“GENERATION Z REACHING ADULTHOOD IN SOCIETY.”

Perceptions of Generation Z's impact on the construction of Societal Challenges and Organisational Changes in Western Europe:

A Qualitative Exploration

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Abstract

This research examines how Generation Z (individuals born between 1997 and 2012) is perceived to impact the construct of societal challenges and organisational changes within the context of Western Europe. To explore their impact, the research aims to investigate their perceived role in shaping societal perspectives and organisational responses. The study is guided by Mannheim's socio-historical theory, considering shared emotional orientations, motivations, considering limitations as a result of human development.

Purposive sampling was employed to select participants with specialised knowledge of Generation Z's impact. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven participants, including Generation Z individuals, a sociology professor, an analyst, a youth worker, an HR professional, and individuals experienced with Generation Z-related issues. Reflexivity was applied to acknowledge the researcher's potential biases due to personal context as a Gen Z member. Thematic analysis was used to extract key themes from the interview data.

The study contributes to understanding how Generation Z's socio-historical context shapes their perceptions, motivations, and actions, influencing societal challenges and organisational changes. It proposes a model connecting their context to expectations and actions. The research suggests that future studies should test the theoretical framework and investigate behaviour prediction based on widespread data. The study reveals that Generation Z's impact on society and organisations stems from their emphasis on authenticity, demand for transparency, and pursuit of purpose-driven approaches. They mobilise through digital skills, transforming personal concerns into collective activism, and their integration into organisations depends on alignment with values like transparency, social responsibility, and work-life balance.

Keywords: Generation Z, societal challenges, organisational changes, socio-historical context, perceptions, motivations, qualitative research, thematic analysis.
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction on research interest

I was born on May 3, 2000, shortly after the Roman calendar marked its second millennium. Needless to mention that this unique occurrence has only taken place twice in the history of the Roman calendar and it won't happen again for another 977 years. Despite the ongoing advancements and progress, these 977 years remain beyond anyone's control as they are governed by time itself. In my personal and professional life, I often find that revealing my birth year generates more surprise than sharing my current age. In theory, one would assume that the two convey the same information; if I was born on May 3, 2000, my age is unequivocal. Similarly, if I'm currently 23 and my birthday falls on May 3, my birth year should be unquestionable. However, I perceive a distinct divide at the year 2000 when conversing with others. There's a sense that by disclosing my birth year, I'm symbolising the emergence of a new generation entering the workforce. It signifies that individuals like me, who were associated with diapers and Lego not long ago, are now active participants in the broader dialogue. During my relatively short time as an ‘adult’, I've observed noticeable disparities in how different age groups collaborate, perceive the world and find meaning.

I often perceive that people tend to view Generation Z in a similar way to how they would approach an unfamiliar religion. They acknowledge its existence but are unaware of its norms, values, beliefs, attitudes and desires. While I may find it easy to explain many of these attitudes, there are instances where it becomes challenging for other generations to clarify Z’s behaviour. Does this mean I possess a greater understanding of human behavioural patterns? Not at all, it works both ways. Sometimes I collaborate with older professionals whose behaviour doesn't align with mine. While many individuals from other generations comprehend the train of thoughts of these older individuals, it often takes more time for me to do so.

This led me to question whether this phenomenon is simply a result of growing up and the association with specific age groups as I used to understand them (new-borns, infants, children, adolescents, etc.). However, the categorisation seems to be more linked to one's age rather than one’s generation. This made me wonder why I increasingly hear the term ‘Generation Z’ instead of referring to them as ‘youth’ or ‘young adults’. As a result, I began studying the concept of generations and why they exist.
1.2 Problematisation

Before delving into the role Generation Z (defined as individuals born between 1997 and 2012) is perceived to play in shaping the future of society and organisations, it is essential to examine the role and impact of generations on society as a whole. Researchers have begun exploring how generational shifts influence organisational dynamics going forward. Bourne argued that understanding generational perceptions is crucial for leaders to develop effective change strategies and enhance organisational performance (Bourne, 2015). The findings revealed that individuals across different generations held both positive and negative perceptions regarding how members of various generations react to organisational change. The study highlights the importance for leaders to recognise these generational perceptions and effectively address them, especially when managing teams consisting of multiple generations. Additionally, Sedrak and Cahill emphasised that comprehending generational diversity contributes to a better understanding of individuals in the workplace (Sedrak & Cahill, 2011). However, it should be noted that the focus of these studies mainly revolved around understanding the role of Generation Y (born approximately between 1981 and 1996) in society. As people from Generation Z begin to enter the workforce, organisations may soon find themselves comprised of four or even five different generations working together, leading to potential intergenerational biases, stereotypes, and conflicts (Urick, 2019). What’s more, Hernaus and Vokic found that different generational cohorts may have unique work preferences and job characteristics (Hernaus & Vokic, 2014).

While Generation Z's entry into adulthood is ongoing, they already constitute about 12% of the global workforce (Peralta, 2022). This proportion is projected to rise significantly, with Generation Z and Generation Y combined expected to make up around 60% of the total workforce by 2030 (Mugisha, 2022). Given this substantial demographic impact on society, it becomes crucial to understand how the growing dominance of Generation Z may play a role in (changing) perspectives on society today, and before they reach full adulthood in 2030.

The views of Generation Z on organisational changes might be influenced by their broader societal perspectives. Maes and van Hootegem proposed that shifting societal perspectives may trigger different attitudes towards organisational change (Maes & Van Hootegem, 2019).
However, it is crucial to recognise that generational perspectives are not solely attributed to social changes but may also be influenced by human development (Troll, 1970). Troll’s research suggests that organisations evolve over time, and humans adapt accordingly. Furthermore, organisational changes and societal differences can stem from various factors beyond generational shifts, such as technological advancements. For instance, when the CEO of Dukaan, an e-commerce company, replaced 90% of support staff with AI chatbots due to the technological advancement of AI (Cooban, 2023), it illustrates how organisational changes can be driven by different sources (Troll, 1970).

Nevertheless, it has to be noted that this research doesn’t aim to find out what (mainly) causes changes in society and organisations, but rather to open a discussion on how the role of Generation Z is perceived in this construct of changes of societal challenges and organisational changes, taking into account it’s generational attitudes and views. Individuals from Generation Z are gaining larger influence; they will be allowed to vote, they will enter the workforce etc. At the same time, the Generation will account for a larger number of the population. Therefore, the continued expansion of Generation Z within society and the workforce could lead to varying viewpoints regarding the contribution and influence of Generation Z in this progression.

By exploring the interplay between generational shifts, societal/organisational perspectives, and human development, the study seeks to uncover unique insights into how Generation Z's increasing presence in the workforce and society might shape the understanding and approach towards these changes, ultimately contributing valuable insights for leaders and organisations preparing for the future. Therefore, the research question is formulated as follows:

“How is Generation Z perceived to impact the construction of societal challenges and organisational changes in Western Europe”.

“
Chapter 2: Theoretical framework

2.1 Background information

2.1.1 Generations based on socio-historic context.

In this subchapter, we delve into possible interpretations of ‘generation’ and how generational labels are created by society. Furthermore, the goal is to explore theory on generations in relation to socio-historical context, attitudes, motivations, shared emotions and human development. As such, the aim is to create an overview of factors that may establish ‘generational evolution’, a development towards a new generation.

This thesis acknowledges the general consensus among researchers in employing consistent labels for different generations. Nevertheless, there exists the possibility of discrepancies in defining the specific birth year ranges for each generation. However, these variations in birth year criteria typically maintain a range of approximately five years. For the purposes of this study, the generational terms and timeframes established by the Pew Research Center will be adopted. The rationale behind this selection is elucidated by the methodological approach of Pew. The Pew Research Center delineates a sequence of eight generations spanning from 1883 to the contemporary era: the Lost Generation (1883-1900), Greatest Generation/GI Generation (1901-1927), Silent Generation (1928-1945), Baby Boomers (1946-1964), Generation X (1965-1980), Millennials/Generation Y (1981-1996), Generation Z (1997-2012), and Generation Alpha (2013-present) (Pew Research Center, 2015). A succinct outline of each generation, emphasising the principal historical context that underpins their classification, is available in Appendix 3. It is imperative to recognise that although a comprehensive exploration of generational divisions is feasible, the appendix will solely provide a concise overview of the basic socio-historical context of these generations.

2.1.1.1 Disruptions in linear human development.

The following subsection provides context on how (long-term) linear human development can be disrupted by socio-historical events. Later in this chapter, the implications of these socio-historical events are connected to the possible construction of generations.

In the field of generational theory, researchers analyse the approximately eight billion individuals in the world based on their year of birth in order to construct a general profile of
each group. Through their studies, researchers have demonstrated that certain ‘advancements’ occur as a result of evolution. One such example is the increase in life expectancy over time, as evidenced by studies such as (Mathers, Stevens, Boerma, White, & Tobias, 2015), which indicated a rise of six years between 2000 and 2019 (WHO, 2020). Additionally, research by James Robert Flynn on the ‘Flynn Effect’ reveals a trend of increasing IQ scores over time (Hernstein & Murray, 1994). Numerous other examples exist highlighting the relationship between these human ‘advancements’ and the passage of time. However, it can be argued that these effects follow a generally linear pattern, prompting us to question whether they can be attributed to generational evolution or if they are better described as a linear evolution within each generation.

This perspective raises the intriguing question of whether generation is merely a generalisation. While basic human evolutionary effects can be understood by observing linear progress over time, the uniformity of this progression within generations compared to the differences between generations challenges the notion of a direct link. Nevertheless, there are exceptions that can be examined.

World War II serves as an illustrative example, as it was regarded by many as a defining event for a new generation. However, impactful historical events that contribute to the emergence of a new generation can also encompass broad socio-cultural changes, technological advancements, economic and societal shifts, or other demographic factors. These factors can be interpreted as both positive and negative developments (Matsumoto & Yoo, 2006).

Understanding the intricacies of evolution poses a challenge in determining the extent to which various influential factors have shaped its course. While socio-historical elements may play a role in driving advancements in technology, the economy, the environment, and society overall, it's also plausible that the relationship could be reversed (Welzel, Inglehart, &
Sweden

Klingemann, 2003). This raises the question of whether the socio-historical context can truly propel economic, technological, or environmental (and such) progress. Consequently, this study focuses on instances of evolution that aren't directly tied to socio-historical contexts, but rather stem from the (linear) progression of society over time as a whole, which is herein referred to as 'human development.'

2.1.1.2 Socio-historical context in the construction of generational attitudes

In the following subsection the connection between social-historical context and generations is made through the theoretical approach of Karl Mannheim. Furthermore, the social-historical context of generations is also explored into construction of attitudes.

Sociologist Karl Mannheim believed that individuals are influenced by the socio-historical context based on shared experience (Mannheim, 1928). He argued that each generation, defined by individuals born around the same time, shares a common location within the social and historical process. This location in time shapes their experiences, thoughts, and behaviours in a specific way. Mannheim distinguished the concept of ‘generation’ from that of a concrete social group (family, tribe, sect), as generations do not require concrete knowledge of each other (Mannheim, 1928). Unlike a community for instance, where members interact directly and have personal relationships with each other, individuals within a generation may not necessarily know each other on a personal level. They might be spread across various geographic locations, making it impractical for everyone in the generation to have concrete knowledge of each other.

Mannheim viewed generations as a unique social phenomenon, arising from the biological rhythm of birth and death (Mannheim, 1928). He claims that when individuals are born within a specific time frame and share a common historical context, they are more likely to experience similar events, developments, and societal changes during their lifetimes. These shared experiences create a collective identity and consciousness within that generation, setting them apart from other age groups. The passing of one generation and the birth of the next continues this cycle, allowing societies to adapt and change over time. However, he also emphasised that the sociological significance of generations goes beyond mere biological factors. Mannheim suggests that each generation brings its own perspectives, values, and ideas, contributing to the development and evolution of the social structure. Generations
inherit and transmit cultural heritage, and their experiences are limited to specific historical periods. As a result, each generation tends to develop particular tendencies, modes of thought, and behaviours associated with their shared temporal context. Mannheim's insight suggests that the biological rhythm of birth and death is not just a physical aspect of human life; it also has profound social implications (Mannheim, 1928). By understanding how generations are shaped by historical experiences and shared contexts, we can gain valuable insights into the dynamics of social change and the development of cultures and societies.

Mannheim’s approach provides a more comprehensive understanding of how generations are influenced by their shared historical experiences and how these influences shape their perspectives and actions within society. By exploring the concept of generations within formal sociology, Mannheim aimed to provide a clearer understanding of the dynamic interplay between individuals and their historical context, contributing to a more organised and holistic approach to the study of generational phenomena.

In line with Mannheim’s theory, ‘generational’ is defined as “relating to or characteristic of all the people born and living at about the same time, regarded collectively” by Oxford dictionary, the term may also still refer to “relating to the different generations of a particular family” (Oxford Dictionary, 2023). ‘Generation’ originally derives from the Latin words “generatio”, describing when one brings a child into existence by the process of reproduction (Oxford Dictionary, 2023). For example, since 778 A.D, approximately 39 individuals in the French royal family were named 'Louis' and have been part of the lineage (Doyle, 2001). All 39 individuals can be traced back to the same family tree. Even today, Louis Alphonse de Bourbon (also known as Louis XX), who is still alive, continues this family lineage and has a son named 'Louis' as well.

While many refer to such Manheim does not specifically contrast the view that generations can be shaped through bloodline, as he refers to as fresh contact of the biological type (Mannheim, 1928). Rather, he took on a more holistic approach, suggesting that generations should be looked at more horizontally (based upon the socio-historical period of birth) than vertically (based upon one’s ancestors).
Within the realm of generational dynamics, variations in attitudes emerge as reflections of broader sociocultural transformations occurring during specific historical epochs (Donnelly, Twenge, & Carter, 2015). The dissimilarities in outlook among different generations are emblematic of how larger cultural contexts shape individual perspectives. However, these cross-sectional analyses across generations at a specific moment present complexity as they blend factors of cohort, age, and historical influences.

