A Problem of Generations? Habitus, Social Processes and Climate Change

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Purpose – This conceptual paper focuses on climate change as a social issue and therefore as a social scientific problem. According to young climate activists, Greta Thunberg being the most widely known, it is specifically a problem of generations. Typically, the discourse on responsibility focuses on the technical and philosophical questions posed by the study into 'intra-' and 'inter-generational justice'. However, it is acknowledged that the field lacks the basic sociological conceptual tools with which to both analyse and propose solutions to specific social problems caused by current generations that will affect future generations. **Approach –** Figurational process sociology, that develops and tests models of the long-term, unplanned developments which produce the conditions in which the short-term practices of informing and planning social interventions are bound up. **Findings –** The paper reveals the significance of sociological models that can describe and explain social processes and long-term developments in human habitus that have important explanatory value for understanding contemporary social problems like human-caused climate change. **Originality/value –** The concepts and analytical frames of reference provided by figurational process sociology provide crucial insights into the problem of generations and can help reveal how this social dynamic contributes to challenges facing young climate activists calling for rapid 'ecologization' processes and increased human restraint with regard to the natural environment. **Keywords –** Generations; figurations; habitus; social processes; economization; ecologization.

You are failing us, but the young people are starting to understand your betrayal. The eyes of all future generations are upon you and if you choose to fail us, I say: We will never forgive you.

We will not let you get away with this. Right here, right now is where we draw the line. The world is waking up and change is coming, whether you like it or not.

Greta Thunberg Speech to the United Nations Climate Action Summit

23 September 2019 (NPR.org)

Introduction and Background

Greta Thunberg's agitational expression of the views of young climate activists that the responsibility for the climate crisis is a generational problem presents particular challenges to the responsibility discourse. Since the earliest days of the environmental movement, the 'rights' and interests of future generations have been invoked (see e.g. Palmer 2001). What is new, however, is that children (0 – 15 years) and young people (16 – 24 years) have emerged as aspirant change agents in a social movement focused on solving the global climate crisis. They express in the language of conflict between the generations the need to make climate change a pressing issue and to reveal the failure and inaction, as they see it, of the existing older establishment, of political leaders and corporations. Their narrative assigns blame and responsibility to them, as well as past generations, nation states and

their leaders, and the media, while depicting future generations and even the earth itself, as the victims of the climate crisis (Han & Ahm, 2020).

Since the mid-twentieth century humans have been living outside the climate parameters within which the species evolved. Leading climate scientists concur that little time remains to limit global warming to a maximum of 1.5°C, based partly on evidence that many ecosystems are at risk with greater climate change. However, most advanced industrial societies have not done enough to keep within the limits set out in the UN 2015 Paris Climate Agreement. Those most vulnerable to direct climate change impact as well as associated symptoms related to poor environmental management and animal welfare are children and young people (Sanson & Burke, 2020).   For example, during the Covid-19 pandemic, while older people were most at risk from the virus itself, young people disproportionately suffered the economic consequences. In Britain, two-thirds of the employment losses were experienced by those under 25 years old. Indeed, more than half of those aged 18 – 25 in employment were either furloughed or made redundant during the lockdowns (ONS, 2021). Across Europe and the rest of the world, and despite some large-scale government support schemes, pandemic unemployment was highest among the under-25s, reaching nearly 15% in 2020 (ILO, 2020).

With regard to the health impacts of climate change, the World Health Organization estimates that children in particular will suffer more than 80% of the illnesses, injuries and deaths caused by it (McMichael et al., 2004). Due to their not fully formed physiological defence systems and the ways in which they interact with their immediate environment, they are physically more vulnerable to the direct effects

of extreme heat, drought and natural disasters. Children will suffer injuries and the effects of environmental toxins and infectious, gastrointestinal and parasitic diseases that will become more prevalent with warmer temperatures and changed rainfall patterns (Sheffield & Landrigan, 2010; McMichael, 2014).

