Intergenerational Equity: A Debate Goes Global

Steven K. Wisensale, Ph.D.
Professor of Public Policy
University of Connecticut
What is intergenerational equity?

The *fair* distribution/redistribution of assets and resources across generations.
Policies as Lightning Rods?

Medicare (1965)

Older American's Act (Title III) (1965)

Cost of Living Adjustment (1972)

“Cost-based and competitive political pressures are now emerging which may threaten both the traditional political resources of the aging and the future expansion and liberalization of old age policy benefits.”
The aged had been stereotyped as poor and deserving to get policies passed. Later, opponents began to use stereotyping of the aged to attack the very policies designed for them.
That Special Year: 1984

1984
George Orwell

60th Anniversary Edition

Who controls the past, controls the future....
... who controls the present, controls the past.
What made 1984 so special?

David Durenberger – Senator, MN (R) 1978-1995

Created Americans for Generational Equity (AGE) with Rep. James Jones (D-OK)

Samuel H. Preston – Professor of Demographics – U of Pennsylvania

“Children and the Elderly in the U.S.”
Scientific American, 1984
And one more memory from 1984!

“The elderly and terminally ill patients, have a duty to die and get out of the way... so that our kids can build a reasonable life."

Gov. Richard Lamm (D), Denver, Colorado
March, 1984
“After people have lived a reasonably full life of, say, 70 to 80 years, they should be offered high quality long-term care, home care, rehabilitation and income support, but not extraordinary and expensive medical procedures.”
Kids vs. Canes

"Just what exactly is your generation going to do about my generation's social security?"
Meanwhile, the Reagan Revolution is underway!

“Government is not the solution; government is the problem”

- Smaller government
- Lower taxes
- Opposed to redistributive policies (from top down)
- Towards privatization
- He saw the “deserving and the undeserving poor.”
Think tanks emerge and are prolific!

American Enterprise Institute
Cato Institute
Brookings Institution
Heritage Foundation
RAND Corporation
Intergenerational Equity and The Mainstream Media

“Consuming Our Children” 1988

“The Tyranny of America’s Old” 1992

“Greedy Geezers” - 1988

“Victims of the Golden Years: Are Children Shortchanged as Seniors Reap Vast Benefits?” 1995
Strategies and Goals of the Critics?

1. To reconstruct Social Security as an unfair intergenerational tax rather than an insurance program.
2. To remake the public images of the elderly in ways that would justify decreased spending.
3. To divert attention away from major tax cuts for the wealthy and the growing gap between rich and poor.
New Organizations Form

Founded in 1992, it is dedicated to educating the public about the causes and consequences of federal budget deficits.

Since 1986 Generations United has focused solely on improving the lives of children, youth and older people through inter-generational strategies, programs and public policies.
But the beat goes on!

After his 2004 victory George W. Bush promised to reform Social Security by privatizing it.

In both the 2008 and 2012 presidential campaigns both Social Security and Medicare were framed as being too burdensome for younger generations.

The use of “budget battles” and “entitlements” in the same sentence is commonplace.
Solutions?
Public policies and social programs
The Debate Goes Global

“There's an iceberg dead ahead. It's called global aging, and it threatens to bankrupt the great powers. As the populations of the world's leading economies age and shrink, we will face unprecedented political, economic, and moral challenges.”

Pete Peterson, Gray Dawn, 1999
The UN’s International Year of Older Persons – 1999
“Towards a society for all ages.”
2013 Theme:
The future we want: what older persons are saying

"By 2050, the number of older persons will be twice the number of children in developed countries, and the number of older persons in developing countries is expected to double. This trend will have profound effects on countries and individuals."

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon
Intergenerational Equity in the EU
Or, is it “intergenerational solidarity?”

It emerged in two stages:

1. Concerns over changing demographics and plunging birthrates. How can a smaller, younger population support an expansive welfare state?

2. The economic collapse of 2008. Or, the collision of austerity and solidarity.
European Day of Intergenerational Solidarity

World Population Ageing 1950-2050

European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations 2012
A Look at Three EU Countries
France, Germany and Italy

Two common words used in the EU debates: “solidarity” and “sustainability”
Has Britain ROBBED its children?
And what is on the horizon?
What about developing countries?

The world’s population is aging and, in developed countries, the size of the elderly population has already surpassed that of the 12-24 age group.
by 2050 nearly one in five people in developing countries will be over 60
Norm Daniels – Based on the work of John Rawls, Daniels has created a “framework of justice across generations.”

Harry Moody – “Intergenerational equity should not be viewed as the latest buzzword of politics, but rather as a means to keep the debate going and the dialogue responsible so that we can make wise decisions about ourselves and others.”
The End!

Thank you!

Contact information:
steven.wisensale@uconn.edu