Research has shown that socio-historical context, together with a person as context (e.g., values, emotions, psychological distance, human development) shape one’s attitudes (Albarracin & Shavitt, 2017). Therefore, the perspective introduced by Karl Mannheim provides valuable insights into the influence of shared experiences within a socio-historical context on generational attitudes. This approach offers a more holistic understanding of generational phenomena, going beyond simplistic demographic categorizations. By exploring the concept of generations and their historical interpretations, we gain a deeper understanding of why Generation Z is labelled as a distinct generation with its own attitudes. Additionally, by recognising the importance of socio-historical contexts and major events in shaping generations, we can better comprehend Generation Z's unique perspective on societal challenges and their potential impact on organisational changes. This knowledge enriches the exploration of how this generation is contributing to the dynamics of social change and the development of cultures and societies.

2.1.1.3 Socio-historical context in the construction of motivations

In the following subsection, we delve into how different socio-historical context may redefine priorities, needs and motivations. We do so by connecting socio-historical context to Maslow's theory on behaviour.

Some research has explored the significance of each level in Maslow's hierarchy of needs based on different age groups. Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a widely recognised motivational theory that posits that individuals have multiple, originally five, fundamental needs. These levels include physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness and love needs, esteem needs and self-actualisation needs (Maslow A. H., 1943). In his later reflection, exploring the motivation of ‘fully developed humans’ (fulfilment in each of the five needs),
he added that these fortunate individuals are motivated by values which transcend his self, characterised by intrinsic values (Maslow A. H., 1969).

Although Maslow’s theory is commonly known as a hierarchy pyramid, where individuals need to fulfil each level of need sequentially before progressing to the next, it originally had a different output. It has to be noted that Maslow himself didn’t use the widely known pyramid to describe a hierarchy. He even stated in his original essay that the order of needs, being described as a fixed order in his previous work (before 1943), are actually it is not nearly as rigid as he may had implied (Maslow, 1943). Nevertheless, it has to be stated that he did mention each need in a specific order and implicated that one (more bottom) need needs to be fulfilled more than the subsequent (more top) need. However, it has to be stated that Maslow highlighted that the need does not have to be 100% fulfilled before the next need emerges (Maslow, 1943).

Scientist Scott Barry Kaufman later reinterpreted Maslow’s theory in line with his unpublished revisions from 1966. According to Kaufman, the enduring aspect of Maslow's theory lies in its differentiation of two types of needs (Kaufman, 2020). The first type is referred to as ‘deficit needs’, which significantly influence our motivation and take precedence over higher-level needs when they are urgently unmet. For example, if we find ourselves underwater and running out of oxygen, our focus would solely be on the immediate need to breathe again, rather than pursuing self-actualisation or other ‘higher’ needs.

Kaufman claimed that as a physiological need becomes more precarious, it increasingly dominates our thoughts and preoccupies our minds. He suggests hunger can be a potent motivator for example. Nevertheless, Kaufman claims that when our access to fundamental necessities like water, food, and shelter is secure, we tend not to focus on them extensively. He concluded that the activation of deficit needs primarily occurs when we experience a lack of them, prompting them to take centre stage in our motivations and behaviours (Kaufman, 2020).

Research by Verma and Mezes underscore the dynamic nature of how different generations perceive and prioritise their needs based on Maslow’s theory (Verma & Menezes, 2018). It showcases that the interpretation and significance attributed to each need can diverge
significantly from one generation to another. This divergence is particularly highlighted in the varying degrees of effort required to fulfil these needs across generations. Notably, the study indicates that Generation Z places less emphasis on physiological and safety needs in comparison to both Generation Y and Generation X. This implies that the younger generation might require different means or experiences to satisfy these fundamental needs. These differences may be attributed to changes in work nature, evolving societal values and shifts in parenting and education practices. Maslow’s theory offers valuable insights into behavioural motivation, delving into the driving forces behind specific actions and the preservation of certain values. By applying Maslow's theory to different generations, we can gain deeper understanding of what motivates them in both organisational and societal settings.

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\text{2.1.1.4 Socio-historical context in the construction of shared views and emotions}
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In the following subchapter, we delve into the effect of shared views and emotions on generational constructions.

Societal perspectives refer to the collective viewpoints, attitudes and outlooks of a society towards specific issues, events, or phenomena (Eisenberg, Reykowski, & Staub, 2016). These perspectives are claimed evolve across generations due to various factors such as social, cultural, economic, technological and historical influences (Pew Research Center, 2015). The extent in what each specific influences contributes to change, or the intensity of change may vary and is bound to a complex process.

Societal perspectives may extend beyond matters of importance; they also involve prioritisation. Research suggests that priorities, in turn, have not remained consistent over time. One research indicates that Baby Boomers are more likely to prioritise addressing climate change as a top personal concern compared to Generation X, while Generation Y and Z indicate a higher priority than Baby Boomers (Pew Research Center, 2021). Societal perspectives may play a crucial role in driving societal change. When a significant portion of the population holds a particular perspective or opinion on a social issue, it exerts pressure on policymakers, organisations and leaders to take action (Page & Shapiro, 1983). Research by Page and Shapiro suggests that substantial alignment between public opinion and policies, coupled with the fact that opinion tends to change before policy, demonstrates the importance of opinion changes as causes of policy change (Page & Shapiro, 1983). Additionally, societal
perspectives can give rise to social movements, which are organised efforts by groups of people to effect change on specific issues.

Socio-historical context may attribute to the collective shared emotions of a generation, encompassing the emotions and perceptions of peers and historical contexts that shape group dynamics (Firer, Slakmon, Dishon, & Schwarz, 2021). Shared emotional experiences can lead to the development of a collective views and emotional orientation within a society (Bar-Tal, 2006). Just as individuals may be characterised by dominant emotions, societies, too, may adopt certain emotional tendencies as a collective. This notion is not new, as research has explored how societies and cultures shape individuals' emotions through various factors such as exposure to common information, socialisation practices, and cultural norms (Smith & Lazarus, 1990).

Understanding the interplay between emotions and societal perspectives may be particularly relevant because societal perspectives refer to the collective viewpoints, attitudes, and outlooks of a society towards specific issues (Bar-Tal, 2006). The duration of experiences is not the sole determining factor; rather, it is the impact these experiences have on individuals and the collective views and emotional orientation that shapes societal perspectives.

These emotional orientations can influence societal perspectives in several ways. They can lead to shifts in attitudes towards specific issues (Page & Shapiro, 1983), e.g., increasing support for LGBTQ+ rights and climate change action. When a significant portion of the population shares a particular emotional orientation on a social issue, it exerts pressure on policymakers, organisations, and leaders to take action, driving societal change (Page & Shapiro, 1983).

*The main objective of this research is to examine the perceptions on the role and impact of Generation Z, based on its socio-historic context, in construction of societal challenges and organisational changes, considering shared views, motivations and emotional orientations, considering the limitations of human development. In doing so, we may capture shared emotions that may explain changing perspectives.*
2.2 Previous research

In the subsequent subchapter, the presentation of previous research aims to thoroughly examine the distinctive socio-historic traits of Generation Z. This endeavour facilitates an interactive discourse and exploration into the degree of alignment between the theoretical constructs and the pragmatic realities at hand.

2.2.1 Societal priorities over generations

Adamczyk and Kowalczyk state that learning about the younger generation’s approach to the societal goals has made it possible to extract priorities in this regard (Adamczyk & Kowalczyk, 2022). Yet, it has to be noted that priorities of societal challenges may be subject to other influences, such as age, culture, economic stability and recent events. Still, by analysing societal priorities per generations, we can extract the motivations of Generation Z and thus, might be able to tell something about their motivations and action towards societal challenges and organisational changes.

Research and statistical data have demonstrated the shifting nature of societal priorities across generations. The MYWorld 2030 survey, initiated by the United Nations and its partners, serves as a global platform for individuals to voice their opinions, priorities and perspectives on the Sustainable Development Goals (hereafter SDGs) (United Nations, 2023).

The SDGs, comprising 17 goals, were adopted by the United Nations in 2015 as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Howard-Grenville, et al., 2019). These goals aim to eradicate poverty, protect the environment and promote prosperity for all. The SDGs provide a comprehensive framework addressing economic, environmental and social dimensions of sustainability (Salvia, Filho, Brandli, & Griebeler, 2019). They are supported by 169 targets and various indicators for monitoring progress. The SDGs cover a wide array of issues, including poverty, hunger, health, education, gender equality etc.

The MYWorld 2030 survey aims to engage individuals in the implementation of the SDGs and ensure their participation in decision-making processes. Participants are asked to select six out of sixteen possible SDGs that they consider most important for their country and the world. The survey results contribute to informing policy decisions and monitoring progress towards achieving the SDGs. To date, over 584,000 people from around the world have
participated in the survey. MYWorld survey are shared by hundreds of global, national and local partners around the world who work with the United Nations to gather people’s voices (United Nations, 2023). Participants are also required to provide information about themselves, including age, education level, gender, country, city and disability. By analysing the responses, data can be extracted and linked to different generations.

The results obtained each year indicate a trend in which Generation Z, in particular, significantly differs from other generations. Survey respondents were asked to rank six of their main priorities. Priorities then each were awarded one vote. In the following graphs, the (temporary) results of the surveys are showed (cutoff February 10, 2023). The first graph shows the results, per generation group in Western-European countries (Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Monaco, Netherlands, Switzerland).

Horizontally, the graph underneath showcases each SDG based on the ranking of the United Nations. The vertical bar in both graphs shows the share of votes one SDGs received (in % of the total votes per age group). There are four lines; each line represents an age cohort, and the associated generation.

![Societal priorities per age group (In % of votes)](image)

*Figure 2- Societal priorities per age group (In % of votes) (MyWorld, 2023)*
The generalisability of the MyWorld survey over generations can be justified by considering the longitudinal nature of these surveys and the distinct socio-historic contexts that define Generation Y and Generation Z. While it holds true that individuals in a particular age group might slightly span across multiple generations, it is reasonable to assume that the majority of respondents within the 16 to 30-year-old category during MyWorld 2030, the majority of respondents are from Generation Z, as the large majority of individuals born between 1996 and 2012 would have been within this age range during the survey's opening in 2021-2023.

It has to be stated that, in line with a social constructivist approach, this context is not centred on strict generalisability. Additionally, without additional context, one could not claim that the MyWorld survey is guided by generational theory instead of human development and the process of becoming an adult. However, it’s present is there to sparking a broader discussion. The MyWorld survey can be used in this research to open up comprehensive dialogue to link perceptions on societal priorities to its underlying rationale based on socio-historical context.

2.2.2 Previous research into socio-historically fuelled attitudes of Generation Z
In line with the theory by Mannheim, this subsection seeks to create a better understanding of the socio-historic context of Generation Z and how this may have affected their attitudes.

2.2.2.1 Generational principles in socio-historical context
Research implicates that regulatory principles of one’s practices and beliefs are a result of the historical facts associated to economic reasons (Araya & González, 2008). Generation Z has grown up during of economic stress (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). They grew up witnessing financial hardships in their families and communities. Moreover, when the first Z’s were on the cusp of reaching adulthood, unemployment in Europe had reached its peak of the last 20 years. The research findings indicate that a substantial proportion of Generation Z individuals possess a heightened consciousness regarding the imperative of future financial planning (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). It claims Gen Z prioritise employment stability over a lofty income, diverging from the perspectives of preceding generations like Gen Y. Furthermore, the study concludes that Gen Z exhibits a notable inclination towards conventional, consistent employment as opposed to freelance or part-time engagements, compared to a more entrepreneurial mindset by Millennials when they were of similar age. Additionally, Seemiller and Grace showcased that Generation Z is more conservative towards financial
issues, while it is considerably liberal towards social issues (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). The socio-historical and economic factors are claimed to play a pivotal role in shaping individuals’ regulatory principles and beliefs, underscoring the profound connection between economic context and generational characteristics as highlighted in Araya & González’s study and research on the socio-historical context on Generation Z.

2.2.2.2 Generational actions as a result of motivations and emotions

Gendolla claims that experiencing fear or anger can prioritise and facilitate actions (Gendolla, 2017). It further suggests that this motivational amplification effect of emotions is the main reason of action stimulus. Generation Z students have come of age after the 9/11 attacks, experiencing the aftermath of an unstable economy, social justice issues, frequent incidents of public shootings, and persistent acts of violence and terrorism (Seemiller & Grace, 2017). It indicates that the accessibility of the internet and social media exposes them to personal accounts of these occurrences, leading to the cultivation of fear and apprehension among many students. Despite facing uncertainty and fear, Seemiller and Grace claim Generation Z students believe they can make a difference. They elaborate that social justice issues prominent in their lifetime, such as the legalization of same-sex marriage and the Black Lives Matter movement, as well as policy debates on immigration, religious freedom, transgender rights, and women’s rights, have fuelled the fire for many. Seemiller and Grace define this discovery in our research as a “we”-centred mentality of Generation Z, in which the majority of their concerns centre around the well-being of everyone rather than solely themselves. Additionally, Twenge showed that Generation Z is more inclined towards addressing key societal challenges, displaying stronger support for environmental causes and greater political engagement compared to previous generations (Twenge, 2017). Twenge compared archival personality data from different generational groups taken at different time periods in order to allow an examination of differences in personality by generation, age or maturation.

Seemiller and Grace's study on Generation Z students, while insightful, does come with certain limitations that warrant consideration (Eberhardt, 2017). The heavy reliance on self-reported characteristics introduces the potential for biases and subjectivity. It's important to approach the study’s conclusions with a critical lens, recognising the complexities of Generation Z's behaviours and attitudes beyond generational stereotypes. As time progresses and societal dynamics change, the study’s temporal relevance might also diminish. Despite
these limitations, Seemiller and Grace's work remains a valuable resource for understanding this cohort's characteristics, though cautious interpretation is advised.
Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Research question

“How is Generation Z perceived to impact the construction of societal challenges and organisational changes in Western Europe”.

3.2 Research aim

To investigate and understand the perceived role and impact of Generation Z within the socio-historic context of Western Europe in shaping societal challenges and organisational changes. This research aims to explore how Gen Z’s socio-historical context and its effects on current society are perceived to contribute to the evolving dynamics of societal perspectives and organisational responses, considering the socio-historical basis (based on Mannheim’s theory), shared emotional orientations, views and motivations, while considering the limitation of human development. By delving into the interplay between generational influences and broader societal shifts, this study seeks to open a discussion on the perceived role and impact of Generation Z in the construct societal challenges and organisational changes in Western European society and workplaces.