Children are also more susceptible to indirect effects of climate change, such as food shortages, intergroup conflict, economic dislocation and migration (Akresh, 2016). Particularly for younger children, their dependency on adults can lead to psychosocial consequences through the impact of climate-related extreme weather events on parents' physical, emotional and social well-being, family functioning and economic status (Clayton, Manning, Krygsman, & Speiser, 2017). Children also face danger in the period following extreme weather events when their routines and support networks are disrupted, and in some societies they are vulnerable to physical and sexual violence, recruitment into armed groups, early marriage, trafficking and child labour (The Child Protection Working Group, 2015; Rees et al., 2021).

Despite the high probability that throughout their adult lives they will need to adapt to significant changes in lifestyle, consumption, work and travel as the world is increasingly forced to attempt radical shifts to a zero-carbon economy, the children and young people of our time face a difficult reality: first, even the most ambitious youth activists recognize that what they can achieve is limited given their lack of power resources. Second, there is not enough time for children to grow up to be become ready to join current young people as aspirant change agents.

This conceptual paper argues that the concepts and analytical frames of reference provided by figurational process sociology provide crucial insights into the problem of generations. Further, these concepts and frames of reference reveal how this social dynamic contributes to challenges facing interdependent human figurations living within underlying long-term processes of social development that are responsibe for the unintedended consequence of human-caused climate change. In doing so, the paper reveals the significance of sociological models that can describe and explain social processes and long-term developments in human habitus. These models have important explanatory value for understanding the contemporary imperative for rapid 'ecologization' processes and increased human restraint with regard to the natural environment.

Critical Review of the Extant Literature

Generational Justice

'Responsibility', understood in an ex-ante or potential way and referring

to possibilities of conduct not yet realized, is necessarily future-oriented (Birnbacher, 2006). A growing area of responsibility discourse argues that one of the major reasons why the natural environment needs to be protected is to achieve 'justice' between the old and young respectively, and between present and future generations (Tremmel, 2006). Global climate change has important implications for the way in which risks and burdens will be distributed amongst present and future generations. As a result, it is argued that to raise important questions of 'generational justice' and questions of the temporal scope of responsibility for the future. Inter- and intra-generational justice has taken various forms with different emphases but in general it concerns the extent and character of 'moral relations' among different

generations. Theories of intergenerational justice attempt to show why particular moral responsibilities and obligations apply. Although much of this goes to acknowledge the tensions in the relationships between contemporary societies, the discourse predominantly focuses on technical and philosophical questions related to how responsibility towards future generations can or should be defined. For example, for *what period of time* in the future are present generations responsible? (e.g. Vasconcellos Oliveira, 2017); in terms of ontological scope, *for whom* are present generations responsible? (e.g. Thompson, 2009); *for what* are they responsible? (Beckerman, 2006); what is the *significance* of responsibility for the future compared with responsibility for the present? (e.g. Iliescu et al., 2018); and what of the central issue of *motivating people* to accept and practically take over responsibility for the future? In general, the discourse on responsibility for future generations reflects the whole variety of normative opinions held in philosophical ethics. This includes the numerous competing norms of 'justice', especially concerning 'distributive justice'. An examination of the long-term development of 'justice' as a concept is beyond the scope of this paper. Crucially, however, what is commonly recognised is that any notion of intra- and inter-generational responsibility has a *temporal* component. The status quo takes place in the present and necessarily the goal of the process concerns the future. But at present, there is a recognition that the discourse lacks the basic conceptual tools with which to both analyse and propose solutions to specific social problems caused by current generations that will affect future generations.

This is recognised by Agius (2006) who, drawing on the realist philosophy of A.N. Whitehead, rightly identifies the concern of the present with regard to

environmental posterity as a *social problem*. People of the early twenty-first century often blame their cultural unease on scientific developments which have led to the discovery of nuclear weapons and the pollution of the environment, instead of placing the blame on themselves, on the societies they form with each other and the contests of power between nation states. Whitehead's philosophical understanding of the universe sees it as an interconnected web of relations where the acts of every individual are necessarily social and relational. The relational nature of the human self is such that the individual does not first exist and then enters into relations with its world. Rather, the person is constituted by his or her relations and has no other existence than as a creative synthesis of these relations. Moreover, the interdependence of human nature does not stop at the boundaries of the town or the nation. Relations extend not only over space but also across time; every generation is related to all preceding and succeeding generations and thus past history characterises the present and fashions the form of process in the future. This implies that every generation will subsequently live amid the conditions governing the lives of its parents and will transmit those conditions to mould the lives of its children. Therefore, to see the present events within a given society in isolation from the past and the future is to deprive the present reality of its relational character. So, for Agius, Whitehead's vision of the past, present and future reality as a unified whole implies a new perspective that can be employed for the reinterpretation of various concepts related to generational 'justice' from a broader standpoint

