

# Youth in an Age of Uncertainty and Turmoil

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Ever since Kairos Future was founded 20 years ago the study of young people, their values and lifestyles, has been at core of our studies of the future. The reason is simple. Human values are surprisingly stable – we tend to keep the values we develop during our childhood and adolescence – and therefore, looking into the values of the young will provide us with a glimpse of the future.

Over the years, we've done several large-scale youth studies – in Sweden, in the Nordic region and globally – and interviewed around 100 000 young people. We've also analyzed tens of millions of blog posts, tweets and status updates hunting for new insights. The most comprehensive global survey was carried out in 2007 when 23 000 people, most of them 16-29 years old, living in 17 countries in Europe, Asia and North America were interviewed.

Five years have passed and the world is a different place. We are now in the midst of the worst economical and social crisis since the Great Depression. Moreover, an unprecedented generational shift is taking place in workplaces across the globe, when millions of boomers are retiring and companies are facing the challenge of both attracting young employees and dealing with the generational knowledge transfer. On top of all that, a major technological revolution is happening, when communication patterns change as we move our digital lives from computers to smartphones and tablets. We are moving into a truly mobile world, predicted a decade ago, but happening as we talk.

How will all these enormous changes affect young people's views of their future? What are their fears and aspirations? And how will young people's actions today impact the future trajectories?

To understand that, Kairos Future is now starting a second Global Youth project focusing on the challenges young people are facing in today's turbulent times. In this article we provide a brief background research on three themes that will be covered in the project:

- Young in an age of social unrest
- Growing up digital: Young in an age of technology and transparency
- Thought economy, new work life and knowledge work automation

If you are interested in taking part of the insights generated in the project, become a sponsor or project partner, please feel free to contact us.

Enjoy the reading,



Mats Lindgren, CEO and founder

# YOUNG IN AN AGE OF SOCIAL UNREST

What will the future society look like? And what will it look like if the young were in charge?

The young used to be the future. They were promised a better world than their parents and grand parents. Not so anymore, at least not everywhere. Across the globe people talk about a lost generation, a jinxed generation or ant tribes. The future is not as promising as it used to be, and as a consequence, young people are losing faith in governments and institutions and many are pessimistic about their futures.

But they are not sitting still, they are also taking action, using Internet to communicate, organize and express their opinions. In 2011 that started the Arabic spring, which triggered similar movements all around the world aimed at fighting back injustice, corruption, social instability and decadency. In all cases, young people showed the world their power and determination to fight back situations they thought were untenable and unfair. There is much unrest among young people in the world and many want to change the present situation dramatically.

So, in brief, how could the present situation be summarized?

## *Pessimistic Europeans, optimistic non-Europeans*

When it comes to young Europeans' view about their own future, the image is quite pessimistic. In general, compared to youth from non-European countries, young Europeans do not see their future looking bright. Young people from emerging powers tend to see their future much brighter than European youth do.

## *Dark future in the job market, except among emerging countries*

Many young people worry about their future job career in the short term. Many say they would readily accept a job that required less experience and skills than they have to offer, if it meant they could be assured of secure employment. Again, while Europeans are pessimistic, youth from emerging economies are much more optimistic.

## *Globalization opens up a world of opportunities*

Youth among emerging countries tend to be much more positive about globalization than youth in Europe and North America. China is considered to become much more influential on the global arena, while especially American youth consider USA to be the most influential country.

## *The EU loses youth supporters among its founding partners*

Trust in the European Union decreases, likely because of the Euro-crisis and the prevalent financial problems. Outside the Union, the picture is more optimistic. Being European is not an important identity factor for half of young Europeans.



But for newly incorporated EU countries, being European is of greater importance as an identity shaper.

*Young Europeans do not trust their national institutions*

Overall, young Europeans are much more distrustful than non-Europeans on this issue. The majority of young Europeans, except for the Swedes, claim not to trust the government or the parliament. The Chinese, Indians, Israelis and Moroccans show the biggest trust in their government. In the specific case of the UK almost two in five young Brits feel the government does not understand the needs of their generation, and they do not believe the government is taking positive steps to help them.

*Young people's addiction: Internet*

The primary way of getting information and news among worldwide youth is the Internet. More than half of college students indicate they could not live without the Internet, as they feel it is an integral part of their daily life. Four out of ten college students choose Internet as the most important thing in their daily life, before social activities such as going out with friends (25%), dating (13%) and music (10%).