3.3 Sampling method

Interviewees were contacted based on their own generational classification or through their experience with Generation Z., in the context of societal challenges and organisational changes. Therefore, I chose to use purposive sampling. Rai and Thapa state that purposive sampling is a form of non-probability sampling in which decisions concerning the individuals to be included in the sample are taken by the researcher, based upon a variety of criteria which may include specialist knowledge of the research issue (Rai & Thapa, 2015). These criteria were thus based on my perception on their connection with Generation Z in their personal or professional life, their geographical location (Western Europe), and their connection to societal challenges or organisational changes. To promote a diverse set of interviewees, I also aimed to get at least one person from Generation X and one person of Generation Y to support more diverse perspectives, while remaining a focus on Z. In the theory of purposive sampling, I thus used ‘expert sampling’ as a type of purposive sampling.
Expert sampling involves selecting participants who possess specialised knowledge or expertise relevant to the research topic (Rai & Thapa, 2015). In this case, the choice was made to select individuals who have a direct connection to Generation Z and are actively part in (promoting) changes in society or organisation. These participants include a sociology professor, an analyst focusing on Generation Z, a youth worker, an HR professional who assists companies in attracting young workers, and individuals who have experienced and engaged with Generation Z-related issues firsthand. This aligns with expert sampling because I am seeking insights from participants who have unique knowledge and experiences related to the research question. I contacted all individuals through social platforms (e.g., LinkedIn). I introduced my research topic in approximately 5 sentences and requested their email addresses to send them more information. In the end a total of 7 individuals were interviewed for this research project. To ensure ethical considerations, pseudonyms have been assigned to each participant. It is important to note that all participants in these interviews have reached adulthood. The following individuals have participated in this research. Each individual is introduced with their connection to Generation Z\(^{(1)}\), and to societal challenges\(^{(2)}\)/organisational changes\(^{(3)}\).

- **Professor** (Male / Generation X): Professor is a sociology professor at a university in the Netherlands. With a teaching career spanning the early 21st century, he has provided many lecturers to Z’s\(^1\). Professor has also been involved in provincial government activities in a division called “Youth and Work”, stimulating younger people (predominantly Z’s) with their transition to the labour force\(^{1/2/3}\).

- **Analyst** (Female / Generation Z): At a young age, Analyst actively engaged in various youth political organisations\(^2\). A few years ago, she was elected to a prestigious youth role in the United Nations\(^2\). Following her term at the United Nations, she transitioned into the role of an analyst focusing on Generation Z\(^1\).

- **Youth Worker** (Male / Generation Y): Growing up, Youth Worker was surrounded by millennials who faced significant societal and economic challenges\(^2\). Now, his primary focus is working with Generation Z\(^1\).

- **HR Professional** (Female / Generation Y): HR Professional (hereafter HRP) assists companies in adapting to changes in human resources\(^3\). One of her main focusses is assisting companies in attracting and retaining young workers\(^1\) (predominantly Z’s).

- **Zoe** (Female / Generation Z): Zoe has encountered multiple mental health challenges and has shared her experiences through (v)blogs\(^2\). She is a Z herself\(^1\).

- **Zayla** (Female / Generation Z): Zayla started her career in local government, specialising in "education and the labour market"\(^2\). She is a Z herself\(^1\).

- **Zion** (Male / Generation Z): Zion is an active member of a local political youth organisation\(^2\). He is a Z himself\(^1\).
3.4 Reflexivity

Alvesson and Sköldberg’s perspective on reflexivity underscores the complex relationship between knowledge production, the researcher’s context, and the researcher themselves (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000). Reflexivity is not just a matter of looking inward; it is about a rigorous examination of the various influences that shape the research process. This involves critically evaluating the interaction between theoretical assumptions, language, personal biases, and the empirical data. By doing so, the researcher aims to generate knowledge that is nuanced, contextually sensitive, and open to alternative interpretations.

My research question, on how Generation Z is perceived to impact the construction of societal challenges and organisational changes in Western Europe, aligns well with Alvesson and Sköldberg’s call for reflective research as I am classified as Gen Z myself, and live in Western Europe. I recognise the inherent influence of my personal experiences and perspectives on the research process. Being a part of this cohort, my understanding is shaped by my own socio-historical contexts. This reflexivity prompts critical self-awareness about potential biases and subjectivities that may emerge during the study. My aim is not to impose a simplified ‘truth’ upon the complexities of reality but to navigate through the intricacies of my subject matter while acknowledging the subjectivity inherent in interpretation.

One crucial application of reflexivity in my research lies in the selection of my sampling method. The use of purposive sampling, particularly the form of expert sampling, is a manifestation of this reflexivity. I have intentionally chosen participants who possess specialised knowledge and experiences relevant to Generation Z and its impact on societal and organisational contexts. This method resonates with Alvesson and Sköldberg’s idea of considering the intricate interplay between knowledge producers and the contexts of knowledge production (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000). By selecting participants based on their expertise and connections to Generation Z, I am acknowledging the importance of diverse perspectives in understanding the research phenomenon. While the utilisation of purposive sampling introduces elements of researcher bias in relation to classification as someone from Generation Z, I have strived to address it through explicit selection criteria based on participants’ expertise and experience. This approach seeks to ensure diverse viewpoints while mitigating undue influence on participant selection.
3.5 Data collection method

In-person, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the selected participants. The interviews have taken place in a private setting and audio was recorded with the participant's consent. Unlike structured interviews with fixed questions, the semi-structured approach encourages new ideas based on interviewee input. Interviewers typically follow a thematic framework for exploration (Knott, Rao, Summers, & Teeger, 2022). A semi-structured interview diverges from structured interviews by fostering flexibility.

Semi-structured interviews offer advantages despite challenges. Semi-structured interviews provide flexibility to navigate unexplored areas, making them valuable for investigating potential critical issues (Adams, 2015). They cater to various participant groups, including program recipients, interested parties, and administrators. Semi-structured elicit independent thoughts, address sensitivities, and provide in-depth insights, enhancing data collection and analysis beyond surveys or focus groups.

For grounded theory studies, semi-structured in-depth interviews and focus groups emerge as effective tools (Khan S., 2014). These methods aim to uncover antecedents and factors linked to the study's phenomenon according to participants' perceptions. The collected interview data undergoes meticulous transcription and analysis through coding and constant comparison, adhering to the constructivist grounded theory approach. This approach enables the exploration of participants' perceptions of Generation Z's role and impacts on the construction of societal challenges and organisational changes. By including a mix of structured and unstructured questions, the interview process provides a comprehensive understanding of the participants' perspectives. Some example questions are displayed in the interview guide (Appendix 4).

These interview formats provide the opportunity to delve into open-ended inquiries, accommodate a diverse range of perspectives. These attributes align seamlessly with the overarching aim of comprehending the intricate interplay between generational dynamics and shifts within society. Notwithstanding the significant time and labour investment that semi-structured interviews entail, their pliability and contextual richness render them highly suitable for capturing the nuanced insights essential to this study's objectives.
3.6 Data analysis

In interpreting the connection and applicability of the theoretical frameworks to my research, I employed thematic analysis to extract key themes and insights from the collected qualitative data and was inspired by grounded theory to construct generate theories that explain and interpret complex phenomena. Grounded theory aims to develop theory and progress new insights based on an inductive approach (Thomas, 2003). As such, it typically does not take vantage point from existing theories (like e.g. Mannheim’s), although likewise approaches have been executed and it's relatability to grounded theory can be debated upon (Seaman, 2008).

This analysis involved a rigorous examination of the participants' interview responses, focusing on identifying recurring patterns, underlying meanings, and nuanced perspectives that shed light on the research question (Guest, MacQueen, MacQueen, & Namey, 2014). Through this analytical process, I aimed to uncover the interplay between Generation Z's perceived impact in the construction of societal challenges and organisational changes, considering the socio-historical basis, motivations, shared emotional orientations, and human development.

3.6.1 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is a flexible qualitative research method for discerning, interpreting, and presenting recurring patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2008). It involves a comprehensive exploration and description of the data set, often exceeding mere organisation, extending into the researcher's interpretation of various dimensions of the research topic. While it lacks a distinct branding like other analytical methods, thematic analysis is distinct in its ability to adapt to diverse theoretical frameworks, allowing it to offer social constructionist insights into participants' realities while demanding transparency regarding the theoretical stance taken in analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2008). By emphasising the importance of participants' perceptions and experiences, thematic analysis provides a rich exploratory opportunity to delve into the constructed realities of those involved. Through its comprehensive approach, thematic analysis embraces the essence of social constructivism by revealing recurring themes that emerge from participants' perspectives, shedding light on the collaborative construction of meaning.
The thematic analysis process involved several iterative steps, including familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, identifying patterns, organising codes into themes, and refining those themes through a continuous process of reflection and comparison (Chapman, Hadfield, & Chapman, 2015). In analysing the data, I split up the themes based on recurring patterns during the interviews, which are socio-historical context, shared emotions and views, motivations and stakeholders.

3.6.2 Inspiration by grounded theory
Thematic analyses, as in grounded theory and development of cultural models, require more involvement and interpretation from the researcher (Guest, MacQueen, MacQueen, & Namey, 2014). Grounded theory is a qualitative methodological movement rooted in symbolic interactionism (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000). It represents an approach to research where the emphasis is on exploring and understanding particular cases. The method involves sensitising concepts that stimulate researchers to perceive new relations and perspectives. Just like grounded theory emphasises exploring and comprehending particular cases, my research aims to unravel the intricate dynamics of Generation Z's perceived impact within the socio-historic context. This resonates with sensitising concepts in the thematic analyses process to unveil new relations and perspectives. Again, it has to be stated that this approach is may not be completely in line with the principles of grounded theory as a vantage point from existing theories is used.

3.6.3 Thematic analysis to grounded theory
The transition from thematic analysis to grounded theory involves a methodical evolution of analysis techniques within the qualitative research process (Chapman, Hadfield, & Chapman, 2015). Thematic analysis constitutes the initial stage, wherein I immerse myself in the raw data, in this case, through the examination of interview transcripts. The aim is to generate concise codes that capture the essence of various statements, creating a structure for indexing and grouping related ideas. These codes then serve as building blocks for the subsequent analysis. In grounded theory, this process advances towards generating themes or categories by organising and contrasting the codes. Here I aimed to gradually coalesce the themes into a theoretical model.
3.7 Philosophy of science

This research uses social constructionism as it’s philosophy of science. The theory of social constructionism focuses on the idea that knowledge and reality are socially constructed through communication and interactions (Prawat & Floden, 1994). It emphasises the limitations of traditional monological approaches that seek to establish objective truths (Hugh, 1994). I believe my methods aligns with this perspective by seeking to understand how Generation Z's impact on societal challenges and organisational changes is perceived within the socio-historic context of Western Europe. The theory challenges the dominance of monological rationality, by for example, asserting that generations are not solely determined by a linear progression of time, but are significantly shaped by shared historical experiences and socio-historic contexts. As such, this research seeks to move beyond simplified narratives and explore the complex interplay of socio-historical context, motivations, shared emotional orientations, and human development in shaping perceptions of Generation Z's impact. The analysis methods align with social constructionism by emphasising the interpretive nature of data analysis and the collaborative construction of meaning, in this case, through qualitative interviews.

3.8 Limitations

3.8.1 Limitations within the research scope:

The study's focus on the perceived impact of Generation Z in the construction on societal challenges and organisational changes may overlook the intricate causal factors driving these changes. While generational dynamics contribute, technological advancements, economic shifts, and geopolitical influences play significant roles. Moreover, the reliance on definitions and generational characteristics might not be universally applicable in Western European contexts, ignoring cultural and regional variations. This narrow focus limits a holistic understanding of the forces at play in shaping societal changes.

The decision was made to prioritise the examination of perceived generational constructions over delving extensively into all influencing factors, due to the complexity in relation. However, this approach imposes constraints on the overall validity of the generalised assessment concerning the impact on change as a whole. Nevertheless, in line with a social constructivist approach, this context is not centred on strict generalisability but rather on
sparking a broader discussion. As a result, future research can shed light on the balance between generational- and other influences.

3.8.2 Limitations in theory and applicability of theory:

The exploration of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs lacks depth in capturing the complexities of generational differences. Human motivation is multifaceted, influenced by cultural, social, and individual factors that Maslow’s theory simplifies. The presented research, largely focused on correlations without establishing causality, might not fully account for cultural nuances and socioeconomic influences affecting priorities. The contextual emphasis on Western Europe might not encompass the diversity of societal challenges and organisational dynamics across various countries and regions.

The decision to incorporate aspects of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs was driven by its foundational role in understanding human motivation. While acknowledging its simplifications, the theory still provides a valuable framework to analyse certain motivational patterns within the scope of this research. The research serves as a starting point for identifying potential relationships between generational differences and motivational factors, even though it may not capture the full complexity of cultural and socioeconomic dynamics.

3.8.3 Limitations in methods:

The methodology’s complexity could lead to varying interpretations of the research question, potentially resulting in inconsistent participant responses. The research’s limited scope to Western Europe restricts its generalisability to other regions with distinct socio-cultural dynamics. Western Europe, as delineated by the United Nations, comprises the following nations: Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Monaco, Netherlands, and Switzerland (United Nations, 2023). According to Linton, an understanding of the limits to generalisability is important in cases where cultural, geographical, or political differences exist (Linton, 2020). The research subjects, those interviewed, were exclusively from Western European countries; nevertheless, it is noteworthy that not all interviewees hailed from a uniform single country within this region.

The choice not to include subjects from other countries was made upon the aim to tackle the risk of not getting enough participants from outside my own living region (Western Europe) to be able to claim considerable generalisability. It is also pertinent to recognise that previous research often spans a broader geographic region than a single nation.
While expert sampling enhances insights, it introduces selection bias by excluding perspectives from individuals indirectly connected to the topic (Rai & Thapa, 2015). The use of semi-structured interviews offers qualitative richness but lacks the quantitative rigor necessary for broader trend identification. Integrating thematic analysis and grounded theory risks overgeneralisation or overly complex theoretical models, impacting the study’s applicability beyond its context.

