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‘Generationing’ Public Policy: A Multicountry Review of Intergenerational Equity Policies

Tamara Krawchenko and Karen R. Foster

This paper examines how different states have operationalized intergenerational equity, solidarity and justice, exploring how they have drawn on these concepts in public policy across the social, fiscal, and environmental realms, offering lessons for Canada in the process. We find that, though widely recognized as important, intergenerational equity is an underused concept in public policy. Within social policy, a gerontological lens dominates; in contrast, fiscal and environmental policies tend to focus on the costs and benefits accruing to cohorts over time. It is found that few states have adopted comprehensive policies that address intergenerational equity in a robust manner, and such policies generally fail to take into account the complexity of power relations and inequalities that impact, but are at the same time much larger than, intergenerational relations. Evidence of increasing intergenerational inequalities propels the need for governments to more effectively tackle these issues.

Introduction

The political scientist Jonathan White recently observed that “today’s social problems are the problems of *generations*” (2013, p. 216). At the present moment—just over a decade into the 21st century—it seems that “generations” are everywhere, implicated in nearly every major societal concern, from unemployment and racism, to health care, austerity politics, feminism and climate change. A wide range of “social and political” issues, across the workplace, the labour market, and the political sphere, are narrated in “generationalist” terms (White, 2013, p. 216). The theoretically-grounded idea that social life and human history are lived, experienced, and created by successive “waves” of people, connected through relations of dependence and influence but distinguished by unique historical circumstances and subjectivities, has not only shaped the popular imagination but has also come, increasingly, to shape public policy (United Nations, 2013).

The last twenty-five years have seen the rise of a "generational accounting" approach to policy development and evaluation (Auerbach et al., 1992, 1999); more recently, discussions of climate change and climate policy have centered on "intergenerational equity" as an objective and a benchmark for evaluating the potential impact of current human behaviour on the well-being of earth's future inhabitants (Kverndokk et al, 2014). In both of these instances, "generation" is used to distinguish everyone alive today from everyone not yet born. But in the wake of the global economic crisis of 2008 and the spread of austerity measures in government programs, the idea that *current* generations of young and old compete with one another for resources and attention has also come to frame public and, to a lesser extent, policy discussions of youth unemployment, student debt, and "positive aging" strategies (Simpson et al., 2013).

Despite this widespread and enthusiastic uptake of "generation," it remains an elusive term (White, 2013; Foster, 2013). In social science theory, it is the subject of ongoing debate. Scholars from an array of disciplines—mainly sociology, gerontology, political science, and history—have squared off about how to properly define and operationalize generation for nearly a century (Foster, 2013; Irwin, 1998; Kertzer, 1983; Mannheim, 1927/1952; McDaniel, 2001; Turner, 1998). Seeing in generation some "creative tensions" that its sister term, "cohort," lacks, these scholars have been keen to salvage generation by clarifying and in some cases standardizing its usage (Ryder, 1965). They appeal to its important legacy in sociological thought (Pilcher, 1994) but criticize its imprecision and non-reflexive usage in contemporary work (McDaniel, 2001). Together, they urge more theoretical reflection and refinement of this under-theorized concept (McDaniel, 2002a, p. 90).

This article explores how this concept, so foundational *and* so contentious in social science, has been translated and operationalized in public policy. It reviews extant policies addressing intergenerational equity with the aim of exposing their underlying assumptions – about what a generation is and how multiple generations relate to one another – and contrasts them with the social scientific struggles to define and theorize generations.

While the lens of intergenerational equity may encourage a careful, long-term view in policy development – one that is particularly effective when it is institutionalized (i.e., grounded in law and embedded in institutional structures), scholarly engagements with the concept of generation reveal weaknesses and contradictions in the key assumptions underpinning generational policy. Specifically, the generational policies reviewed here fail to take into account the complexity of power relations and inequalities that impact, but are at the same time much larger than, intergenerational relations. Moreover, the project of forecasting burdens and benefits into the future cannot fully account for the unforeseeable circumstances that new generations, by definition, find themselves in – and may even have some role in creating. Despite its shortcomings, public policy operationalizes the generation concept by displaying "regularities" in how states create and respond to patterns of resource distribution across generations (as age-based social categories, anyway), as well as the political and ideological tensions that structure these actions. There is something to be learned from the fact that public policy continues to reach for generation as a way of articulating social, fiscal, and environmental sustainability and the need for compromise and sacrifice in the pursuit of equity.

