Media Generations: Objective and subjective media landscapes and nostalgia among generations of media users

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Summary:

This article discusses from an inter-cultural and inter-generational perspective the relationship between 'objective' media landscapes and how they are subjectively perceived among four different media generations. Based on a focus group study with media users in Sweden and Estonia of two tentative generations, the relationship between the 'objective' and 'subjective' media landscapes is analysed, as is how the landscapes produce nostalgia at the intersection of age, generation, life course and life situation. Based on the differences found in the cross-cultural and the cross-generational comparison, it is concluded that in relation to the formative years of the respondents, there are two different kinds of nostalgia produced: one individually based, focussing on childhood memories; and one social or collective, focussing on the formative years of the respondents.

Keywords: generation, media generations, media use, nostalgia, media landscapes, age, life course, life situation

Introduction

An important component in Karl Mannheim's (1928/1952) theory of generations is the 'fresh contact' with objects, events and phenomena during the 'formative years' in youth. Through fresh contact, generational experience is formed, and these experiences are held to impact on all later experience. To Mannheim, the most evolving formative moments were related to historical events, disasters, wars, crises of different sorts, etc.: national traumatic moments such as the murder of the Prime Minister (Olof Palme) or the President (John F. Kennedy), or disasters such as the 2006 tsunami, the Chernobyl disaster in 1986 or its counterpart in Fukushima in 2011, the German invasion of Poland in 1939, as well as more positive historical events such as the end of the Second World War in 1945, the end of the

Vietnam war in 1975, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, etc.

As Mannheim was interested in societal and historical change, his focus was on evolving societal events. These were moments that everyone in a given society was affected by, moments that actualized the 'dynamic compromise between mass and individual' (Ortega y Gasset 1923/1931: 15). Such a compromise includes responses from the social subjects confronted with them. And even if the responses to the events could vary, thus producing generational units that related the historical unfolding in collective – but separate – ways, the role of the event itself was paramount. However, it can be argued that there are also less spectacular, more personal and more mundane, even banal, moments which are formative. Many people can probably testify about the moment at which they discovered a cherished artist, film star, or novel that would make a lasting imprint on their lives. For some, it might be Elvis (or Tommy Steele), the Spice Girls or Lady Gaga, for others it might be Marlon Brando, James Dean, Greta Garbo or Marlene Dietrich, and for still others this moment might have occurred when they read *The Catcher in the Rye*, *The Lord of the Rings* or *The Twilight Saga*. These are smaller, much more personal events that might not be as revolutionary in character, but nonetheless have an individual impact that can be revived and returned to later in life. Of course, there is a collective dimension even to these moments: the rise and popularity of artists, and the fan cultures surrounding them, indeed occur at a specific point in historical time. But they are *felt* more personally, according to the principle that idols, fan objects and media texts more generally create a specific personal bond between the admirer and the cherished object.

One component in the generational media experience is thus the intimate relationship that develops with media personalities and content from one's formative youth period. This especially concerns music genres and stars. However, people also develop specific, sometimes passionate, relationships with reproduction technologies such as the vinyl record, music cassette tape, comics, and other now dead or near-dead media forms. Passion, however, is a dialectic concept that not only refers to the joyful desire for and intense emotional engagement with cherished objects, but also includes its dialectic opposite in the form of pain and suffering. This passion, it is argued in the article, is activated by the nostalgic relationships with past media experiences, the bittersweet remembrances of media habits connected to one's earlier life phases.

The aim of this article, then, is to analyse the relationship between the objective structures media users inhabit in the form of historical events and accessible media technologies on the one hand, and the subjective appreciation and appropriation of (some of) these technologies on the other. In order to capture the specificities of the generational experience, the analytical approach is inter-generational (relating different generations to each other) as well as inter-cultural (relating generations in different cultural settings). The argument is in four parts. In the next section a more detailed review of previous generation research is presented, with special attention to media perspectives, in order to theoretically frame the analytical model. This is followed by a section presenting the empirical basis for analysis in focus group interviews with Swedish and Estonian media users of two different

generations, born in the early 1940s and the early 1960s. This section also includes a description of the media landscapes in which the respective generations grew up. In a third section, the extent to which the respective generational groups subjectively relate to the media is analysed, with special focus on their media use during their formative years. In the final section, the wider implications of the nostalgic relationship to media are briefly discussed. The article then ends with a final concluding section.

1. Previous research on generations

Leaving aside buzz discourse in the form of the 'net generation' (Tapscott 1998), the 'digital natives' (Prensky 2001), 'generation X' (Coupland 1991) and 'digital generation' (Edmunds & Turner 2005, Buckingham & Willett 2006),[1] most research on generations takes its departure in Karl Mannheim's (1928/1952) essay 'The Problem of Generations' from the late 1920s. Mannheim, as well as the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset (1923/1931, 1930/1932), were writing in the wake of the First World War, and sought to capture 'the rhythm of ages' (Ortega y Gasset 1923/1931: 15) by which societies were changing. The interest of both Mannheim and Ortega y Gasset was thus not primarily the generations themselves, but rather generations as an explanatory factor for understanding why societies were changing.

Mannheim developed his generational theory as an alternative to Marx's class theory, whereby social class is the historical subject and the driver of social change. To Mannheim, it was rather the generation who was the social subject, but it is also evident that his theory borrowed more than a little from Marx's theory of class. A generation, in Mannheim's sense, is a group of people who have a similar relation to societal happenings. Drawing analogies with the class position of groups in society, Mannheim defined generation as 'the certain "location" (*Lagerung*) certain individuals hold in the economic and power structure of a given society' (Mannheim 1928/1952: 289). A basis for the generational location is naturally year of birth: all people born in the same year, for example, have a 'common location in the historical dimension of the social process' (p. 290).

However, as location in time taken in isolation would reduce a generation to an age cohort (cf. Burnett 2010: 48), Mannheim introduced the concept of generation as *actuality*. Actuality should be seen as opposed to generation as potentiality, and Mannheim develops his concept of generation as actuality against the background of Aristotle's (1997) concept of *entelechy*, a term that refers to the realization of something that previously existed as a potentiality, the 'inner aim' of something. Generation as actuality first appears when individuals who occupy the same historical location share the same experiences and become realized as a generation also *for* themselves (as opposed to *in* themselves – and here the analogy with Marx's class concept is evident). These experiences can naturally vary. Some are triggered by dramatic historical-political transformations, such as the demise of the Soviet Union and the sudden independent status of countries formerly under Soviet rule (cf. Opermann 2013; Kalmus et al. 2013; Siibak and Tamme 2013). Others might be triggered by media use and cultural experiences, such as cinema-going (Jernudd 2013) or shared,

historically situated music preferences (Suna 2013). But they all create a certain 'we-sense' among the members of the group (Corsten 1999: 258).