Furthermore, while semi-structured interviews may lack quantitative rigor (Adams, 2015), their use facilitates a holistic understanding of participants’ experiences. Integrating thematic analysis and grounded theory was chosen to yield richer interpretations, acknowledging the potential risks while aiming to strike a balance between depth and relevance for wider applications.

### 3.8.4 Future research to overcome current limitations:

Future research can overcome the limitations in problematisation by adopting a multidimensional approach to understand the causal factors driving Generation Z’s impact on societal challenges and organisational changes, encompassing generational dynamics, technological advancements, economic shifts, and geopolitical influences. To address theory and previous research limitations, integrating Maslow’s hierarchy of needs with other motivational theories while using mixed-methods research to establish causality and cultural nuances would yield a more comprehensive understanding of motivation. In terms of methodology, combining structured surveys with semi-structured interviews, expanding the study’s scope beyond Western Europe, and employing both qualitative and quantitative analysis techniques would enhance generalisability.
3.9 Ethical considerations:

In conducting this research, several ethical considerations have been taken into account to ensure the well-being and rights of participants, as well as the integrity of the study. Firstly, informed consent was obtained from all participants, clearly outlining the purpose, procedures, and potential risks involved in the research. Pseudonyms were assigned to protect their anonymity and privacy, preventing their identities from being disclosed. Moreover, as all participants were adults, their autonomy and agency were respected throughout the research process.

To address the limitation of excluding perspectives from individuals indirectly connected to the topic, efforts were made to minimise selection bias by incorporating a diverse set of participants with varied expertise and experiences related to Generation Z. By involving individuals from different fields and roles, a more comprehensive and holistic understanding of Generation Z’s impact was sought.

At the outset of each interview, I initiated the interaction by expressing gratitude for the participants’ invaluable time and insights. Following this, I outlined the interview’s purpose, underlining the significance of their contributions to my research. Crucially, I assured them of the utmost confidentiality, fostering an atmosphere of trust.

Throughout the research, the principles of reflexivity were embraced, acknowledging the researcher’s own subjectivity and potential biases as a member of Generation Z living in Western Europe. Reflexivity allowed for transparent decision-making in the research process and encouraged critical self-awareness regarding potential influence on participant selection, data collection, and analysis.
Chapter 4: Analysis

This chapter focuses on the analysis of the 7 semi-structured interviews conducted as part of my research. This chapter is being split into several subsections. In the first section we delved into the perceived socio-historical context of generation Z to establish a basis of the generation in the theoretical view of Mannheim. Then, interviewee answers of shared views and emotions are gathered. Finally, this chapter delves into motivations based on the socio-historical context. In the end, all these factors are linked to generation z and its perception towards societal challenges and organisational changes.

4.1 The perceived socio-historical context of Generation Z

The foundational purpose of this section is to delve into the perceived socio-historical context of Generation Z, setting the stage by aligning their experiences with the theoretical framework conceptualised by Karl Mannheim. As Mannheim’s theory suggests, individuals within a generation are united by their shared socio-historical experiences (Mannheim, 1928), which in turn contribute to the formation of distinct generational attitudes and worldviews. In the initial stages of this exploration, we navigate the conceptual landscape that lays the groundwork for our analysis. In this subsection, I aim to unveil the perceived socio-historical context of Generation Z, punctuated by significant events and development.

Although Pew Research Center defined Generation Z as people born between 1997 and 2012 (Pew Research Center, 2020), it’s not a rigid term. A general consensus seems to exist between the defined generations, however, the timeframe of each generation various per research. Nevertheless, the timeframe does not seem to vary a lot as the socio-historical context of each generation can often be traced by certain events and developments. In order to establish context on how participants perceive the socio-historical context of Generation Z, I have explored whether participants generally agree with the timeframe of Pew Research Center.
While Professor generally agrees with the established boundaries, he suggests that the starting year could potentially be adjusted to 1995.

“While I understand that the term ‘Generation Z’ is commonly used to describe individuals born between 1997 and 2012, I believe that the starting year for this generation should be pushed back to 1995. This is because individuals born in this year would have been coming of age during a time of significant social and technological change, which has had a profound impact on their experiences and perspectives. It is important to not only consider the historical context in which generations are formed, but also the cultural shifts that occurred in the mid-1990s, such as the rise of the internet and the increasing prevalence of multiculturalism, have had a lasting impact on the attitudes and beliefs of young people who came of age during this time. By 1995, there were also already a lot of websites, like Yahoo, being visited by millions. I believe the technological revolution already started from that point on.”

Most of the other participants expressed general agreement with the guidelines established by Pew. Zoe provided an explanation for her belief that setting 2012 as the end boundary for Generation Z was the appropriate choice:

“I agree with those [1997 up to 2012] years. To me, it feels like 2012 is the right year to end the boundary because it marks a clear transition point in terms of new technology and also changes in behaviour of youth...” “... While I cannot imagine not having a phone from my 12th or something onwards, it seems that today’s children are already not to get loose of iPads and Phone’s on their 6th. I recall being one of the only girls in class that had an iPhone 3, I was kind of special in that sense. But by the time the iPhone 5 was released, you were kind of special when you didn’t have one.”

Participants were asked to describe Generation Z in four words on how they are different from previous generation; what makes them unique. The question was asked with the intention of open up a discussion on how socio-historical context led to them formulating these specific words. Participants came up with the following words:
The repeated words among participants included “collaborative/cooperative” (mentioned 4 times), “conscious/awareness” (3x), “authentic” (2x), “activism” (2x), “resilient” (2x), “innovative” (2x) and “entrepreneurial” (2x). Participants were then asked to provide explanations for their choice of these specific words.

It is worth exploring why HRP considered "collaborative“ as one of the key terms to describe the unique qualities of Generation Z in comparison to previous generations. HRP explained:

“While my own generation [Gen Y] is also known for their independent mindset, it seems that Gen Z values collaboration and working in teams more. In my work, I have noticed that Gen Z workers prefer sharing ideas and resources with their colleagues and contributing to a common goal, while a few years ago, people first wanted to work ideas out out before sharing them”.

The question was followed up. In order to extract the social-historical context to which HRP believed the value of collaboration was established, HRP was asked what she believed caused Generation Z to value collaboration and working in teams more in the context of world where Generation Z was brought up. She suggests technological advancements as the main socio-historical basis:

“I believe that the growing importance of using technology to connect with each other has had a big impact. The way we work remotely and stay connected online has also influenced this. These youngsters are really familiar with using digital tools to work together, no matter where they are. They appreciate working as a team and understand that they can collaborate effectively even if they’re not in the same place physically.”
Zayla added that in her perception, Zs are really strong collective action takers:

“I chose the term ['cooperative'] because I have noticed that this generation performs really well in collective action, like climate marches or petitions. We understand the connections between different issues and know that solutions require effort from multiple angles.”

Zayla was presented with the same follow-up line of questioning as HRP in order to gain a deeper comprehension of the socio-historical context from a Z perspective:

“I think the exposure to the shortcomings of institutions, conflicts and environmental degradation with our own eyes, showed us the urgency. The advantage of internet and all social media platforms makes sure that all shortcomings come to light and false information is being checked all the time. As a result, when things are getting out of hand, we can mobilise pretty quickly without even have to know the people that’ll join…”

“…It’s more value-driven instead of having to travel through networks of connections if that makes sense.”

Zayla’s answer indicates that the gaining ease of access to the internet and connectivity to information and validity from social media, shape socio-historic context of Z. Furthermore, she mentions that the process of mobilising, has become easier as a result. Another frequently mentioned term was “resilient,” which may reflect the challenges that Generation Z has encountered and their ability to adapt and overcome obstacles. Youth Worker explained:

“Generation Z has grown up in a time of significant change and uncertainty and they have shown incredible resilience in the face of adversity…” “…Certainly, one of the more recent scenarios was undoubtedly the COVID pandemic. Consequently, a substantial number of individuals found themselves at home, connected online, and with the opportunity to exhibit digital resistance in response to what young people perceived as unfeasible policies preventing social interaction.”
Additionally, Analyst was one of four that mentioned ‘Conscious’ (or aware) as one key characteristic of Generation Z. Apart from the digital transition that may have helped develop this key characteristic, she mentioned inclusion as one other aspect:

“The digital transition in which we are still living helped Generation Z to gain different perspectives from all over the world. Common opinions are more mainstreamed than ever before. As a result, opinions are being adopted over the whole globe a lot faster…” “… Anyway, I do have to underline that the general composition of culture might have also added to the generation’s consciousness. Because people have become free to say and think what they want, because people are largely present on the socials and because we are way more exposed to arguments than positions only, we can really take stances on solid information.” “… the fact that inclusivity has been a mainstream topic is, mainly because of the technological developments, due to cross-cultural information that can be better interpreted. Also, this generation is more diverse than ever before, so one and one makes two.”

When Zoe was asked to elaborate on her choice for “aware”, she mentioned that her upbring played a significant part:

“I can’t really speak for everyone else, but in my case, I have grown up at a catholic elementary school that merged with a public elementary school. I don’t think many kids minded because the whole education system was the same. The main difference was that Christmas celebration were executed differently. Anyhow, I came into a class with a lot of kids that were not… how can say… catholic and white. I sometimes heard the stories of the segregation that existed when my parents were in school, where even boys and girl were divided into different schools…” “…I generally think that, because of the changed systems and the open-minded thoughts of our parents, it has enabled us to get in contact with way more perspectives, ideologies etc. which has allowed us to get into contact with way more social questions than our own.”

A lot of description made included technological context as a basis for developments of generation Z. Professor also included ‘Digital’ as one of his key words. He described the following:
“I can vividly recall my initial experience of transitioning my classes online due to the lockdown brought about by COVID. It was quite a challenge as I struggled to make everything function smoothly, while literally every young student seemed to effortlessly guide me through the process. It highlights their greater familiarity with computers owing to their upbringing. Even though the software we were using had just been released, they swiftly adapted to it. In contrast, I faced audio issues in every lesson during the initial week…”

“…Over time, I grew accustomed to delivering lectures online. However, what was once an unusual circumstance has now become somewhat routine, although I still conduct hybrid sessions occasionally. It’s worth considering that for some individuals, online education has been their introduction to university life or, as you mentioned, their conclusion. The fact that certain individuals have had minimal exposure to physical universities might impact their learning and developmental journey for years to come.”

“They [Z] have grown up in a world that is saturated with advertising and media messages. They are used to being bombarded with videos, articles, images; just loads of information streams in general. Consequently, they have become very good at spotting when something is fake or insincere. In addition, they [Z] has grown up in a time of political and social upheaval, with many issues such as climate change, social inequality at the forefront of public discourse. As a result, they are more sceptical of institutions and organisations, especially large commercial cooperations and government, that they perceive as being insincere or disingenuous.”

*The interviewees' reflections on Generation Z's socio-historical context underscore the multifaceted nature of this generation. Through their selection of words and explanations, the interviewees illuminate the impact of technology, exposure to diverse viewpoints, and resilience in shaping Generation Z’s socio-historical context. These insights contribute to a deeper understanding of the socio-historical factors that have influenced Generation Z and provide a valuable lens.*
4.2 Shared emotions on societal challenges by Generation Z

Following the socio-historical basis of Generation Z, this subsection aims to better understand what shared emotions and attitudes Generation Z upholds, based on their perceived values based upon socio-historical context.

All participants were presented with a list of the SDGs and requested to rank their top three goals that they believed Generation Z values the most. This question aimed to delve deeper into the subjects that participants considered most relevant to Generation Z, compare them to the MyWorld survey as well as to uncover patterns in shared reasoning. The participants provided the following responses:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Top Three Goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth, Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being, Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyst</td>
<td>Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth, Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being, Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Worker</td>
<td>Goal 4: Quality Education, Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth, Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HRP</td>
<td>Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth, Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities, Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoe</td>
<td>Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being, Goal 5: Gender Equality, Goal 13: Climate Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zayla</td>
<td>Goal 4: Quality Education, Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth, Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zion</td>
<td>Goal 7: Affordable and Clean Energy, Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production, Goal 13: Climate Action</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both the MYWorld Survey and the input for the interviewees rank decent work and economic growth as Generation Z’s highest ranked societal priority. Some participants were asked to why they believe this is the case. Analyst suggest that the current perceived struggle among Z’s is a driving factor for the prioritisation:
“If you look at the world today, there is a lot of instability and inequality. Many young people struggle to find good jobs and create a stable future for themselves. That’s why I believe that decent work and economic growth is a top priority for Generation Z. We [Z’s] want to build a future where everyone has access to opportunities, regardless of their background. It’s not just about making money; it’s about creating a society where everyone can thrive and contribute to the greater good.”

Professor, on the other hand, believes that the desire for decent work and economic growth is due to the quality of work:

“Generation Z is aware of the fact that we live in a rapidly changing world where new opportunities and challenges arise every day. Despite the fact that unemployment rates may be low, the quality and security of employment is still a concern for many young people. We are witnessing a shift towards a more flexible, diverse and digitalised labour market, which brings both opportunities and challenges. Therefore, ensuring decent work and economic growth is a top priority for Generation Z. It’s not just about having a job, but about having a meaningful job that provides stability, opportunities for growth and a sense of purpose”.

While not all participants anticipated “decent work and economic growth” to be among the primary priorities of Generation Z, Zion emphasised that he did not perceive it as one of the most frequently discussed concerns among members of this generation. Zion suggests that the definition of “growth” might be connected to societal challenges such as climate change and social justice, which Generation Z is more likely to prioritise and engage with.

“I’m a bit surprised to hear that that [decent work and economic growth] is the top priority of Generation Z, as I always think that issues such as climate change and social justice are far more discussed. Of course, having a stable and meaningful job is important, but I think we also value a sense of purpose and making a positive impact on society. Furthermore, I think that many young people are concerned about the environmental and social impact of economic growth and are looking for more
sustainable solutions. While economic growth is important, I don’t think it should come at the expense of the planet or vulnerable communities.”

The responses showcase different perceived reasoning as well as interpretations in relation to both the meaning as the prioritisation of the MyWorld survey results. It has to be noted that apart from the SDG’s title, participants were not introduced to the specifics of the SDG’s and may thus not be aware of what each SDG specifically is intended to refer to. However, the questions are not asked to find out one’s opinion on SDGs, but rather to open a discussion on Z’s shared attitudes and emotions towards societal challenges.

