

International and interdisciplinary conference

Young adults and circulation of cultural products *Mediterranean perspectives*

Organized by the University of Paris 13 - LabSic LABEX ICCA



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Université Paris 13 – IUT de Bobigny – Bâtiment l’Illustration
1 rue de Chablis – 93000 Bobigny

In partnership with

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Argumentary

The "sociology of youth" too often implies an identifiable distinction between young people (adolescents or post-adolescents), who are in the process of constructing their identity, and adults, who have already completed this process (Cicchelli, 2001). And the sociology of the media and ICT has adopted the same distinction. If one is not talking about adulthood, one is presumed to be talking about youth. But the concept of youth is itself problematic. How is it to be defined? Who is young? Who is not? The question is particularly acute in a context where the prolongation of education has led to the status of youth becoming less determinate (Bigot, 2007). The categorisation of age groups is socially constructed and arbitrary, and the issue is a contentious one in all societies. An individual can be young for one person and old for another (Bourdieu, 1992).

In recent years, the term "young adult" has been much used by the media and the cultural industries, but also sociologists; and this has added further complexity to the analysis. Though an apparent oxymoron, it denotes a concept to which terms such as "adolescent" or "young person" are inadequate. It is pivotal to the study of interdependences between generations, as well as relations between young adults and the institution of the family (Cicchelli, 2001). In some Mediterranean countries, for example, a growing number of people aged over 30 continue to live with their parents, or are financially dependent on them (Chambaz, 2001), whereas in other cases it is these same people who are the breadwinners. In other words young adults, generally between the ages of 18 and 30, are at the boundary between dependence and autonomy; between education and a career; between living with their parents and living apart from them.

The aim of this conference is to examine the relationship between young adults and cultural products in a digital, globalised age. The focus will be on the logics and the modes of production, distribution, circulation and consumption of cultural products intended for young adults in the diversified geographical space of the Mediterranean.

Apart from being a crossroads of civilisations, the Mediterranean basin is a problem for the social sciences (Cousin, Crivello, 2008). Looking at the region in terms of the cultural products that circulate within it means analysing, on the one hand, economic, political and cultural relationships between different countries, and, on the other hand, between the region and the rest of the world. It also means comparing a number of geopolitical projects, based on convergent or divergent flows of informational and cultural products. The idea is to find out how young adults relate to these products at the present time, without venturing into projections about the future. Since the start of the 1990s there have been enormous changes in the informational landscape of the region, with a proliferation of cultural products originating either there or elsewhere. The new networks and formats are both formal and informal. Since the middle of the 1990s, a considerable amount of research has been carried out on information flows and restructurings of the media, particularly in the Arab world; but much less work has been done on the circulation of cultural products – the cinema, television, music, audiovisual productions, books, video games, etc. – and the way in which they are used by 18-30 year-olds. The relations between the consumption of cultural products and the changes the region is undergoing remain, for the moment, largely unexplored.

This conference will look at the relationship between young adults and the circulation of cultural products in the countries of the region, at three levels of analysis.

- The macro level will be concerned with geopolitical and cultural relationships, and the role played by the cultural products that circulate round the region. The emphasis will be on the nature of products and services, along with national and transnational strategies and roles.
- There will be a mid-level focus on the strategies of economic, social and ethnic groups.

- The micro level will examine individual practices, and young adults' representations of the cultural products they produce and/or consume.

Contributions will centre on one of the following themes.

1. National and transnational cultural policies

Cultural policies are necessarily aimed at particular groups (Dubois, 2012). How are they developed, and in particular with regard to young adults? What do decision-makers know about their target groups? If, in some countries, young adults are becoming less interested in "traditional" cultural practices, how does cultural policy respond to this? And more generally, can one talk about a particular "cultural policy" across the different countries of the Mediterranean? What functions are assigned to culture, and to cultural policies framed with young adults in mind?

The question of cultural policy also raises that of broadening access to culture. What different positions are to be found in the region? And what about freedom of cultural expression? What attitudes do States display with regard to informal markets in cultural products, which flourish in most Mediterranean countries, and are used, in particular, by young adults?

