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# Connecting Generations. A Research and Learning Approach for Media Education and Audience Studies

Conectando generaciones: investigación y aprendizaje en educación en medios y estudios de audiencia

## ABSTRACT

Based on theoretical and methodological orientations from authors' previous research on media and generations, this article presents a research and learning process involving supervised field work conducted by graduate students from a Master Seminar on Media Studies at FCSH, New University of Lisbon. Acting as facilitators of focus groups composed of older participants, exploring intergenerational and intragenerational differences and similarities that emerge from different age cohorts, and critically reflecting on this experience on their individual essays, students were able to build a contextual knowledge of media uses among their grand-parents' and parents' generation in Portugal. The choice of focus groups as a tool for research and the topic of generations to be investigated within Media Studies proved to be very productive. The article argues on the potentialities of this intergenerational relation between facilitator and focus groups' respondents as a way of activating the interactions inside the groups, leading –for instance– the participants to assume an «explaining» attitude in self-accounting. Final notes are presented about 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.

## RESUMEN

A partir de orientaciones teóricas y metodológicas previas sobre medios de comunicación y generaciones, este artículo presenta un proceso de investigación y aprendizaje a partir de la supervisión del trabajo de campo desempeñado por estudiantes licenciados en el Seminario del Máster en Medios de Comunicación en la Facultad de Ciencias Sociales y Humanas de la Universidad Nueva de Lisboa. Los estudiantes implicados lograron construir conocimiento contextual sobre el uso de los medios en la generación de sus abuelos y en la de sus padres en Portugal, actuando como facilitadores en los grupos de discusión, formados siempre por participantes de mayor edad, explorando las diferencias y similitudes intrageneracionales que emergen en grupos de diferente edad y llevando a cabo una reflexión crítica sobre la experiencia en sus informes individuales. La elección de los grupos de discusión como herramienta para la investigación y la elección del tema en el marco del Estudio de los Medios de Comunicación resultó muy eficaz. Este artículo pretende defender la potencialidad de esta relación intergeneracional entre los facilitadores y los miembros de los grupos de discusión como forma de activar la interacción entre grupos, permitiendo, por ejemplo, que los participantes asuman una actitud explicativa en sus propias respuestas. Las notas finales que se presentan contemplan las ventajas de esta metodología para la Educación en Medios y para diferentes ramas del Estudio de los Medios, como la historia de los medios de comunicación e historia social, el periodismo o la participación política.

## KEYWORDS / PALABRAS CLAVE

Audience, media education, media studies, media and generations, qualitative methodology, interview, focus groups. Audiencia, educación en medios, estudio de los medios de comunicación, medios y nuevas generaciones, metodología cualitativa, entrevista, grupos de discusión.

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## 1. Introduction

The paper reflects on the potentialities for media education and for audience studies that emerge from a research and learning approach involving intergenerational relations between graduate students and mature adults, inspired by the authors' previous research in the projects «Media and Generations in Italian Society» (2006-09) and «Digital Inclusion and Participation» (2009-11).

The project *Media and Generations in Italian Society* (Colombo & al., 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» (2009-2011) funded by the UTAustin/Portugal program aimed to understand practices of users and non-users of digital media, focusing on deprived social groups in Portugal and the US. Generations emerged as a critical issue, 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 have distinguished seven age cohorts since the 1930s, based on the relation between adolescence and traumatic events or the media: «Millennials», 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 1950s»; «Greatest Generation», who experienced the traumatic times of the Second World War. Al-

though popular and internationally disseminated, these definitions did not work in Portugal for adults and the elderly, due to significant historical differences and this acknowledge stimulated research on media and generations (Ponte, 2011a; Ponte, 2012).

Participating in the COST network «Transforming Audiences, Transforming Societies», we identified common grounds in the above research projects, both related to the media's role in the definition of generation. A key concept 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 adolescence; 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 taken-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 constitute 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; 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 extent the media experiences contribute to shape the collective identity of a generation, but also comparing collective identities developed by people who were born and grew up in the same period of time, though 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 historical 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 explored 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, as reported elsewhere Aroldi & Ponte, (2012).

Adapting the methodology used in the Italian Project, the Portuguese methodology was empowered with a new tool: the involvement of supervised students in the field work. The current article aims to stress the potentialities of this orientation for media education and audience studies.

