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Media and Generations:  
A Research and Learning Approach for  
Media Education and Audience Studies

AEI Occasional Paper 22

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# **Media and Generations: A Research and Learning Approach for Media Education and Audience Studies**

Professor Cristina Ponte

**Christina Ponte<sup>1</sup>**

Based on theoretical and methodological orientations on media and generations, this article presents research and learning processes involving supervised field work conducted by graduate students. It briefly introduces sources that inspired this pedagogical approach, before presenting two projects in which students played a key role as focus group facilitators and as life story interviews of folder generations. The discussion argues on the potentialities of this intergenerational relation and on the educational gains of this methodology for Media Education and for different branches of Media Studies, such as media and social history, journalism and the news or political participation.

## **Three inspiring views on role of generations on University students**

In a recent essay discussing the life in the University, Paddy Scannell, the Professor who established the first undergraduate degree program in Media Studies in the UK, in 1975, reflects on the value of its teaching and learning context. Scannell (2011: 18-20) argues that a fundamental aspect of the University working life is the process of generational change and renewal, which includes tensions, pleasures and contradictions. He says the University has two populations – the students and their teachers – who define each other: the students wish to learn, and the teachers offer them what they know – knowledge transfer. Interestingly, he considers that the most singular difference between them is on the generational position: it is that the student population remains forever young, while the teaching population grows old and dies. Since University students are in particular position in their life – they are no longer adolescents and not yet adults, the author stresses the value of the learning experience beyond the acquisition of “useful knowledge” and vocational

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competences. This learning experience involves “beginning to think for oneself, and developing analytical skills, critical judgment, informed opinions” (Scannell, 2011: 19- 20).

Marcia Baxter Magolda, Professor on Students Affairs in Higher Education at Miami University, stresses precisely the value of a constructivist-developmental pedagogy for students’ development of identity as part of their professional socialization process. Based on an epistemological reflection on young adult intellectual development, Baxter Magolda (2004) presents four intellectual categories, from simplistic to complex knowledge: *absolute knowledge*; *transitional knowledge*; *independent knowledge*; and *contextual knowledge*. As opposite poles, she contrasts the *absolute knowing*, when students understand knowledge to be certain and view it as residing in an outside category, with the *contextual knowing*, the knowledge shaped by the context in which is situated and whose veracity is debated according to the context. This move promotes identity development as self-authorship, including learning through scientific inquiry (Baxter Magolda, 1999).

A third contribution comes from a methodological tool, *mediagraphies*, developed by Tehri Rantanen, Professor at London School of Economics and Political Science, and Soilikki Vettenranta, Professor of Media Education at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology. Mediagraphies are reports based on biographical stories and interviews of primary sources conducted by graduate students, along with secondary sources such as newspapers, photos or history books. Students collect individual life stories from their families over four generations by interviewing family members and filing a globalization factors includes for each generation’s member (great grandparent, parent, child) the place and time of birth, home country, number of siblings, education, languages spoken, the first travel abroad, changes in the lifestyles and in class, uses of media and communication, ideology and identity (Rantanen, 2005).

This tool was developed by Rantanen taking into account the specifications of media and communication in the globalization process. The author worked on a structure of the globalization factors influenced by Appadurai’s theory of five scapes: the *ethnoscape*, the persons who are on the move; the *mediascape*, the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information and to the images created by these media; the *technoscape*, the mechanical and informational technology that moves across boundaries; the *financescape*, the currency markets, national stocks and commodity speculations; and the *ideoscape*, modern ideas such as democracy, representation, rights, welfare or freedom (Appadurai, 1998, pp. 33-36). Considering

the interpretation of the individual as also affected by specific national and local circumstances, Rantanen added two scapes: *timescape*, attention to the life time and generations; and *linguagescape*, the diversity of the linguistic capital one owns.

From a media education perspective, Vetteranta (2011: 372-373) notes that students' production of mediagraphies of their families combines three perspectives: *phenomenology*, starting from the experiences of an individual with the outer world; *hermeneutic*, emphasizing the importance of interpreting the human actions by studying the deeper meaning, which can only be understood in its contexts and *socio-cultural*, considering the media as artifacts. Carrying out research on their own family, students gained an impression of how globalization had an impact on the individuals in their families.

These three orientations - the particular generational position of University students, the generation of contextual knowledge and the value of mediagraphies as a methodological tool - inspire the research and learning processes activated in the Project *Media and Generations Portugal-Italy*, and its follow up, the project *Media and Family Generations in Portugal*.

### **Comparing media and generations in Portugal and Italy and its follow-up**

The comparative research emerged from my collaboration with Piarmarco Aroldi, from the Catholic University of Milano, Italy. Participating in the European COST network *Transforming Audiences, Transforming Societies* (2010-2014), we identified common grounds in our previous research projects, both related to media's role in the definition of generation: the project *Media and Generations in Italian Society* (2006-2009)<sup>2</sup> and the project *Digital Inclusion and Participation. Comparing the trajectories of digital media use by majority and disadvantaged groups in Portugal and in the USA* (2009-2011).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Funded by Italian Ministry of Universities and Research (MIUR) as a Research Project of National Interest (PRIN 2006) (see: <http://mediagenerationproject.wordpress.com>). Main results in Colombo, Boccio et al, 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Funded by Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology as part of the international Program with the University of Texas at Austin (see [http://digital\\_inclusion.up.pt](http://digital_inclusion.up.pt)).

