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## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MACEDONIAN MILLENNIAL GENERATION: QUALITATIVE STUDY

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**Abstract:** At any given moment in time, age group differences can be the result of three overlapping processes: 1) Life cycle effects: young people may be different from older people today, but they may well become more like them tomorrow, once they themselves age. 2) Period effects: major events (wars; social movements; economic downturns; medical, scientific or technological breakthroughs) affect all age groups simultaneously, but the degree of impact may differ according to where people are located in the life cycle. 3) Cohort effects: period events and trends often leave a particularly deep impression on young adults because they are still developing their core values; these imprints stay with them as they move through their life cycle. Macedonian young generation belongs to the Millennial generation (born between 1981-2000). There are a lot of beliefs about this generation cohort, which are based upon empirical findings that characterize its members as very enthusiastic and tolerant people, with high self-esteem, highly educated, technologically skilled, with great expectations from work, career and life in general. They value their parents’ opinions very highly, they support and believe in social rules, and are more in line with their parents’ values than most other generations have been. The focus on getting good grades, hard work, and involvement in extracurricular activities, etc. is resulting in higher achievement levels. They see college as the key to a high paying job and success, and may miss the bigger picture of what a college education is all about. They are pressured to decide early on a career – and have been put on a career track orientation since grade school. Their focus is more on the world of achievement rather than personal development. The Macedonian Millennials during their childhood and adolescence were witnesses of many significant events in their nearby surrounding but also in the globe. Therefore one of our research questions was to investigate which events are remembered as the most positive and most negative ones, which left mark on their personality and life in overall. Another intention was to investigate what is their preferred lifestyle and what are their aspirations. This paper is a result of a cross-sectional qualitative research study about the Macedonian youth, which was conducted in September 2016, by a research project team from the Institute for Sociological, Political and Juridical Research, University “Ss. Cyril and Methodius” – Skopje. Qualitative research approach has been applied for this paper, by semi structured in-depth interview data collection and analysis.

**Keywords:** Macedonian Millennial generation; preferred lifestyle; aspirations; attitudes toward politics, work and family.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Young Macedonian people aged 15-29 years are generally representatives of the Millennial generation. This generational cohort was witnessing numerous important historical (sociological, economic, political, technological) events/changes in the world as they are: fall of the Berlin wall in 1989; wars in the Middle East (Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria) and on the Balkan (Bosnia, Croatia, Serbia, Kosovo); terroristic attacks (like 9/11 and many more) and terroristic groups (Al Qaeda, ISIS); the world economic crisis/recession from 2008; social transformations (shift from communism into capitalism, changes of borders and creation of new countries); new movements in art (Digital art, Neo pop, Body art); social movements (LGBT); innovation of personal computers, mobile phones (today smart phones) and Internet; social media development (Facebook, Twitter, youtube). Also they were witnessing many natural disasters over the globe with large human cost (tsunamis, hurricanes, earthquakes, floods) and were threatened by several deadly viruses (HIV, HPV, bird flu, Ebola). These major events have for sure left marks over their personality and behavior.

Millennials in large number still live together with their parents - mostly because of the financial dependence. So the parents’ influence is still present in their work and general life related decisions and as well the feeling that their parents are always here to support and protect them if they failure, which prolongs their adolescence

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and sense for self-responsibility<sup>1</sup>. Also we must take into consideration the conflict based on the generational gap (in terms of values, attitudes, behavior and characteristic) between the Millennials and X-generation or Baby boomers.

Another belief is that Millennials are saying no to traditional marriage. Millennials have been putting off significant milestones like marriage and children<sup>2</sup>. But that doesn't mean they want to stay single forever. In Western culture in the late 18th century, marriage transformed from an economic arrangement into a union based on love. Now it may again be heading toward radical change<sup>3</sup>. Today an unprecedented portion of Millennials will remain unmarried through age 40, a recent Urban Institute report predicted. The marriage rate might drop to 70 percent -- a figure well below rates for boomers (91 percent), late boomers (87 percent) and Gen Xers (82 percent). And declines might be even sharper if marriage rates recover slowly, or not at all, from pre-recession levels, according to the report. Traditional marriage has been on a downward trajectory for generations, but with this group it appears to be in free fall.