Analyst was asked, based on her perception on Z’s perspective on decent work and economic growth, what emotions she believed Generation Z had based on her key words to describe the generations (Activism, Diversity, Authenticity, Conscious), is leading in their attitudes towards work and economy:

“I think it’s a blend of aspirations and anxieties. The younger generation seeks employment and financial stability to establish a sense of security. They also seek significance in their work, aiming for recognition from both them and society. On a broader scale, they exhibit a more positive and idealistic attitude towards work and the economy; aspirations for meaningful change rather than fear or frustration, even though protests might convey a different impression…” “…Nonetheless, definitively categorising this is challenging. It reflects my personal perspective more than being conclusively supported by scientific evidence.”

Youth worker also reflected on emotions playing a role on Generation Z’s views and attitudes. He complemented Analyst in her statement on the combination of aspirations and anxieties.

“I’ve come to understand that the younger individuals I collaborate with, specifically Generation Z, often react with fear or anger when they believe their lives aren’t going as they’d like. Nevertheless, when they have their own matters in order, they usually shift towards assisting others. What sets this transition apart is that their mindset becomes notably more open-minded and optimistic.”
Additionally, Zoe was asked to what extend she believes generation Z are guided by group behaviour. With this question, I intended to extract her perception into what extend shared attitudes could influence an individual Z. She suggested that common goals enhance the bilateral guidance of group individuals.

“Well, I guess it’s mostly about how different age groups are influenced by groups of people. Younger kids in middle school can be easily influenced by what their friends do. But I think as people get older, their authentic beliefs matter more and more. I believe that what people believe in brings them together in groups, like caring about the environment. These groups are like teams with a common goal, and I think the generation guides each other a lot in these specific groups.”

When Zoe was asked if and in what way she believes generation Z may differ in this description, she mentioned:

“I believe that we show more empathy towards others that share issues that we have or had, and that we view individuals issues as important as the big picture. However, this sometimes is also our pitfall as you as everyone has individual issues…” “...I think we have just been able to make so much more issues collective, meaning that we group up, stack up individual issues, and make a collective case out of it in order to reach a larger audience. The large connectivity enables us to reach so many people. I think what makes us different is our strategic approach to gain larger audiences by grouping together, as we shared similar goals”

Analyst also suggested that the ease of access to information has stimulated the development of widespread awareness on social justice issues, and thus is consolidated in Gen Z’s worldview.

“We [Z] have grown up in a world with more access to information than ever. We can no longer imagine that Wikipedia used to be a book. Also, because of social media, we have opened our ears to more diverse perspectives and more global challenges than any previous generation. This has helped shape our world view and given us an awareness of societal issues. Social justice has become a more prominent point of
interest for us because we see the injustices and inequalities that exist in our society, and we want to do something about it…”

“…it’s, in essence, about awareness. The moment when a lot of children get gunned down in another country across the world, we are made aware of it instantly. Discussions start via social media and policy makers get pressurised. “

Professor echoed the general input of Analyst:

“They [Z] are the first digital generation, growing up with direct access to news, information and social opinions. The direct access has led to an increased interest in social questions among young people from an early age.”

In discovering what shared emotions of generation Z could be, participants were asked to delve into personal situation that made them proud of themselves, feel more completed or feel are aligned with the perspectives of Generation Z as a whole.

Analyst mentioned that when she was in high school, she volunteered at a local non-profit organisation that focused on providing education to underprivileged children. Through this experience, she realised that she felt most fulfilled when she was doing something that had a positive impact on society:

“As I started thinking about my future career, I knew that I wanted to find a way to continue doing work that aligned with my values and made a difference in the world. I found out that I was not alone and that's why I focused on studying behaviours of the generation [Generation Z] and pursued opportunities to work with organisations that prioritise social responsibility. It's not just about having a job for me -, it's about finding a way to make a positive impact through my work. I think that applies to many of us [Z’s]."

Zion mentioned that when he was in high school, he became very concerned about the state of the environment and the impact of climate change. One day, he stumbled upon a local
political youth organisation that was dedicated to promoting climate action and he immediately knew he had to get involved:

"Joining a political youth organisation opened my eyes to the fact that we have the opportunity to make a difference in society. Through the organisation, I worked with multiple people that have power to a significant extend, this includes politicians of the second chamber {The Dutch House of Representatives} and CEOs of both national and international foundations. It made me realise that it really drives me to help".

Additionally, to uncover the perceived shared values of Z, questions were asked in regard to connecting with individuals from generations Z. HRP delved into how she believes people can connect with Z and their inner beliefs:

“As I mentioned, I believe a key differentiator from Generation Z is their authenticity. I believe Generation Z also expects this from the company they work for. Generation Z values authenticity more than any other generation before them. They can easily spot insincere marketing or a company’s attempts to convince customers without really understanding their own values. Unlike previous generations, they [Z’s] don't just look for a job that pays well, but they want to feel a sense of purpose in their work. Unfortunately, many companies fail to recognise this and are still using outdated approaches that worked with Gen X and Gen Y, especially in recruitment. Companies that want to attract Generation Z need to be transparent, socially responsible and have a clear mission, but most of all they need to be consistent in doing so.”

Professor and HRP were questioned about whether greenwashing exemplifies disconnect with Generation Z. Both participants agreed that greenwashing is indeed an example of inauthentic and insincere behaviour. HRP believed that greenwashing (as an example of inauthentic/insincere behaviour), can also lead to internal disengagement.

“Oh yes, I think we all can come up with several examples. It seems that organisations often forget that false claims are not only damaging consumer trust, but also internal trust. It just erodes trust and credibility within the organisation. When
employees feel that the company's environmental claims are insincere or misleading, they start questioning the company's commitment to sustainability and its overall values. This can lead to a sense of disillusionment and disengagement among employees, particularly those who value CSR [corporate social responsibility]; often younger people…”

“…A friend of mine used to be supply chain sustainability manager at a big food international. She led few projects in order to make both packaging and processes more sustainable. She faced difficulty when her ideas and projects kept being rejected by management due to cost-efficiency. Meanwhile, the marketing division kept promoting their sustainability promises that she and her colleagues knew where no longer reachable. Ultimately, she just became disengaged and few months later, left the company when she got another offer.”
4.3 Motivations

The foundational purpose of this section is to delve into the motivations of Generation Z, based on Maslow’s theory on human motivation (Maslow, 1943). By looking at what organisations should do to connect with Z, by exploring the desired workspace of Z, and by seeking motivations for Z’s to engage with societal challenges, I aim to uncover generational motivation patterns, based on the socio-historical context of the generation.

A lot of interviews mentioned common goals and shared values as a motor for change. Among which are underlined by statements by HRP: “...I have noticed that Gen Z workers prefer sharing ideas and resources with their colleagues and contributing to a common goal, while a few years ago, people first wanted to work ideas out before sharing them”, Zayla: “I have noticed that this generation performs really well in collective action, and Professor: “It's not just about having a job, but about having a meaningful job that provides stability, opportunities for growth and a sense of purpose”.

In gaining a deeper understanding on what motivates Generation Z in metaphorically ‘turning this motor on’ and to ‘keep it running’, participants were asked what organisations should do to attract and maintain Z’s. HRP suggested that companies should adapt to the work-life balance of the generation:

“Based on my experience, one effective way to attract Generation Z employees is to offer them a flexible work environment that allows them to balance work and life commitments. Often new employees of the generation [Z’s] are combining their work life with something else that requires lots of time, such as a study, a starting family or a house to be build. At our company, for example, we offer remote work options, flexible schedules and freedom in choosing vacation time…”

Based on HRP’s perspective on attracting Z’s, she was asked whether healthy work-life balance is deemed important because of the current age of generation Z instead of its socio-historical context, as one can mention she referred to alternative activities that one is often exposed to in their early twenties (starting a study/family, buying a house). She acknowledge that age is definitely influenced the current intensity of the need but mentions that it might still be linked to the socio-historical context of the generations.
“I think it’s both generational as well as age-related. Of course younger people are in the start of their adult life and want their own roof above their heads and desire to start a family. Having said that, I feel like Generation Z has a stronger desire for stability than my own generation [Gen Y]. They seem to feel like without stability, for example financial wellbeing, they cannot progress in their career or can’t grow as human being…”

“…Although, I do have to mention that on the other hand, I feel like my generation has a stronger desire for independence. For example, not to insult you in any way of course, for many of my friends during my younger year, it was really a no-go to still live with your parents.”

In the interview with Analyst, we came to the topic on why work-life balance is so important for Generation Z compared to previous generations:

“We [Z’s] place a high value on work-life balance because we grew up in a world where technology and globalisation have blurred the boundaries between work and personal life. We have seen our parents and older siblings struggle with long work hours, stress and burnout and we don't want to repeat the same mistakes. We want to enjoy our hobbies, travel and spend time with family and friends, while also pursuing our careers. Additionally, we have seen the negative impact of work-life imbalance on mental and physical health. We prioritise our well-being. I recently read about a study that said that 75% of Gen Z believe that mental and physical health are the most important factors in a good work-life balance. Therefore, employers who prioritise work-life balance are more likely to attract and retain Gen Z employees. We simply just value having choices and stability.”

Stability in work-life was also discussed with Zoe. Zoe mentioned that she was dealing with a lot of stress in school and that, at some point the stress was taking up too much of her energy:

“…When I was in school, I was dealing with a lot of stress. It was hard for me to keep up with schoolwork and extracurricular activities, let alone the job I had at the time.
At one point I just realised that my days required more energy than I had during the day. I think many of my generation have had similar experiences or know someone who has. I think our generation [Z] wants to avoid that kind of stress and pressure in our work lives as well. We want to work for companies that recognise and support our personal goals as much as they can. Moreover, I think it’s a good thing as well, because, speaking for myself, when I feel balanced, I am more productive as well…”

“…They [employers] should take proactive steps like creating a supportive work environment where people can talk openly about mental health without feeling judged. I often had the feeling that they were listening, just because it was expected from them, instead of feeling that they really cared. Also, they can also offer programs to promote well-being, like counselling services and workshops on managing stress and staying strong. But employees should not have to ask for these programs, instead they should be made aware of the kind of programs upfront…”

Zoe opened up about a mental challenge she faced and her perceived vision on how one should help Z’s deal with them. The cause of such mental challenges was discussed with professor. When Professor and I discussed the motivations of Generation Z, I referred to whether Maslow’s theory and the different needs included in his view. It has to be noted that Professor upheld the interpretation of Maslow’s theory as a pyramid.

"It presents a fascinating challenge to analyse the progression of generations using Maslow's hierarchy. My contention is that the foundational aspects of the hierarchy grow more robust over time, rather than being strictly tied to generational influences. Nevertheless, I also posit that when it comes to the top of the pyramid, Generations Y and Z exhibit noteworthy parallels, particularly in their cravings for esteem, status, and similar aspirations."

"What I believe is that Generation Z places a heightened emphasis on self-actualisation. Their concentration on learning, ongoing personal growth, and sustained meaning in their professional pursuits is significant.”
“Nevertheless, the generation [Z] also developed itself in a difficult parquet [=to make something difficult for oneself], as numerous individuals within these generations expect complete personal fulfilment without possessing the foundational prerequisites, like financial stability, a secure job, a fulfilling relationship; I could name numerous examples but I think you understand the essence of my argument...”

“… I believe that a significant number of young people experience adverse mental emotions due to the inability to fulfil their upper needs, leading to a lot of perceived mental hurdles for them.

4.4 Stakeholders

According to the people interviewed, those involved in the process of changing how we think about societal challenges and organisational changes are seen as employers, elected officials and youth figures themselves. HRP mentioned that employers understand that changes are happening, but they may not be fully prepared for them:

“Employers are crucial stakeholders who can actively promote these changes within their organisations or even in society at large. By aligning their organisational goals and practices with the priorities of Generation Z, employers can contribute to broader societal changes. It is essential for employers to actively engage with Generation Z, listen to their ideas and empower them for Gen Z to even be motivated to give 100% in the first place. I guess at this point, it’s all about willingness to do so. I believe most employers are already aware that change is inevitable but are not yet ready to adapt to it. However, the longer they wait, the more they miss out on analysing their future customers. Some companies have made the same mistake in the past. Nokia, for example, BlackBerry...”

Zayla also added onto her perceived inevitability of change. She mentioned that employers need to adapt to changes in power dynamics:
“In our region, we already see some major changes; many vacancies, a huge number of graduated students, but not nearly as many matches between individuals and organisations as we’d wish for. The requirements of younger people to join an organisation have become more extensive. Not only with regards to conditions like money or working hours, but also a lot more qualitative conditions such as values, people, planet, authority, consistency and more. Employers need to adapt to the fact that they are essentially have less power and control then they are used to. It’s no longer as often about what money can buy, but more about what culture can do.”

“…Essentially, employers are forced to change course or else they’ll miss the train [=fall by the wayside]. Younger people do not only account for an increasing labour force, but also an increasing number of customers. As far as I recall, that’s where the money comes from.”

According to Zion, societal change can be stimulated by increasing influence on elected officials. He states, however, that getting attention has become more and more important in order to reach Z’s.

“…I think what changed is the way we [Z’s] are reached effectively is different now, it’s not only about sharing information. It’s about getting our attention and then sharing information, making me care about it and making me believe that I can influence change. Don’t get me wrong, the ideals are still more important than the attention someone gets, but it has to enter my ears in order to make me care. That’s why activism has become more and more popular. It’s become a way to make people aware of something. And if they become aware, they start to care. If they start to care, they choose a politician who does, too. The politician then influences change and so on; you get what I mean”.

Professor and Analyst both mentioned that Generation Z themselves are the biggest stakeholder on changing perspectives on societal challenges and organisational changes. Analyst mentioned that Gen Z is more independent than previous generations:
“I have observed that Gen Z demonstrates a remarkable level of independence when it comes to achieving societal and organisational change. Compared to previous generations, they are more likely to take matters into their own hands. They are not content with waiting for other stakeholders to drive change; instead, they actively initiate and participate in movements, campaigns and grassroots initiatives to address pressing issues. Therefore, it is essential to recognise and support their autonomy. Gen Z displays a reduced dependence on others when it comes to driving change. One reason for this is the shift in their sources of influence and authority. Unlike previous generations, Generation Z places less trust in hierarchical structures and traditional power dynamics. They are more likely to seek information and validation from their peers, both offline and online.”