The project *Media and Generations in Italian Society* (Colombo, Boccia et., 2012) was rooted in a theoretical framework that considers “generation” as “an age cohort that comes to have social significance by virtue of constituting itself as cultural identity” (Edmunds & Turner, 2002: 7). Biographical traits coexist alongside historical and cultural characteristics, and one’s belonging to an age group is connected to specific historical experiences (Elder, 1974), to the development of particular consumption habits (Volkmer, 2006) or to the occupation of certain positions in the family chain (Bertaux & Thompson, 1993). These biographical factors involve distinctive social levels: one’s position in the life-cycle, media biography, contexts provided by families and friendship networks as environments for the elaboration of media experience (Aroldi, 2011), the belonging to a world of values shared with other members of the same generation (Edmunds & Turner 2005), the historical development of the media system and the different phases of technological innovation (Corsten, 2011), the processes of mastering and assimilating technologies and media products (Buckingham & Willet, 2006; Bolin & Westlund, 2009), and the wider structural changes affecting the social and cultural system (Hardey, 2011).

The project *Digital Inclusion and Participation* aimed to understand practices of users and non-users of digital media, focusing on deprived social groups in Portugal and the US. Joseph Straubhaar, Professor of Global Media at the University of Texas in Austin and our partner in the US, stressed the relevance of involving students, illustrating this by drawing on his own experience: for a decade he had activated the process of research and teaching with graduate and undergraduate students, involving them in supervised field work collecting life stories with the media among their own families, and in areas of rural Texas or poor neighbourhoods in the city of Austin where Latin American families live. Besides their learning in Media Studies, students contacted with and gathered up different life experiences while contributing with their own individual efforts to a collection of life stories with the media among generations of families in a long-term view, therefore also developing a sense of belonging and participating in a strong research project. For these reasons, the project *Digital Inclusion and Participation* (2009-2011) included among its aims advanced research and education in the digital media with a transnational and interdisciplinary perspective. The balance of this pedagogical approach is reported elsewhere (Ponte and Simoes, 2012).

The concept of generations emerged as a critical issue in this international research, since it was difficult to compare digital practices as far as mature adults and the elderly were concerned. Definitions on the US generations from the American Pew

Institute distinguish seven age cohorts since the 1930's, based on the relation between adolescence times and traumatic events or the media: *Millenials*, born in the last decade of the Twentieth century; *Y Generation*, the 'digital natives'; *Generation X and Young Boomers*, the 'digital settlers'; *Old Boomers*, the Vietnam generation; *Silent Generation*, contemporary of the economic boom in the 1950's; *Greatest Generation*, who experienced the traumatic times of the Second World War. Although popular and internationally disseminated, these definitions did not work in Portugal for adults and the elderly, due to significant historical differences. This gap stimulated my interest in further research on media and generations (Ponte, 2011; Ponte, 2012).

A key concept for us was Mannheim's (1927) seminal distinction of generation as *social location*, *actuality* and *unit*. Social location refers to the strata of experience provided by being born and growing up at the same time, and it is equivalent to the concept of birth cohorts; generation as actuality refers to the collective self-interpretation of people who belong to the same generation, a common view of the 'historical new' during their biographical period of adolescents; generational units emerge from concrete groups of people of the same age, who not only define their situation in a similar way but also develop similar reactions in response to their problems and opportunities.

Both as technologies which occupy the everyday life horizon as token-for-granted tools and as cultural institutions or communicative products, genres or texts, the media are a set of elements that contribute to shape generational identities (Aroldi & Colombo, 2003; Rossi & Stefanelli 2012). Media also contribute a sort of *public arena* in which different generational identities can express and question themselves. They do this by co-building each other through mutual representation and through the production of social discourses which can be ritually celebrated in front and on behalf of their peers in terms of their collective identities (Edmunds & Turner, 2002 and 2005; Boccia Artieri, 2011).

In the last decades, the global dimension of the audiovisual media and communications technology has allowed cross-national perspectives, not only exploring whether and to what extend the media experiences contribute to shape the collective identity of a generation, but also comparing collective identifies developed by people who were born and grew up in the same period of time., through in different national contexts. Hence we considered that Italy and Portugal could offer an interesting case study: sharing similar cultural traditions, they experienced also different events and socio-

economic conditions in the post Second World War. While Portugal had a dictatorship which only ended in 1974 and high levels of poverty and illiteracy, Italy lived an optimistic era of economic development and social mobility, marked by modern life-styles and consumption of private goods.

Given these two national contexts, we decided to explore processes of socialization concerning the media, domestication of technologies and appropriation of cultural and media contents by people living their youth in the two countries in the '60s and '70s and how have they entered in the digital world of the 1990's and 2000's. Thus we questioned the concept of a "global generation" (Edmund & Turner, 2005; Volkmer, 2006; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2008; Aroldi & Colombo, 2013) in these decades. For the proposal of this article, attention goes to the research and learning processes which Portuguese University students in this comparative research, whose results are reported and discussed elsewhere (Aroldi & Ponte, 2012).