Generation in Public Policy

Nation-states have begun to implement explicitly "generational" policies, from generational accounting practices to intergenerational equity reporting, no doubt responding to the rising discourse of generation in the fallout from the global economic crisis of 2008 and mounting pressures for government action to combat climate change. By and large, these policies are put forth in the name of "intergenerational equity." In what follows, we inquire into the concept of generation, and its relationship to equity, underpinning these measures.

This question is approached through a comparative policy review, selecting cases on the basis of heterogeneity (Gupta 2012) but focusing on industrialized nations. This review was conducted by searching for self-identified intergenerational policies and strategies in both scholarly and grey literature. Government websites were searched using the key terms "intergenerational" and combinations of 'justice,' 'solidarity,' 'equity' and 'fairness'. Keyword searches were conducted in English and a number of other languages (e.g., Finnish, Hungarian, Japanese). Thus, the snowball search method was followed to get the most comprehensive picture of which strategies are being adopted in this area.

It should be noted that while the chosen search terms – equity, solidarity, justice, and fairness – are related, they have different origins. Intergenerational solidarity gained prominence in the 1980s and '90s within sociology to describe family relations – specifically, relationships between older adults and ageing parents (Leuscher and Hoof 2013: 41). Such work has focused on describing and measuring the nature of reciprocity and support between generations. This conceptualization – grounded in social integration and cooperation – arose partly as a reaction to the predominant narrative that social ties in modern societies are weakened through labour differentiation and individualization. In contrast, the concept of intergenerational justice draws on normative theories of social cohesion from a top-down perspective in which "just rules are established prior to social relations" (ibid.: 70). Related to this, intergenerational equity and fairness have been used in economic, psychological, sociological, and management contexts to describe fairness or justice in relationships and social structures. It is particularly prevalent in the literature on environmental sustainability (e.g., Summers and Smith 2014) and fiscal/economic management (e.g., Scarborough 2011) to describe the rights and obligations between present and future generations.

Across this policy review, the terms 'equity' and 'solidarity' were found to be far more prevalent than that of 'justice' or 'fairness'. For the sake of simplicity, this paper proceeds by using the term 'equity' unless policies are named otherwise. There is a wide array of policies that have the effect of increasing (or decreasing) equity between generations, but they are not articulated as such. In other words, this review is as much about how the issue of intergenerational equity is presently framed in public policy as it is about what is actually being done across a variety of states.

This discussion is set against population ageing, a phenomenon that is globally unprecedented, pervasive, and enduring (United Nations, 2001), and it is intimately tied to the structure of the social welfare state. For example, it is believed that population ageing will lead to a massive increase in health care costs across industrialized nations (Evans et al. 2001). Such prognostications have the potential to lead to a divisive politics, in which generations can be pitted against one another in a zero-sum game. This risk is well known in the policy sphere, where instruments like the UN Madrid Agreement remind policymakers that their goal should be "to create a society for all ages" (MIPAA, 2002). Given this important demographic and discursive context, how have intergenerational equity policies been designed and articulated across different 'realms' of public policy (e.g. social, fiscal, environmental) and, for comparison, parliamentary decision-making? And what is the understanding of "generation" operating therein?

As it turns out, the generation concept's roots run deep in modern public policy. The modern welfare state – the foundation for much social policy – is itself founded upon a generational social contract (Becker 2000, p. 121). Much like the "generational compact" described by McDaniel (2009) above, this idea holds that each generation supports the other when it is in a position to do so, and each generation benefits in turn. But public policy research shows that this ideal is often hard to structure equitably with specific, enduring policy measures. On top of the challenge posed by changing social, fiscal, and environmental conditions over time, there is also the notorious tendency for electoral politics to discount the future; political interests align with immediacies, often along a time frame as short as the four-year electoral cycle. These challenges constitute both a hurdle and a *raison d'être* for the idea of intergenerational equity, which, in public policy discourse,

> "require[s] that future generations have the same or greater access to social resources as the current generation. It concerns pension income adequacy and accessibility and affordable and good quality social and health services. But also, one imperative requirement of social sustainability in ageing societies is to enable practical and mutually beneficial and satisfying relationships between generations… such solidarity should not be seen only in financial terms" (Zaidi, Gasior, Sidorenko, 2010).