## 2. Material and methods

The potential of students' ability to learn beyond their current knowledge level through guidance from and collaboration with adults or with groups of peers has been explored in relation to concepts such as constructivist learning, communities of practice or identity development (Hunter & al., 2006). Among others, Baxter (1999; 2004) sustains that the move from absolute to contextual knowing is a shift from an externally directed view of knowing to one that is internally oriented, promotes identity development as «self-authorship» (including learning through scientific inquiry) and is better supported by a constructivist-developmental pedagogy situating learning in students' experience.

Within Media Studies, Rantanen's (2005) and Vettenranta's (2011) teaching on media and globalization using mediagraphies may be related to this perspective. 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 filling a globalisation factors table that in-

cludes the place and time of born, home country, number of siblings, education, languages spoken, the first travel abroad, changes in the lifestyle and in class, uses of media and communication, ideology and identity (Rantanen, 2005).

From a media education perspective, this approach «combines 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 mea-

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ning which can only be understood in its contexts) and a socio-cultural perspective (considering the media as artefacts)» (Vettenranta, 2011: 372-373). Carrying out research on their own family, students gained an impression of how globalization had an impact on the individuals in their families. This contextualised knowledge was visible when they wrote for instance that they «had obtained thought-provoking experiences about the inadequate education of previous generations, the large number of children, the changing ideologies and the lack of access to the media» (Vettenranta, 2011: 377).

In Portugal, the project «Digital Inclusion and Participation» (2009-11) used a similar approach, stimulated by our US partner J. Straubhaar, also Professor of Global Media who has a large experience of involving students in collecting life stories concerning the media. As part of that project, at FCSH, MSc seminars on Media Research included supervised fieldwork, as reported elsewhere (Ponte, 2011b; Ponte & Simões,

2012). In the 2011-12, following the theoretical and methodological orientations of the Italian project on media and generations, the nine students that attended this MSc seminar were oriented to collect and analyse similar data<sup>1</sup>.

First sessions introduced the theoretical and methodological frameworks. Students read and commented literature on «media domestication» (Silverstone, Hirsch & al., 1993), Bourdieu's concepts of capital, field and habitus adapted to the digital experience (Rojas, Straubhaar & al., 2012), «generation» (Mannheim, 1927) and follow-ups such as «generational semantic» (Corsten, 1999) or generational belonging» (Aroldi, 2011). Methodologically, students were presented to qualitative methods (Bryman, 2004; Lobe & 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 other documentation. A focus-group simulation allowed students not only to place themselves as participants, recalling and confronting their memories about events and their media experiences. They also become aware of the processes of generating ideas and of facilitating the discussion while following the script. Students were also instructed on ethical and transcription procedures.

Focus groups were conducted in December 2011. Their composition was based on personal relationships and snowball recruitment. In all, participants knew each other which facilitated a familiar atmosphere. For the purpose of this article we will analyse six focus groups in which participants were older than the students-facilitators. The one with elderly people was held in a day-care center, the others occurred at home, on the week-end, after a dinner or around the afternoon tea. At the end of the discussion, all participants filled in a questionnaire with demographic questions as well as questions on their media uses.

In January, the seminar discussed students' transcriptions looking at generatio-

nal belonging, generational units and generational semantics and the media's role in these processes. This discussion facilitated the writing of individual essays (around 4000 words), which should integrate the theoretical approaches into the analysis of the respective focus group.

### 3. Results

In this section we briefly characterize focus groups' participants, compare results by age cohorts and present information for the further discussion.

As Table 1 shows, two focus groups had six participants and four had five participants. Born between 1940 and 1978, most of these 32 participants lived their youth years in metropolitan areas (contrasting with their parents' youth lived in rural areas), almost all surpassed their parents' preparation but less than half reached tertiary education. These trends on place and education attainment translate demographic and social dynamics that crossed the 1960's and 1970's in the Portuguese society as shown elsewhere (Aroldi & Ponte, 2012).

• 1940-1952 – «We are the ones who experienced the dictatorship's consequences»

FG1 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 large [urban] centres, which facilitated access to culture and education» (Student A).