However, not everyone who shares the same experience of large and evolving societal events (revolutions, war, famine, etc.) will react to these events in exactly the same way. When faced with a specific phenomenon, individuals can 'work up the material of their common experiences in different specific ways', which will result in separate 'generation units' (Mannheim 1928/1952: 304), each of which will display 'an identity of responses' to the problems at hand (p. 306).

An important component in the formation of the generational experience is the phenomenon Mannheim calls 'fresh contact', that is, that moment at which an individual is confronted with a novelty of some sort (Mannheim 1928/1952: 293ff). As young people are lacking in experience compared to older people, fresh contacts will have a deeper impact on the young than on the old, and '[a]ll later experiences then tend to receive their meaning from this original set, whether they appear as that set's verification and fulfilment or as its negation and antithesis' (p. 298). Experience, then, appears in the form of a 'dialectical articulation, which is potentially present whenever we act, think or feel' (p. 298). Furthermore, individuals are most receptive in relation to phenomena they are confronted with around the age of 17 years, give or take a few years; this according to Mannheim, who, like Gumpert and Cathcart (1985), refers to research on the formation of language in an individual, of which it is said that the spoken dialect seldom changes after age 25 (Mannheim 1928/1952: 300). The way we relate to 'native' or 'arriving' media is parallel to the way we relate to our native language, as opposed to other languages we might learn later in life. In this sense the media have their own 'grammar', and like all grammar, it needs to be learnt and incorporated. Thus, each new medium an individual is confronted with will be read through the grammar of what could be termed his or her 'native media':

> Even when a person learns several spoken/written languages in a lifetime, the person will generally tend to interact with the world through the bias of the native language. It is our position that the early acquisition of a particular media consciousness continues to shape peoples' world view even though later they acquire literacy in new media. /…/ For example, those born into the age of radio perceive the world differently from those born into the age of television. (Gumpert & Cathcart 1985: 29)

Thus, one also should expect a certain homology in, for example, the way 16-22-year-olds relate to a certain media technology and its dominant uses, and that they should bring with them these relations when they grow older; we can find some evidence of this in Signe Opermann's (2013) analysis of the ways Estonian media users speak about the media.

Mannheim's theory of generations also has affinities to other theories that have tried to grasp the relationship between the individual and society. For example, there are striking similarities between Mannheim's concept of entelechy – the 'stratified

consciousness' and the 'similarity of location' he finds as the common denominator for the generational experience – and Raymond Williams's (1961/1965: 64f) concept *structure of feeling*; that is, the emotional structure through which we orient ourselves in culture and society. Williams also discusses this in terms of generational succession:

> One generation may train its successor, with reasonable success, in the social character or the general cultural pattern, but the new generation will have its own structure of feeling, which will not appear to have come 'from' anywhere. For here, most distinctly, the changing organization is enacted in the organism: the new generation responds in its own ways to the unique world it is inheriting, taking up many continuities, that can be traced, and reproducing many aspects of the organization, which can be separately described, yet feeling its whole life in certain ways differently, and shaping its creative response into a new structure of feeling. (Williams 1961/1965: 65)

So, both the entelechy and the structure of feeling are systems of durable dispositions that guide the actions and practices of the individual. This disposition will also include a specific understanding of the workings of the surrounding worlds, and a specific interpretive stance towards it. These systems will privilege certain ways of acting at the cost of others, although they will not determine individual action in every situation in minute detail. Through privileging certain modes of action over others, the concepts of entelechy and structure of feeling are also close to Bourdieu's concept of habitus; that is, the system of durable dispositions an individual has internalized through family upbringing and education and in relation to the surrounding society, and which imposes on the individual a specific disposition to act. Habitus is 'society inscribed in the body' (Bourdieu 1990: 63), and a 'durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations' (Bourdieu 1972/1977: 78) that encourages certain ways of acting over others.

Now, we could call the analytical perspective of generation a social theory of time, whereby individuals and groups are located in the historical process. However, arguably location in social and geo-political *space* (as well as material *place*) should be of equal importance for gained experiences. Dramatic events should, for example, mean different things depending on the national position one has. Having experienced evolving historical events, such as the student revolts in Paris in May 1968, the protests on Tiananmen Square in Beijing in 1989, or the tearing down of the Berlin Wall the same year, should be dependent on whether they were experienced on site or in mediated form. Arguably, such events touch people all over the world, but the response to them will vary depending on one's geographical relation to them.

As Judith Burnett (2010: 41ff) has helpfully shown, one needs to distinguish between age (and age cohorts), life course and generation. *Cohort* is the statistical unit used in positivist inquiry, in which its fixed boundaries are identified and objectified by the researcher. In Mannheim's words, a cohort is a generation as locality: it has its fixed position

in the historical process by the fact that it is constructed of people born in the same years. **Figure 1** illustrates such a cohort analysis of people born in the early 1930s, 1950s and 1980s, and their patterns of mobile phone use.
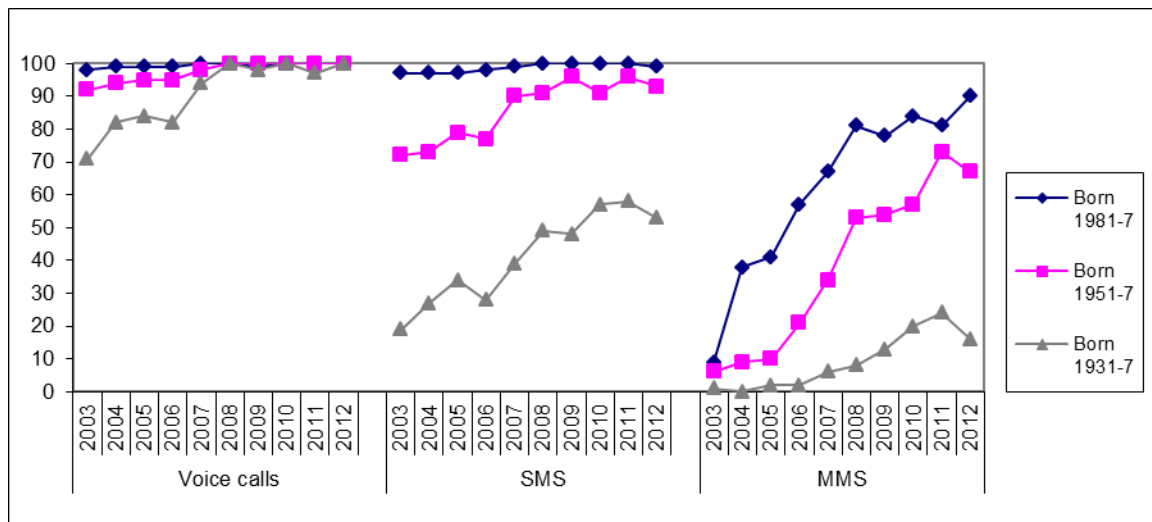
Figure 1: Generation as locality: three age cohorts and their use of three functions on the mobile phone 2003-2012. Use defined as use at all. Source: Bolin (2013: 526).