These concerns permeate public policy. They contain within them an idea of progress – that generational wellbeing will either increase or stay the same over time.

In conducting this review, three "realms" emerged: social, fiscal, and environmental. It is important to note that the distinction between them is artificially constructed. After all, the primary fiscal question for public policy is how to guarantee the robustness of public finances and environmental resources given social welfare contributions and entitlements over time. Yet it is still useful to disentangle social, fiscal, and environmental policy initiatives, given that policy makers often treat them as separate administrative jurisdictions, to examine how generation features therein. A further distinction is made between parliamentary initiatives. We review each in turn.

Social Intergenerational Equity

The social realm is where public policy directs and shapes the objectives, techniques, eligibility requirements, and delivery of social welfare programs (e.g. in healthcare, education, housing and income assistance).

It is increasingly common to see measures in these social programs directed toward intergenerational equity, and the programs themselves treated as "vehicles that create purposeful and ongoing exchange of resources and learning among older and younger generations" (Butts 2007, p. 1). However, this framing has largely been championed by researchers and practitioners in the field of ageing; thus, unsurprisingly, it is a gerontological take on intergenerational equity (Butts 2007, p. 11). That is, it is disciplinarily framed by the study of aging, including its social, psychological, cognitive, and biological aspects.

The United Nations framework on ageing (The Madrid International Plan of Action on Aging, 2002) has been particularly formative in forwarding such a view, emphasizing the need to combat the social exclusion of the elderly in public welfare and informal care systems. The European Union has readily embraced this lens (see the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Regional Implementation Strategy for the MIPAA). For example, Germany launched a dialogue on intergenerational social equity in 1994, which initially focused on active ageing and lifelong learning for seniors. This approach eventually evolved into supportive programs, such as 'Jobs for Older Workers', and the creation of intergenerational houses. Meanwhile, pension reforms have been undertaken to increase the retirement age from 65 to 67 (between 2012-2029) and to increase personal and private sector pension savings. Thus, while Germany has focused on fostering intergenerational exchange, the structure of its policy responses has been focused much more on the needs of seniors.

Drawing on the insights from the sociology of generations, we can see that the gerontological lens on social policy makes little room for a more "relational" or "generational compact" view of "what we owe each other" in non-commodified terms (McDaniel, 2009, p. 250). We also see some evidence of the "social closure" theorized by Turner (1998), in which older people "win" an increased retirement age and pensions, and the corresponding "loss" to younger people goes unacknowledged in policy rationales.

On the surface, Finland offers an interesting contrast. While there is a tendency for many governments to treat age as another form of interest group (Krawchenko and Keefe, 2014), in Finland ageing is 'mainstreamed' across the policy domains of public finance/economy, employment, social and health care, security, communications and information, housing, culture and sport, through comprehensive legislation and programming. While Finland has age-specific legislation, it has also adopted a "lifecycle impact assessment tool" for social program design and planning (Government of Finland 2012, p. 13). This tool leads policymakers to view individuals over the entire life cycle, ostensibly acknowledging the "dynamics" of ageing.