In spite of different experiences, the national context emerged as a constraint unity. Participants com-

**Table 1. Participants by gender, education and place where the youth times were lived in**

Born in	FG	Gender		Mothers' education				Fathers' education				Own education			Youth lived in a...	
		M	F	N	B4	B9-S	T	N	B4	B9-S	T	B4	B9-S	T	Metro-politan area	Other local
1940-1952	FG1	2	4	1	5	0	0	1	4	1	0	0	5	1	4	2
1953-1965	FG2	3	3	2	4	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	1	5	6	0
	FG3	3	2	3	2	0	0	3	2	0	0	0	4	1	0	5
	FG4	2	3	1	1	3	0	1	1	1	2	0	1	4	1	4
1966-1978	FG5	3	2	0	5	0	0	0	4	1	0	0	4	1	3	2
	FG6	3	2	0	3	2	0	0	2	2	1	0	4	1	5	0
Total		16	16	7	20	5	0	5	19	5	3	0	19	13	19	13

Legends: M=Male; F=Female; N=No level; B4=Basic, 4 years; B9-S=Basic, 9 years, Secondary; T=Tertiary.

monly 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 childhood and adolescence times. Television did not 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 (Balzac, Zola, Eça) were invoked as ways of accessing information and culture. At the present, while television is the key media for information, particularly among these women who do not access the internet, the pleasure of reading literature continues alive among all.

Gender discrimination was a key topic in a focus group quantitatively dominated by women. They were proud to recall that they had participated in social changes when they introduced practices such as having a driver's licence, smoking or wearing trousers in their morally constrained neighbourhoods. Being retired before the informatisation of their administrative jobs, they defined themselves as the «generation of the typewriter».

This session generated follow-ups. After uploading a video on the session in his blog, a participant felt proud when we were told that the video was seen in Italy; the student-facilitator decided to focus her Master dissertation on senior users and non users of digital media, which is already concluded.

- 1953-1965 – Different generational belongings

Participants in FG2, FG3 and FG4 include people that lived the end of the dictatorship in their childhood, adolescence and youth years. 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 sense of belonging (the generation as a unit) is more visible than in the previous group. Common references to the Carnation Revolution in 1974 provided distinctive pictures of that political transition. Besides age differentiation, the place where the adolescents and young people lived during these years revealed to be significant.

Composed by participants that were University students living in metropolitan areas in the end of the 60's and the beginning of the 70's, FG2 revealed politically and culturally engaged youth times. Coming from urban families with small business, 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 Revolution, they lively reported where they were, what they did and even how they were dressed. The media diet of their youth times (movies, music, newspapers, magazines) continue relevant nowadays, much more than TV. All are frequent internet users.

FG3 was composed by participants that were adolescents in 1974, shared a rural origin and whose 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 («In the bars we had to be careful with what we said») and a traditional local order that disconsidered poor families as their own's. The Carnation Revolution was associated with an unexpected 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 lyceum was for the rich; the technical school for the poor») were the most recalled memories of their youth times. 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, women don't use the internet, the men are occasional users. TV is the main medium for all.

FG4 was composed by participants born by the middle of the 60's that mainly lived their childhood and youth times in a small countryside town. Their parents, younger than the previous ones had more years of school attainment. The scarce personal memories of these participants on the social change lived in 1974-1975 evidenced 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, equally for boys and girls. From more wealthy households than the previous FG, their media memories are dominated by turntable, radio and TV. Nowadays all are regular internet users,

mainly for professional reasons, but their media diet continue dominated by television.

Comparing these FGs, students realised that besides age, place 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 FG3 and FG4 only recalled local events related to their past, FG2 had memories about the Vietnam or Biafra wars, the May 1968 demonstrations, the academic crisis in Coimbra in 1969, the robbery of the National Bank for political reasons, in 1970. The media diet also diverges: television was almost ignored in the media memories of the most engaged group, while the others define TV as their «magic box». While going to the cinema was a common experience, the movies and the associated audience experience were clearly different, as shown in table 2.

- 1966-1978 – «We are the generation which gave the world what the world has today...».

The ten participants of FG5 and FG6 lived their adolescence 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 audio-visual media, their historical memories include international and national events such as the fall of the Berlin wall and the end of the «Soviet Empire» (1988-91), the first Golf war (1991), the Columbia disaster (1985), the Pope visiting Fátima (1982), the first Portuguese test-tube baby (1984), the earthquake in Azores and the arrival of colour TV (1980). Although historical memories were charged by TV screens, students were surprised by participants' memories associated with outdoors, surpassing their expectable focus on the media in a decade marked by changes in the global, national and local landscape: «Memories of street games drew my attention due to their intensity. I was

Table 2: Memories of the movies in the 1970's.