A generation, by contrast, also needs to perceive of itself as a generation to fulfil Mannheim's idea of generation as actuality. This is also why some analysis claiming to be generational analysis – such as Zukin et al. (2006), in which the 'generations' span several decades – is nothing but cohort analysis, and adds little to our understanding of generations in Mannheim's sense.[2] *Life course* or life-cycle analysis, on the other hand, concentrates on the individual and his or her trajectory through history. In its socio-psychological version it points to the 'narrativized /…/ journey of the self' (Burnett 2010: 43). It is, of course, evident that all such narratives do not follow the same trajectory, but there are at the same time general phenomena that each individual in a given society is confronted with: kindergarten, school, working life, etc. There are also some phases of life that are common for many – although not all – people, for example having children, going to university, marrying, etc. This means that many (but not everyone) will share the experience of marriage and child-rearing, which will contribute to a shared experience that can make up common combinations as a basis for specific generational units. Some experiences will also extend *between* generations, and can thus be the basis for inter-generational shared experience. We could call some of these circumstances that are common during the life course *life situations*. Being employed, having children, being a student, etc., will affect the amount of time possible to spend with the media, as well as which media are accessible and on what occasions. Children and pensioners, for example, have more free time to spend on media consumption than do those who work (Gahlin 1977).

Life course is thus tightly connected to *age*, in the meaning that it is a phase of life you enter in order to then leave: We are 17 years old for one year of our life. We can never

return to this moment, as we are doomed to leave it behind. This is contrary to your generational belonging, which you can never leave. Age is when the individual moves *through* time, while generation is when the individual moves *with* time.

The analysis of generations has been a vivid theme within sociology (e.g. Eisenstadt 1956, Murdock and McCron 1976, Frith 1978, Jamison and Eyerman 1994, Vincent 2005, Wyatt 1993, Corsten 1999, Burnett 2010, Pilcher 1994 and 1998), but the interest within media research has come much later. There are some early examples of trying to adapt the generation concept to media studies (e.g. Gumpert and Cathcart 1985, Bolin 1997), but it is not until lately that the interest has sparked off in wider circles, and that the concept of generation has been thoroughly theorized (see several contributions in Bolin and Skogerbø 2013).

Empirical studies of generational experience of media have most often been on the more structural level that Mannheim privileged in his writings. They have also most often focused on one generational cohort: the 1960s (Eyerman & Turner 1998), broadband (Colombo & Fortunati 2011), mobile phone (Bolin & Westlund 2009), video (Bolin 1997), new media generally (Loos et al., 2012), etc. Few studies have analysed inter-generational relationships; that is, across several different generations. There are instances of what could be called 'family research', whereby three generations from the same family have been studied, for example focusing on the reproduction of gender in Sweden (Åström 1986 and 1990) and, more related to media, Terhi Rantanen's (2005) analysis of three generational families in China, Israel and Finland. Rantanen's approach, however, is not on generations per se but on globalization. A similar perspective is developed in Siibak & Tamme (2013), in which three-generational families are interviewed on their use of web-based platforms for communicating within the family and across generations.

A study that has indeed taken its theoretical departure from Mannheim, also analysing cross-generational media habits, is the cross-national analysis conducted by Ingrid Volkmer (2006) and her international collaborators. The focus of their research was on *News in Public Memory*, and it involved nine countries on all the continents. The respective chapters, each from a different national context, show how different generations related to media technologies on the one hand, and on the other, to international media events or news stories such as the first moon landing, the Second World War, the Vietnam War, the assassination of Kennedy, the Prague Spring, Watergate, Woodstock, etc. The generations studied were born in three cohorts: 1924-29 (the radio generation), 1954-59 (the black-and-white TV generation) and 1979-1984 (the Internet generation). It was concluded that these three generations did relate to international media events differently: the oldest were marked by the media being addressed to adults, the mid-generation by the growing image culture of television, and the youngest generation by the global media flows.

Although the theory of generation proposes the differentiation of experience between generations, there is surprisingly little empirical research that has dealt with, and from comparative perspectives analysed, inter-generational experiences (but see Kalmus et al. 2013) and how the possible absence of such unifying traits affects inter-generational

relationships. There are even fewer studies of generations along cross-cultural dimensions, although Aroldi & Ponte (2012) is a good example, comparing generations in Italy and Portugal. In the rest of this article an attempt will be made to add to this research, building on the analysis of focus group interviews with different generations in Sweden and Estonia. First the objective and subjective media landscapes of the generations will be accounted for in order to, in the following section, take up a discussion on the possible existence of a nostalgic modus among the respondents.

2. The 'objective' media landscape(s)

In line with generational theory, one might expect that some people born around the same time, and in the same geo-cultural and political environment, should develop similar relationships to the media as technologies and content. This was the basis for the construction of a series of focus group interviews conducted in late 2011/early 2012 with Estonian and Swedish media users. The reason for this cross-cultural composition is that large international events occur at the same time, but in different geo-political and cultural environments. The groups were thus composed of people born around certain years in both countries, with special concern for the transformations in society.[3]

Each of these tentative generations are born into a different media landscape. If we think of societal and media development in linear terms, we can construct a timeline on which media technologies appear successively over the years. Each generation also appears at certain points on this timeline, where some media technologies are already present while others appear during their lifetime. This 'objective' structure of the media landscape is sketched in **Figure 2**.
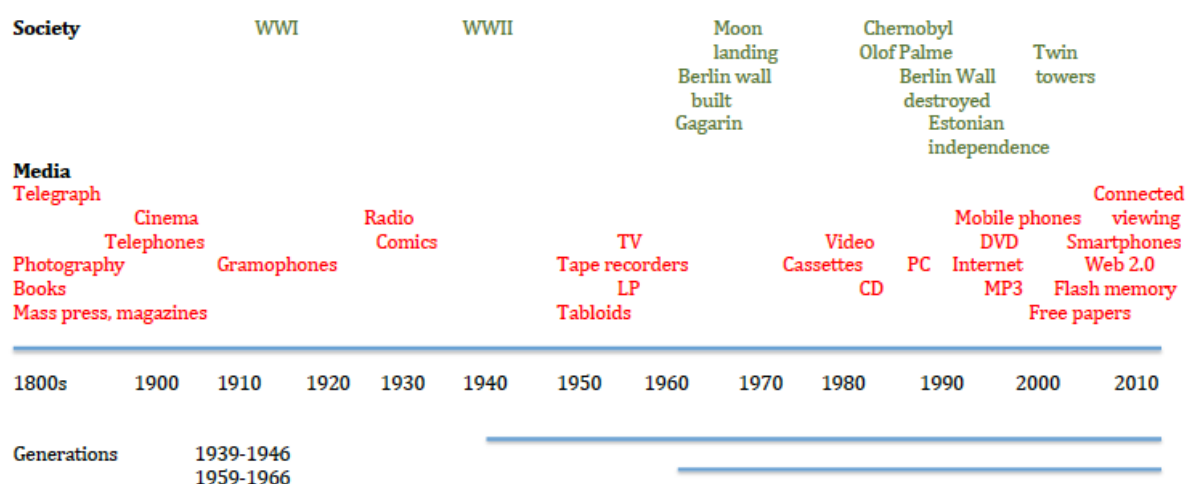
Figure 2: 'Objective' media landscape 1800s to the present, and the trajectory through it by the two generations.