The Finnish government touts the life cycle tool and the mainstreaming of age as a move toward intergenerational equity. Much of their claim rests on the fact that the policy approach, according to them, creates "no major intergenerational conflicts concerning the 'social contract'", and has "solid support across all age groups" (Government of Finland, 2012, p. 14). Nevertheless, the sociology of generations implores us to ask, what about this model is truly "generational"? It clearly draws attention to the ageing process in individual lives; to a lesser extent, it connects the life cycle to kinship relations of support and dependence, acknowledging the roles and responsibilities that come along with certain life stages. But even this attention to generation's relational aspects is, in a sense, individualizing, in that the policies it creates deal with the consequences of intergenerational relations in individual lives rather than re-shaping the relations themselves. Thus, while the Finnish model's underlying concept of generation might be more expansive and less skewed toward elder Finns than the German approach, it is not a very "social" or sociological one. It is primarily sensitive to the "life cycle" or the "life course" – concepts that are related to, but not synonymous with, generation.

Fiscal Intergenerational Equity

While gerontological and life cycle lenses have dominated public policy's social realm, in the fiscal realm, where states determine how to balance revenues and expenditures in the short and, less often, long term, 'apocalyptic demography' sets the tone. In this view, population ageing is commonly seen as a financial burden rather than a great advancement in health and longevity (Gee, 2000; Martin, Williams and O'Neill, 2009; Foot and Venne, 2005; Robertson, 1997). This portrayal of ageing, based on a demographic mix that is unique to the twenty-first century, shapes the numerous fiscal policy mechanisms that are used to structure intergenerational equity.

One group of mechanisms saves some of today's money for tomorrow's needs. Continuing with the Finnish example, the country's Sovereign Wealth Fund has set aside and invested a vast number of oil revenues for future use. New Zealand's Superannuation Fund, by comparison, has established a "Save As You Go" mechanism to ensure fair and stable pension funding (2013). Similar mechanisms used by many other states anticipate ballooning costs as those countries' populations age. They are often described as ways of ensuring intergenerational equity, but their focus derives more from a life cycle approach, which reminds policy to ensure that individuals are supported as they age. In contrast, an intergenerational approach asks the current population to leave something behind for the future. Nevertheless, one of the justifications for supporting an ageing population is that it addresses the potential resource burden that an ageing "baby boom" cohort might place on the smaller, younger cohorts behind it. As mechanisms for fiscal sustainability, these budgetary measures are about ensuring that the 'older generation' doesn't drain the fiscal tank to empty.

Accordingly, many states conduct intergenerational budgetary forecasting to see if they are on track. The Australian government was an early adopter of this approach; in its 1998 *Charter of Budget Honesty Act,* the Treasurer is required to publish an 'intergenerational report' every five years. The report models the financial sustainability of government policies 40 years into the future based on social, demographic, and economic projections. These reports have been widely criticized for the way that they correlate old age with dependency, and for their embedded assumptions regarding projected health care costs related to population ageing (Miller and Siggins, 2003; Kinnear, 2001. From our perspective, we can also see that the future focus on budgetary forecasting is less on citizens yet to be born and more on current citizens as they age. There is a partial failure to view older and younger people, and the exchanges and relationships between them, in the same frame at the same time. In any case, the discursive link between long-term sustainability and intergenerational equity is interesting. It appears as if, in order to make sustainability matter as a government priority, it has to be anchored to the generational notion of 'our children and grandchildren'.

Moreover, Australia's intergenerational equity reports frame future costs as a zero-sum game. This is part of a broader trend in public policy that "segments society and argues for one part over another" (Miller and Siggings, 2003: 21). While there are many criticisms to be levied against Australia's approach, it does give rhetorical prominence to the issue of intergenerational equity. Such reporting can be offered as a useful counter to the practice of generational accounting – the use of social discount rates to value the structure of funding on social projects. Generational accounting considers who pays and who benefits both now and in the future. Such analyses contrast society's relative valuation of today's well-being against future well-being; a concept that is highly controversial (Almansa and Martínez-Paz, 2011; Arrow et al., 2012; Williamson and Rhodes, 2010). As Becker describes, "using a social discount rate, possible costs and benefits are expected to be less important if they are assumed to occur further in the future" (Becker, 2000, p. 121). Present day impacts are prioritized over possible future ones. Cohen and Parfit argue against 'build now, pay later policies' and recommend against applying any kind of discount rate – stating that intergenerational discount rates should be zero (Cohen and Parfit, 1992, p. 144, in Becker 2000, p. 121).

