, whereas the protest generation will favour more liberal lifestyles and will stress values as democratization, equality, and freedom of expression.

Cluster analyses are used to test the plausibility of Becker's four generation model for the ten political attitudes. Cluster analysis techniques are used for several reasons. Primo, we cannot make specific assumptions about the relevance and weighing of single attitudes.[9] Secundo, cluster analysis offers appropriate tools to discover new patterns. Tertio, in some variants within-generational differences can be accounted for, such as suggested by Becker's differentiation between core and boundary cohorts. Cluster analysis has been used by Becker and his associates before (Becker and Sanders 1993; Van Rijsselt 1992). They offered rather rudimentary applications, probably following the default options of SPSS.[10] However, it has to be stressed that cluster analysis is not a self-evident 'innocent' statistical technique. Quite a number of deliberate decisions are necessary such as those concerning (dis)similarity measures, criteria for fusion and splitting up clusters, choices between agglomerative and divisive hierarchical or iterative methods, criteria to fix a number of sufficient homogeneous clusters, etc. Lack of agreement on statistical decision rules is a ground for the present unpopularity of cluster analysis. However, a search for generations by looking at different patterns as consequences of different explicit choices is certainly preferable to a 'harder' test of generational differences on measures and by criteria which are just technical standards derived from heroic statistical assumptions. In the next section we will report results of diverse types of cluster analysis (as well as its technical assumptions and consequences) in some detail. Explanations may be found in standard texts about cluster analysis (cf. Aldenderfer and Blashfield 1984, Romesburg 1984) and in the CLUSTAN manual (Wishart 1987). CLUSTAN has been used for all analyses except one in which the SPSS k-mean clustering algorithm was used for classification.

4. Clustering cohorts

Cases analyzed are (year-of-birth) cohorts and not individual respondents. Pooled data from combinations of years-of-survey are used to have large numbers of respondents also for one-year cohorts. Individual data are aggregated into scores of cohorts as means of the individual z-scores on the attitude scales, without any weighing for differences in reliability because of differences in numbers of respondents and in internal variance of cohorts.[11] Note that with pooled data variables refer to combinations of attitude and year. Values for the same attitude between years are not compared and therefore it cannot be excluded that cohorts of the same clusters are characterized by high scores on a particular attitude scale in one year and in another year by mean or even low scores. We are exclusively concerned here with overall similarity and not with stability. Thus, if two cohorts are both very authoritarian in one year and in another year both are very non-authoritarian they are highly similar from this perspective.

Firstly, five-year cohorts are analyzed with agglomerative hierarchical clustering techniques. Twelve cohorts are used to cover the Becker-generations: four pre-war (pw) generation cohorts pw1 (1910-1914) pw2 (1915-1919), pw3 (1920-1924) and pw4 (1925-1929); two silent generation (sl) cohorts sl1 (1930-1934) and sl2 (1935-1939); three protest generation (pt) cohorts pt1 (1940-1944), pt2 (1945-1949) and pt3 (1950-1954); and three lost generation (lt) cohorts lt1 (1955-1959), lt2 (1960-1964) and lt3 (1965-1969). Because of data restrictions 16 years olds are out-of-range in pt3 in 1970, and 75 years olds are out-of-range in pw1 in 1985.[12]

Analyses are repeated for two data-sets: pw1-pt3 in all years-of-survey combined and pw1-lt3 in 1985 and 1992. For both data-sets two combinations of (dis)similarity coefficient and clustering method were selected to