The older focus group consisted of people born at the beginning of the 1940s, in the midst of the Second World War, and growing up in postwar Soviet Estonia and postwar Sweden,

respectively.[4] They are thus called 'the postwar generation' in the following. On the occasion of the interviews, this group was in early retirement, and many had children as well as grandchildren. They have mixed working-life experience, and were originally brought up in different parts of their respective countries. This (tentative) generation grew up in a media landscape dominated by the mass media cinema, press and radio. During their formative years (in Mannheim's understanding, between 17 and 25) they saw the birth of television, tape recorders, tabloid press and the vinyl record. It should be noted, though, that even if television and music media were *technologically* the same in Sweden and Estonia, the *content* that was broadcast and distributed was dramatically different (which of course also goes for the press, cinema, etc.). They were still very young at the end of the Second World War, but they grew up during the Cold War, the building of the Berlin Wall, and the murder of John F. Kennedy.

The second focus group consisted of people born in the early 1960s. This generation had their formative years during the Cold War, the arms race, and ultimately the early phase of Perestroika under Mikhail Gorbachev. They were in their mid-20s when Olof Palme was murdered. This was the pre-digital era, but this generation experienced the arrival of cassette tape recorders, video and the CD record during their formative years.[5] Most of them have children, who are now in their teens or early 20s. They all work and have no grandchildren yet.

Of the two generations, as represented by the focus groups in Sweden and Estonia, the older group is the one who has experienced the most new forms of media over the years. They grew up in a media landscape that was dramatically different from that of the younger generation, whose members are around 20 years younger. In terms of age, one could say they have travelled 20 years farther through this landscape, and over the course of years have seen it shift in character quite dramatically. Correspondingly, they also have 20 years more first-hand experiences of historical events, although these experiences were also assumed to vary depending on the geo-political position from which they were experienced. That is, the fall of the Berlin Wall had an impact globally, but its meaning is assumed to vary between Swedish and Estonian interviewees.

An initial supposition was that the focus group situation, and the ways the focus groups were triggered in the interview situation, would produce nostalgic remembrances among the interviewees. All interviews started with the same prompting question: 'Can you tell us about your earliest media memories?'. It was also presupposed that the older generation would be the one that would be more nostalgic in relation to their media memories, regarding the media landscape both as technological structure (the media technologies and gadgets they had experienced) and as symbolic environment (the texts, discourses around artists, etc.). It is reasonable to assume that this affectionate relationship to the media of one's youth gradually developed as the generation in question grew older; a kind of age component that was expected to have an impact on the generational experience, and that would be activated by the focus group situation. In order to close in on this question, the next section will account for the media landscapes and events as

experienced by the two generations, since they have experienced the arrival of several new media technologies and witnessed many shifts in genre and content over the years.

3. Subjective generational media landscapes

The 'objective' media landscape outlined in **Figure 2** was naturally reflected in the focus group interviews, although emphasis was put on certain features of the landscape (rather than others). This means that one can construct a 'subjective' media landscape consisting of the media technologies and content that were mentioned and discussed during each focus group interview. This landscape would be subjective in the sense that it would reflect the landscape as composed in the specific social interaction of the interviewing researcher and the interviewed individuals in the group. It is important to emphasize the subjective nature of this landscape composition, as it is produced in social interaction, and need not necessarily have been represented in the same way even by the same people, were the interview to have occurred a month later, or if the group had consisted of a different combination of people. It is also subjective in the sense that it has to be lived and experienced first-hand. Below, the Swedish and Estonian focus groups of the 1940s and 1960s generations are discussed.

The postwar generation

The 'subjective' media landscape of the generation born during the Second World War had their formative years in the late 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s. However, they have clear memories of earlier media uses, represented by both media technologies and content.
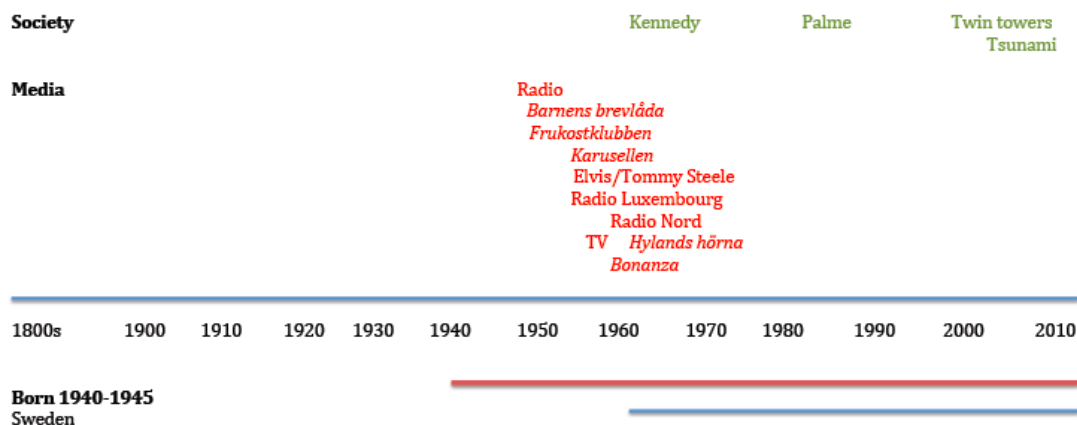
Figure 3: The 'subjective' media landscape of the Swedish 1940s generation focus group. Media experiences reduced to childhood and formative years.