*The research and learning process involving students as facilitators in focus group*

Following the theoretical and methodological orientations of the Italian project on media and generations, the methodology of this comparative analysis in Portugal was empowered by the involvement of supervised students in the field work. In 2011-2012, the nine students that attended the Master seminar on Media and Journalism Studies at the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities were involved in a research and learning process in which they were theoretically and methodological oriented to collect and analyse similar data in Portugal.

The first sessions introduced the theoretical and methodological frameworks. Students read and commented literature with a special focus on: *media domestication* and the related concepts of *appropriation*, *objectivation*, *incorporation* and *conversion* (Silverstone, Hirsch & Morley., 1993) Bourdieu's (1984) concepts of capital, field and *habitus* adapted to the digital experience (Rojas, Straubhaar et al., 2012); theories of *generation* (Mannheim, 1927) and follow-ups such as generational semantic (Corsten, 1999) or *generational belonging* (Aroldi, 2011).

Methodologically, students were introduced to qualitative methods (Bryman, 2004; Lobe, Livingstone et al., 2007), namely to the focus group approach, its particularities and its explicit use of group interaction to generate data (Barbour & Kitzinger, 1999). The Italian scripts were translated and discussed along with the Portuguese historical

context, looking at national statistics and documentation. A focus-group simulation allowed students to place themselves as more than mere participants, recalling, and confronting their memories events and their media experiences. Students also became aware of the processes of generating ideas and of facilitating the discussion while following the script. They were also instructed on ethical and transcription procedures.

The composition of the focus groups for different age-cohorts (1940-1952; 1953-1965; 1966-1978; 1979-1991) was based on personal relationships and snowball recruitment. Overall, participants knew each other, which facilitated a familiar atmosphere. At the end of the discussion, all participants filled in a questionnaire with demographic questiones as well as questions on their media uses. Each student transcribed the collected material from their respective focus-group.

In seminar, we discussed the transcriptions bearing in mind the theoretical concepts and the media's role in the processes of generational belonging, generational units and generational semantics. This discussion facilitated the writing of individual essays (around 4000 words), which should integrate the theoretical approaches into the analysis.

For the purpose of this article, reflecting on research and learning contexts that involve different generations, the following sections briefly characterize the three cohorts of participants older than the students. Demographic data showed that most of the participants born between 1940 and 1978 lived their youth years in metropolitan areas, in contrast with their parents' youth lived in rural areas. Almost all surpassed their parents' habilitations but less than half reached tertiary education. These trends on place and education attainment translate demographic and social dynamics that crossed the Portuguese society as shown elsewhere (Aroldi & Ponte, 2012).

*1940-1952- "We are the ones who experienced the dictatorship's consequences"*

The focus-group of the elderly was composed by five former bank employees living in a day care-center, and a retired judge. The student-facilitator noted the difference in their geographic origins as a point to explore generation as social actuality:

*"The fact that the interviewees grew up in different regions of the country enriched the discussion, because they talked of two very different realities. Some grew up in isolated regions, while others spent their formative years in urban centres, which facilitated access to cultural and education." (Student)*

In spite of different local experiences in their formative years of youth, the national context emerged as a constraints unity. Participants commonly recalled the poverty and the high rates of illiteracy; the difficult access to secondary education for those belonging to poor families; the gender discrimination against women; the dictatorship and its repression of ideas. Broadcasting media were far from their children and adolescents times. Television didn't cover most of the country and the radio was only present in wealthy households. Some participants associated radio with the possibility of breaking the political censorship and accessing international and national news (*"at home, in secret, we listened to the BBC, the Moscow Radio..."*). Newspapers and classic novels from French and Portuguese writers were invoked as ways of accessing information, particularly among these women who don't access the internet, the pleasure of reading literature continues alive among all. Having retired before the informatisation of their administrative jobs, they defined themselves as the "generation of the typewriter".

### *1953-1965 – Different generational belongings*

Participants in the three focus groups of this age cohort include people that lived the end of the dictatorship in different moments: childhood, adolescents and youth. Thus, the common references to the Carnation Revolution of 1974 provided distinctive pictures of that political transition. As these focus groups were composed of students' parents and their relatives or friends, the participants knew each other for years and had common cultural practices. Because of this composition, the generation as a unit is more visible than in the previous group. Besides age differentiation, the place where the adolescents and young people lived during these years proved to be significant.

The focus-group composed by participants that were University students living in metropolitan areas in the end of the 60s' and the beginning of the 70s' revealed a politically and culturally engaged youth. Coming from urban families with small businesses, which invested in their education, they present the biggest gap on school attainment between themselves and their parents. Regarding the dictatorship, these participants recalled the media censorship, the political repression, gender discrimination, their desire of being connected with the international mood of their generation. All wished to talk about the precise day of the Carnation Revolution, they lively reported where they were, what they did and even how they were dressed. The media diet of their youth (movies, music, newspapers, magazines) continues to be relevant nowadays, much more than TV. All are frequent internet users.