Figure 1: Cohorts pw1-pt3 1970-1992: UPGMA/seucild

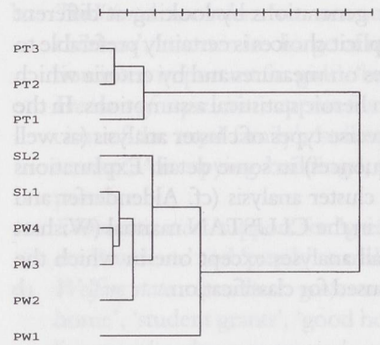
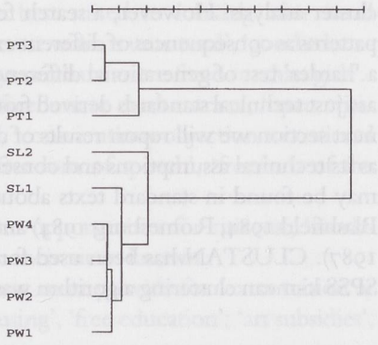


Figure 2: Cohorts pw1-pt3 1970-1992: centroïd/correlation



cover distance and pattern ('size and shape') as different aspects of similarity: squared euclidean distance combined with average linkage between groups (UPGMA) as clustering method, respectively Pearson r correlation pattern similarity combined with centroid clustering. Comparing a large number of measure/method combinations this selection showed the best performance with relatively high cophenetic correlation values and low values for the Jardine and Sibson Delta-hat for both data-sets.[13]

Figure 1 and 2 show dendrograms of clustering the pre-war, silent and protest cohorts in all five years-of-survey (1970, 1975, 1980, 1985, and 1992) combined. Both measure/method combinations roughly reveal the same picture. Only the oldest cohort (pw1) behaves different when clustered with distance or pattern measures. This cohort shows rather extreme attitudinal

Figure 3: Cohorts pw1-lt3 1985-1992: UPGMA/seucild

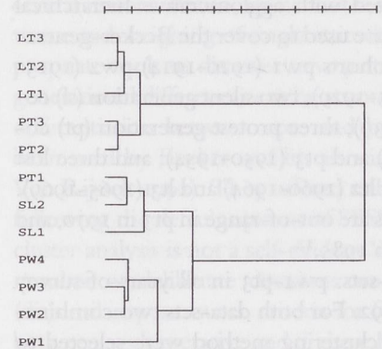
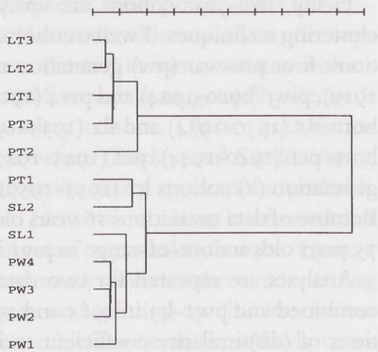


Figure 4: Cohorts pw1-lt3 1985-1992: centroïd/correlation



scores, but no strongly deviating relationships between scores compared with the other older cohorts. In the 1970-1992 period the protest generation can be recognized but there is no reason to distinguish the pre-war and silent generation.

Figure 3 and 4 show dendrograms for cohorts from all four Becker generations in the pooled data of 1985 and 1992. For this data-set both measure/method combinations reveal a split for the protest generation cohorts, whereas compared with the 1970-1992 data the pre-war cohorts are more recognizable as a generation. This difference in clustering of cohorts between both periods may be due to the influence of new cohorts in the latter period on proximate protest generation cohorts, but may also be caused by the fact that only two of the five years have been taken into account which may point at instability as such or at specific period or aging effects. These possibilities, however, cannot be tested in this context.

The conclusion based on five-year cohorts must be that there is little empirical support for Becker's typology of four distinct generations. A pre-war/post-war dichotomy with a split before or after the first protest generation cohort (pt1: 1940-44) would better fit our data.