Professor also acknowledges that autonomy is important in their pursuit towards change:

“Generation Z values individual agency and self-expression, seeking autonomy and personal fulfilment in their pursuits. Acknowledging and supporting their independent initiatives is crucial in making use of the potential of Generation Z and their unique contributions to achieving societal and organisational change.”
Chapter 5: Discussion

“How is Generation Z perceived to impact the construction of societal challenges and organisational changes in Western Europe”.

The following chapter aims to delve into interpretations of the data and create possible theory on how Generation Z is perceived to impact the construction of societal challenges and organisational changes in Western Europe.

5.1 The formation of generational principles, based on socio-historical context.

5.1.1 The socio-historical context of Z may be influenced by technological advancements.

In exploring the perceived socio-historical context of Generation Z through the perspectives of various interviewees, a clearer image is created of a complex interplay of factors. Grounded in Karl Mannheim's theory, which emphasises shared socio-historical experiences as the foundation for generational attitudes, this analysis delves into significant events and developments that have shaped Generation Z. While the Pew Research Center's defined timeframe of 1997 to 2012 serves as a baseline, variations in the exact years are acknowledged, with some suggesting a potential starting year of 1995. This is evident in the participant's remarks, particularly Professor's observation that the technological revolution began as early as 1995, with the rise of websites like Yahoo.

The participants highlight the significance of technological advancements as a defining feature of Generation Z's context. According to Professor, the "digital" nature of this generation stands as a defining characteristic, underscored by the ubiquity of websites visited by millions and the rise of the internet. This sentiment is echoed by Zoe, who emphasises the inherent attachment to phones that defines her generation. The generations’ upbringing in a media-saturated environment, filled with advertising and messages, as stated by Professor, has significantly contributed to their evolving social and historical narrative. Analyst highlights how Generation Z has been immersed in a world teeming with information accessibility, a reality unimaginable in the era when Wikipedia existed as a mere book. The impact of technology is further illuminated by Youth Worker, who notes that the COVID-19 pandemic confined a substantial number of individuals to their homes, pushing them to connect online for a sense of community. This transition to online education during the
pandemic is also acknowledged by Professor, who point out its transformative effect on education experiences. Collectively, these insights underscore the perceived overarching influence of technological advancements in shaping the trajectory of Generation Z.

The presented perspective, however, might potentially oversimplification of Generation Z's experience, as focusing solely on technological advancements might neglect other complex factors shaping their socio-historical context.

5.1.2 How technological advancement may have created unique traits of generation Z.

Generation Z may be characterised by their digitally connectedness. The use of technology to foster connections is echoed by HRP, who highlights how this generation leverages technology to interact with one another, and as exemplified by Zoe's sentiment that having a phone since a young age is unimaginable for her. The ability to work remotely and stay connected online, as mentioned by HRP, has become a defining feature of this generation's professional landscape, enabling effective collaboration irrespective of physical proximity. This sense of online connectivity is further delved into by the observations of Youth Worker, who notes that the COVID-19 pandemic led a significant number of individuals to seek community and connection online while confined to their homes. Analyst's further echoed HRP’s observation by highlighting that Z’s substantial presence on social media platforms underscores their constant engagement in the digital realm, reflecting their interconnectedness and digitally infused lifestyle. Furthermore, as noted by Professor, this generation's unique position as the first to grow up with direct access to news, information, and social opinions, has contributed to their ability to critically evaluate digital content and remain informed about a wide range of issues. The instant awareness of global events, such as tragedies, underscores the immediacy of their access to information, a sentiment shared by Analyst. Their digital consciousness is reflected in their proactive efforts to stay well-informed, navigate the complexities of online information, and actively engage with current events and global matters. Furthermore, apart from Analyst’s claim that generation Z is the most diverse generation to date,
Generation Z may have developed **digital savviness** due their familiarity with using digital tools for (online) collaboration and connectivity, as noted by HRP. Their perceived adaptability to technology is exemplified by the accounts of Professor who navigated the challenges of transitioning to online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic. Professor's experience underscores the generation's innate understanding of tech and their ability to swiftly adapt to new technological development, which may highlight their natural affinity for digital engagement.

However, Generation Z may have also become **digitally exposed**. Their digital lives are perceived to be shaped by a world saturated with advertising, media messages, and a constant stream of information, as mentioned by Professor. He further highlighted Z’s exposure to education has undergone a transformation due to the proliferation of online learning, potentially impacting their learning and developmental journeys. Additionally, Analyst's perspective sheds light on how this digital exposure has blurred boundaries between work and personal life that technology and globalization have ushered in. It was suggested that this exposure to a digital ecosystem may influence their approach to career, learning, and personal well-being.

It has to noted, however, that the assumption that Generation Z's constant engagement with digital content equates to effective critical thinking and discernment may be limited by the potential for echo chambers and information bubbles in online spaces, which can lead to a narrow exposure to differing viewpoints and a lack of well-rounded understanding.

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**Figure 4 - Theoretical framework on Generation Z's perceived impact in the construction of societal challenges and organisational changes V2**
5.1.4 How developed traits may influence Z’s views and emotions:
Professor suggests that events, like the continued development of the internet, have had a lasting impact on the attitudes and beliefs of young people who came of age during this time. He suggests that direct access has led to an increased interest in social questions among young people from an early age. The developed traits may establish new collective emotions societal views or actions in line with Bar-Tal’s theory, stating that change of the experiences, as well as maintaining mechanisms, may change collective emotions, societal views and direct its actions (Bar-Tal, 2006).

5.1.3.1 A Global Perspective (SV1)
In the context of Generation Z’s socio-historical relationship with technological advancements, interviewees suggest that this generation has cultivated a notably more global perspective. Apart from Analyst’s statement that Generation Z is the most diverse generation to date, she noted that the digital advancements helped Generation Z to gain different perspectives from all over the world. She further highlighted that this effect is accelerated by the widespread use of social media. She believes that this boost, has led Generation Z to embrace a wider range of viewpoints and global issues, allowing the generation to develop a more comprehensive worldview.

5.1.3.1.1 global perspective leading to purposive-driven approaches
The digital interconnectedness characteristic of Gen Z’s time has been perceived to spark significant transformations in societal consciousness. As Zoe accurately pointed out, the widespread presence of the internet and social media platforms has shed light on the deficiencies of institutions, conflicts, and environmental degradation at a worldwide level, intensifying the need to address these concerns urgently. Professor highlighted that Gen Z’s upbringing in constant stream of news, viewpoints, and media has sharpened their capacity to differentiate between authenticity and falsehood, empowering them to recognise and question dishonesty. He also highlighted that their exposure to societal turmoil and urgent challenges has made them wary of conventional institutions and corporations that come across as insincere. Zayla mentioned that, as a result of this development, society is more assured that inadequacies are exposed while false information continues to be critically examined, fostering a populace that is better informed. The immediate spread of information, as
highlighted by Analyst, transcends geographical borders, enabling us to witness remote tragedies such as the heartrending loss of children’s lives, prompting collective empathy and action. As such, the interviewees implicate that the digital era has not only provided us with the means to stay informed about global events but has also offered a profound comprehension of the imperfections within our institutions and the potential for rapid, coordinated action to drive positive transformations.

Multiple interviewees mentioned that Generation Z seems ‘resilient’ to (conventional) institutions. Analyst implicated that the socio-historical context of uncertainty is the basis for Gen Z’s resilience towards institutions. One of the most recent tests Gen Z has faced is the adaption to COVID-policy. Youth Worker explained that the widespread lockdowns and restrictions forced a substantial number of individuals into their homes, driving them to connect online. This situation presented an opportunity for Generation Z to showcase their digital resistance as a response to what they perceived as impractical policies impeding social interaction.

As a result of the interconnectedness, global perspective and resilience, one may suggest that generation Z has developed a more purpose-driven approach. Zoe notices that Gen Z is good at sticking together based on what they believe in, sort of like a team with a common goal. The interconnectedness may suggest that, digitally, people can better connect and voice shared emotions and views, without requiring a relationship between these ‘team members’. Zayla mentioned that Z’s focusing more on what they believe themselves in instead of just following what everyone else does. This may have to do with Professor’s and HRP’s claims on Z’s being exposed to large information streams, advertising and media message. Consequently, within the large information streams Gen Z may have been forced to filter information and it’s perceived validity based on their personal socio-historical context. On the other hand, Analysts’ view that opinions are being adopted around the globe a lot faster seems to question this interpretation.

The digital interconnectedness of Gen Z is perceived to have sparked a shift in societal consciousness. Interviewees suggest Gen Z has become more informed and discerning due to exposure to global issues and conflicts online. This is perceived to have led to scepticism of traditional institutions. As a result of the digital interconnectedness and growing access to
information Gen Z has shown resilience, using digital tools to resist impractical policies. The interviewees implicate that this interconnectedness, along with their global perspective, has cultivated a purpose-driven approach. They unite around shared beliefs, empowered by their ability to connect online.

5.1.4.1.2 A global perspective leading to more inclusive principles.

With websites visited by millions and the power of social media, interviewees believe Z’s have grown up exposed to various viewpoints from all corners of the world. The digital transition has enabled them to gain insights into different cultures, ideologies, and societal challenges, fostering a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of global issues. This exposure is perceived by interviewees to have cultivated a mindset that values collaboration, empathy, and collective action. As Zoe pointed out, the changed systems and open-minded thoughts of their parents have facilitated contact with a plethora of perspectives, resulting in an awareness of diverse ideologies and global challenges. One can claim that as a result, the amalgamation of technological advancements and digital engagement has led Generation Z to embrace an inclusive approach.

In line with research by Araya and González, the socio-historical basis of this generation in combination with present day societal realities, may have led to the development of regulatory principles of one’s practices and beliefs (Araya & González, 2008). These developed are labelled “Shared Principles”.

One limitation of the described principles, as a result of the influence of developed traits in Generation Z’s views and emotions is that it largely focuses on the positive aspects of digital interconnectedness and global perspective, potentially overlooking the negative impacts such as information overload.
5.1.3.2 Uncertainty avoidance (SV2)

Generation Z's formative years have unfolded within a socio-historical backdrop marked by rapid technological progress and an unprecedented flow of information. As Professor A notes, their defining feature is their digital prowess, growing up in an era when websites attract millions of visitors and the internet's influence is ascendant. This digital immersion has been further cemented by the COVID-19 pandemic, which compelled a considerable number of individuals to resort to online connectivity, as highlighted by Youth Worker. Analyst further highlighted that Generation Z has noticed their parents and older siblings facing difficulties like working for long hours, feeling stressed, and getting burnt out. They don't want to go through the same problems and want a better balance in their lives.

5.1.3.2.1 Uncertainty avoidance leading to a desire for balance and empowerment.

Growing up in a world rapidly transformed by technology and globalization, the generation emerged amidst an era of unparalleled interconnectedness and access to information. As the
world grappled with economic recessions, social upheavals, COVID, the emphasis on providing stability for Gen Z may have become more evident.

The generation seeks stability not merely in terms of employment and financial security, but as a means to establish a sense of security, growth opportunities, and purpose, as implicated by Professor and Analyst. This yearning for stability arises from their reactions to unfavourable situations, driving them towards achieving personal order and an open-minded, optimistic mindset, as highlighted by Youth Worker. Gen Z's perspective on stability may have become more evident as HRP observed that they prioritise it more than previous generations, implicating that without a stable foundation, progress in both their careers and personal lives becomes hindered. Furthermore, Analyst describes that the blurring of boundaries between work and personal life due to technology and globalization has influenced Generation Z, leading them to place a high value on work-life balance.

Both Analyst and Youth Worker seem to have nuanced perspectives on Generation Z's emotions, hopes, and fears as they navigate their journey towards personal growth and navigating uncertain situations. Analyst perceives Generation Z's attitude toward work and the economy as a mixture of aspirations and anxieties, driven by a desire for stability and recognition, yet maintaining an idealistic view for meaningful change. Youth Worker complements this by noting that Generation Z's emotions drive them to react with fear or anger in challenging situations, shifting to optimism and open-mindedness when they attain personal stability.

Overall, interviewees perceive that Generation Z's collective mindset underscores their inclination towards balance, cultivated in response to the uncertainties of their upbringing. Yet it has to be noted again that these shared principles may oversimplify reactions of interviewees.
Figure 6 - Theoretical framework on Generation Z's perceived impact in the construction of societal challenges and organisational changes V4
5.2 How generational principle, and underlying motivations, are perceived to impact the construct of societal challenges and organisational changes.

5.2.1 Motivations on purpose-driven, inclusive, balanced and empowered approaches.

In line with Bar-Tal’s theory, emotional co-stating that change of the experiences, as well as maintaining mechanisms, may change collective emotions, societal views and may even direct its actions (Bar-Tal, 2006). However, it is implicated that levels of motivational activation, both positive and negative, provoke action. As such, we can explore the alignment between the perceived shared principles (SP) with motivational theory to indicate resultative actions.

The core concepts of "purpose-driven" and "empowerment" that define Z's principles could find resonance in the idea of self-actualisation among Generation Z. This is because they are suggested to align these principles with an emphasis on ongoing personal development and enduring significance in their professional pursuits, as suggested by Professor. This aligns with Maslow's self-actualisation need, representing the paradigm of self-actualisation; “what a man can be, he must be” (Maslow, 1966). However, one may suggest, based on the socio-historical context of uncertainty avoidance that a general stable basis of all ‘bottom’ needs describe the essence better. In this context, the ability to self-actualise properly is more described by the desire for balance and a strong basis of ‘bottom needs’, than the actual desire to self-actualise. However, the desire for Gen Z to value self-actualisation concentrated on learning, ongoing personal growth, and sustained meaning may not completely back this theory. It seems interesting for future research to further deep dive in the generational desire for self-actualisation needs, and how it is shaped through socio-historical context.

The inclusive principle finds resonance in Professor's mention of cravings for love and belonging needs as well as esteem needs as well as love needs. In Maslow’s perception of love needs he refers to people seeking for a place in his group and belonging among others. On the other hand, esteem needs describe the desire for respect, recognition and appreciation by others (Maslow, 1943). The increasing perceived ability to interpret cross-cultural information (as a result of technological advancements) and increased diversity of the generation, as mentioned by Analyst, together with the diminishing segregation between diverse groups, as exemplified by Zoe during her time at elementary school, implicates that love and belonging needs can be more easily achieved than before. However, the strong
desire for social justice by the generation (as an example of a societal purpose), mentioned by Zion and Analyst, may indicate that the generation is motivated by the topic of inclusiveness through the esteem needs of mutual respect, recognition and appreciation.

