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## Who are the global super-rich of tomorrow? We interviewed teens at one of the world's most expensive schools to find out

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While super-rich kids make for [great TV](#) subjects, their real lives, perspectives and ambitions are often [shielded from the public](#). To learn more about them, we interviewed students at [one of the most expensive secondary schools](#) in the world, where fees come to 120,000 Swiss Francs (around €125,000) per year – and followed up with them five years later.

We started our research when these young people were studying together in the Swiss Alps, observing and interviewing them over 15 months. We asked about their backgrounds, thoughts on their school environment, and plans for the future. Five years later we asked them about what had happened since they graduated, their daily lives, and their ambitions. At that point, most had finished their university studies and were starting their careers.

Our findings, which we discuss here, have been published over several articles.

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### **Article by an MPIfG researcher**

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Certain features were universal – these young people came from extremely wealthy families in their own countries, and their parents had pushed them to study abroad, learn English and live a global lifestyle. However, their paths to joining the ranks of the global super-rich varied depending on where they were from and what they wanted to do with their lives.

## **Citizens of the world?**

Their exclusive Swiss school promised to turn its students into “citizens of the world”, but these Gen Zers’ friendship groups were in fact usually determined by their national background or language – partly because they shared cultural references and values, and partly because of pressure to conform. As one student told us, “If I wanted to sit with other friends, [my national group] would be like, ‘Are you mad at us?’”

Even when starting careers abroad, these wealthy young people did not entirely break their ties to their home countries. Living abroad could “feel lonely”, they told us, while home offered “more resources and more support ... family and also friends”.

However, these young people were also aware that meeting wealthy peers from around the world at school could lead to international business opportunities down the line. As one explained, “There’s definitely benefits of making friends from all over the world, no doubt. The general profile of students here is that of upper-class to high-class families so, regardless, you’d be making powerful and wealthy friends and that’s a plus.”

## **“I don’t fly commercial”**

As teenagers, these Gen Zers embraced conspicuous consumption. They stayed at five-star hotels and shopped for luxury brands, and one even donated a lightly used Louis Vuitton backpack to local refugees. They did not, in the words of one student, “fly commercial”.

Their families’ financial resources made these habits possible, but the habits themselves were a product of boredom: “I’m going after something when I want that thing, you know? I look forward to it. I need it. Like, I’ll move mountains to have it. But when I actually have it ... it’s just meaningless to me,” one young woman told us. Buying items and experiences provided short-term relief from boredom, but the ease with which things could be bought just made these young people more bored.

As young adults, however, they found meaning in taking on jobs and living within their income, though often with family money and connections to fall back on if needed. Still, these young people took pride in self-sufficiency, which they connected to “growth”, “character”, and “self-respect”.

Though one of our interview subjects still drove an Aston Martin, the luxurious, stereotypical super-rich lifestyles from their younger years seemed to matter less as they got older.

## **Racism and geopolitics: leaving the boarding school bubble**

At their boarding school, wealth was the norm – the few scholarship students were largely left out of social cliques – and this defined much of these young people’s social identities. As one young Russian explained, “The type of people who come here, they’re really rich, right? So, people here often see Russians as really rich people. I don’t know – strange but it suits.”

When transitioning to university, however, their privilege was challenged by the realities of geopolitics and racism. This intensified with time.

Geopolitics, for example, meant that one wealthy Ukrainian student had to think about “more important things ... than just like, whatever things I want.”

Racism meant that a young Chinese man who had moved to the US was rethinking his decision: “Basically, going back to China is effectively saying like, Oh, I could just be the white person. I could be the white male in the room. And wouldn’t that be nice? ... I don’t want to live in a place where people think I have no personality, or ... where people tell me ... you have a glass ceiling at the top.”

### **Limitless possibilities make for an uncertain future**

One question for these young people was what they wanted to be. Some knew – artist, entrepreneur or, most often, owner of their family’s business – while others were figuring it out.

Another question was where they wanted to be. These young people were weighing going home versus staying abroad, and whether they would put down roots or keep moving.

Some of these wealthy Gen Zers were aiming to join the global super-rich, while others wanted to remain part of the wealthy in their countries of origin. Some embraced the adventure of the unknown. Others felt anxious about the uncertainty. Despite similar starting points and opportunities, their paths and goals hugely varied.