In the following analyses we take the number of Becker generations for granted and we will test how well one-year cohorts fit into the model. An obvious exercise in this respect is to optimize the three respectively four clusters in the 1970-1992 and the 1985-1992 data-sets, starting from an initial classification of the one-year cohorts according to Becker's generation typology. Table 1 shows relocations of cohorts, again with seuclid distances and Pearson correlations.[14]

It has to be concluded from table 1 that the number of 'mistakes' in the Becker classifications is substantial: 6 respectively 10 out of 43 cohorts in the 1970-1992 data, 17 respectively 18 out of 59 cohorts in the 1985-1992 data. Becker's idea of core and boundary one-year cohorts of generations is a good starting point for a further exercise in non-hierarchical clustering of cohorts. The marking years of the four core cohorts – 1920 for the pre-war generation, 1935 for the silent generation, 1947 for the protest generation, and 1960 for the lost generation (Becker 1992b: 93) – are used as centers to classify the one-year cohorts for both pooled data-sets by shortest squared euclidean distances.[15] Table 2 shows the results in columns that are again ordered according to the Becker typology.

The 1970-1992 data-set shows some attitudinal homogeneity of the pre-war and protest generation but no clear border cohorts can be identified. Moreover, the silent generation is not to be recognized as such as its core cohort does not bind any other cohort (it has to be added that zero distances of core cohorts are rather meaningless as they are imposed). The 1985-1992 data-set reveals some homogeneity among the youngest and oldest cohorts

Table 1: Relocation of one-year cohorts from the Becker generational model[a]

pooled data 1970-1992

co	Be	r1	r2	co	Be	r1	r2	co	Be	r1	r2
11	1	1	1	30	2	1	1	40	3	2	2
12	1	1	1	31	2	2	1	41	3	3	3
13	1	1	1	32	2	2	1	42	3	3	3
14	1	1	1	33	2	2	1	43	3	3	3
15	1	1	1	34	2	2	1	44	3	3	3
16	1	1	1	35	2	2	1	45	3	3	3
17	1	1	1	36	2	2	1	46	3	3	3
18	1	1	1	37	2	2	2	47	3	3	3
19	1	1	1	38	2	2	1	48	3	3	3
20	1	1	1	39	2	2	3	49	3	3	3
21	1	1	1					50	3	3	3
22	1	1	1					51	3	3	3
23	1	1	1					52	3	3	3
24	1	2	1					53	3	3	3
25	1	1	1								
26	1	1	1								
27	1	2	1								
28	1	2	1								
29	1	2	1								

pooled data 1985-1992

co	Be	r1	r2	co	Be	r1	r2	co	Be	r1	r2	co	Be	r1	r2
11	1	1	1	30	2	2	2	40	3	3	1	55	4	4	4
12	1	1	1	31	2	2	2	41	3	3	2	56	4	4	3
13	1	1	1	32	2	3	2	42	3	3	4	57	4	4	4
14	1	1	1	33	2	2	2	43	3	3	1	58	4	4	4
15	1	1	1	34	2	3	1	44	3	3	3	59	4	4	4
16	1	1	2	35	2	2	1	45	3	3	2	60	4	4	4
17	1	2	1	36	2	2	2	46	3	4	3	61	4	4	4
18	1	1	2	37	2	2	2	47	3	3	3	62	4	4	4
19	1	1	1	38	2	3	2	48	3	4	3	63	4	4	4
20	1	1	1	39	2	3	1	49	3	4	3	64	4	4	4
21	1	1	2					50	3	4	4	65	4	4	4
22	1	1	1					51	3	4	3	66	4	4	4
23	1	2	1					52	3	4	3	67	4	4	4
24	1	2	2					53	3	4	4	68	4	4	4
25	1	1	1					54	3	4	3	69	4	4	4
26	1	2	2												
27	1	1	2												
28	1	2	1												
29	1	1	2												

[a] Iterative relocation with constant number of clusters with Becker generations as initial classification. Abbreviations: co= one-year-cohorts (1911-1953/69), Be= cluster number according to Becker-generations, r1= cluster number after relocation with squared euclidean distances, and r2= cluster number after relocation with Pearson correlation similarities.

but also identification problems of in-between cohorts. Again, the silent generation cannot be identified. For a correct interpretation of the data it has to be added that in 1985 and 1992 the cohorts of the last generation are included but each cohort is characterized by 20 variables (i.e. 2 years times 10 attitudes) in stead of 50 (i.e. 5 years times 10 attitudes); as distances are not divided by number of variables they are shorter.