The focus group composed by participants that were adolescents in 1974 shared a rural origin and their parents had low school attainment. They lived their youth years in the countryside, where they continue to live. From the dictatorship, they recalled the political surveillance (“at the coffee shop we had to be careful with what we said”) and a traditional local order that humiliated poor families as their own’s. The Carnation Revolution was associated with an expected explosion of rights (“*We lived in a repressed time. Suddenly came the 25th of April, there was total openness of ideas, of thoughts...*”). Local memories on the end of educational discrimination (“*the high school was for the rich; the technical school for the poor*”) were the most recalled memories of their youth. Radio and movies composed their media diet before the arrival of the TV in their households, by the end of the 70’s. Nowadays, having undifferentiated jobs, the women that participated in this focus group don’t use the internet, while men are occasional users. TV is the main medium for all.

The third focus group of this age cohort was composed by participants born in the middle of the 60’s who mainly lived their childhood and youth in a small countryside town. The sparse personal memories of these participants on the social change lived in 1974-1975 includes the evidence of how the fear of repression persisted among population. A participant recalled: “*One day I was playing in the balcony and singing “A Gaivota” (a popular song associated with images of the Carnation Revolution, frequently transmitted in the radios and TV) and my mother came to me, very nervous, saying “Shush, don’t sing this’. I remember I didn’t understand the reason*”. These participants seem to have grown up far from politics, within protective families even though investing in their education, for boys and girls. From relatively wealthy households, their media memories are dominated by the turntable, radio and TV. Nowadays all are regular internet users, mainly for professional reasons, but their media diet continues to be dominated by television.

Comparing these three focus group, students realized that besides age, the place of living during the formative years and educational capital also matter for the generation as social actuality. The cultural gap and the overture/distance to politics is visible in the memories of key events: while the later two focus groups only recalled local events, the first one had memories about international events such as the Vietnam or Biafra wars, the May 1968 demonstrations, besides a large memory of national events. Television was almost ignored in the media memories of this most engaged group, who are active readers of print press and internet users, while the others continue defining TV as their key “*magic box*”.

*1966-1978 – “We are the generation which gave the world what the world has today...”*

These participants of two focus groups belonging to this age cohort lived their adolescents and youth in the 1980's, the decade that started in Portugal with an economic crisis and the IMF presence, ended with the arrival of European funds and was followed by the 1990's boom of credit cards and consumption. Most of the participants grew up in metropolitan spaces but only two entered into the University.

Illustrating the influence of the audiovisual media, their historical memories include international and national events such as the fall of the Berlin wall and the end of the “Soviet Empire” (1998-1991), the first Golf War (1991), the Columbia disaster (1985), the Pope visiting Fatima (1982), the first Portuguese test-tube baby (1984), the earthquake in Azores and the arrival of colour TV (1980). Although historical memories associated with playing outdoors, surpassing their expectable focus on the media in a decade marked by changes in the global, national and local media landscape.

*“Memories of street games drew my attention due to their intensity. I was expecting those accounts, because of previous research on the background of the 1980s (reference to the contextualisation of the decade). However, I thought that street games would be referenced together with the phenomenon of video games, for example, which got children and youth to play at home as well.” (Student)*

In their comments, students noted the relevance of local radio channels providing updated international musical trends and exploring an informal language targeted to youth. This happened before the arrival of private TV channels, in the beginning of the 90's.

*“This generation saw colour television enter its home, so I thought that they would already be attracted by its fascination, placing it as media protagonist. However, while media memories were embedded in their talks, in most accounts, the dominant discourse was that TV was never quite arresting... there were many accounts about television programmes, but without the level of fascination or enjoyment as in the case of radio...” (Student)*

In spite of the common interest in these two focus groups, students identified two generational units defined by their ways of evaluating past and present times. A focus group associated their youth with a relaxed and happy atmosphere where “*everything was easy to do*” and “*there was respect for the elderly*”, replicating the mythical idea of a lost paradise of order and joy. By contrast, the other portrayed their generational identity as marked by the idea of change at all levels: “*We are the generation of the innovation and freedom. Everything changed: the media, politics, social life, the food... The generation of change!!*”

*The follow-up: a focus on Portuguese family generations*

The follow up of this research and learning approach was the project *Media and Family generations* in Portugal, conducted in 2012-2013. Similar in the theoretical approach to the concept of generation, its aim was to go deeper in the characterization of Portuguese families across three generations and their relationship with the media. Thus, the field work would involve interviewing people from three generations belonging to the same family, if possible students’ own (a young university student, one of his/her parents and one grand-parent, from the mother or father’s lineage). The idea was to follow a family chain, its processes of cultural transmission and turning points. For this purpose, the research adopted the use of mediagraphies. After being introduced to the Appadurai’s and Rantanen’s scapes, students explored national longitudinal trends on demographics, education, health, media access and circulation and so forth, since the 1930s until the present times. These statistical trends were discussed in class, thus providing contextual information for all.