Money is a major motivator for Millennials, more so than other generations. Overall, Millennials are 19 percent more likely than average to say that money is the best measure of success<sup>4</sup>. Millennials have a unique set of values around how they choose to spend their money. They grew up during the recession, entered a struggling job market and must now pay off record amounts of student debt<sup>5</sup>. Millennials are highly adept at using technology and social media influences many of their purchases. They prefer to spend on experiences rather than on stuff. Seventy-eight percent of Millennials—compared to 59% of baby boomers—“would rather pay for an experience than material goods,” according to a survey from Harris Poll and Eventbrite cited on *Bloomberg*. They favor products marketed as ethical, sustainable and environmentally friendly<sup>6</sup>.

Alsop<sup>7</sup> describes the ultimate dream job for the Millennial generation as the one which offers unlimited career opportunities, plenty of praise and rewards, flexible work hours, casual and fun atmosphere, and ‘meteoric rise to the executive suite’. He thinks about this generation in very similar way as Twenge does<sup>8</sup>, both describing the Millennials as very self-confident and with unreasonably high and unrealistic expectations from work and life in general. Twenge believes that ‘follow your dream’ and ‘you can be anything you want to be’ philosophy in the ‘90s has lead this generation to become narcissistic, focused only on the self, and in the same time it is the main reason for Millennials’ disappointments later in life.

Millennials grew up in a period in which they had more daily interaction with other ethnicities and cultures than any other generation before. Unlike the Boomers who grew up in fairly homogeneous settings, the new crop of young adults had much greater exposure to multiculturalism, a diversity of races, religions, and backgrounds. So they can be considered as the most tolerant generation to diversity. It is believed that they are technologically knowledgeable, socially responsible and work well collaboratively<sup>9</sup>.

Millennials’ unique historic experiences have shaped their relationship with politics and their communities. Given their sheer numbers, Millennials are a potentially powerful political force, yet they do not pursue traditional forms of civic engagement, such as voting, and are more likely to eschew party identity<sup>10</sup>. The majority of Millennials have little or no trust that the government will do what is right<sup>11</sup>. When asked how much they agree with this statement - “I am an activist (a person who behaves intentionally to bring about political or social change)” – in the same study the average response was just over neutral (54%), while the median

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<sup>1</sup> Latkovikj MT, Popovska MB, Popovski V. Work Values and Preferences of the New Workforce: HRM Implications for Macedonian Millennial Generation. *Journal of Advanced Management Science* Vol. 2016 Jul;4(4).

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.goldmansachs.com/our-thinking/pages/millennials/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.bentley.edu/impact/articles/nowuknow-why-millennials-refuse-get-married>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.experian.com/assets/marketing-services/reports/ems-ci-millennials-come-of-age-wp.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.forbes.com/sites/deborahweinswig/2016/09/07/millennials-go-minimal-the-decluttering-lifestyle-trend-that-is-taking-over/#6f8cd2624c1a>

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*

<sup>7</sup> R. Alsop, *The Trophy Kids Grow Up: How the Millennial Generation is Shaking up the Workplace*, San Francisco: JosseyBass, 2008.

<sup>8</sup> J. M. Twenge, *Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled--and More Miserable Than ever Before*, Simon and Schuster, 2006

<sup>9</sup> J. Ferri-Reed, “The keys to engaging Millennials,” *Journal for Quality and Participation*, vol. 33, no. 1, 2010.