As was the case in table 1, a linear trend of attitudinal differences between one-year cohorts can be observed, but there is little evidence to draw the lines according to Becker's classification.

Table 2: Classification of one-year-cohorts to core cohorts of the Becker generational model[a]

pooled data 1970-1992

co	cl	dist	co	cl	dist	co	cl	dist
11	1	2.1	30	1	1.8	40	3	1.9
12	1	2.4	31	1	1.9	41	3	1.5
13	1	2.1	32	1	1.9	42	3	1.6
14	1	2.1	33	1	1.5	43	3	1.3
15	1	1.9	34	1	1.9	44	3	1.2
16	1	2.0	35	2	.0	45	3	1.3
17	1	1.6	36	1	2.1	46	3	1.4
18	1	2.0	37	3	2.1	47	3	.0
19	1	1.8	38	3	1.9	48	3	1.4
20	1	.0	39	3	2.0	49	3	1.6
21	1	2.0				50	3	1.6
22	1	1.3				51	3	1.6
23	1	1.7				52	3	1.7
24	1	1.6				53	3	1.2
25	1	1.7						
26	1	1.8						
27	1	2.1						
28	1	1.7						
29	1	1.5						

pooled data 1985-1992

co	cl	dist	co	cl	dist	co	cl	dist	co	cl	dist
11	1	1.1	30	1	1.4	40	1	1.1	55	4	.9
12	1	1.6	31	2	1.0	41	3	1.0	56	3	.8
13	1	1.5	32	3	.8	42	3	.9	57	4	.8
14	1	1.2	33	1	1.1	43	3	.9	58	4	.9
15	1	1.4	34	3	1.2	44	3	.7	59	4	.8
16	1	1.2	35	2	.0	45	3	.6	60	4	.0
17	1	1.1	36	2	1.2	46	3	.8	61	4	.7
18	1	1.2	37	2	1.3	47	3	.0	62	4	.8
19	1	1.3	38	3	1.0	48	3	1.0	63	4	.9
20	1	.0	39	3	.8	49	4	.8	64	4	.9
21	1	1.4				50	4	.7	65	4	.7
22	1	.7				51	4	1.0	66	4	.9
23	1	.8				52	3	.8	67	4	1.0
24	1	1.0				53	3	.6	68	4	1.3
25	1	1.2				54	4	1.1	69	4	1.0
26	2	.9									
27	1	1.4									
28	2	1.0									
29	1	1.0									

[a] Underscored cohorts are core cohorts of the Becker-generations. Their attitude scale scores were used as classification centres. Abbreviations: co= one-year-cohorts (1911-1953/69), cl= cluster with nearest centre, and dist= squared euclidean distance to this nearest centre.

So far we analyzed pooled data covering the 1970-1992 period while focusing on the plausibility of the Becker generation typology. In a final analysis we address the plausibility issue by looking at separate years. Cohorts of the lost generation will be excluded. Besides the number of generations or clusters will not be determined in advance.

Figure 5: One-year-cohorts: principal component scores (vertical) and cluster identifications in seperate years