However, despite recognising that individual persons cannot be separated from an interconnected web of societal relations that are necessary and integral to the human self, Agius, following Whitehead and all normative philosophical speculation,

assumes that 'acts' or 'actions' that humans perform are the 'atoms' of human societies and therefore the appropriate subject of study and speculation. That is, 'actions' are placed at the centre of their philosophy, rather than the *people who act*. Furthermore, investgiations into the web of societal relations require concepts and models amenable to empirical investigation. Adopting a figurational view of society sees philosophical speculations recast, reframed and transformed. Rather than follow a normative approach to expressing and analyzing social issues, the endeavour is to investigate social problems with the theoretical and empirical planes in closest touch with one another (Kilminster, 2007). Importantly, in the context of the tensions in the relationships between contemporary societies, if we adopt a figurational sociological orientation to the notion of environmental posterity, we gain crucial insight that reveals the capacity of people to develop more adequate orientation and control in the sphere of natural events, has developed much more rapidly than their capacity to develop equally adequate symbols of orientation and control for the level of the social world that they form with each other. As the architect of figurational process sociology, Norbert Elias, explains:

> '… without conflict between states, which are today no more subject to human explanation and control than were epidemics of the plague in the Middle Ages, the development of our knowledge of the atom and of the corresponding technology would have been turned in directions other than in the developments of weapons of war. The pollution of the environment is likewise not a problem of 'nature' or natural science but rather a social and, therefore, a social scientific one'.
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> Elias (2009a:16).

Figurational Process Sociology

Applying a theoretical-empirical sociological orientation we can see that societies are networks of interdependent people *in the round*, not reducible to a collection of disembodied acts. Further, a study of social development reveals the importance of the long-term intergenerational process of knowledge formation that exceeds the scope of the individual knowing subject. The fundamental relational nature of humans' existence as a species is adroitly summed up by Elias:

> Human beings have evolved within a world which consists of other existences apart from themselves. Each human being is therefore made, by what we call nature, of life in company and in relation with a great variety of existences, some friendly, some hostile, some inanimate, some animate, and some of the latter are human. Accordingly, most attributes and properties of a human being have functions that can only be understood if one considers people's relationships with existences other than themselves.
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> Elias (2009b:152)

This fundamental epistemological and ontological orientation to sociological research is directed by Elias towards the real, corporeal dimension of human existence. The orientation is also dynamic, with an emphasis on social processes and long-term development. To study people 'in the round' is to recognise them as economically, politically and emotionally bonded to each other in shifting patterns of interdependency (Kilminster, 2007).

Figurations

By virtue of their fundamental interdependence with one another, human beings always group themselves together in the form of specific *figurations*. This human mode of living together in small and large groups is in some respects unique. Unlike groups in other species, human figurations are not fixed biologically like animals: tribes are dynamic and can develop into nuclear families, villages into towns, city states into nation states. Figurations have structural peculiarities and represent orders of a particular kind (Elias, 1978). People in figurations are bonded together in real interdependencies that change over time and this provides the starting point for figurational process sociological inquiry. Without this conceptual foundation, philosophers like Agius cannot recognize that the bonds people share are as real as the 'individuals' themselves. Consequently, 'individuals' are as much conceptual constructs as are 'social bonds' and 'social entities'. This becomes particularly clear when we recognise that people are bonded together in a continuum of changes through time as well as any particular moment. Indeed, one can consider concepts like 'social bonds' and 'social interdependencies' as synonymous. Like interdependencies, social bonds between people can give rise conflict as well as cooperation and compromise. They can induce hostility as well as affection and sympathy. Whichever it is, changes in people's interdependencies, in their bonds, is best understood if we compare societies at different stages of their development (Elias, 1978; 2009c).