Based on the script on family life story and media uses in the Digital Inclusion and Participation Project (see Annex 1) students accepted the challenge of analyzing their own family. While some students interviewed their siblings as representative of the youngest generation, others replied to the interview themselves. Among the students that decided to answer the questions themselves, some asked a friend to act as the interviewer, in a face to face situation. As observed in the previously reported projects, students realized the difference between being familiar with the script and being directly asked on a particular question and having to answer it. As one student noted, “*although I have read the interview script numerous times, the moment when I transcribed my own words was a surprising experience*”

Taking into account our purpose of considering relations between different generations, attention goes to the students' analysis of their grandmothers' generation through the *mediagraphies* they produced from the life story interviews. Students identified globalization factors present in the life trajectory of their grandmothers: the *timescape* of growing up under difficult conditions and having lived the experience of a deep political and social change in their adult life; the *ethnoscape* of the move, when some left their birth place, and convey how their own move was a turning point in their family's structure of opportunities; the *mediascape*, that changed from the total absence of media except school books (and not for all) to the present hegemony of television, which is more than audiovisual contents; their *languagescape*, which integrates the opportunities concerning education and cultural capital, was reduced to minimum levels and thus affected their placement in the *technoscape*; the *ideoscape*, where traditional values of religion, gender roles and local identity are, in some cases, combined with modern values against injustice, gender violence and social inequality. Intergenerational trajectories of mobility, educational opportunities and replacement/ weakness of traditional values emerged as key points compared with their children's and grand-children's *mediagraphies*.

Table 1: Mediagraphies of five grandmothers of Portuguese University students

Name	Teresa	Lilia	Gabriela	Manuela	Isabel
Birth place	Machico (rural) Madeira Island	Ourique (rural) South Portugal	Cova da Piedade (Great Lisbon)	Fernando Po (rural) South Portugal	Seixo do Coa (rural) North Portugal
Time	1929	1929	1933	1936	1939
Education	Didn't attend school	Primary school (3 years)	Didn't attend school	Primary school (4 years)	Primary school (4 years)
Family	5 siblings; 3 children	6 siblings; 1 child	5 siblings; 1 child	6 siblings; 2 children	4 siblings; 5 children
Profession	Embroiderer	Worker in a factory, doorwoman	Worker in a factory	Dressmaker, at home	Farmer
1 <sup>st</sup> travel in Portugal	Angola, 1961 (migration)	Malveira dos Bois (husband's birth place)	Salvaterra (husband's birth place)	Fatima (Catholic place)	Never left the village except for health care
Language	Only Portuguese	Only Portuguese	Only Portuguese	Only Portuguese	Only Portuguese

Travel abroad	England (visiting family)	Salamanca (Spain)	Never	Spain and European tour by bus 10 years ago	Never
Media in childhood	None	Only school books	None	Female magazine; radio at the coffee-shop	Only school books
Social class	No change	Change	No change	Change	No change
Change in lifestyle	Angola (1961), she came back in 1976	From rural to urban (Great Lisbon)	Retired for health reasons, in her 30s	From rural to urban (country town)	No change
Radio and TV	Radio in the 60s; TV in 1978	Radio in the 1960s, TV in the 1970s	Radio in the 1970s; TV in the 1980s	Radio in the 1950s; TV in the 1960s	Radio in the 1950s; TV in the 1970s
Memory of TV news	April 25th 1974; Civil war in Angola (1975-1976)	Death of Salazar (1971)	April 25th 1974	Hijacking to the Santa Maria ship (1961)	None
Media use nowadays	Television	Cable television, Radio; mobile phone	Television	Radio; TV; magazines; mobile phone	Television, mobile phone
Interests	Embroideries	Painting, embroideries; music and drama in an amateur group.	Watching TV	Taking pictures; Streaming; Family	Producing goods for the family; supporting grandchildren's studies
Ideology	Conservative; Catholic	Catholic; Socialist	Socialist	Catholic	Catholic; PSD (center-right)
Resistance to	End of colonialism	Injustice; hunger; envy; maltreated children	Violence; poverty; ICT	Violence and hunger	Migration
Identity	Local and regional (Madeira)	National	Local and National	Local	Local

Table 1 presents five Portuguese women born between 1929 and 1939, in rural or industrial neighborhoods. Two had no conditions to attend school and rest illiterate, two had no access to four years of primary education and one did not finish it (Lilia: *My dad took me away of school because I was a girl and I already had the*

*third grade, and so I started working when I was nine years old*). They recalled the number of siblings, the differences between boys and girls; some noted that they had particular responsibilities because they were the oldest girl. All started working in their childhood, doing the same jobs as their mothers and contributing to the family economy. Their first travel within the country just happened in their adult life, frequently associated to a visit to the husband's birth place.

In their life trajectory, two of these grandmothers, Lilia and Manuela, had only one child; they also coincide on their move from rural to urban areas, Both experienced modernity and social mobility; they had opportunity to travel abroad; they are more open to the media and developed their own personal interests. In both cases also, their children had conditions for pursuing their studies and even reached university, introducing ruptures with a past of low education and precocious labor. For the other three grandmothers, the access to higher education only happened two generations later.

All the grandmothers share childhood and youth timed deprived of radio and printed media for leisure. The TV set entered the home in their adulthood, when after they married or even later. The most distant TV memories evoke different times.