Environmental Intergenerational Equity

Environmental imperatives also drive attention to intergenerational equity in public policy. Climate change in particular is widely predicted to have a massive impact on future generations, and has compelled policy makers to grapple with the current population's obligations toward the environmental welfare of future generations (Asheim, 2010; Summers and Smith, 2014). Edith Brown Weiss, considering the development of environmental policy in the United States, detected a budding recognition of intergenerational environmental equity as early as 1984, describing it as follows:

> "The theory of intergenerational equity states that we, the human species, hold the natural environment of our planet in common with other species, other people, and with past, present and future generations. As members of the present generation, we are both trustees, responsible for the robustness and integrity of our planet, and beneficiaries, with the right to use and benefit from it for ourselves" (Brown Weiss, 1992).

In Brown Weiss's formulation, everyone alive at the same time constitutes a generation; the next generation is made up of everyone not yet born. Mannheim's theory of generation – insisting as it does on the heterogeneity of generations, the existence of competing interests within them, and the tendency for successive generations to fight different adversaries – suggests some critical blind spots in this view. What if "the present generation's" environmental adversary is not the same as that of the future generation? What if both present and future generations are divided, such that within each, some people benefit from environmental destruction and others suffer? What if the image of one monolithic present generation consuming all the resources to the universal detriment of the next monolithic generation glosses over some crucially important inequities in consumption today and suffering tomorrow?

The Brundtland report (1987 World Commission of Environment and Development), highly instrumental in forwarding the idea of environmental obligations to future generations, adopted the same homogenizing view as Brown Wiess. The report defined sustainable development as that which “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” A vast number of international agreements and declarations demonstrate concern for future generations in this same monolithic way.

In any event, there exists “no legally binding instruments which specifically commit states to the protection of future generations” anyway (UN 2013, p. 13). While many countries have enshrined the rights of imaginary future generations within their constitutions, recourse to the legal protection of these rights remains problematic (UN 2013, p. 13-14). In part, the difficulty stems from the elusive nature of generation itself: exactly who would bring a complaint forward? Would they realistically be unopposed by others with different interests? Who speaks for a generation?

Two recent lawsuits by youth groups against states for climate negligence raise the prospect that this is changing. In 2014, the world’s first climate liability lawsuit met success when The Hague ordered the Dutch Government to cut emissions by at least 25 per cent within five years. The lawsuit was brought forward under human rights and tort law by civil society groups – youth groups among them. In the United States, a group of 21 youths has recently filed a lawsuit against the federal government for lack of action on climate change. These are not the first such lawsuits – there have been lawsuits for climate negligence brought forward for specific issues like deforestation or against individual companies in the past. But the encompassing nature of these recent lawsuits is unique, and results from the Dutch case indicate their effectiveness in demanding policy action.

While the above example points to generationally-framed climate action based on recourse to the law, what of policy-induced change? Wales offers a unique case in this respect – environmental sustainability is a central piece of the Welsh government’s approach to intergenerational equity. The Welsh Ministry is the first European nation to address intergenerational practice as a funded policy area linked to national strategy. Practically speaking, it is guided by a more relational understanding of generation than many of the other policy examples discussed thus far, in that the approach developed out of a partnership between the government's children's commission and older people's division – it is based on intergenerational partnership. The strategy, which called for the establishment for a Welsh Centre for Intergenerational Practice, led to Wales adopting a piece of legislation titled "The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Bill" (passed March 17 2015). The bill enshrines the principle of sustainable development in law by creating a set of long-term well-being goals for "a prosperous, resilient, healthier, more equal Wales with cohesive communities; and a vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language" (Cynnal Cymru, 2014).

Under the legislation, sustainable development becomes the central organizing principle of the devolved public service in Wales, and public bodies are required to pursue common well-being goals and objectives and to measure their performance towards achieving these goals through annual reports (including a 'future trends' report) and national indicators (Cynnal Cymru 2014). Interestingly, the newly created position that monitors, assesses, and makes recommendations on the achievement of these goals is called the Future Generations Commissioner.