People's dependence on each other is obviously not always the same in all societies at different stages of development and people's interdependencies change as societies become increasingly stratified and differentiated. Differentiation in this

respect can be best understood in terms of increasing occupational differentiation, more commonly referred to as the division of labour. A central developmental process in European societies has been their increased density, produced by a combination of population growth and urbanization and the ever-larger circles of people that any single individual is now interdependent with, no matter how fleetingly. A consequence of this has been an increasing ambivalence of overlapping and multiple networks: as social networks become more complex and contradictory, the same people can be 'friends', 'allies' or 'partners' in one context, and 'opponents', 'competitors' or 'enemies' in another. Furthermore, differentiation makes people interdependent on many levels and simultaneously they become more dependent on the institutions of the state for their coordination and integration. Indeed, the differentiation of the structure of society and the larger numbers of people bonded together in longer chains and more intertwined webs of interdependence is a central feature of the process of state-formation. Differentiation also makes people interdependent with people they never meet and never interact with and we are affected by the activities of people far down a line of interdependence and they with us. This long-term process has become increasingly global in nature and scope (Elias, 2012).

Power and Interdependence
A person's fundamental directedness to other people expressed through the affective, political and economic bonds they share, is also revealed when considering the area of intergenerational justice discourse that considers the permanent asymmetry in power-relations between existing generations and between living people and those who will live in the future. Agius recognises that

'responsibility' in terms of its scope and content is directly related to power. Yet, despite his Whiteheadian notion of the relational character of reality, he does not recognize that among interdependent people, power is an observable *relationship of interdependence*. Power always consists in a relationship of balance between control and dependency, not only in extreme cases where one side is virtually completely dominant. Whoever is less dependent on others has more power in the relationship.   Power is also polymorphous. It is many-sided and inherent in all human relationships. In contemporary societies, power balances are multipolar, involving large, complex dynamic figurations of interdependent individuals and groups (Elias, 2008a). Moreover, through the application of sociological process models and longer-term frames of reference it becomes clear that these chains of interdependence have become much longer, more dense and more differentiated. This process has involved a transformation of the total social structure. A specific aspect of this has been industrialization alongside the longer-term process of economization. The increasing division of functions that such developments have generated has led to increased specialization, and those performing specialist roles have gained chances of exerting varying degrees of reciprocal influence and control. This whole dynamic process Elias terms, 'functional democratization', under which there has been, since the nineteenth century, a gradual process of power differentials between groups becoming relatively more even over time. Generally this means a decreasing of power differentials within and among groups, including between governments and citizens, social classes, men and women, parents and children, and the living generations (Elias, 2012; 2013).

All these developments are the products of long-term *social processes*, only touched upon, if at all, in the philosophy of Whitehead and followers like Agius. However, as the second part of this paper will argue, it is mainly through the application of concepts and models from figurational process sociology that employs long-term, generational frames of reference, that we can fully appreciate the nature and extent of pollution of the environment and climate change as a *social problem.* A problem in large part caused by the unintended consequences of industrialization and economization (Elias, 2009b). This in turn enables us to recognise that over many generations, the long-term development of human habitus under the social process of economization, pose challenges to the efforts of young people like Greta Thunberg calling for an immediate reorientation of the relationship between humans of all generations and the natural environment to be set within unprecedented ecological constraints.

The Sociological Problem of Generations

In contemporary sociology the unifying pont of reference in the study of generations is Karl Mannheim's 1928 essay, *The Sociological Problem of Generations.* Mannheim argues that although a generation is not a concrete group in the sense of a community, individuals who belong to the same generation are endowed with a 'common location' in the historical dimension of the social process. This common location predisposes people towards certain definite modes of behaviour, feeling and thought. However, this generational consciousness only becomes sociologically significant when it also involves participation in the same historical and social circumstances. That is, a generation as an actuality only becomes observable when contemporaries participate in a common destiny and in the ideas and predisposed

integrative attitudes formed and moved by their common experiences. From these collective impulses and formative principles groups may consciously experience and emphasis their character as *generation units*. These may be termed in certain circumstances, *change agents,* that are both challenging traditional interpretations of historical conditions and offering alternative interpretations. More specifically,

> [w]hen as a result of an acceleration in the tempo of social and cultural transformation basic attitudes must change so quickly that the latent, continuous adaptation and modification of traditional patterns of experience, thought, and expression is no longer possible, then the various new phases of experience are consolidated somewhere, forming a clearly distinguishable new impulse, and a new center of configuration. We speak in such cases of the formation of a new generation style, or of a new *generation entelechy* (Mannheim, 1970 [1928]:403).