*The first TV set was only bought when we were already living in Alcacer (small town 100 km south Lisbon). The first event I remember being on the news was the hijacking of the Santa Maria. [1961]. (Manuela)*

Other strong memories recalled to the grandchildren are related to TV images of the death of Salazar or the April 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution, in both cases turning points in the dictatorship regime. Two women who identify their political ideology as leftist report these as moments of happiness lived in family:

*I remember Salazar's death. The death of Salazar was our joy at the time. (Lilia)*

*I remember the 25<sup>th</sup> of April, of course. That day I was so scared that I couldn't even listen to the radio. Your grandfather found it strange that they were only playing military marches. But when they said that the other Salazar [Prime Minister Marcelo Caetano] had been arrested, there was great joy! (Gabriela)*

For Teresa who had moved to Angola in 1961, the year the colonial war started, the civil war that occurred after the independence in 1975 made her return to Madeira in difficult material conditions. At home, the TV set arrived years after the first TV broadcasts in Madeira, which happened in 1976. She brought up her favorite program, a Brazilian soap opera, humorously telling her grand-daughter about moments shared with her husband:

*I recall Escrava Isaura. Do you know what is it? (pause) You probably don't. It was a lovely Brazilian soap opera that aired at lunch time. Your grandfather liked it as well, and why wouldn't he? The girls showed all their skin! There was no decency! (laughter) –Teresa*

Living in a working class suburb, Gabriela, who had already resisted to the presence of radio in the household, bought by her daughter, explained to her grandson the costs of the first TV set, by the beginning of the 1980s, as well as the consequences for her family life;

*It was your mother who bought it as well. If I'm not mistaken, she paid half of it and your grandfather paid the rest. It was one of the newer sets, which aired in colour. I also didn't like it very much that she bought that thing. (laughter) I quite enjoyed talking to your mother and your grandmother in the evenings. Talking would really cheer me up. But when the shows were on no one would talk in our home. There were evenings when I'd just go to bed earlier, because I couldn't have a conversation like in the old days. (Gabriela)*

Nowadays, television is the dominant medium for all, for several shared reasons. It keeps them company against, breaking their isolation since all of them are widows; it provides para-social interaction, identification and attachment to characters and narratives. It also assures them a sense of integration and something to talk about through the information about is happening in the outside. Their daily and week schedule is organized according to TV programs (soap operas, news shows, talk shows, the Sunday mass) and they are loyal to specific TV channels. Not surprisingly, the language of the programs also matters in a country where foreign contents are subtitled: all the programs they report watching are in Portuguese.

*Television keeps me company. Radio doesn't show images and I prefer television. I watch the afternoon shows, the soap operas and the news. (Lilia)*

*With the TV we know everything that's going on around here and abroad. And it has images...sometimes I don't get what they're talking about but I see the images and I understand a bit. (Gabriela)*

*This is always on in the same channels, either SIC or TV Madeira. As far as I'm concerned, since I've been alone, the television keeps me company. When I get up I switch it on, if nothing else just to hear the noise. But what I really like are the soap operas. I can spend all day watching soaps without leaving the living room.*

As a student wrote, this was the first time that she realized the importance of the TV placement in her grandmother's home:

*The TV set is on top of an old cupboard, right in the centre of the wall. Its personality is visible through the objects on display. Next to the TV, on the right-hand side, are family photos. On the left-hand side, there is a crucifix, a candle and a picture of a saint. With most family members having emigrated, the grandmother relies on religion and spends her days with the sound of television. (Student's essay)*

Most students depicted this research and learning experiences as a challenge and a discovery of something that was there but was invisible. Some noted that the interviews with the oldest family members revealed how they were able to overcome silences and secret stories of the family, affected by feelings such as social shame.

*Contrary to expected, the interviews were a revealing process, as useful for me, who learned family stories, as for the interviewees, since it promoted expressions and reflection about their life path. It deepened family ties and mutual understanding. This study brings forth questions for further analysis: how can older generations provide historical memory to help understand the present; how can young people contribute to alleviate the feelings of digital exclusion among older groups. (Student)*

## **Discussion**

On the background of the description of the research learning processes, it is possible to draw some methodological remarks in relation to the dynamics of recruitment and

leading of focus groups and conducting interviews, in terms of students' involvement and also in terms of the role of intergenerational relations for media research and education.

Students' involvement as field researchers proved to be relevant approach to *teaching* sociology of media and communication research *by doing*; not only because "such an approach will greatly enhance the sociology major by providing the student[s] with "hands on" research experience" (Takata & Leiting, 1987 : 144), but also because this kind of experience empowered heir sociological imagination and self-reflexivity. By this point of view, the choice of both the focus groups as a tool for research and the topic of generations to be investigated have been very productive.

It is worth noting, in fact, that the peculiar object of investigation – the generational identity and its relationship with the media- results in purely, objective, socio-demographic data (the age of the participants) and – at the same time – a subjective disposition that are easier to conduct for students; as Lunt and Livingstone (1996:15) noted. "the group establishes confidence more quickly, it moves more readily beyond platitudes toward analysis".

Furthermore, generational consciousness and the general mood of the evocation of the past (purely nostalgic, for example, or future-oriented), are directly affected by the degree of affinity, mutual understanding and intimacy of the participants.