# GROWING UP DIGITAL: YOUNG IN AN AGE OF TECHNOLOGY AND TRANSPARENCY

What does it mean growing up in a technology soaked, transparent, mobile and constantly connected world? How does it affect everyday life as well as perspectives and worldviews? What does technology do to the “next” generation?

Some would say it makes them lazy and asocial, others would argue that the next generation is more active and social than any earlier generation. They do have access to new ways of communications. They sure don't sign up for any political organization, but they do have political agendas, engaging through Internet and new media. They are always connected, and transparent with their lives through Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, etc. Of course the young know all the tricks and gadgets with new technology, giving them an advantage to teachers and employers. They engage with everyone, and through crowdsourcing they can bring momentum in an instant. Technology is a second skin, not a strange thing.

*Youth are publically present, just not from this angle*

Historically the youth was proactive in volunteerism, activism and politics. However, nowadays youth are much less engaged in traditional parties and organisations. Having a broader view about the transparent world we live in and having easier access to it, it is common to see changes of views and positions among youth. Media facilitate the collaboration for problem solving, and circulate the information among youth where they feel a sense of attachment.

So, of course youth are engaged, just not from the angle of older generations.

*Would you fix me a sandwich while I infiltrate the world?*

The youth are more powerful than ever before, self-reliant and curious and that is creating a new force in history, “a force for social transformation”. They see technology as a normal, day-to-day activity, where they weren't exposed like the generation before them to limited knowledge.

Internet for youth is a means of making their work more efficient and speeding up their requests of questions they are already asking. As the world is transforming to a transparent one, youth are the pioneers to embark this journey where they are showing the older generations that it is the natural way of the future.

*If businessmen can do it, I sure can*

As younger generations demand transparency from their leaders, ripple effects are taking movements through governments and large organizations. Ultimately, the young generation will need much more information to match their desired outcome, therefore creating a bigger technology and transparent business world.



### *Time to teach the teachers new tricks*

Self-learning: With the increase use of online references and collaboration, people are discovering endless range of information, being exposed to enormous quantity of knowledge. People often find their way surfing from one page to another based on interesting information, and sometimes drifting completely from the original aim of the search.

Change of the curriculum: All learning bodies are adapting to the new and bold digital world. They change into collaborative, multitasking and overlapping assignments that students enjoy in teams.

### *Listen to me; I'm sourced from everywhere*

Networked learning encompasses also the individualized learning. No straightforward answer is seen, but a collaborative, non-hierarchical, non-competitive partnering and mediation. Synergy is enhanced by open source, providing for peers to interact and share knowledge freely and easily. The desire for interconnectivity by all equals fuel this digital world in forms such as social media and social networking.

### *Violence? It's your fault not ours*

Anything good can also be exploited for the worse. Cyber-violence among youth is increasing in numbers because of the exceeding transparent world we live in today. Youth are being humiliated, harassed, and even threatened by their peers, and numbers are only growing. However, all the violent games, movies, music are not made by the youth in Generation I, but instead created by the adults for the young consumers.

### *BYOD and risky behaviour*

Growing up digital also means that you get used to certain tools, gadgets or devices. When entering the world of work, young people tend to use their own stuff – or Bring Your Own Device, BYOD. This means that companies need to accept other systems and other technology when attracting young people. This also leads to increased risks to IT-systems, giving the CIO:s headaches.

# THOUGHT ECONOMY, NEW WORK LIFE AND KNOWLEDGE WORK AUTOMATION

They are called the Millennials, or Generation Order, and they are expected to shake up the workplace. Millennials have been born and raised in a digital era and they are said to have completely different expectations and demands on their future employers. Millennials are demanding, need constant feedback and encouragement and are expecting constant and rapid development.

They are also tech savvy, bringing their own toys and tools to work, and do not want to put their private life aside when going to work, so don't expect them to disconnect from their social networks and online chats at the workplace.

Are employers prepared for these challenges? What do they have to offer to attract and retain these demanding young employees?

## *No career progression? I'm outta here!*

One of the main concerns for today's managers is how to attract and retain young talented employees in their organizations. The features Millennials most associate with career success substantially differ from the ones managers think Millennials value the most. Both American and Swedish managers think salary is what Millennials first associate with career success. Instead the Millennials themselves regard opportunities for personal development as most important. On top of this, youth expect constant or regular feedback at the workplace.

## *Young urbanites with green expectations*

Generation Y prefers to work in an urban to slightly urban location, with easy access to a transport infrastructure. Even though Millennials have grown up in a society with greater demands on green initiatives in all aspects of life, evidence shows this green behaviour is not really embedded in their culture. Many young prefer the car to public transport. But Millennials do have green aspirations when it comes to the employer. Most youngsters aspire to work in a greener office and many require the workplace to be environmentally friendly and aware.