Mannhiem stresses that new generation styles do not arise spontaneously but rather from mutual stimulation in a close-knit vital generation unit and from here potentially develop into a much broader appeal and binding force. In this respect, it could be viewed that the political activism of Greta Thunberg and the groups of fellow young climate activists form the nucleus that have developed the most essential new conceptions and responsibilities with regard to the natural environment, which are subsequently being developed by the generational unit of their peers. And, furthermore, Thunberg's speech to the UN may refer to the emergence of a new generational style – a new generational entelechy – ready to accelerate the tempo and impact of environmentally-related social change.

However, this has yet to be confirmed through empirical research; a point to which we will return later in this paper.

Mannheim was a friend and intellectual inspiration in Elias's early scientific career and there are common concepts employed and sociological problems considered in their work. Notably, Elias's concept of figuratuions contains a relational view of social existence compatible with that expressed by Mannheim. Both sociologists also considered the historical discrepancy between humans' increased control of nature but inability to control the social forces created by the unintended consequences of long-term social processes. (Kilminster, 2007). Elias also considered that those comprising a generation are bonded through a similarity of experience and feeling – a *we identity.* They are also bounded by biological factors as well as a similarity of social conditions and experiences. Humans are unique as a species because they pass on a stock of learned knowledge to the next generation. Indeed, during their early stages of development human beings only had a chance of survival if the current generation could acquire a fund of reality-adequate knowledge from the preceding one (Elias, 2009c). In whatever context, humans' mode of living together is always jointly shaped by the transfer of knowledge from one generation to another, and therefore by the entry of the individual into the specific social world of an existing figuration of people. With very few exceptions, every human who has ever lived has experienced the process as a child and young person growing into human figurations, and therefore in learning a certain pattern of self-regulation in interacting with other human beings as an indispensable condition of developing into a human being. The socialization and individualization of a human being are therefore different names for the same process – the civilizing process.

Habitus

Human beings are not civilized by nature. They have by nature a disposition which, under certain conditions, makes the civilizing process possible. That is, an individual self-regulation of momentary behavioural impulses based on drives and affects, or a redirection of those impulses from primary to secondary goals and, in some cases, their sublimatory transformation. The specific psychological process of 'growing up' in Western societies is the individual civilizing process to which each child and young person, as a result of the social civilizing process over many centuries, is automatically subjected from earliest childhood, to a greater or lesser degree and with greater or lesser success. Among many 'grown up' adults this process results in a largely taken-for-granted way of thinking, acting and feeling – a cultural personality make up – that always involves a set of shared characteristics: that is termed *habitus* (Elias, 2009c; 2012). As mentioned, social functions have become more and more differentiated under the pressure of competition within and between societies. The more differentiated societies become, the larger grows the number of functions people perform for each other and therefore of people on whom the individual constantly depends in all her or his activities, from the simplest and most commonplace to the more complex and rare. As more and more people must attune their conduct to that of others, the web of activities must be organized more and more strictly and accurately, if each individual activity is to fulfil its social function for others. Individuals are compelled to regulate their conduct in an increasingly differentiated, more even and more stable manner. This is characteristic of the psychological changes in the course of civilization. Thus, in matters relating to personal hygiene or in matters of personal morality, children are conditioned to a certain social standard. This mouldng aims at making socially desirable behaviour

second-nature, taken-for-granted aspects of self-control, so as to form part of the individual's consciousness as if as the result of their own free will.   The more complex and stable control of conduct is increasingly instilled in the individual from her or his earliest years towards a self-compulsion that she or he cannot counteract even if she or he consciously wishes to. The web of conduct grows so complex and extensive, the effort required to behave 'correctly' within it becomes so great that besides the individual's conscious self-control, an automatic, blindly functioning framework of self-control is firmly established. In complex societies the social habitus has many layers and it depends on the number of interlocking planes in the society as to how may layers are interwoven in the social habitus of the individual person (Elias, 1978; 2012).