The intergenerational lens in Parliamentary decision-making

While the above discussion highlights how different states have sought to address aspects of intergenerational equity in the structure of their policies, what of their polity? Here, three initiatives stand out: Finland's Committee for the Future; Israel's Commission on Future Generations, and the Hungarian Parliamentary Commissioner for Future Generations. All three acknowledge, intentionally or not, the political character of generations by creating the formal mechanisms mechanisms by which successive generations can self-determine according to their particular interests, adversaries, internal divisions, and contemporary inequities.

However, the sociology of generations helps us to see that they also face ontological and practical challenges.

The Finnish Parliament established the 'Committee for the Future' in 1993. This think tank of MPs (Government of Finland, 2014) is tasked with developing a 'futures' dialogue with government and society and research and development work in the field of futures studies. The committee has some latitude in determining which themes to research, the results of which are published once per government term in a report on 'Long-term future prospects and the Government'. A 2011 discussion paper on "Revamping the work of the committee on the future" suggests that the committee should enhance its work on direct democracy and public discourse and recommends:

• Launching "futures juries" in Finnish society. These are well-prepared public civic discourses on the key societal questions relating to the future;
• Creating a "living conditions in the Finland of the future" body. This would operate virtually as much as possible and would have the right and obligation to act on behalf of future generations by speaking for them in society, and if necessary also taking legal action in the name of people not yet born;
• Launching a project to study how to shrink or freeze the intergenerational gap and strengthen the development of multigenerational democracy (summarized from Tihonen, 2011, p. 17-18).

In a similar vein, Israel has created a Commission on Future Generations (est. 2001), an organ of Parliament that, by law, gives opinions, recommendations and advice to Parliament (and Parliamentary committees) on bills that impact future generations (Israeli Parliament n.d.). The Commission can also initiate bills for future generations. The idea behind this approach is that an inner-parliamentary entity has a "comprehensive view of the legislative picture with regard to any potential negative effect on the needs and rights of future generations together with the means to prevent such legislation from taking place" (ibid. 4).

Hungary's efforts in this area were short-lived. In 2008, acting on a proposal from an environmental non-governmental organization (Government of Hungary, 2008), the Hungarian government created the Parliamentary Commissioner for Future Generations, which had three major functions: complaints investigation, parliamentary advocacy, and strategic development and research. The resulting Future Generations Ombudsman (FGO) released only three reports before being replaced in 2012 by the Office of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights, which has a broader mandate. According to then-FGO Sándor Fülöp, this change significantly diminished the original mandate of the office, "pushing the interests of future generations into the background" (Government of Hungary, 2011b). Nevertheless, during its short tenure, the Ombudsman focused on evaluating the right to a healthy environment for future generations and was instrumental in having sustainable development enshrined in law at the constitutional level through the 18 April 2011 Fundamental Law of Hungary (Government of Hungary 2011a, p. 2).

Finland, Israel, and Hungry offer examples of how intergenerational equity has been operationalized within the Parliamentary system. On its surface, the concern about democratic representation suggests that a more sociologically nuanced concept of generation – attuned to power, interests and inequality within and across generations – is at work here than that which underpins public policy and discourse in the social, fiscal, and environmental realms. However, again the vision of generation in these policy mechanisms is of fairly monolithic groups whose internal differences, tensions, inequities, and conflicts are far less important than those that ostensibly divide the singular current and future generations from one another. There are no tools for older and younger contemporaries to lodge complaints about current inequities between old and young, or instances of "social closure" (Turner, 1998) enabled or exacerbated by public policy – at least, not using the explicitly "generational" policy levers created in the three examples here. These are not, in other words, mechanisms designed to translate the self-identified demands and interests of "actual generations" (Mannheim, 1928) into socio-political change. They are also not directed toward the relations of dependence and support between current generations of old and young – the kind McDaniel sees as critically important to policy-making (2009). They are instead premised on a model that pits all of today's debits and credits against all of tomorrow's. And, in a sense, they proceed on the assumption that interests and, indeed, adversaries, stay the same as successive generations enter the picture. They assume that their task is to ensure that the means of satisfying today's needs are sustainable into the future – not to worry about future needs that are, at present, unforeseeable.