## *When and where I want in order to achieve work/life balance*

The global Millennials think it is important to have a good work/life balance. For employers this means they have to work on their offerings and live up to the expectations they create regarding this issue, since a bad work/life balance – or work/life integration – can be a reason for employees to be less motivated at work, look for another job, etc.

A good work/life balance highly depends on the employer's provision of flexible working possibilities. An increasing number of Millennials opt for unconventional working hours i.e. being online and connected at anytime, from any place they

choose. When asked how they feel about having to be in the office, many feel it would be unnecessary to perform their everyday job routines. Freedom of movement and decision should be provided to the young employees in order to attract and retain them.

### *Leading technologies at the workplace: a MUST*

Technology expectations at the workplace are obviously high among Millennials. This generation has grown up in the first ever-digital era; they are used to multi-tasking, want to be connected and available 24/7, and are a demanding generation. At schools and colleges they have been approached with interactive technologies, such as podcasts and videos. Therefore, when they join the workplace they expect their employers to be updated on the latest tech breakthroughs and to adapt to their tech demands. Access to state-of-the-art technology at the workplace is so important to some, that they contemplate this factor when considering a job.

However, having leading tech at work does not mean Generation I are willing to leave their own devices at home. Most young expect to be able to use the computer of their choice at the workplace, and to be able to access the mobile and technology applications they like the most – BYOD, or Bring Your Own Device.

### *Rethink the way U communicate*

Managers need to provide young employees not only with the right technology, but also with updated communication tools. Millennials would prefer their employers to communicate with them via online chat and mobile text, instead of in person, through e-mail or phone, which is closely related to the way they communicate with their friends on a daily basis (Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp). Of course they are not ready to give up on it even if the company does not allow its use.

If organizations want to get out the best of Gen Y at work, they have to adapt their mindsets to the way these young people think and feel about technology. Otherwise there is a huge risk to miss talented employees and also the opportunity for improving the company's performance.

### *Living in a Thought economy*

We are now entering the Thought Economy. Just having knowledge is not enough. Instead, innovative companies try to create competitive advantages by effectively using intangible assets such as knowledge into new ideas, concepts and products. Those that come up with the brightest ideas and thoughts are the winners, not those retaining their knowledge. In this crowd sourcing and open innovation are important assets. Therefore, technology plays an essential role in today's thought economy. The workers in the thought economy need technology in order to access information and share it within the business. As we have seen, tech savvy Millennials prefer flexible working, which in practice means that they need to be able to connect seamlessly to the corporate network from a remote location.

Employers need to offer workplaces that foster communication through a positive working atmosphere where collaboration is encouraged. Moreover, high consideration should be given to the latest technologies available at the workplace.



## WHAT'S NEXT?

Throughout history, young people have taken the lead, and especially so during turbulent times. At the end of the 19th century they marched for democracy and social justice. In the 1930's they lined up behind strong leaders in arms. In the 1960's and 70's they marched for peace in Vietnam, against environmental pollution and global injustice. And they tore down the archaic university structures. So what now when times are not so different from the 1890s, 1930 or 1970s?

How will today's youth shape tomorrow's society? How is it for them to grow up in a time of T:s – Turbulence, Transparency and Talent competition? What does it mean to young people in Sweden, USA, India, China, Brazil or South Africa?

In order to bring clarity to these important questions, Kairos Future initiates a global study covering more than a dozen countries worldwide under the umbrella of "Youth in an Age of Uncertainty and Turmoil." We will tailor the study to the needs of our partners and clients, but are focusing on the three broad themes discussed above – social issues, mobile consumer behaviors and work life trends. In collaboration with partners, we are planning to produce thematic public reports in relation to these topics.

And we are looking for partners that are interested in making a change through providing information and insights to their customers, partners or the general public.

If you are interested in doing that, please pick up the phone or send an e-mail!

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## ABOUT KAIROS FUTURE

Kairos Future is an international consulting and research company that helps companies and business leaders to understand and shape their futures. We work as consultants for strategic futures, providing our clients with trend analysis and scenario planning, strategy and innovation, strategic change and capability development. Our aim is to make complexity actionable. The company was founded in 1993, has its head office in Stockholm and representatives in Beijing, New York, Barcelona and Copenhagen as well as partners around the globe. For more information, visit our website at [www.kairosfuture.com](http://www.kairosfuture.com) or contact us at:

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