In **Figure 3**, we can see the subjective media landscape of the Swedish focus group born in the early 1940s. In the figure the media phenomena they mention are marked out, as are some news events of international magnitude: the Kennedy assassination in 1963, the murder of Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme in 1985, and the attack on the World Trade

Center's twin towers in New York in 2001. We can also see that, when prompted on what media they remember from their youth, they mention television (introduced in Sweden in the late 1950s), Radio Nord and Radio Luxembourg, both popular alternatives to the Swedish public service radio SR. Radio Luxembourg is well known for its international penetration, and broadcast 1933-9 (which naturally cannot be recalled by the focus group) and 1946-92 (Crisell 1997). Radio Nord was a 'pirate' radio channel, broadcast from M/S Bon Jour, anchored in international waters outside Stockholm, beginning in March 1961 and broadcasting for a year, launching itself as 'Swedish commercial radio' and in clear opposition to SR (and the official media policy of Sweden). Its content was foremost popular music, which resulted in the launch of popular music on SR also, just a few months later (see Forsman 2010).

Much of the content on Radio Nord and Radio Luxembourg was international popular music, with artists such as Tommy Steele and Elvis Presley. These performers are accordingly remembered by the informants. Both Elvis and Steele had their specific fan followings in Sweden, which is also remembered by the participants in the focus group. When it comes to television, some of the hugely popular phenomena at the time are mentioned, such as the Western series *Bonanza* (broadcast as *Bröderna Cartwright* in Sweden) and the hugely popular Saturday evening entertainment show *Hylands hörna*, led by legendary radio and television host Lennart Hyland, first in radio from 1961 to 1962, and then on television 1962-83. Hyland had also hosted the popular radio show *Karusellen* (1951-1954), from which many features were imported to *Hylands hörna*.

Another programme they mention is *Barnens brevlåda* (in translation, 'The children's mailbox'), a radio programme for children, broadcast 1925-1972, for its duration led by legendary radio host Sven Jerring. Another common experience was listening to *Frukostklubben*, broadcast on Saturday mornings and possible for children to listen to before leaving for school (as one did in Sweden until 1968). *Frukostklubben* was a morning show broadcast between 1946 and 1949, and after a few years' break between 1955 and 1978. It was most likely the earlier period in which the respondents listened (as they had finished school by 1955).

This landscape can be contrasted with the media landscape of the corresponding Estonian generation, as represented by the Estonian focus group of interviewees born 1939-1946.

In **Figure 4** (below) we can see that the societal events mentioned differ from their Swedish contemporaries, and are more connected to the respondents' geo-political and cultural position in Soviet Estonia. Rather than the moon landing, it is the memory of Soviet astronaut Yuri Gagarin, the first man to travel in space in May 1961, that comes to mind. Memories of wartime are also clearly present, with some informants accounting for time spent in Siberia.
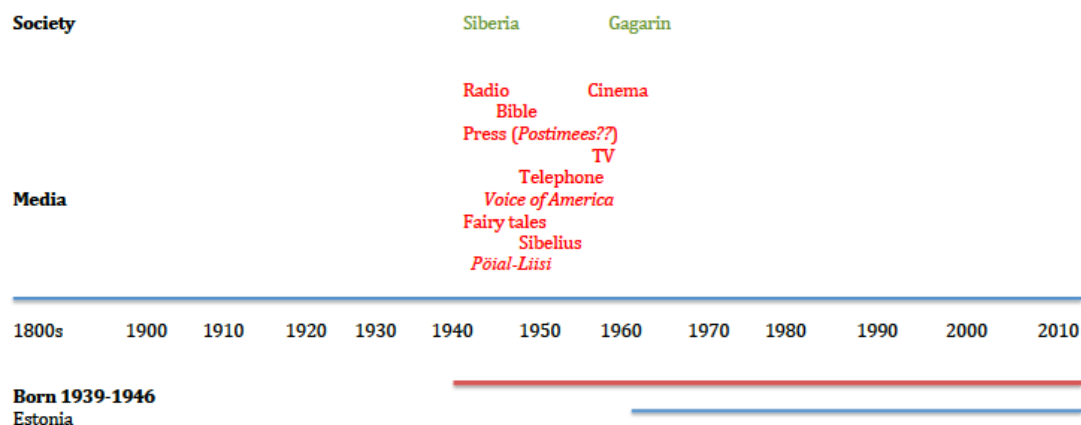
Figure 4: The 'subjective' media landscape of the Estonian 1940s generation focus group.

When it comes to the media, the radio has a very prominent position. There are, however, very few references to programmes or content on the radio – the only radio content referred to is *Voice of America* (broadcast since 1942). The accounts are more about the radio as a technology or device. The significance of radio as a technology is clearly enhanced by the fact that radios were confiscated by the authorities during and shortly after the war. People had to hide them away if they were to keep them, and several of the respondents describe this.

Another medium emphasized by the Estonian respondents born in the early 1940s is the telephone. Telephone access was scarce during and after the war, and in a similar way to radio, its use was collective and the technology shared. Two of the Swedish respondents in the same generation also had no telephone at home during their first years, and can vividly recount the sense of achievement when they got one in the early 1950s. Both radio and telephone were thus 'objectively' existing technologies in the media landscape at the time, but were not available in the homes of some of the respondents, and it is obvious that this lack makes the arrival of the technology in the home so much more remembered.

In the Estonian focus group of the 1940s generation, memories of children's books are also accounted for. A specific example of this is the Estonian version of Hans Christian Andersen's tale of Thumbelina, written in 1835 and published in Estonia in 1956 as *Pöial-Liisi*, with characteristic drawings by Estonian illustrator Siima Škop (see **Figure 5**). One of the respondents mentions receiving *Pöial-Liisi* as a present from her aunt when she was four years old and in hospital for diphtheria. Another respondent tells how her interest in reading began with reading *Tsaari Kuller* (original *Michel Strogoff*, 1876, and published in English as *Michael Strogoff: The Courier of the Czar*) by Jules Verne when visiting her aunt. The old edition with its Gothic letters, which were hard to read, is still in her memory.