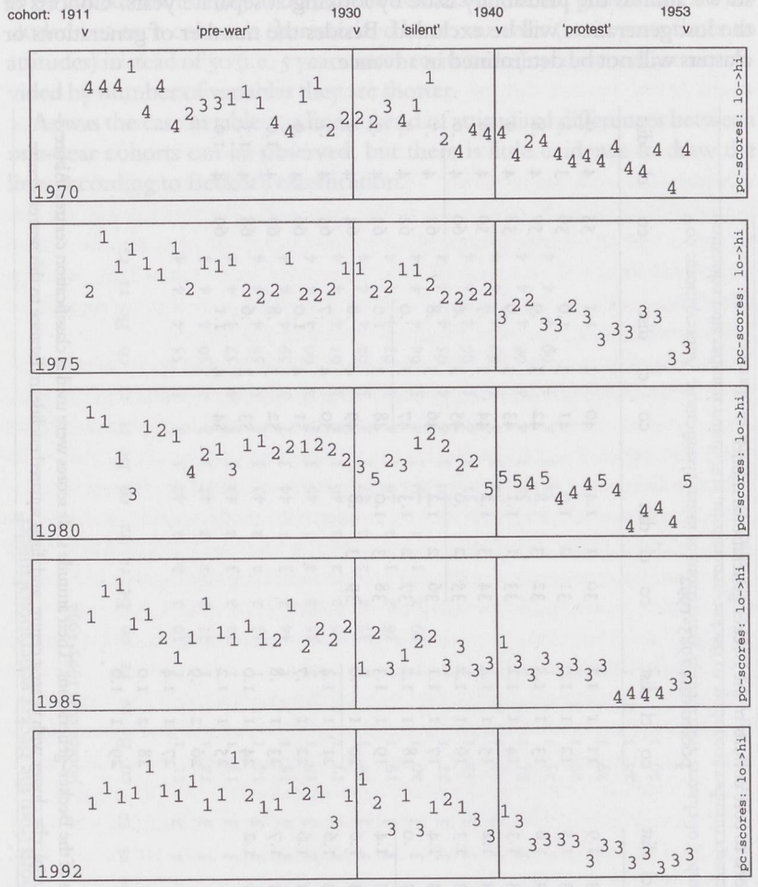


Figure 5 shows a graphical presentation of the results from an exploratory analysis. For each year a scattergram has been made showing years of birth horizontally and scores on the first unrotated principal component of the ten attitude scales vertically. Principal component analysis and cluster analysis produce two summaries of the data per year: the first analysis is directed at reduction of the ten attitudes, whereas the second analysis is directed at reduction of the 43 cohorts. Cohorts are clustered each year with an identical density search method.[16] The horizontal position of the cohorts indicates year-of-birth (1911-1953), their vertical position their principal component (pc)

score. Cohorts are marked numerically to distinguish clusters. For each year the only relevant question is whether these numbers are equal or unequal, between years the numbers are not comparable.

The number of clusters varies between 3 (1975 and 1992) and 5 (1980). Both with respect to pc-scores and cluster numbers there is substantial overlap between the various Becker generations. The (small) silent generation as distinguished by Becker is least homogenous, whereas the protest generations shows the highest homogeneity. Based on the cluster identification numbers there is no evidence in 1970 which justifies a sharp distinction between generations, in 1975 there is little reason to do so, and in the remaining years it seems more likely to distinguish between two rather than three generations.

Surprisingly, all analyses suggest that younger cohorts are more alike than older cohorts. The younger cohorts may have more similar attitudes in line with Becker's typology than the older cohorts. This finding is quite contradictory with post-modern notions of the fragmentation and the disappearance of youth culture. The finding also challenges the idea of lasting effects of shared experiences during the formative years of older cohorts, as they show greater dissimilarity than younger cohorts.

Summarising our findings it has to be concluded that the analyses presented in this section show little or no empirical support for Becker's typology of four clearly distinct generations, at least not in terms of political attitudes.