This kind of recruitment of family members – which is often justly recommended in other kind of qualitative research – seems to be here very useful to improve some sociological skills. On the one hand, it made more visible the main research variable to be taken in account, that is the Mannheim's differentiation between generation as *location*, generation as *actuality* and generation as *unit*, visible in the comparative analysis. The influence of this variable – and its theoretical conceptualization – becomes quite acknowledgeable by the students involves in the study. On the other hand, the field work experience they had to conduct and critically report on media and generations contributed to a "contextual knowing", also underlined by Rantana's research on media and globalization.

The intergenerational relation between facilitator and focus group's respondents has also to be highlighted. In fact, the age gaps and – sometimes – the kinship between them may sound like a bias in the research design. Being aware of this, students

had to recognize that, as is well known, the researcher is always anyway *situated* in relation to his/her objects or respondents by the points of view of gender, nationality, age *and* generation *too*. The researcher's age and age gaps with respondents matter in a meaningful way in activating the interactions inside the groups, leading – for instance – the participants to assume a "pedagogical" and "explaining" attitude in self-accounting.

Focus group and family's life story interviews as tools in Audience research are here understood "not by analogy to the survey, as a convenient aggregate of individual opinions, but as a simulation of these routines. Since these relatively inaccessible communicative contexts can help us discover the processes by which meaning is socially constructed through everyday talk" (Lunt & Livingstone, 1996: 9), this kind of dynamic is not to be seen as a methodological bias. On the contrary, they may be seen as a reproduction – in the research field – of the same social dynamics developed in both the intra-generational and inter-generational relations, which are parts of the processes of generational identities building.

In other words, in the focus group or in the family interviews as well as in the everyday life, generational identities are produced through discursive performances happening "in front of" the other generations, to highlight differences and sometime oppositions toward previous or following cohorts. Therefore focus groups and family interviews don't limit to record some data, but reproduce the process from which those data emerge, positioning the student-as-a-researcher in him/her proper relation with the informants. Thus this kind of exercise could improve the students' reflexivity (Jenkins, 1995).

This methodological framework opens room to other suggestions for research in generation. Inter- and intra-generational dynamics could, in fact, be emphasized adopting different combinations of age cohorts of participants and facilitators: for instance involving young students in researching the elders and their memories, so to reproduce the grandparents/grandchildren attitude in self-accounting; or, on the other side, designing interviews which couple of grandparents and grandchildren, mediated by adults. Some innovative research tools could be thus developed. As Huisman (2010) says:

*"Hearing real stories [...] brings the readings to life. Students apply the sociological imagination by focusing on individual's life story or biography"*

*and situating that story within a larger structural context. When students hear over and over again how individual lives are shaped by larger structural forces, it drives home the inextricable connection between history and biography. This experience deepens students' comprehension of social structure and agency and results in a majority of students reflecting about their own social locations and family histories.” (Huisman, 2010: 114)*

In addition, we cannot forget that the research processes are *situated* in well-defined historical moments, and are affected by those moments; especially, our present times affect our memories of the past. As it is visible in some transcriptions, such economic or political trends as crisis or revolutions contribute to shape the gaze on the past in a really passionate way.

Some notes for reflection can be proposed about the educational gain of this kind of methodologies based on the students' involvement. On the media studies side, students focused on very different branches can learn a lot by researching media memories from the voices of witnesses: not only research methodology or peculiar topic such as media and globalization, as we have already seen, but also media and social history, audiences and reception, as well as journalism and news, or political and participation. This pedagogical approach confirms that students can be greatly improved by this kind of source of direct knowledge, enabling self-reflexivity and theoretical awareness.

On the media education side – both in schools and in other educational contexts – this discipline can really welcome such methodologies, gaining a tool for critical, contextualized, historical knowledge, and positioning children and young people in a research perspective.

## Annex

### Interview guide on Life Story and the Media used in the Digital Inclusion and Participation project

NB: *The question order doesn't really matter. Once a topic or a main question is introduced, the remaining questions should be used only with the aim of initiating a missing answer or specifying incomplete information.*

#### Part One

**Origin and family characterization:** *Let's start by talking about you and your family...*

- a. Could you tell me about the place where you were born? What memories do you have? How was your childhood?
- b. Is your family from that region? Tell me a bit about the place where your family is originally from (where were your parents born? And your grand-parents?)
- c. And what about the rest of your family? Do you have any brothers or sisters? (Ask if they were born in the same area/region/country). Are they older or younger?
- d. Do you have children? Where were they born?
- e. Nowadays, do you leave with any family members?

**Family mobility:** *Tell me about where you live... (city/town/village)*

- a. How many years have you lived here?
- b. For how long have you lived here? And your family?
- c. Where did you/they live?
- d. Where did you like mostly to live?
- e. (In case the person has moved from another place) – Why did you move here?
- f. (In case the person has moved from another country) – Did you have difficulties (or your family) in moving to Portugal?