Cultural policies cannot be looked at in isolation from the financial and economic challenges involved in production and distribution processes. In the Mediterranean region, as regards culture, what is the connection between political and economical forces (whether endogenous or not)? What policies are being adopted, given the activities of the multinationals, and the fact that digitisation has led to the appearance of new economic players – Google, Yahoo, etc. – for whom young adults are a prime target?

The Mediterranean region is one of migratory flows, both inwards and outwards. What does the mobility of people within this space mean for cultural policy, and especially with regard to young adults of immigrant origin?

Cultural products are central to national foreign policy. And this can have interesting ramifications. In what way, for example, does the existence of official cultural centres influence the consumption patterns of young adults? And more generally, do differences between the types of cultural product offered to young adults in different Mediterranean countries create imbalances in cultural relations? Are there national approaches to cultural policy that can be harmonised within a framework of transnational initiatives?

2. Cultural economic strategies and markets

Over the last two decades, cultural industries worldwide have experienced unprecedented technological and economic change. Digitisation has been a vector of a "revolution" that is far from over, and one that calls for interpretation. The cultural industries of the Mediterranean region are fully engaged in this movement, opening up access to a range of international content but also giving a new dimension to their own products, and to regional exchanges. An analysis of production centres can shed light on the variety and intensity of flows around the region, with young adults occupying a key position. And the amount of content that is currently being produced in the southern part of the region is an illustration of this. The growing importance of Arab countries and Turkey in the production of television series, the influence of companies such as Rotana Records in the music business, and the ART (Arab Radio and Television), MBC (Middle East Broadcasting Center) and LBC (Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation) networks – these are organisations whose output is aimed essentially at young adults.

But the most striking changes are taking place upstream from these industries, in publication, distribution and marketing, with new channels and forms of communication such as digital television, musical platforms and file-sharing networks, which represent a threat, but also a potential opportunity, for traditional producers of content. Over the last decade, for example, software giants such as Google, Facebook and Microsoft, and manufacturers such as Apple and Samsung, have made use of links between computing and telecommunications in the digitised creation of cultural products, and their distribution via the Internet, to develop new forms of intermediation in the Mediterranean region without necessarily being physically present there. National cultural industries are being profoundly affected by the arrival of these new organisations, which are extremely diverse in terms of economic model, industrial structure, type of intervention, etc.

What modes of operation and implementation are to be found in this region? What strategies are being used to attract young adults? What is the influence of the cultural industries, and the nature of their activities? What are the relations between economic forces in different parts of the region, and with other parts of the world? Do these forces undermine existing hierarchies? Do they increase the range and availability of cultural products by favouring access to a growing amount of content, both amateur and professional? Or, on the contrary, do they have the effect of cutting off funding for the production of content? Do they increase the volume of exchanges within the Mediterranean region? Are international players giving ground to alternative regional forces? In the production and distribution of content, do automation and digitisation have positive or negative effects on employment in the cultural industries?

Within the Mediterranean region, besides the aforementioned structures, there are more "discreet" networks around which cultural products circulate (T. Mattelart, 2011), notably cheap imported counterfeit and pirate goods that can be attractive to young adults. What are the consequences of this phenomenon? And how do the economic and political authorities react?

3. Patterns of consumption and circulation

What has digital technology modified in the consumption of cultural products such as films, television series and music? Do consumption patterns vary across countries, regions, age groups and/or social strata? How do cultures, traditions and socio-economic contexts influence trends in consumption?

What kinds of cultural product are of interest to young adults in the Mediterranean region? How has digitisation changed consumption patterns since the start of the 21st century? Are people now combining "traditional" media and ICT, or have they remained faithful to existing models, at least in some sectors? Are tensions appearing between different types of consumption? And what might be the result of such tensions?

How does digitisation contribute to cultural diversification? Can it lead to new forms of cultural domination? Does it favour the introduction of cultural products from outside the Mediterranean basin? Might it tend to homogenise the production and consumption of cultural products? In what way does culture influence consumption patterns? And how do consumption patterns, in turn, affect collective and cultural consciousness?