It was of course highly expected that the Second World War would cast different shadows on the Swedish and Estonian respondents. The media, especially radio, are clearly related to wartime, especially for the Estonian respondents, and the sensitive issue of having access to radio appears in several of the respondents' accounts. If the radio is
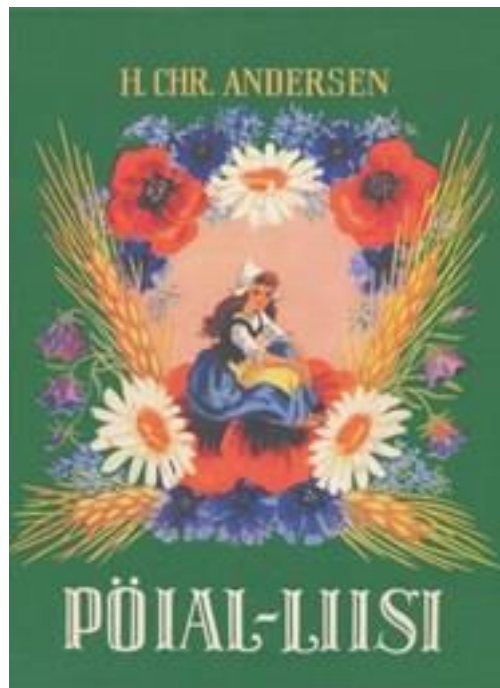
Figure 5: *Pöial-Liisi*, originally published in 1956 and re-published in 2007 with the original cover painting by Siima Škop.

connected to the war and the political situation for the Estonian respondents, it is more connected to popular music and youth culture for their Swedish counterparts. Both groups mention influences from abroad, but whereas the Estonian respondents mention classical music and Sibelius, transmitted from stations in Finland, the Swedish respondents report on the influx of Anglo-American popular music via Radio Luxembourg and Swedish pirate radio stations.

The Estonian respondents also account for formative moments in their very early childhood years through traditional children's fairy tales (H.C. Andersen) and adventure novels typical of the youth period (Jules Verne). Children's books and fairy tales are absent from the accounts of the Swedish postwar generation, and literature is only mentioned when they reach the formative years. It is also evident that the Estonian respondents think of the radio in terms of a device, something that had to be hidden during and after the war since it could possibly connect to the world outside Soviet Estonia. Radio was a means to reach outside in Sweden as well, but rather to the international cultural world outside the country's media landscape, where one could listen to the international pop music that – at least at first – could not be accessed through Swedish Radio.

The Cold War generation
The generation born in the early 1960s are born into an 'objective' media landscape where not only radio, telephone, the press and the cinema are already present, but where television is also a fact, even if some families do not yet have access in their homes. Their

formative years occur in the second half of the 1970s and the 1980s, at the height of the Cold War, and in the shadow of the nuclear 'terror balance'. The arms race and the political tensions between the First and Second Worlds are, however, absent from both the Swedish and Estonian interviews, and form more of a general background to other, more personal, stories (of course, privileged by the interview setup).
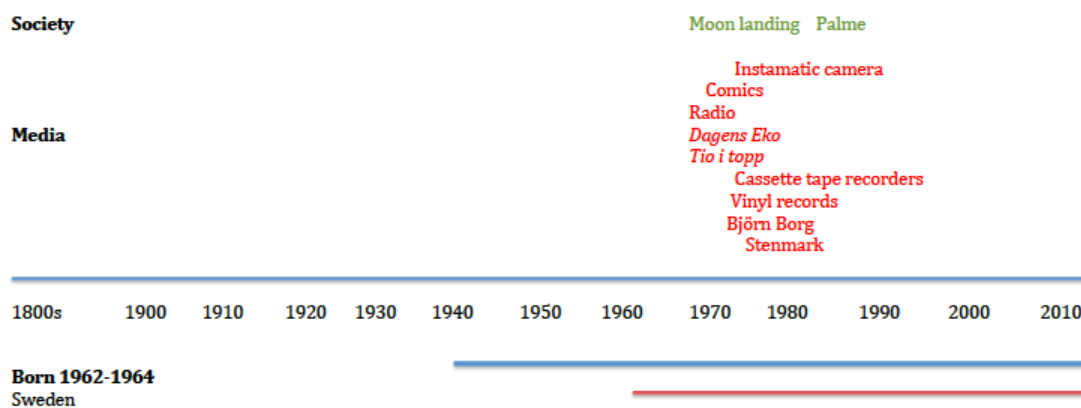
Figure 6: The 'subjective' media landscape of the Swedish 1960s generation focus group.

The Swedish respondents born in the early 1960s have clear memories from the moon landing (even if some also reflect on whether their experience is from a later date; that is, they might not have seen the landing when it occurred but rather in reruns afterwards). Like the Swedish 1940s generation, they have strong memories of the murder of Olof Palme in 1985.

They also have clear memories from sports events, foremost the international success in tennis of Björn Borg, who had his most successful period between 1974 and 1981, and slalom skier Ingemar Stenmark, whose career also peaked in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

It is obvious from the interview that television was the most important medium for them when they were very young, that is before the age of ten. There is one exception in the group who holds radio as more important, since she grew up in Liberia, Africa, and did not have access to television. However, not many children's programmes are mentioned, but rather sports events (Borg, Stenmark, World Soccer championships, etc.), that relate more to the respondents' formative years than to their childhood.

A common discussion in the 1960s focus group was comics (*MAD, Fantomen, Agent X9*) (cf. Aroldi & Ponte [2012] on a similar attraction to comics in Italy among respondents born roughly at the same time). A special feature related to the comic magazines was the opportunity to find pen pals through them. This is also contrasted by the respondents in reference to younger generations, who supposedly do not write traditional letters but rather communicate via e-mail and social networking sites. Another prominent feature was the introduction of the cassette tape recorder, by which you could produce mix-tape

recordings of your favourite songs from the radio.

In the group discussion the respondents often contrast their own media use to that of younger generations, and comment on the intangible character of contemporary, digital media. There is an emphasis on the materiality of cassette tapes, vinyl records – especially their album covers – and the tangible feel and the 'rustly' sound of the printed newspaper.
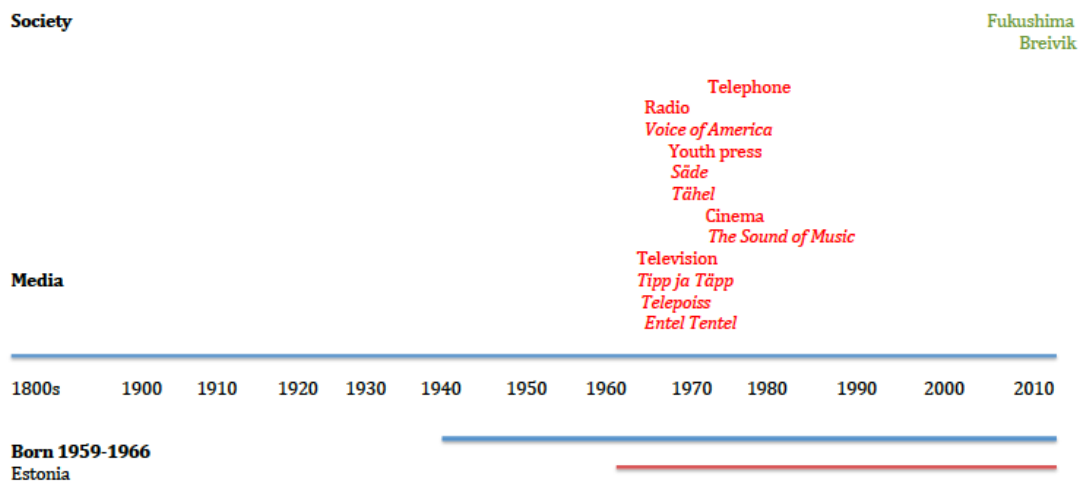
Figure 7: The 'subjective' media landscape of the Estonian 1960s generation focus group.