5. Discussion

Designing generation typologies is currently *en vogue*. Social scientists, journalists, and marketeers are engaged in persistent attempts to explain social and cultural changes in terms of generation replacement. With some determination 'new' generations are detected – often stereotyped through catchy labels – which are assumed to hold novel values, norms, and preferences and to show distinct lifestyles. In this sense generation replacement is supposed to be the impetus behind social and cultural innovation. It is notable that the (forced) birth of such new generations is likely to attract wide media attention particularly in view of its high communicative appeal. As such the concept of generation is clearly a sensitizing concept. In Dutch social science and media accounts Becker's four generation model has met with such wide scientific and media coverage which inspired a whole range of scholarly and popular publications. His typology specifies the following generations: the *pre-war generation* (born between 1910 and 1929), the *silent generation* (born between 1930-1939), the *protest generation* (born between 1940 and 1954), and the *lost generation* (born between 1955 and 1969). As each generation

during its formative period was exposed to unique social, economic, and political events it is believed that experiencing these events has lasting effects over the individual life-course. This in turn implies that each generation is assumed to have a distinct political profile. The popularity of Becker's generation typology induced us to address the question whether such unique political profiles can indeed be attributed to generations. For this purpose use is made of data collected in the longitudinal Dutch survey project *Cultural Changes in the Netherlands* (CCN). A wide variety of repeated measures of political attitudes are analysed such as authoritarian attitudes, traditional attitudes, democratic attitudes, welfare state attitudes, and political self-perceptions.

A number of cluster analyses with five and one year-of-birth cohorts were done to test the empirical plausibility of Becker's model. The analyses showed differences in political attitudes, particularly between younger and older cohorts but also substantial overlapping of generations and intercohort instability. The idea of core and boundary-year cohorts of generations, as suggested by Becker, was tested for the construction of generations. Core cohorts are assumed to be the prototypes of their generation, whereas boundary cohorts are supposed to mark trend changes between generations. However, our findings do not support the existence of such patterns. In short, it is concluded that although linear trends in attitudinal profiles can be found there is little evidence to draw the lines according to the four generation model as outlined by Becker. Interestingly, our data suggest that contrary to common sense reasoning or post-modern reflections on the fragmentation of values and attitudes and the decline or disappearance of youth culture, younger cohorts turned to be more homogenous in terms of political attitudes than older cohorts. This is remarkable in view of social processes such as individualization, secularization, and lifestyle liberalization that are supposed to affect younger people in particular.

As far as political attitudes are concerned empirical research does not support the assumption that exposure to major events particularly during one's formative years has lasting and stable effects over the life-course. It seems that many generation typologies have a rather fragmented and 'dated' view on socialization by strictly focusing on cohorts' formative years and overlooking the continuity of learning processes in modern society. Exposure to major social events may be as influential in one's formative years as in later life. In our view theoretical and empirical analyses of how cohorts may experience and remember more or less collectively major events are much more promising than technically advanced searches for the best combinations of clusters to fit survey data into generational models.[17]

Do our findings imply that generation distinctions are meaningless? Certainly not. But the idea to reconstruct generation typologies based on simple

birth cohorts – involving all members of society – and to attribute distinct political profiles to various encompassing generations is not a very fruitful exercise, as our findings clearly indicate. This conclusion even holds if one approaches the construction of distinct generations as 'ideal types' from a Weberian perspective. It seems to us that much more effort has to be given to developing hypotheses that theorize *how* cohorts have actually experienced major social, cultural, economic, and political events. Moreover, it is equally important to reflect upon the question *who* has been affected by these events as it is unlikely that they have a uniform impact on all people of the same age. This would imply a further social differentiation of cohorts. The answer to both questions seems an important missing link in many theories and present empirical studies about generations. Mannheim's ideas about generation units may be a good starting-point to develop a more 'subjective' perspective on how cohorts interpret and evaluate these events and adopt their coping strategies. The reconstruction of this subjective perspective through the method of analyzing life history biographies and event histories may be quite helpful in this respect (cf. Blossfield et al. 1989; Birg et al. 1990, 1991). The search for 'real' distinct and comprehensive generation units typified by a common subculture and common crucial social experiences (e.g. student leaders, Vietnam activists, ethnic youth subcultures, artistic cults, internet freaks?) is a much more interesting and stimulating research strategy compared to constructing population wide generation typologies (e.g. Alwin and Krosnick 1991; Braungart and Braungart 1990).