<sup>10</sup> [https://s3.amazonaws.com/www.newamerica.org/downloads/The\\_Civic\\_and\\_Political\\_Participation\\_of\\_Millennials.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/www.newamerica.org/downloads/The_Civic_and_Political_Participation_of_Millennials.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ryan-scott/new-report-millennials-po\\_b\\_10764426.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ryan-scott/new-report-millennials-po_b_10764426.html)

response for this question was 60 percent. So most Millennials somewhat believe they are activists<sup>12</sup>. Millennials consistently have the lowest election turnout among all generations.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This paper is a result of a cross-sectional qualitative research study about the Macedonian youth, which was conducted in September 2016, by a research project team from the Institute for Sociological, Political and Juridical Research, University "Ss. Cyril and Methodius" – Skopje. As a research technique semi-structured in-depth interviews (with 14 questions divided in different thematic parts according the research questions, besides the demographic questions) have been applied on a purposive sample consisted from N=30 respondents (Macedonian young people, aged 15-29, heterogeneous by gender, place of existence, educational level, marital status, employment status and ethnicity). The qualitative data was collected online via e-mail and analyzed and interpreted by the research team members. The content data analysis didn't assume quantification of the findings.

## 3. RESULTS

The results have shown that as the most significant events which have had the most positive influence over the Macedonian young people could be highlighted the following: 1) the success of the Macedonian basketball national team (fourth placement) on the European championship in Lithuania; 2) student protests from 2016; 3) the independence of the Republic of Macedonia. For the representatives of the Albanian ethnicity group this kind of event is the Ohrid framework agreement.

On the other hand as the most negative events the respondents have pointed out the following: 1) the ethnic armed conflict in the country from 2001; 2) the natural disasters in the country in the last three years (the floods and earthquakes series in Skopje and the other regions); 3) the attempt of the (ex) president Kiro Gligorov; 4) civil wars in the neighboring countries. As important events which have triggered negative feelings Macedonian youngsters have mentioned the personal loss of close family members (parents).

For the question are Macedonian young people feeling prepared for independent life, and what is necessary for taking this step on, the results have shown that most of the respondents would like to live by their own, but it requires a large amount of financial resources. It represents a problem for the young people because they don't have the money at all or they don't have enough for total financial independency. Even those respondents living separately in another household still depend in economic terms from their parents. For the respondents that (were or) are living abroad the situation is the opposite, or more precisely, they provide financial help for their parents. Macedonian young people in large extent believe that the knowledge and skills how to successfully manage the housing should be something that should be learned after leaving the parents' home.

The opinion about the parents is very positive, Macedonian Millennials have characterized their parents as some ones who care, give love, nurture, guide, support and protect.

The respondents mainly see themselves in the future as employed - with successful career, in a family life, with a marital partner and children, having an own place of living, with sufficient finance – but without luxury. Two of the respondents are describing themselves as "middle class" members. As exception, some of the respondents dream about living somewhere by the sea or abroad in general, some of them would like to start up their own business or/and travel the world.

Macedonian young people generally think about themselves as a strongly determined to invest the required time, money and effort in order to reach their goals and aspirations, they learn and strive to complete their studies, work part or full time (often in the same time while studying), very often continue with the formal education (postgraduate and doctoral studies), actively participate in the non-formal education and don't mind to work overtime hours. But almost a quarter of the respondents are feeling demotivated, as they have lost their fate that doing everything right and giving their best would bring them the deserved outcomes ("...because it simply doesn't pay in this country..."). Some of the respondents said that unfortunately they cope with certain barriers or lack of possibilities for personal upgrade (usually time or money).

The attitudes toward politics among Macedonian youngsters are generally negative, and only in one case we can recognize activism-oriented behavior. There are a couple of respondents who consider themselves as politically engaged, but mostly because of extrinsic motivation (employment, security, better economic standard).

Macedonian Millennials would easily change jobs/organizations for a higher salary and better opportunities for career development (promotion on a higher job position).

They expect from their direct supervisor/manager to have a mutual friendly but professional relationship, to have an open and direct communication, to learn a lot from his/her experience as a mentor and a role model, to receive continuously feedback, recognition and financial rewards for their outstanding performances.

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<sup>12</sup> ibid

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Macedonian young people generally follow the Millennial generation cohort paradigm of thinking and acting. But the results also show that the national context has a big influence which makes this group of people special and unique in particular way. This kind of findings can be considered as useful for the creators of the national programs, strategies and politics about youth, educational and scientific institutions, employers and HR professionals.

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