Conclusions

This review has found that, when it comes to social intergenerational equity, gerontological voices dominate. The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (2002) was a remarkable achievement. It recast ageing in positive terms and shifted the discourse away from a language of elder dependency. But it may also lead to the danger "that older adult advocacy efforts will threaten intergenerational solidarity" (Butts 2007:7). Fiscal intergenerational equity has largely been operationalized through budgetary forecasting (i.e., projecting the fiscal robustness and equity of program contributions for future generations) and through intergenerational accounting measures (such as those used by large infrastructure projects). Environmental intergenerational equity is present in many national constitutions, and is mentioned in legislation, but its operationalization is often weak. Finally, there is an emerging area of policy focused on equity for future generations – Wales, Finland, and Israel have adopted some interesting initiatives in this area. Parliamentary initiatives have focused on future-oriented reporting and analysis as opposed to the creation of a multi-generational democracy. Across all of these areas, there is a clear divide between those countries that are more inclined towards social welfare or social investment (e.g., Denmark and Finland) versus those that are increasingly neoliberal in the structure and logics of their supports (e.g., Australia). This is to be expected – such policy structures are based on fundamental approaches to the roles and interactions of state, market, and society (Chauvel and Schröder, 2014).

This high-level review can offer some insights for Canada. First, Canada would do well to improve its reporting on intergenerational equity indicators, particularly on the robustness of public finances. Doing so would give all generations increased confidence in the transparency of public policy decisions over their life course and could help dispel the generational divisions that so often arise through a lack of adequate knowledge and budgetary forecasting. Still, as with any forecasting exercise, the assumptions and logics that guide such analyses need to be carefully considered. The synthetic index of intergenerational justice created by Peter Vanhuysse (2013) provides a useful example of how to structure such equity indicators. Second, Canada would do well to follow the path of Finland and undertake a dialogue on how to create a multigenerational democracy – opening up public debate and discussion on key social issues affecting all generations. Third, Finland's lifecycle impact assessment tool for social decision-making and planning offers a concrete example of how intergenerational equity can be effectively addressed in public policy in a manner that avoids pitting generations against one another (Government of Finland 2012: 13). Finally, Wales' recent legislation, "The Well-being of Future Generations", points to the potential of a national strategy to merge intergenerational social, fiscal and environmental equity by creating reporting and accountability requirements for all public bodies.

In 1997, a multi thematic analysis of intergenerational dynamics in Canada found that those who retire are continuing to benefit, while younger generations are faring less well (Statistics Canada, 1997). Almost three decades on these inequalities are growing more entrenched (Moos, 2014; Galarneau, Morissette and Usalcas, 2013). Paul Kershaw, of the group *Generation Squeeze* – a lobby for Canadians ages 40 and younger – reinforces this point: "Canadians must acknowledge that we risk fostering intergenerational inequity if our governments continue to show less urgency in responding to challenges facing younger generations than we do in responding to challenges facing older Canadians, which this study suggests has occurred since 1976" (Kershaw, 2015: 16).

Public policy intimately affects the life course and vice versa. Operationalizing the concept of intergenerational equity for present and future generations is important for many reasons – perhaps chief among these is simply that it can lead to better planning now and in the future. In the process, it can force us to think harder about what kind of society we want, grounded in the concepts of social, fiscal, and environmental sustainability. This requires taking into account the complexity of power relations and inequalities that impact, but are at the same time much larger than, intergenerational relations.

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Karen Foster is the Canada Research Chair in Sustainable Rural Futures in the Department of Sociology at Dalhousie University, Halifax. She holds a PhD in sociology from Carleton University and degrees from the University of Waterloo and Dalhousie University. Her work spans the sociology of work, political economy, and historical sociology.

Tamara Krawchenko is an economist/policy analyst at the OECD in Paris. She holds a PhD in public policy and political economy from Carleton University and degrees in history, political science, and public administration from Dalhousie University. Between 2013-2015, she held a SSHRC post-doctoral fellow at Mount Saint Vincent University. Her work is grounded in political economy and the politics of scale.

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