In contemporary times, a tendency can be observed to view the interdependent generational processes at the heart of the civilizing process as 'natural' and relatively harmonious. Yet, Elias's formulation of the habitus concept can also provide important insight into specific forms of generational consciousness and the emotional charge it generates. For example, Elias and other figurational process sociology scholars have conducted historical analyses into a deep layer of social relations which continue into the present day. Specifically, the organization of power relations around the representation of social prestige and status. This is important because the tendency of many human groups to exploit here and now the power chances that fall their way due to their position, without thinking about the future of the group, can often be observed in the relationship between older and younger generations. Indeed, conflicts between generations are among the strongest driving forces of social dynamics. Generational conflict is a *social conflict*.

The relationship between the different interdependent generations in a state society is a process that nearly always entails open as well as latent struggles for power (Elias, 2013). These struggles of shaping and reshaping a generational habitus can often be concealed by other developments and may only be recognized when they burst out from under the surface and become manifest in political or violent confrontation. Examples include the rise of American middle-class student radicalism in the 1960s (Goertzel, 1972); the violent action conducted by young middle-class radicals in the Federal Republic of Germany in the 1970s as an expression of despair against an establishment they viewed as highly unjust and oppressive (Elias, 2013); or the 'reform generation' of young intellectuals who took part in the mass protest movements that swept China in the late 1980s (Cherrington, 1997).

The privileges of older generations include occupying positions that give their holders a monopoly over chances for making decisions and issuing orders at the highest levels in matters that concern the whole society. Young people are usually excluded from access to positions of command. The reason often given for excluding them is the need for quite a long period of preparation and learning, without which the young are not in a position adequately to fulfil the responsibilities associated with ruling in every society. The conflicts arising from this near-universal monopolization of social functions by older generations, and from the desire of younger generations for access to the relevant positions, have been highly variable in the course of social development but at each and every stage they are socially specific. They have a structure that can be explained as a feature of the whole structure of the society in question,

In the trials of strength between older representatives of state authority and rebellious groups of young people, the former often forget that the latter are among those who will be involved in the life of their society when they themselves are dead (Elias, 2013: 383).

Implications

Economization as a Social Process

The study of social processes reveals the specific pattern and mechanisms of transmission of sociological inheritance over generations, and how these specific patterns, or part of them, of one generation tend to perpetuate themselves in the next generation (Elias, 2009c; 2012). Elias argues that younger and older groups are structurally bound to one another. Children are growing people at a very early stage of their development who are completely dependent on adults but are on the path to independence. Slightly older young people are approaching that independence. These interdependent figurations are social groups and there is an observable, fluid power relation between them and adults, which can decrease or increase (Elias, 2008b).

Usually encompassing not less than three generations, social processes are continuous long-term transformations of the figurations of human beings, or aspects of them in one of two opposite directions. One of these directions usually has the character of a rise, the other of a decline. The criteria are purely objective. Unlike the biological process of evolution, social processes are reversible: shifts in one direction can give way to shifts in the opposite direction, or both can occur simultaneously. One may become ascendent and hold the other in balance. The

crucial point is that social processes are *dynamic*, generated by specific power

struggles which set a particular direction – but a direction which no-one had planned

(Elias, 2009c; 2012). The relative autonomy of social processes is based on the

constant intermeshing of the feelings, thoughts and actions of many individual

people and groups of people, and on non-human natural processes. From this

constant interweaving there continually emerge long-term changes in the social

coexistence of people. Examples of social processes include industrialization,

differentialization and globalization.

A long-term social process of particular importance relates to the struggle for

status and security that accompanied industrialization and drove the growth of

consumption among people. This social mechanism – the struggle for power and

prestige – triggered the same process in the sphere of production among businesses

and nation states: namely, the process of increasing *economization.* Current

environmental problems are to a considerable extent caused by unbridled 'economic

growth', and reflect the historical expansion of economic activity, the widely known

marketization of Western society and its encroachment and structuring hegemony

over other areas of society such as government, religion, education, and general

public discourse. Over many generations, economic activity in market societies has

become a kind of civilized warfare; a power struggle fought with mainly peaceful

methods and also with an increasing knowledge of and control over the natural

environment. Indeed, forms of marketization reflect forms of control that are

definitive parameters of civilizing processes – namely, self-control, social-control and

control over nature (Schmidt, 1993). Yet, this increasing capacity to manipulate

'nature' has engendered a growing sense of dislocation from it (Elias, 2009a).

