

# The Complexity and Promise of Intergenerational Solidarity

Riikka Korkiamäki  
Tampere University  
[riikka.korkiamaki@tuni.fi](mailto:riikka.korkiamaki@tuni.fi)

INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONS: PEOPLE, PRACTICE AND POLICY

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# Solidarity – what is it?

‘The feeling of **reciprocal sympathy** and **responsibility** among members of a group which promotes **mutual support**’ (Wilde 2007)

- can be explored through an understanding of ‘we’s’ and, as people have multiple ‘we’s’, they are also simultaneously capable of several solidarities (Hollinger 2006; Lehtonen 2025)
- **Affective** solidarity
  - moral responsibility of people who we are emotionally attached to
  - family members, close friends
- **Conventional** solidarity
  - shared values, views and traditions that unite people
  - those who are ‘like us’
- **Reflective** solidarity
  - shared responsibility that is not based on similarity but on the realization of everyone’s vulnerabilities, resources and capabilities
  - universal solidarity

(Dean 1995)

# Intergenerational solidarity

- mutual support, resource-sharing, shared responsibilities, sympathy of thoughts values and actions between different generations
- most often studied in the context of **family** relations, but extends **beyond** those, e.g.
  - IG friendships, voluntary activities, mentoring, philanthropy, generational responsibility, multigenerational services, etc.
- Two views to IG solidarity
  - **Intimate** relations perspective
    - contact and communication, emotional ties, shared values, help and support, reciprocity
  - **Societal** perspective
    - responsibility towards other generations, shared resources, opportunities, sustainability, justice
- can be intentionally generated in communities and in society, but builds also ‘naturally’ between/among people from different generations
- **cultural** and societal phenomenon (e.g. Izuhara 2022)

# The complexity and ambivalence of IG solidarity

- Opportunities for IG solidarity are not equal
  - differences according to social class; social disadvantages reduce IG solidarity
- IG solidarity can cause dependencies and too big responsibilities
  - IG solidarity may become a burden and an unhealthy feature in families/communities
- IG solidarity is a normative expectation
  - may become an obligation which reduces people's freedom
  - may disregard demographic imbalance
  - may cause conflict

(e.g. Bengtson & Oyama 2010; Bognar 2024; Fragoso, Valadas & Paulos 2023; Katz & Lowenstein 2022)

# Our study (Tiina Määttä & Riikka Korkiamäki): *Intergenerational solidarity in school – student and staff perspectives*

- investigation into the rationales underlying sources of solidarity of different generations and how intergenerational relationships come into the play when defining solidarity in ‘thrown-together’ space
- short-stories on post-apocalypse world (‘who would you save and why’) from 30 young people and 24 staff members representing older generations

Määttä, T. (2025) Potential of schools to promote spatial solidarity by recognising intergenerational power relations: Staff perspective. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/17577438251407198>

Määttä, T. & Korkiamäki, R. (2024) Tracing the rationale for solidarity in teenagers’ post-apocalypse stories. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/09075682251334343>

# Older generation staff members

- The stories of half of the staff members from older generations (12/24) represented intergenerational **conflict**
  - students as objects of adult decisions
  - dictatorial communication style
- In their stories, half of the people belonging to older generations (12/24) relied on **interdependency** and **norms and values** as the basis of solidarity
  - negotiation
  - moral integration
  - open and trusting or neutral communication style

*“I began to think of all the people in the school. All of a sudden lina came to mind. She is [...] smart and most of the time nice to everyone. She is not a friend of mine, but I get on well with her. And then [...] livari. He can be annoying, but for some reason he comes to my mind. Yes, why not [him].” “...In addition, I want to make sure that there is plenty of intelligence in the future, so I will save the two best pupils, one girl and one boy. I also wish to add diversity to the mix, so I will save two pupils whose native tongue is other than Finnish.” “A couple of adults would be useful...”*

## Young people (15-16 yrs)

- In their stories, 13/28 young people relied on **conventional of affective solidarity**
  - pre-existing relationships (friendships)
- 15/28 young people (more than half) relied on **reflective solidarity**
  - “mutual expectation of a responsible orientation to relationships” (Dean 1995: 123)
  - rational solidarity based on interdependency and diversity
  - allying with individuals with skills and abilities different from their own in order to build a ‘good society’
  - strong intergenerational pull

*“First me and my friends were thinking if we should not save anyone else. We could take over the world between the three of us but then we realized that it would be good to have wise people in addition to us dummies.”*

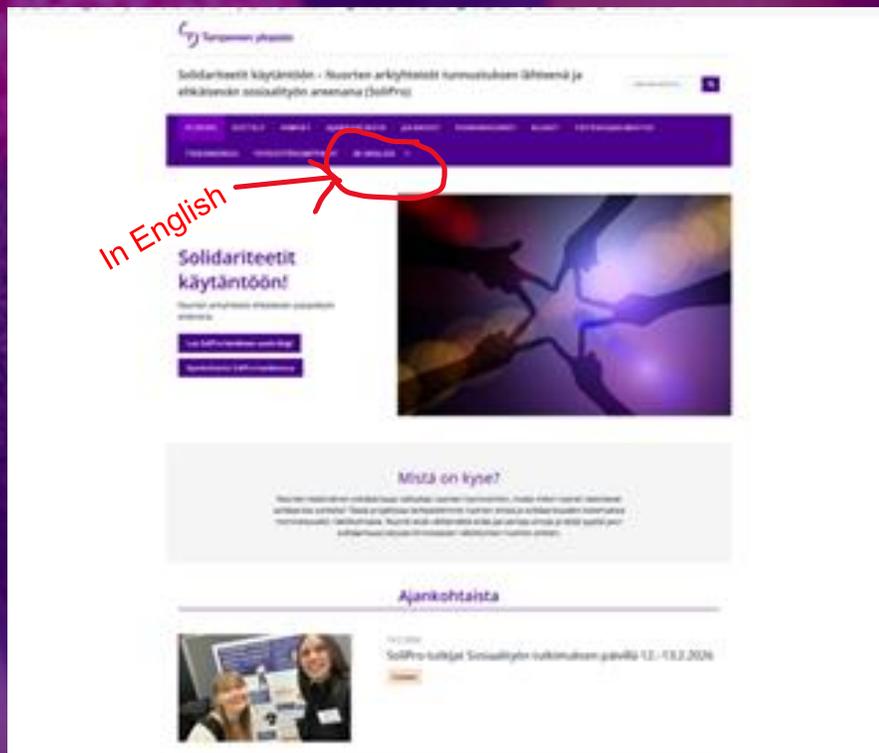
*“Adults/teachers are in possession of more skills [than us children], which is very important when the world ends. Young people are fast, though, this is a benefit when we need to get food, for example.”*

# The promise

- It is precisely difference that forms the basis of ‘us’ as a community; solidarity comes into being because of difference.
- Solidarity starts with how we react to others with whom we share a common space with
  - it is not (necessarily) confined to shared values or a common cause as traditionally understood
  - it is an experience of togetherness when generations are united by action

(see Oosterlynck et al. 2006; 2007)

“..solidarity not that much in sharing the cause chosen, as solidarity in having a cause; I and you and all the rest of us [...] having purposes, and life having a meaning” (Bauman 2012, 13)



<https://projects.tuni.fi/solidaarisuus/>

**Kiitos!**  
**Thank you!**

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