Finally, one may claim that balance is the result of the total sum of needs. Again, it has to be noted that although Maslow didn’t claim that ‘higher’ needs cannot be fulfilled without full fulfilment of a ‘lower’ need, his theory did mention the general decreasing percentages of satisfaction as we go up the hierarchy (Maslow, 1943). For instance, for illustration, the average is satisfied perhaps 85 per cent in his physiological needs, 70 per cent in his safety needs, 50 per cent in his love needs, 40 per cent in his self-esteem needs, and 10 per cent in his self-actualisation needs. Therefore, it might be important for future researchers to delve into this ‘average citizen’ per generation in order to extract motivational shifts as Generation Z might have different interpretations or practical application of needs, or required intensity in order to feel fulfilled, further diving into the context of Verma & Menezes’ research (Verma & Menezes, 2018).

Generally, previous research and research findings suggest that Generation Z is motivation through ‘higher’ needs, or stability within their ‘lower’ needs. However, it remains vague to what extend this is shaped through socio-historical influences as motivational theory is a complex interplay of factors. Limitations arise from its narrow reliance on Maslow's hierarchy of needs as a simplistic lens through which to understand the motivations of Generation Z, disregarding the intricate interplay of diverse factors. It overly simplify Generation Z's motivations, with little empirical material. Furthermore, it remains unclear to what extend human development and the process of reaching adulthood may influence one’s motivations. Therefore, future research will have to further examine the needs and motivations of generations. The incorporation and interplay of shared motivations in the theoretical framework of understanding Z’s perceived impact on the construction of societal challenges and organisational changes might be questioned, until future research will elucidate upon the matter.
Figure 7 - Theoretical framework on Generation Z's perceived impact in the construction of societal challenges and organisational changes V5
5.2.2 Perceived impact on societal challenges and organisational changes.

With all the information on the socio-historical context of Generation Z, its perceived shared traits, views, emotions, principles and motivations, we can construct an interpretation on how the generation is perceived to impact the construct of societal challenges and organisational changes.

The framework showcases the road from socio-historical context to resultative perceived generational expectations and actions. It is important to note that the framework may entail many more traits, views, emotions etc. than is covered in this research. As such, the framework itself may provide guidance to future researchers and individuals in their approach to understand the perceived impact of Generation Z in the construct of societal challenges and organisational changes. In the following subsection, the aim is to delve into the resultative perceived expectations/actions, and notable behaviours that interviewees have observed in their private or work-life in relation to Generation Z. It has to be noted that expectations and actions may have been constructed by combinations of shared principles and motivations and thus may not be directly linked to specific ones.

5.2.2.1 Expectation: Authentic Behaviour

Professor highlights how Generation Z excels at identifying perceived counterfeit or lacking authenticity. This keen perception of authenticity goes beyond being a mere preference; rather, it stands as a necessity, particularly emphasised by Professor when addressing the importance of thwarting misleading environmental assertions. In this realm of preventing deceptive claims, the notion of authenticity becomes intrinsically tied to Generation Z's outlook. According to HRP, the inclination towards authentic conduct within Generation Z is underpinned by their perceived desire for transparency, a sense of social responsibility, and an unwavering commitment to a coherent corporate mission. This alignment echoes their perceived influence on prevailing societal issues and organisational transformations, especially in terms of their perceived competence in critically assessing information and actively seeking out a multitude of perspectives.

The repercussions of inauthentic behaviour are distinctly perceived by employers and various stakeholders. Both HRP and Professor indicate that instances of inauthenticity or insincerity within organisations tend to elicit disengagement from individuals. Moreover, HRP posits
that the fallout can be substantial, as Generation Z can wield their perceived influence to propagate disengagement across online platforms. This is amplified by Generation Z's perceived capability to reach extensive audiences and foster communities without establishing more profound interpersonal connections. HRP and Zion assert that in the context of societal challenges, any perceived inauthentic or insincere behaviour could entail further harm to organisations, should it come to light. This perceived value of authenticity gains prominence due to Generation Z's exposure to societal concerns, which has been heightened by their widespread digital access. Adding to this, Zayla suggests that the Generation's continual validation of information on the internet heightens the likelihood of exposing fabricated information.

*Drawing from the collective insights, Generation Z's perceived emphasis on authenticity and transparency emerges as a defining hallmark in shaping societal and organisational landscapes. Their perceived unparalleled ability to discern inauthenticity has positioned them at the forefront of driving societal challenges and organisational changes. With Z’s heightened digital exposure, they demand sincerity and remain vigilant against misinformation, reflecting their inherent social responsibility and commitment to authentic causes. Participants view that, as they navigate an increasingly digitalized world, Z’s influence extends far and wide, holding organisations accountable and championing transparency at every juncture. Their perceived influence underscores the dire need for authenticity in addressing both societal concerns and organisational missions, heralding an era where genuineness becomes imperative.*

**5.2.2.2 Expectation: Purpose-centred**

Interviewees express a resounding endorsement for purpose-driven approaches. For instance, Zayla highlights a departure from traditional networking practices, emphasising that purpose-driven paths inherently prioritise values over established connections. This notion gains depth from a Generation Z Analyst who envisions a collective desire to reshape the future, prioritising universally accessible opportunities over purely monetary gains. This shift signifies a broader ambition to cultivate a society that promotes universal thriving and meaningful contributions.
Supporting this sentiment, Professor elucidates that contemporary employment pursuits surpass mere job acquisition, revolving around roles that offer stability, growth, and profound purpose. Building upon this idea, Zion underscores the inherent desire to create positive societal impacts through one's endeavours. This perspective aligns smoothly with another Analyst's observation that Generation Z seeks both internal and external validation, reflecting their inclination towards substantial contributions.

Interestingly, this outlook extends beyond individuals, revealing an optimistic and idealistic attitude towards work and the economy within Generation Z, contrary to common portrayals of outward protests. Zooming out, Zoe emphasises the role of shared beliefs in nurturing these inclinations, likening these groups to collaborative teams united by a common objective. These specific circles serve as guides, reinforcing the shared goal of infusing purpose into professional pursuits.

In this context, Analyst's personal journey aligns seamlessly with the collective, as they aspire for work that mirrors their values and generates positive impact. Finally, within the realm of HR, it is emphasised that this generation diverges from its predecessors. Their professional orientation is not solely calibrated by financial rewards, but by the profound resonance of purpose in their undertakings, underscoring their distinct approach to careers.

*Generation Z is perceived to show a pronounced shift towards value-driven trajectories, prioritising core principles over mere affiliations, and universally accessible opportunities over personal (financial) incentives. The interviewees suggest that their professional aspirations extend beyond mere employment to roles that offer intrinsic purpose. Generation Z is perceived to emerge as a synergistic cohort, bound by common ideals and objectives, aiming to embed profound purpose in their vocational endeavours.*

5.2.2.3 Expectation: Work-life balance

The insights shared by the interviewees converge to illuminate the multifaceted importance of balance, encompassing both work and personal life, within the context of Generation Z. This generation's aspirations, as illuminated by Professor, reach beyond mere employment, culminating in a yearning for work that not only imparts stability but also seeks personal growth and a sense of profound purpose. Echoing this sentiment, Analyst underscores how
financial stability, particularly in the eyes of the younger generation, forms a bedrock of security, allowing them to establish a solid foundation for their futures.

This narrative deepens through the lens of Youth Worker, who provides a distinctive perspective on Generation Z's trajectory. From initial battles with personal challenges, they eventually evolve into active agents of positive change, marked by a remarkable transition towards aiding others. This shift is perceived to not only encapsulates their remarkable capacity for open-mindedness and optimism but also as to underscore the role stability plays in nurturing a broader sense of community engagement and societal betterment.

One can claim that amidst these aspirations lies the overarching theme of work-life balance, which emerges as a defining characteristic of Generation Z. This position emphasises the desire to cultivate hobbies, travel, and meaningful relationships alongside professional pursuits. Zoe's personal reflections seamlessly bridge this notion to enhanced productivity, underlining the relationship between balance and accomplishment.

In light of the perspectives shared, it is implicated that Generation Z is poised to play a transformative role in reshaping societal challenges and spearheading organisational shifts. Their pursuit of work-life balance, deeply intertwined with a desire for personal growth and a profound sense of purpose, indicates a broader vision for societal well-being and community engagement. Financial security, personal growth, and communal responsibility stand as pillars in their aspirations, reflecting an intrinsic balance between personal desires and societal obligations. Organisations and societies at large may benefit from recognising and aligning with these values, as they represent the driving forces behind the growing suggested changes this generation will usher in.

5.2.2.4 Action: Mobilisation
The perceived resilience of Generation Z is not only perceived a testament to their remarkable adaptability but also serves as a driving force behind their mobilisation for change. The resilience, as pointed out by Youth Worker, has been demonstrated in the face of adversity, where they have effectively navigated challenges and setbacks. Their ability to exhibit digital resistance in response to what they deem as unfeasible policies obstructing social interaction highlights their inclination to leverage technology for meaningful action.
This inclination, as highlighted by HRP, is deeply rooted in their proficiency with digital tools, enabling them to connect and collaborate seamlessly, irrespective of physical distances. The digital realm has not only facilitated remote work but also fostered a sense of teamwork and collaboration, key attributes that have translated into their cooperative endeavours for collective change, as noted by Zayla.

Generation Z's active involvement in group actions, like climate rallies and petitions, is rooted in their understanding of how different issues connect, as explained by Zayla. She further notes that the generation has seen how institutions fall short and the environment suffers, and with the internet and social media, they feel a sense of urgency. Zayla points out they can organise quickly, even with people they don't know, by using social networks.

Additionally, Zoe highlights that Generation Z stands out for their distinct approach. They turn personal worries into shared concerns, making strong arguments that speak to more people. They're good at using the internet to spread their messages widely. This way of working together makes their efforts stronger and brings them closer together.

The interviewees suggest that the intrinsic resilience, combined with their adeptness in leveraging digital tools, equips them to confront and reimagine societal challenges. Whether it's addressing environmental concerns or institutional deficiencies, they are perceived to employ their interconnectedness and digital savviness to foster collective action. This perceived capacity to rapidly mobilise may amplify their influence in driving change. Interviewees note that the generation transforms individual concerns into collective movements, ensuring a collaborative approach to evolving challenges. As they continue to grow in numbers and potential influence, they may set new paradigms for societal engagement and collective activism.

5.2.2.5 Action: Pressuring Stakeholders

According to the interviewees, perspectives on pressuring stakeholders and driving change in societal challenges and organisational changes are varied. HRP suggests that while employers recognise the inevitability of change, some may not yet be prepared to adapt fully. Zayla echoes the sentiment, emphasising that employers must adjust to evolving power dynamics where factors like culture and qualitative conditions hold greater sway than before. She emphasises that employers need to recognise their reduced control and understand that
adapting is essential to not miss out on the growing influence of generation Z as both employees and consumers.

Zion underlines the role of influencing elected officials in stimulating societal change. He notes that reaching Generation Z effectively involves not only sharing information but also capturing their attention and instilling a sense of empowerment to influence change. Zayla reinforces this perspective, illustrating how the political influence of Generation Z has grown due to their digital competencies and online engagement.

However, the interviewees agree that the most significant agent of change is Generation Z themselves. Analyst observes that this generation displays a remarkable level of independence, taking proactive roles in initiating movements and grassroots initiatives. They actively contribute to addressing critical issues instead of relying solely on other stakeholders. Professor notes that this independence may suggest a shift in sources of influence and authority, as Generation Z places more trust in their peers rather than traditional hierarchies. He elaborates by indicating that Generation Z values individual agency and self-expression, seeking autonomy in their pursuits for change.

*Interviewees perceive that Gen Z’s proactive involvement, facilitated by their digital skills and preference for peer-driven dynamics, may compel organisations and policymakers to adjust, or else face scrutiny. Their perceived approach, marked by individual agency and self-expression, signifies a significant departure from established norms, which may underscore the importance of acknowledging and harnessing their potential within the evolving societal and organisational paradigms.*

5.2.2.6 Action: Influx / Departure

Interviewees have mentioned how organisational behaviour might attract Gen Z, stimulate loyalty, or on the contrary, might be ground for leaving. HRP portrays how Generation Z employees might leave a company when its actions clash with their personal values. This is hinted through an example of an employee who left because the organisation's commitment to sustainability in marketing didn't align with rejecting sustainable projects due to cost concerns. HRP indicates that this disillusionment and disengagement, ultimately leading to the employee's departure. She additionally noted that organisations aiming to appeal to
Generation Z must exhibit transparency, social responsibility, and a well-defined mission. Both Analyst and HRP suggest that Generation Z are attracted by a work environment that allows them to balance work and life commitments.

The interviewees suggest that Gen Z’s strong alignment with personal convictions means that they will disengage from organisations that lack consistent approaches, especially regarding social issues. It is suggested that for businesses to thrive with this generation, genuine transparency, social responsibility, and a balanced work culture are imperative.
Figure 8 - Theoretical framework on Generation Z’s perceived impact in the construction of societal challenges and organisational changes V6
Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 “How is Generation Z perceived to impact the construction of societal challenges and organisational changes in Western Europe”.

This research offers an in-depth exploration on how Generation Z is perceived to impact the construction of societal challenges and organisational changes in Western Europe. Shaped by their socio-historical context of rapid technological progress, diversity, and uncertainty, Generation Z displays distinct attributes which may have developed unique traits as digital connectedness, digital savviness and digital exposure. Such traits potentially shape and define the generational principles and collective emotions, laying the foundation for their socio-historical identity. This foundation intertwines with present-day realities, highlighting a multifaceted relationship between past socio-historical traits and modern society. Rooted in the generation's socio-historical context, these principles and motivations determine the expectations and behaviours (actions) of the generations. Such expectations and actions illustrate how Generation Z is perceived to influence the structure of societal challenges and organisational changes.