4. Alternative cultural creativity among young adults

Digital innovation can present risks for cultural industries, but it can also open up new possibilities in terms of creativity and interactions between young adults. In this regard, we feel it is important to look at cultural production, circulation and appropriation.

With the developments that have been taking place in a number of Arab countries since the start of the present decade, and the economic crises in Greece and Spain, the political, economic and social

climate of the Mediterranean region has profoundly changed, particularly for 18-30 year-olds, whose public forms of expression differ from those of traditional militancy. The forums that originally brought together fans of reality television or series are now being used for political discussion (Van Zoonen et al., 2007). Are online platforms also serving to advance demands (Monnoyer-Smith, 2011)? What are their purposes? We are interested in two types of approach, namely those that are intentionally subversive, and those that are unwittingly transgressive, along with their consequences.

How do cultural products become objects of appropriation? How do young adults in the Mediterranean region use the Internet to distribute their music, videos, literature, dance, theatre, audiovisual creations and films? Recent studies (see, for example, Amanda Lenhart, *Pew Internet & American Life Project*, 2012) have brought to light specific ways in which video is used on-line by 12-17 year-olds. So what can be said about 18-30 year-olds in the Mediterranean region, in this respect? What are their reasons for producing and disseminating videos, as opposed to simply consuming them? And what type of content do they produce? Are they purely concerned with public phenomena such as flash mobs, happenings, Harlem Shakes, etc., or do they also want to demonstrate their creative talents? What role does narration play? Is there a place for humour and derision? In what sense can the videos in question be oppositional?

And finally, there is the influence of globalisation, or resistance to it. Does the cultural creativity of young people in Mediterranean countries reproduce pre-existing behaviour patterns, manifest differences or assert cultural specificities? What is the relation between young creative artists and cultural economics? How are artists assisted by economic forces? And to what ends?

We invite researchers from several disciplines to submit proposals according to the following fields:

- 1 - National and transnational public policies for culture
- 2 - Strategy of economic actors of culture and markets
- 3 - Habits, customs and modes of movement
- 4 - Alternative cultural creativity among young adults

Scientific Committee

- Florence Allard, Université de Lille 3, IRCAV, France
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- Marwan Kraidy, University of Pennsylvania, USA

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- Tristan Mattelart, Université Paris 8, MSH Paris Nord, CEMTI, France
- Pierre Moeglin, Université Paris 13, MSH Paris Nord, LABSIC, LABEX ICCA, France
- Sylvie Octobre, ministère de la Culture, Département des Etudes de la Prospective et des Statistiques (DEPS), France
- Dominique Pasquier, Télécom Paris Tech, France
- Bruno Péquignot, Université Paris Sorbonne nouvelle, CERLIS, LABEX ICCA, France
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- Naomi Sakr, Arab Media Centre, University of Westminster, United Kingdom
- Dima Saber, Media for Social Change in the Middle East, Birmingham School of Media, United Kingdom
- Tarik Sabry, Arab Media Centre, University of Westminster, United Kingdom
- Kaveri Subrahmanyam, College of Natural and Social Sciences Department of Psychology, California State University, Los Angeles, USA
- Hulya Ugur Tanriover, Galatasaray University – Communication Faculty - Istanbul - Turkey
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Calendar and Submission Procedures

- Deadline for submission of proposal abstracts from 3 000 to 4 000 characters (+ author's name, institution, position and e-mail address, axis) : **January 6, 2014**

- Proposals for papers, which will be evaluated in a double blind, should be sent by email to: colloquelabsic2014@gmail.com and colloquelabsic2014@orange.fr

- Notification: **March 3, 2014**

- Deadline for submission of final texts (30 to 35,000 characters including spaces) : **June 15, 2014**

Fees: Registration fees (including coffee breaks and lunch):150 euros for academics and confirmed researchers; 50 euros for phd students.

Accommodation: a list of hotels at preferential rates will be proposed by the conference organizers.