Moreover, the long-term economization of a growing number of societies has seen them develop into intricate and multi-layered social complexes which are both 'structural' and 'cultural' in a sociological sense. These considerations illuminate the social complexities underlying what is normally referred to as the reality of the 'economy' and the discipline of 'economics'.

'Economy'/'economics' now not only refers to the way people meet their daily needs but also refers to a kind of morality, an ideology and a science at the same time (Schmidt, 1993). The basics of the morality can be understood from the implicit assumption still present in much business economics of the need to act 'rationally'. That is, to act on the basis of cost-benefit calculation with the goal of maximizing the difference between the two. People who learn to act in this way can avoid the bitter experience of being 'scored off' by other rational economic actors. Yet, acting 'economically' is also considered good for society as a whole, as economic orthodoxy holds that it is only by doing so that an optimal allocation of resources can possibly be achieved. In this way, 'economy/economics' is also an ideology because there is a notion of the 'good society' where an optimal allocation is possible. And the study of the variables that are set in motion by 'economically' acting individuals is the basis of much economic science. This further contributes to a rationalization of 'the economy' within the intricate and multi-layered social complex (Schmidt, 1993). Moreover, the current concerns about the climate crisis are taking place in the wake of a powerful thrust of mainstream economics towards providing an ideological justification for greed and the notion that being the more powerful players in very unequal economic power ratios entails being able to ignore 'externalities' such as social and environmental consequences (Mennell, 2014).

Schmidt reveals that the economization of human action is both a condition

for and a function of the economization of human thought. In this way,

economization is a form of civilization and forms part of the civilizing process in most

advanced industrial societies that have undergone structural and cultural

transformations into machines for 'economic growth'. It is under these conditions

that the proposals for a 'ecologization' of 'economy/economics' have been presented

as a necessary counter-balance to increasing economization/marketization – albeit

with a recognition of the challenge to current standards of conduct:

> This 'ecologization' will not only mean a more efficient use of energy and raw
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> materials and more 'economic' disposal of waste, but in some cases, at least
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> in industrialized societies, a more austere lifestyle as well.
>
> Schmidt (1993:40).

> [E]cologization … will also require a moderation of production and
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> consumption which will make an appeal to the human faculty of social and
>
> self-control, that is to say to 'civilization' in the sense of Norbert Elias.
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> Aarts et al. (1995:25).

Such a process of ecologization is considered by Aarts and Schmidt to be best

achieved through a series of positively phrased campaigns to stimulate ecological

moderation. In effect to promote *ecological civilizing offensives*. Derived from the

work of Elias, a *civilizing offensive* refers to intentional campaigns that attempt to

change the behaviour and morals of a group of people. By contributing to the growth

of knowledge it is perhaps hoped that such civilizing offensives may contribute in

some way to a *civilizing spurt.* Specifically, a speeding up of the civilizing process in respect of ecologization.

Schmidt (1993) highlights that processes of economization have been driven by struggles for status and prestige, and from Elias that status aspirations are extremely important in the formation of new behavioural standards and predispositions. Consequently, Schmidt believes that environmental policies should be based on the human sensitivity to status and that, in effect, conspicuous consumption should be steered away from the display of wealth towards the display of self-restraint towards the enhancement of a personal ecological reputation. Arguing from a broadly similar Eliasian track, Quilley (2009) is also concerned with the implications of an 'ecological conscience', which he analyses via Elias's link between emotional 'structures of feeling' and psychological and behaviorialy change on the one hand, and wider socioeconomic structures and patterns of state regulationon on the other. Elias reveals how *sociogenesis* – the expanding division of labour, population growth, urbanization, marketization, and the growth of the state, is intimately connected with *psychogenesis* – the ways in which the formation of habitus changes over time, and how this has involved the progressive internalization of self-restraints and the concomitant tightening and differentiation of behavioural codes. These more stable and consistent mechanisms of self-control can be termed 'super-ego' or 'conscience'. In this respect, Quilley argues that ecologization can be considered as a civilizing process because it intimates an habitual, reflexive self-monitoring in individual impacts on and self-restraint with regard to the natural environment.