Notes

1. This article is a revised part of our paper 'Generational patterns in social and political attitudes: the Netherlands 1970-1992' presented at the 1994 World Congress of Sociology in Bielefeld, Germany.

2. See Pilcher (1994) for a recent evaluation of Mannheim's sociology of generations.

3. According to Mannheim *Jugendstil* is a clear example of a generation unit.

4. Recently Becker (1992b) has added the possibility of a fifth generation, i.e. individuals born after 1970, called the *pragmatic generation*. Members of this generation have better job prospects than members of the lost generation and their value orientations reveal a factual or business-like attitude towards the rights and duties that the modern welfare state dictates.

5. See Becker (1990; 1992a) and Becker and Hermkens (1994) for detailed overviews. In this article we only address studies that analyzed differences in value orientations between generations.

6. See Neve (1992), Van Rijsselt (1992), and Van den Broek (1994a and 1994b), also for different 'solutions' of the identification problem of age-period-cohort-analysis. On the basis of impressionistic analyses of the ten attitudes separately, it was concluded that in most cases cohorts do not show marked differences in attitudes which justifies a distinct

classification in generations as proposed by Becker (Dekker and Ester 1994). There appears to be a lot of overlap between cohorts of different generations, and cohorts of the same generation did seldomly reveal a stable sequence. Cohorts seem to follow general political trends in the public opinion climate. As far as attitudinal change is concerned, the notion of overall population shifts seems a better one-line summary of empirical evidence than the notion of lasting generational differences (cf. Mayer 1992).

7. For further information about the data-sets the reader is referred to Middendorp (1991), Dekker and Ester (1993) and SCP (1993). The data sets are made accessible via the Steinmetz Archives, Herengracht 410-412, 1057 BX Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

8. The scales include two single-item self-assessment scales and eight multi-item scales. All multi-item scales are Likert scales with Cronbach's alphas (or Kuder-Richardson-20) of 0.65 or higher in every year that the CCN survey was conducted. Scale scores have values within a range of 0 to 100. Scales including two or three items are not allowed to lack any item for a valid score, scales containing four or five items may lack one item, and scales containing six or seven items may lack two items. For the actual wording of items see SCP (1993) or Dekker and Ester (1993).

9. If a test of Becker's typology for separate attitudes was aimed after, analyses based on regression would have been more obvious. See for instance Van den Broek's (1994a and 1994b) applications of restricted APC (Age-Period-Cohort) analyses *à la* Mason et al. (1973) to test (and reject) Becker's model. Equality constraints necessary for these analyses can be derived directly from Becker's propositions about generations when full equality is assumed between cohorts of the same generation. This assumption may be disputed, but the idea of generations is doubtless a good reason for selecting statistically necessary restrictions. It is certainly to be preferred to an ad hoc selection of equal cohorts, ages or periods through data-mining and with casual judgements about their 'plausibility'.

10. The authors do not offer any information about measures and methods. As Becker and Sanders (1993: 237) report that their cluster analysis in line with their expectations 'distinguishes two clusters', it is reasonable to assume they used 'quick cluster', an SPPS module which makes two clusters by default. Van Rijsselt (1992) probably used the (agglomerative) hierarchical 'cluster' module of SPSS (defaults: squared euclidean distances, UPGMA) with a very arbitrary choice of the number of clusters.

11. The choice for the standardization of ondividual attitude scores per year was made in order to give the attitudes a more equal weight in the analyses. However, this standardization has only little consequences when compared with choices for different distance measures and methods in the cluster analysis.

12. Data about the lost generation (born between 1955 and 1969) are not available for 1970 and only partially for 1975 and 1980. See Dekker and Ester (1994) for an overview of cohorts and their age ranges and number of respondents in each year-of-survey.