**Occupation and schooling of the family members: personal course and family influence: *Tell me more about your job and your schooling history... and what do the rest of the family members do***

- a. What is your school attainment? When did you stop studying?
- b. What is your parents' level of education? And your grand-parents?
- c. Are you happy with your level of education? Would you have liked to study longer?
- d. Did your family give a lot or little importance to school?
- e. Does your current job correspond to what you had imagined when you were a child/or younger?
- f. How did you come to have this current job? Did you have any other jobs?
- g. Did anyone in your family influence your professional choices?
- h. What is/was your parents' professions?
- i. And what about your grandparents?
- j. And in reference to your schooling, was there anyone in your family that influenced you choices? Who?
- k. Looking back at your life, was there anything important that you learned from your family?
- l. Do you think that being male/female affected your life path? In what way?

**Practices and personal and family experiences: *Tell me about your daily life...***

- a. Could you describe me a usual day for you, for instance, yesterday?
- b. What do you do when you have a day off, for example Saturday or Sunday?
- c. When you were a child, what parties did your family usually have? What occasions did your family get together and celebrate?
- d. And nowadays, has anything changed? Could you kindly describe a typical family party?
- e. (in case he/she came from a foreign country) What was your life like in your country? How was a typical day for you there?
- f. (in case of being a parent) In what ways are your parents/children/grandchildren different to you?
- g. What do you think that differentiates your family from the others? And what do you think make your family similar to the others?

## Part Two

### **Personal history with the media: Let's talk about your free time when you were a child or a young person... and also nowadays.**

- a. When you were a child, what were your favorite activities, how did you entertain yourself? And later on, in your adolescent/youth?
- b. When you were a child/adolescent what did you usually read? Why?
- c. In reference to TV, which programs did you watch normally? Why?
- d. And in reference to the radio, what did you usually listen to?
- e. Do you remember when your family got a radio/a TV set? Who brought it home? Who set it up at home?
- f. What other information and entertainment devices/equipments did you have at home when you were a child? (Radio, turn-table, tape recorder, video, gaming console, computer and so forth...)
- g. And nowadays, does your family have cable or satellite TV? When did they get it?
- h. (Other personal communication media). Do you have a cell phone? What type of mobile phone do you have? What are its characteristics? What kinds of use do you give it?
- i. Going back to your family, who was the first person to own a mobile phone?
- j. (In case of being an immigrant) Do you use the mobile phone to contact your family and friends? What other media do you use to contact your family?
- k. Do you have a camera or a camcorder? What do you usually use it for? When you were a child, did your family also have any of these equipments?
- l. Do you usually listen to the music? What kind of music do you prefer? How do you usually listen to it, what media do you use?
- m. Do you usually watch films? What kind of films? What media do you use for films?

### **Media use nowadays: Tell me about the media you use nowadays...**

- a. What mass media (newspapers, magazines, radio, television...) do you usually use?
- b. With which mass media do you spend more time with? Why?
- c. What for? Do you use it for any special reason?

- d. What mass media do you use to keep yourself informed, to know the news?
- e. Why do you prefer this mass media over the others?
- f. For instance, what mass media did you use to follow the last electoral campaign?
- g. (Only for immigrants): What is the best way for you to be informed about events in your country?
- h. What mass media do you use mainly for entertainment?

### **Part Three**

#### **Computer and internet use: Let's talk about computer and internet use**

- a. Does your family have a computer? How long have they had it? In your home, where is it?
- b. Who was the first person to bring a computer home?
- c. Do you have your own computer?
- d. What are the main uses of a computer for you?
- e. Does your family have access to the internet at home? How long have they had it? It is broadband?
- f. Where can you access the internet at home?
- g. How often do you use the internet? (if they access in different places, ask about the most frequent)
- h. Do you usually use the internet outside home? Where? How frequent do you do it?
- i. In general, for what reasons do you use the internet? Why?
- j. Do you use the internet for different things in different places?
- k. (This question assumes the person speaks Portuguese; if this is not evident ask if the person use the internet in Portuguese). Besides the Portuguese, do you use the internet in other languages? Which?
- l. How did you learn to use the internet? Were you helped by any family members? Who? Were you helped by a friend? Were you helped by a work colleague?
- m. Do you usually use the internet with anybody else at home?
- n. And with your friends, do you normally use the internet with them?
- o. Do you usually play videogames? How do you play (computer, gaming consoles and so on...). And what about the other family members?
- p. (For those who use the internet outside the home). When you use the internet outside the home, do you usually use it with anybody else?

- q. (For those who don't use the internet). If you don't usually use the internet do you know where you can access it?
- r. Why haven't you done it yet?
- s. If you don't use the internet yet, do you have any idea what could you do with the internet?

## **About the Author**

Cristina Ponte, PhD and Habilitation on Media and Journalism Studies, lectures at FCSH/NOVA, New University of Lisbon, Portugal. Her research examines media, journalism and society; children, youth and media; media and generations, with focus on the family; digital inclusion. Coordinating the Portuguese team in the EU Kids Online Project since 2006, she has a wide experience on leading international and large teams of researchers, including the Working Group on Audiences, Transforming Societies (2010-2014), and the funded projects Digital Inclusion and Participation (2009-2011), and Children and Young People in the News (2005-2007). She is author or editor of ten books and several articles in Portuguese and English. A former vice chair of the Audience and Reception Section of European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA) from 2008 to 2012, she is currently vice-chair of the ECREA Temporary Working Group on Children, Youth and Media.



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