The first media memories of this Estonian generation are related to children's radio and television shows, when the respondents were around four to five years old. They also have a discussion about how well they remember the details of these shows: the opening music, the main characters, etc., of television shows such as *Telepoiss* (The TV boy, 1962-)[6] and the puppet show *Tipp ja Täpp* (1969-).[7] The television experiences differ depending on whether the respondent was brought up in Tallin or another part of Estonia. In Tallinn it was possible to tune into Finnish television (YLE), and thus have access to Western television programmes.[8] Many built their own television receivers, a phenomenon that is vividly retold in the (fictional) film *Disco and Atomic War* (2009, org. *Disko ja tuumasõda*), which has been held to be characteristic of this specific generation:

> A story about growing up in the Soviet Union. The film tells the story of a strange kind of information war, where a totalitarian regime stands face to face with the heroes of popular culture. And loses. It was a time when it was possible for erotic film star Emmanuelle to bring down the Red Army and MacGyver to outdo an entire school administration. It is a film about our generation, who were unknowingly brought to the front line of the Cold War. Western popular culture had an incomparable role shaping Soviet children's world views in those days. Finnish television was a window to a world of dreams that the authorities could not block in any way. Though Finnish channels were banned, many households found some way to access the forbidden fruit. (imdb.com, plot summary)[9]

Also mentioned in the interview are many youth newspapers and magazines, for example *Säde* (The Spark), launched in 1946 and published twice a week for schoolchildren, and the extremely popular children's journal *Täheke* (The Little Star), published from 1960 and at the peak of its popularity in the 1980s with a print run of 80,000 copies.[10]

In the postwar years, cinema increasingly became a phenomenon related to youth. While television became the medium for small children and parents, youth socialized around the cinema – in Sweden, Estonia and elsewhere in the world (cf. Doherty 1988). However, for this Estonian generation, cinema carried a very special significance. During the formative years of this group, several new cinemas were built in Tallinn (and in other parts of the country), where you could occasionally watch foreign, Western films. *The Sound of Music* (1965) is mentioned by several informants, and seems to have been shown in theatres in Tallinn around the mid-1970s, but French comedies (Louis de Funes) and Indian films are also mentioned. This was perceived of as a sensational break with the propaganda films of earlier periods.

Another phenomenon with no counterpart for the corresponding Swedish generation was the *Plaadimägi* (roughly: the Record Hill) market, which took place on Sundays on the Harju hill in the centre of Tallinn throughout the 1970s and 1980s. This is where Western pop music records were traded and swapped, and a Beatles record could cost as much as half a month's salary. Although it was tempting for the young Estonians to go there to take part in this 'forbidden' market, those who did not live in Tallinn had restricted opportunities to attend each weekend. Being part of the Plaadimägi market was considered somewhat rebellious, and had a kind of subcultural air to it.

A further difference between Sweden and Estonia is that comics were not a part of the 'objective' media landscape in Estonia, whereas they were in Sweden. As Piermarco Aroldi and Cristina Ponte (2012) show in a generational analysis also involving people born around 1960, comics were an important new medium for those growing up in the 1960s and 1970s, and in this sense the 'objective' media landscape of Western Europe seems to have provided other media, with other opportunity structures. The popular music present in Western Europe, which has also been significant for the 1960s generation, with mix tapes that could circulate among friends and thus be the focus of social meetings within the generation, had its corresponding feature in the Plaadimägi market for popular music.

For the reasons above, it is important to acknowledge the differences between the 'objective' media landscapes of Sweden and Estonia. For all our generations, the press, weekly magazines, cinema and radio were already there as media. Television arrived almost at the same time in both countries technologically, although it is obvious from the interviews that not everyone had access in their own homes before the 1970s, whereas in Sweden 90 per cent had access already in 1963 (Findahl 2013: 19). The landline telephone, however, was not as widespread in Estonia as in Sweden. The mobile phone arrived around the same time in the two countries, and although penetration was slightly slower in Estonia, it quite soon reached the same level as in Sweden (that is, around 95 per cent, cf. Bolin

2012: 61). So, while most of the media appeared simultaneously, the content of the mass media differed considerably.

4. Nostalgic media memories

In line with previous research using life history interviews in focus group settings, it was expected that the interviews would trigger nostalgic remembrances, as the initial questions dealt with childhood and youth experiences from media use (Aroldi & Ponte 2012). In this last section, two kinds of nostalgic memories that appear in the interviews will be discussed. The discussion is by necessity brief, and the discussion will be restricted to those parts that are illustrative of two kinds of generational relations that appear in the interviews.

Clearly, nostalgia can take many forms (Boym 2001), ranging from the everyday conception whereby it often simply connotes cultural preference, to more clinical diagnosis. The concept in fact first appears in medicine in the late 17th century, in a dissertation by the Swiss doctor Johannes Hofer describing 'the desire to return to one's native homeland' (quoted in Boym 2001: 3). Hofer derived the term from the combination of the Greek words νόστος (*nóstos*), meaning 'homecoming', and ἄλγος (*álgos*), meaning 'pain' or 'ache'. It describes the kind of bittersweet remembrance of something past, something to long to return to at the same time as one knows that this is impossible. It is the 'hypochondria of the heart', as Svetlana Boym (2001: 1) suggestively describes it. Perhaps the most famous literary reference to nostalgia is Marcel Proust's (1913/1996) account of the madeleine cake, and the 'involuntary memory' triggered by its taste.