13. For the criteria to evaluate cluster solutions see Romesburg (1984) and Wishart (1987). The criteria may be disputed, but other measures and techniques do not reveal combinations nearer to Becker's model.

14. Use is made of CLUSTAN procedure RELOCATE which finds a local optimum for a given number of clusters by iterative relocation (Wishart 1987: 145-152).

15. Cohorts were classified to clusters with the nearest centers. This was done with the quick cluster procedure of SPPS without updating centers. Actual scores of Becker's core cohorts for the available 50 (1970-1992) or 20 (1985-1992) variables were used as centers.

16. Analyzed are squared euclidean distances with CLUSTAN procedure DENSITY (k= 4, method= average; Wishart 1987: 64-68). This density search method tries to identify 'natural' clusters in the sense of areas of relatively high density in the object space. Maybe because there are no 'natural' clusters in our data, the procedure (as well as the similar MODE procedure) is very sensible for choices of k and method.

17. Apparently, Becker himself is thinking along these lines too as he recently reformulated his differential cohort socialisation hypothesis: 'If cohort members experience major events during their formative period, then the events will have a long-lasting effect on their value orientations, but only if these effects are reinforced in later periods in the life course. If reinforcement does not take place, it is likely that the relevant value orientations will become less dominant and ultimately perhaps fade away entirely. If strong period-effects are active after the formative period and if these effects contradict the original value orientations, then those value orientations are likely to become less dominant and will eventually vanish' (Becker 1990: 608). Though the term 'reinforcement' is rather vague and imprecise, this newly formulated hypothesis clearly stresses the importance of enduring and continuous socialisation and therefore deserves high priority on the generation research agenda.

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Literatuur

Onderzoek naar politieke socialisatie: De stand van zaken

Mireille Gemmeke[1]

1. Inleiding

Hoe kunnen verschillende politieke generaties ontstaan? Welke factoren bevorderen het ontstaan van voldoende steun voor het politieke regime bij de burgers? Hoe kan het dat de bevolking van vergelijkbare moderne, post-industriële landen, zich in verschillende mate betrokken voelt bij de politiek?

Vragen als deze hebben betrekking op processen van politieke socialisatie. Politieke socialisatie is van belang voor de totstandkoming (en verandering) van individuele politieke houdingen en gedragingen, en voor de wijze waarop de politieke cultuur van een samenleving als geheel wordt doorgegeven (en verandert). In het bijzonder is politieke socialisatie van belang voor de mate waarin mensen zich ontwikkelen tot competente en betrokken burgers. Hierdoor speelt politieke socialisatie een rol in debatten over democratie en burgerschap. Onderzoek naar politieke socialisatie kan een bijdrage leveren aan het inzichtelijk maken van uiteenlopende politieke fenomenen als kiesgedrag, verschuivende waardenpatronen binnen een bevolking of de legitimiteit van politici.

Het onderzoek naar politieke socialisatie kenmerkt zich door een stormachtige ontwikkeling in de jaren zestig en begin jaren zeventig. Hierna veranderde het onderzoek naar politieke socialisatie van karakter en nam tegelijkertijd de belangstelling vrij snel af. Het laatste decennium is het aantal publikaties op dit terrein zelfs tamelijk gering te noemen (Sears 1990) en deze nemen dan nog vaak het karakter aan van een oproep tot herbezinning op het onderzoeksgebied. Volgens sommige waarnemers is het terrein van de politieke socialisatie in '*trouble, deep trouble*' (Conover 1991: 125). Voor de Nederlandse situatie geldt dat er, met name vanuit de politicologie, weinig onderzoek is gedaan op dit terrein.

In dit artikel wordt een overzicht gegeven van de ontwikkeling van het onderzoek naar politieke socialisatie. Ik zal aandacht besteden aan de veranderingen die hebben plaatsgevonden in onder meer de doelstellingen van het onderzoek, de onderzoeksvragen en de bestudeerde onderzoekspopula-