He further argues:

> 'Status aspirations in the form of longing for social approval played a crucial
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> role in the formation and spread of the new behavioural standards and
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> predispositions described by Elias in relation to more pacified behaviour and
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> the money economy – and the same now applies to the spread of
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> environmental awareness and the growth of nature conservation and the
>
> environmental movement. Status aspirations partly explains the strong sense
>
> of superiority engendered by the 'we' feeling of many involved in these
>
> movements' (2009:131).

Kasper (2016) argues that figurational process sociology offers central concepts and
theories that are inherently environmental. She stresses that humans are both
biological organisms – dependent on and interacting with the biophysical contexts
within which they develop – and also *social organisms* – embedded and developing
within bonds and chains of functional interdependence with others. Within particular
figurational and biophysical conditions, people develop and express particular kinds
of habitus. In showing that the nature of socio-environmental impacts derive from
the expression of certain kinds of habitus, figurational process sociology provides a
valuable insight into the potential to more intentionally guide social change.
Specifically, research that can inform strategic figurational reorganization to achieved
desired changes in habitus over the short and long term.

Drawing too on Elias's formulations on habitus and changing social conditions,
Connolly (2019) suggests the issue of climate change reveals how the habitus of

older generations may be becoming ill-suited to a newly emerging social transformation. One that involves younger generations developing feelings of 'global' responsibility and a more enhanced affective connection to others across the earth. Yet, despite stressing the unplanned nature of developing social processes, what Connolly recognizes and Schmidt underplays is an equally important part of the structural properties of social development. Specifically, the tensions and conflicts between groups both within and between societies, particularly but not limited to the tensions and conflicts between groups that are losing functions and those acquiring new or increased functions, as with the cogwheeling of generations. These conflicts are a vital structural feature of all developing social processes, and in many cases they and their results form the very kernel of a process of development (Elias, 2008b; 2013). As mentioned, conflicts between generations are among the strongest driving forces of social dynamics. Yet, as Rohloff (2019) reveals in her careful historical analysis of gradual changes in perceptions towards and behaviour in respect of the natural environment, since 1800 there has been only a partial ecological civilizing process developing. Counter processes have also occurred simultaneously that have themselves contributed to climate change. The ecological civilizing process has affected, and been affected by, intentional actions by various campaigners and short-term civilzing offensives but further empirical research is needed to explore individual ecological civilizing processes in order to provide greater insights into ecological developments within a person's lifetime. The research Rohloff calls for would provide important empirical insight into any generational differences in the ecological civilizing process.

Conclusions and Future Research

This paper has demonstrated that beyond the static philosophical focus on normative questions relating to human 'actions' and the technical questions related to how responsibility towards future generations can or should be defined, figurational process sociology enables us to reframe questions concerning the relations between generations from philosophies that tend to see them as constant, motionless states with theoretical models and concepts that can reveal their dynamic, processual nature. Within particular figurational and biophysical conditions, people develop and express particular kinds of habitus and there is a specific pattern and mechnansim of transmission of socioloigical inheritance over generations. Specific human capabilities also include the ability to convey knowledge adequate to reality, which has enabled the species to gain hegemony over nature, from one generation to another. Yet, human beings still do not fully understand the responsibility that is bound up in this situation. The prevailing social processes of industrialization, economization and globalization are the context under which lie the current attempts to reshape a generational habitus towards a counterbalancing of processes of ecologization. The significant challenge this represents to current standards of conduct is partly reflected in the observable power differentials expressed by established adult groups towards young activist outsiders who charge their elders with a poor ecological conscience. In developing a theoretical approach that explains how and why the social dispositions of one generation are transferred to the next, as well as the social dynamics driven by the struggles of shaping and reshaping a generational habitus, figuratiuonal process sociology can develop and test conceptual models about how generations come to reject established patterns of behaviour and feeling, and embrace and develop different codes. Greta Thunberg

and fellow young climate activists may be developing the most essential new conceptions and responsibilities with regard to the natural environment, yet more research is required to ascertain whether others from their generation are now displaying difffferent patterns of ecological behaviour and feeling that are contributing to a reshaping of habitus towards processes of ecologization.

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