FG2	FG3
Male 1. We went to Quarteto [a four-room cinema placed in a modern/intellectual neighbourhood of Lisbon], to the midnight double-features...	Male 1. Because I didn't have a TV I went to the movies a lot. At that time, there was a big boom of westerns. It was almost sacred to go on Tuesdays and Saturdays...
Male 2. Yeah, and you know what I liked to watch with my friends at the time? Woody Allen movies!	Female 1. Not me... I stayed at the village.
Female 1. And Bergman!	Female 2. I used to go.
Female 2. In those I'd fall asleep! I fell asleep watching Wild Strawberries in Quarteto.	Male 2. The cinema street might have a hundred and something parked motorcycles. Those couples... people from the villages. And there were people who, when westerns were playing, would come dressed as cowboys. There was one who would come with a gunbelt with guns and a cowboy hat...
Female 1. That one I really liked! I'm sorry, but we all had nice discussions, drinking coffee, after a Bergman movie...	

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 B).

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 B). «I was surprised by the intensity with which TV and radio shows marked their adolescence in particular, through music and humour. Music hits, in particular, wrapped important moments of their lives, bringing back memories: friendships, dating, marriage, the birth of children, recollections of parents and siblings» (Student C).

In spite of the common interests of these two focus groups, students identified two generational units defined by their ways of evaluating past and present times. FG5 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, FG6 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!!».

Two notes before the discussion of these results: Initially students did not consider the generational gap between themselves and the participants had affected the focus-group dynamics. They stressed the friendly environment, the participants' involvement in the discussion, the pleasure of remembering together moments of adolescence and youth spent in the same historical context. However, highly contextualised descriptions could reflect the will to better transmit experiences and knowledge to a younger person – in most cases, from their inner personal circle. An example is the question asked by a senior to the student-facilitator, «do you know what the Marshall Plan was?» in his talk on the difficulties experienced after the Second World War.

The second note goes to the reflexive exchange of ideas activated by the four groups' discussion. In fact, frequently made participants linked past times and personal biography with present times of economic and social crisis, as it is visible in this dialogue:

- Male 1 – «It [the 80's] was also the time of the highways, of the tar...».
- Female 1 – «At the level of communications, in fact, it was a good investment. Although with the usual deviation in the budget...».
- Male 2 – «For me, the investment in highways is good and bad at the same time. They put an end to the railway. Nowadays, we have to save money. The railway is far less expensive but there are no trains. We cannot use the train anymore...».

#### 4. Discussion

On the background of the description of the research process and its main results, and integrating results from the Italian project on media and generations in which this research is based on, it is possible to draw some methodological remarks in relation to the dynamics of recruitment and leading of focus groups, 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 a 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 their 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 to self-history within the frame of a collective, generational «we-Sense» (Corsten, 1999; Aroldi, 2011). First of all, this leads to work on groups consistent in composition 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 towards 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. The choice to realize the three focus groups with the age-cohort between 1953 and 1966 recruiting students' parents and their relatives or friends produced a greater homogeneity of discourses that stressed the sense of belonging to a group that shares values and interpretations. The same happened in the Italian project with a peculiar kind of in-depth interviews involving some couples of childhood friends.

This kind of recruitment –which is often justly not 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 involved 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 and Vetteranta's research on media and globalization.

The intergenerational relation between facilitator and focus group's respondents has also to be highlighted. In fact, as we have noted, the age gaps and –sometimes– the kinship between them may sound like a bias in the research design. Bearing aware of this, students had to recognize that, as well known, the researcher is always anyway situated in relation to his/her objects or respondents, namely by the points of view of gender, nationality, age and generation. 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.

Since the focus group as a tool in Audience research is to be understood «not by analogy to the survey, as a convenient aggregate of individual opinion, but as a simulation of these routine but relatively inaccessible communicative contexts which can help us discover the processes by which meaning is socially constructed

awareness. To know others he cannot simply study them, but must also listen to and confront himself» (Gouldner, 1970: 493) – 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 with couple of grandparents and grandchildren, mediate 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 an 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

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through everyday talk» (Lunt & Livingstone, 1996: 9), this kind of dynamic is not to be seen as a methodological bias. On the opposite, 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 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 do not 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. Remembering Gouldner – «knowledge about social worlds is also contingent upon the knower's self-

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 this; especially, our present times affect our memories of the past. As it is visible in some of these quotations, such economic or political trends as crisis or revolutions contribute to shape the gaze on the past in a really passionate way.

## 5. Conclusion

Some notes can be proposed about the educational gain of this kind of methodology 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 improving by this kind of source of direct knowledge, empowered self-reflexivity and theoretical awareness.

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

### Foot Note

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