The perception of Generation Z's impact on societal challenges and organisational changes may be shaped by their shared traits, values, emotions, and motivations. This understanding is framed within a model that connects their socio-historical context to perceived generational expectations and actions. One significant expectation is their emphasis on authenticity, where they excel at identifying insincerity and demand transparency. This quality may be linked to their critical assessment of information, which influences both societal issues and organisational shifts. Their pursuit of purpose-driven approaches stands out, prioritising values over traditional networking and seeking roles that align with their principles. Generation Z's pursuit of work-life balance emerges as a defining trait, emphasising personal growth, stability, and community engagement alongside professional pursuits. Mobilisation is perceived a key action attributed to them, as they leverage their resilience and digital skills to drive collective change, often organising rapidly through online networks. Their ability to pressure stakeholders and initiate grassroots movements is noted, transforming individual concerns into collective activism. Additionally, their potential influx into organisations is contingent on alignment with personal values, with transparency, social responsibility, and work-life balance being essential factors.
6.2 Future recommendations

It has to be noted that the theoretical framework was established in order to explore the interviewees’ perspectives on their perceived impact of Gen Z on societal challenges and organisational changes. Future research will have to test the theoretical framework and its aim to uncover perceptions regarding the construct of societal challenges and organisational changes. In this research, the framework can only be used to extract and interpret data provided, however, future research contain widespread rich data may enable us to predict behaviour of generations in the future.

In light of the current limitations in understanding Generation Z's traits shaped by technological advancement, there are promising directions for future research. It's crucial to investigate whether their constant digital engagement truly fosters effective critical thinking or if it could potentially lead to echo chambers and limited viewpoints. Furthermore, while Generation Z's adaptability to technology may be evident, exploring the downsides of their digital exposure, such as the impact of information overload and work-life balance, is essential.

Additionally, examining the connection between their developed traits and their societal attitudes and emotional responses is vital. While positive outcomes like inclusivity and purpose-driven approaches are highlighted, a comprehensive analysis should consider potential negatives like psychological strain. By addressing these research gaps, a better comprehension of can be provided regarding the nuanced traits of Generation Z and their broader implications.

Furthermore, a deeper exploration of the alignment between Generation Z's shared principles and Maslow's theory of needs could provide nuanced insights into their motivations. Secondly, incorporating diverse data sources, such as quantitative studies and longitudinal analyses, may strengthen the validity of findings. Finally, exploring variations in their impact on societal challenges and organisational changes across different contexts could offer a more comprehensive view.
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Appendix 1: Second reflection upon this research

June 2023, I was unfortunately informed that I received a failing grade for my first hand-in. It honestly flooded me with emotion as I had felt so much pressure the final month before the deadline. It took me some time to accept the result, but after a while I felt motivated again to make sure I’d certainly pass in September. In my original reflection (Appendix 2), I expressed my regret for not utilising my supervisor, as I erroneously believed I lacked sufficient information to share. I was determined not to make that mistake again and contacted Kristoffer. Although supervision could not be guaranteed due to the summer break, we were able to meet digitally twice to discuss my paper. I am utmost grateful for the flexibility and valuable feedback of Kristoffer.

In the process of changing my paper, I was provided with feedback by Ms. Appelqvist on her perceived general and specific issues with the thesis I handed in. I could understand many points she made such as the incorporated assumptions, the lack of delimitations and original sources. I looked over the whole thesis and went back to reading original literature in order to gain understanding of the original interpretations (e.g. the “pyramid” of Maslow). However some parts were not immediately clear to me. I initially discussed with Kristoffer that I had difficulty understanding the feedback of Ms. Appelqvist, such as her comments on her perception that the research question was already suggesting that Generation Z are already influencers. Kristoffer helped me to interpret the feedback and also provided a lot of additional feedback himself which I incorporated in my final version.

In the second version, I reformulated the research question to an answerable question based on the empirical data I gathered. Additionally, I removed lots of information that may not directly be relevant to understanding the research question at hand. Furthermore, I removed assumptions and reflected upon my role as a researcher.

I believe that, although there are a lot of things still to take into account (limitations, oversimplifications, lack of empirical data), I believe that I used the empirical data in order to answer the research question though the methods I described. I this thesis shows that I have taken into account the feedback of Ms. Appelqvist and used it to learn from my mistakes.
Appendix 2: First reflection upon this research

Upon reflecting on this research, there are various aspects that have brought both satisfaction and dissatisfaction. When I started a new job in November, I was excited to align my future research with my new position. Presenting my proposal on studying international employees to stakeholders was initially met with enthusiasm, allowing me to begin crafting a research proposal. However, an unfortunate oversight on my part led to the stress of forgetting to register for the Master thesis course, putting me in an uncomfortable position. Fortunately, with the assistance of course professors and the student service office, I was able to rectify the situation and register a few days later. Despite this setback, I had already begun brainstorming ideas and engaging in discussions with relevant individuals.

During an unrelated meeting with one of my managers, I was confronted with the requirement of seeking approval for the individuals I planned to speak with, which made me question the extent of my research autonomy. As a result, I ultimately decided to abandon that research idea. Shortly after, the concept of studying Generation Z emerged, and I began contemplating its relevance to societal challenges and organisational changes. After formulating a research approach and presenting it during the 25% seminar, I received valuable feedback from Fillipa, Lowisa, Merve, and others, which boosted my confidence in the topic. Subsequently, I commenced writing the initial chapters. When planning the interviews, I realised that not all interviewees were proficient in English, prompting me to conduct the research in Dutch with the intention of translating it back to English later. During the 50% seminar, I once again consulted with Fillipa, Lowisa, and Pinja, expressing my uncertainty about including organisational changes as a topic. Their feedback encouraged me to include it while maintaining a focused approach, narrowing down specific regions and aspects within the subject domain. The idea of comparing Northern Europe with Southern Europe was briefly considered but ultimately dismissed due to limited data and the expectation of insufficient basis for an in-depth analysis.

Looking back at the research, I am generally pleased with the outcomes. The research has maintained a sufficient focus on specific domains and contributes to the existing body of knowledge on Generation Z. However, I regret not having conducted focus groups in addition to the interviews. Scheduling challenges and uncertainties arose during the planning process,
diminishing my confidence in completing them on time. Additionally, I wish I had made more progress between the 25% and 50% seminars. Many interviews took place towards the end of April and beginning of May, requiring a significant time commitment during the final month of the research. Another regret is not utilising my supervisor, as I erroneously believed I lacked sufficient information to share. In retrospect, I acknowledge that even with limited information, valuable feedback could have been obtained during the seminars.

Nonetheless, by mid-May, I began to feel content and confident about the direction of my research. I am assured that it has to a large extent addressed the questions and objectives I set out to explore.
Appendix 3: Socio-historical context of previous generations

With the passing of Nabi Tajima of Japan in 2018 at the age of 117, it is presumed that there are no longer any living individuals on Earth who were born in or before 1900. This marked the end of the "Lost Generation." The term was coined during and after World War I to describe a group of writers and artists who came of age during the war and experienced a sense of disillusionment and existential crisis in its aftermath (Holmes, 1952). It is worth noting that the subsequent generation, known as the "Greatest Generation," exhibits a stark contrast in terms of the label used, particularly considering that this generation reached adulthood between two world wars and during an economic depression. While both generations endured significant losses, there was a notable difference in optimism and confidence towards government and other institutions. The Lost Generation harboured great scepticism towards the government after World War I, whereas the Greatest Generation generally displayed more trust in government after World War II (Aldridge, 1951). A statement made by American World War II General James A. Van Fleet captures the sense of pride and duty felt by this generation following the war (Fleet, 1953, p. 326):

“...The men of the Eighth Army are a magnificent lot and I have always said the greatest generation of Americans we have ever produced. They are your sons and husbands. God bless them...”

“...I have no report to submit. The record of my command of the Eighth Army for the last 22 months is a matter of history. I have no apology to make for what I have done. I am happy to be home. There is no bitterness in my heart, contrary to some newspaper report. I, of course, as a military man, wanted to see the war ended victoriously and all of our men come home in triumph, that we might receive the cheers of America which they, not I, have earned...”

“...it is my considered opinion that the Eighth Army, with its attached U.N. and ROK units, is the best-equipped, fed, clothed, housed and cared-for Army that we have ever produced...”

The disparity in trust between generations persisted over time. In 1964, when American President Johnson decided to significantly increase US military involvement in Vietnam,
those over 50 years old (typically adults from the Lost Generation) were almost twice as likely to consider this development a mistake compared to those under 30 years old (typically adults from the Greatest Generation) (Gallup, 1971). While the level of governmental trust and pride varied across countries, a global trend can be observed. A new generation, known as the Silent Generation, emerged for individuals born between the Great Depression and the end of World War II. While the Greatest Generation fought to bring about systemic change, the Silent Generation focused on working within the existing system (Henger & Henger, 2012). Growing up during a period of economic hardship, the Silent Generation prioritised long-term stability for themselves and their families. Their childhood experiences were markedly different from the vibrant times their parents had enjoyed. In 1951, TIME magazine described the Silent Generation as individuals who "worked hard and were quiet, seemingly awaiting the hand of fate to shape their lives" (TIME, 1951).

Following the end of a period marked by war and economic difficulties in 1945, many people got married and a significant number of children were born. Some researchers and philosophers argue that this surge in births occurred due to post-war optimism and economic stability (Chabé-Ferret & Gobbi, 2018). Returning soldiers from World War II sought to rebuild their lives. In the United States alone, the population grew by approximately 50 percent between 1946 and 1964 (National Center for Health Statistics, 2004). Other countries such as Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, France and Australia also experienced a substantial increase in birth rates (Bavel & Reher, 2013). This demographic shift, among other factors, led to the designation of a new generation: the Baby Boomers.

However, in the early 1960s, an increasing number of marriages began to dissolve. Society shifted its focus away from children and toward adults. It was no longer an expectation that parents had to remain together solely for the sake of their children, but rather that they could prioritise fulfilling their own needs (Beutell, 2013). The Generation X, as it came to be known, was heavily influenced by the music, movies, television and pop culture of their time. The generation also experienced greater cultural diversity, with significant differences in ethnicity, religion and overall cultural backgrounds. This likely influenced their attitudes toward diversity, inclusion and tolerance (Parry, 2017). For instance, there was a notable increase in the number of women joining the workforce. In 1991, a Canadian author
published the book "Generation X: Storytelling for an Accelerated Culture" (Coupland, 1991), which contributed to the association of the name "Generation X" with this era.

During the upbringing of Generation X, there was a period of rapid technological advancement, but access to these technologies was limited to certain groups of people. However, as these advancements became more widely available, communication methods in both personal and professional spheres underwent significant changes. It is argued that a notable generational difference lies in the preference of Generation Y (Millennials) to communicate using digital means such as text messaging and email (Verčič & Verčič, 2013). This difference played a significant role in the decision of many researchers and philosophers to designate a new generation. The term "millennials" is used because this generation largely reached adulthood during the new millennium (Paulin, 2018).

Subsequently, due to the rapid technological developments of the 21st century, researchers began to identify a new generation known as "Generation Z." Individuals belonging to Generation Z grew up during a time when access to the internet, smartphones and social media became widespread, shaping their formative years. While Generation Y also had access to social media before they turned 18, platforms like Facebook and Twitter had significantly fewer active users at that time (around 100 million users compared to the current approximate 3 billion users) (McCain, 2023). Research conducted in 2009 indicated that only 3 out of 10 children aged 9 to 18 spent one hour or more on-screen time per day (Withington, Sherry, Park, Blanck, & Fulton, 2013). However, more recent studies from 2020 revealed that children aged 8 to 18 spend an average of 4 to 9 hours per day on screens (AACAP, 2020). These distinctions in the extent and universality of technology usage played a role in distinguishing Generation Z as a separate generation from Generation Y.
### Appendix 4: Interview guide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
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| • Introduction – Explaining the process.  
• Gratitude – Showing gratitude for the interviewee’s attendance.  
• Purpose – Explaining the purpose of the research.  
• Assurance of confidentiality | 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID of Z</th>
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| • How much do you believe that the defined boundaries of Generation Z by the Pew Research Center align with your own beliefs?  
• Could you provide four words to describe Generation Z, highlighting their unique qualities compared to previous generations? Why did you choose specific words to describe the unique qualities of Generation Z?  
• What do you think makes Generation Z authentic?  
• Which social/historical/cultural events do you think add to the socio-historical context of Generation Z?  
• How different do you perceive Generation Z, in relation to Generation Y?  
• What would be 4 key words to describe Generation Z? | 

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Societal Challenges</th>
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| • Are you aware of the sustainable development goals?  
• In your eyes, which three SDGs do you believe Generation Z would prioritise the most? Could you elaborate?  
• What is the significance of social justice for Generation Z and their choice of employers?  
• How has increased access to information and social media affected Generation Z’s interest in social justice issues?  
• What role does the accessibility of information play in shaping Generation Z’s worldviews and awareness of societal issues? |
| Organisational Changes | • What are the ways in which companies can effectively connect with Generation Z, given their emphasis on societal value and authenticity?  
• How does greenwashing exemplify insincere behaviour, and what impact does it have on Generation Z's perceptions?  
• How do you observe Generation Z's alignment with societal values and authenticity in their personal relationships and interactions with organisations?  
• What strategies can companies implement to attract and retain Generation Z employees and customers, considering their strong focus on values and preferences?  
• What specific strategies can be used to attract Generation Z employees in terms of work-life balance?  
• Why is work-life balance so important for Generation Z compared to previous generations?  
• How does the integration of technology and globalization impact the work-life balance priorities of Generation Z?  
• How does stability in work-life relate to the stress and pressures that Generation Z individuals face? |
|---|---|
| Changemakers | • Who are the key stakeholders involved in driving changes in societal perspectives and organisational changes according to the interviewees?  
• How do employers view the changes that are happening and their readiness to adapt to them?  
• What are the qualitative conditions that younger individuals consider when joining an organisation, beyond traditional factors like money and working hours?  
• What role do elected officials and politics play in driving societal change, and how has the approach to reaching Generation Z changed?  
• How does Generation Z influence politics and contribute to change in society? |
| Keywords as inspiration for research questions | • Social/societal value?  
• Maslow?  
• Authenticity/CSR/Greenwashing?  
• Work-life balance?  
• Mental health?  
• Education?  
• Social justice?  
• Climate change? |