In the focus groups there are at least two types of nostalgic remembrances, one connected to childhood and the other to the formative years. Firstly, as expected, the older generation, especially in the Estonian group, had nostalgic relationships with their childhood media use. These early memories are similar to the Proustean 'involuntary memories'; that is, memories that when encountered force themselves upon the individual, who cannot but delve into 'lost time'. This is a nostalgia that is triggered by childhood memories: the reading of *Pöial-Liisi* or *Tsaari Kuller* when it comes to the Estonian postwar generation, and *Barnens brevlåda* when it comes to the corresponding Swedish generation (although somewhat less intense), or to *Telepoiss* or *Tipp ja Täpp*. Many of these childhood accounts are highly individual, especially those in the postwar generation: they do not provoke discussions in the focus groups, and are thus not experiences shared by their members. But they also trigger strong memories of childhood media memory:

> 'Yes, yes, indeed... I can remember everything very clearly. I can even hear this particular song [in my head]' (Focus group, Estonia, born 1959-1966)

Secondly, and contrary to expectations, there was another kind of nostalgia that was related to the formative years, and that also positioned itself as an experience different from experiences in younger generations. This kind of nostalgia was most clearly expressed in the

Swedish Cold War focus group. Some of it directs itself to now nearly obsolete communication forms such as letter writing (the phenomenon of 'pen pals') – a yearning for a kind of pre-digital connectedness that precedes contemporary social networking media like Facebook (which the younger generations engage in). But it is also directed towards 'outdated' media technologies such as comics, cassette tapes and vinyl records. On the one hand it is an expression of a mourning of dead (or near-dead) media technologies themselves, but on the other it is also about the gradual disappearing tangible materiality of the media that produces nostalgic remembrance. There is an emotional attachment to the materiality of the media: the 'rustly' sounds when reading the newspaper, the memories triggered by LP album covers – 'you remember the feeling when you bought it', as one female Swedish respondent puts it. This nostalgia is also social, as when the respondents turn to each other to ask 'Do you remember…?', seeking social confirmation of their bygone emotional states and experiences.

This nostalgia is seldom connected to content itself, since content lives on and can appear on many platforms of consumption, whereas the technologies disappear, or become more difficult to use (for example, where can you buy cassette tapes these days?). Several respondents report having exchanged their record collections several times over the years, from vinyl records to CDs to MP3s, and now hard drives. The old media are not thrown away, however, but rather stored away in attics and cellars as an archive of bygone events and feelings. It is not just any version of a certain song or album, but the specific copy of a certain record (the vinyl copy with its original cover) that is the trigger of memories and emotional states. And you simply do not throw these things away.

To Marie, the extended communication opportunities that exist today have also brought with them a loss of value in communication:

> But, it's like this has to do with quantity. I mean, sometimes you lose the value in… As I see it, today you lose the value in it, because when I went and bought a vinyl record with a cover. You do remember the covers of certain records still, don't you? And you remember the feeling when you bought it, and what it stood for. Today they just sit online, and I get totally confused, because I'm there myself, and I think… God, I can download anything and listen to it. And that stresses me out, because you somehow lose your grip on… And there they are online all the time, and all of this with 30 friends on Facebook, or you have a whole world on your computer, and what not. It has to do with quantity, and you somehow lose the value in it. In everything from friendship to the music. (Focus group, Sweden, born 1962-1964)

This is a loss of value that has to do with the capacity of reproduction, similar to how Walter Benjamin (1937/1977) analysed the loss of the aura of artwork when it became technologically reproducible. This also relates to the investment, the emotional work laid down that Marie is hinting at:

> Marie: Yes, but you've recorded them yourself. Mixed music… mix tapes. I think it has to do with… that it means… It's nostalgic, and has a stronger meaning because it's a physical thing.
>
> /…/
>
> Mats: Yes, it [=making mix tapes] was something you put an effort into making.
> (Focus group, Sweden, born 1962-1964)

If we look at the quote from Marie again, it is not only the fact that young people nowadays have everything but a mouse-click away. It is also related to the fact that the youth of today – including her own children of 21 and 23 years of age – can never understand how it felt for Marie, when she bought that specific record with that specific cover, or when she produced her own, specific and unique, mix-tape. Nor can they understand what it meant to read the comics that Maria and her generation did:

> Marie: My children never read comics much. In fact, I didn't get the sense that it was such a strong influence in their childhood as it was for me.
>
> /…/
>
> Mats: Well, I know because I have saved all my comic magazines, so they [the children] got quite a strong dose anyway. What was a bit disappointing was that *Agent X9* and *Fantomen*, and the others, they were in black and white, and then it wasn't much fun.   (Focus group, Sweden, born 1962-1964)

What Marie and Mats are trying to express is the generational difference between themselves and their children, and the realization that their children can never appreciate comics the same way they did when they were the same age. This is a loss of inter-generational knowledge transfer caused by changes in the ('objective') media landscape. It is a mourning of the ability to pass on media practices and communication experiences to one's own children, as they now are close to leaving their formative years.

This is also where the combination of generational experience with life course and life situation enters. The generational experience can naturally be shared *within* one's own generation, with those who have similar experiences. But it cannot be passed on to the next generation, and this is why this type of nostalgia is triggered at the time when the generation faces their children being at the end of their formative years. This is the moment when one realizes the impossibility of inter-generationally shared experience. The world is not the same, and there is no turning back. And this fact produces nostalgia for times that will never return.

If this kind of nostalgia was clearly visible in the Swedish focus group of respondents born in the 1960s (and also among individuals in the Estonian Cold War generation interview) with children at the end of their formative years, it was absent in the older

generation (since this life phase had clearly passed).

5. Conclusions: cross-cultural and inter-generational dimensions

This article has presented an analysis of the relationship between the structural frameworks of the 'objective' media landscape of the 20th century, and the various 'subjective' landscapes accounted for in focus groups of Swedish and Estonian postwar and Cold War media generations. The approach has been both inter-generational and cross-cultural, and the ambition has been to understand the components that produce cultural and generational differences and similarities.

Firstly, and as an empirical conclusion of the inter-cultural comparison, it is obvious and very expected that the two dramatically different contexts in media landscapes (technologically and organizationally), geo-politics, and cultural traditions make the Swedish and Estonian generations different, be it the postwar or Cold War generation. Other societal events are remembered, and the different media systems produce different generational responses between the two countries. The 'objective' media landscapes (and, for that matter, political and cultural landscapes) naturally have a strong impact on the generational experience.

Secondly, as an empirical conclusion to the inter-generational comparison, there are obvious differences between the postwar and Cold War generations, in both Sweden and Estonia. These differences can, on the one hand, be attributed to the different media landscapes in which the two generations were brought up, as referred to in the first point above. The Estonian postwar generation struggled with reading old books with Gothic letters at their relatives' homes, while the Swedish corresponding generation remember children's radio programmes. In both Sweden and Estonia this generation also refer to media used by their parents (foremost radio and press). The Cold War generation in both Sweden and Estonia more homogeneously related their experiences to television, although for the Swedish generation this was blended with comics and music, while the Estonians related to cinema and also to music. So, also expectedly, the differences were greater between the 1940s generations in Sweden and Estonia, while there were more similarities between those born in the early 1960s, with television as the common denominator.

The inter-generational differences are also clearly revealed in the nostalgic memories, where the older generation relate their nostalgia for media use in childhood, while the Cold War generation first and foremost relate to their formative years. This can be explained as a loss of experience, the ability of inter-generational transference on the part of the Cold War generation, who see their children leaving their formative years different from themselves; the older generation display a loss of childhood. This might have to do with their now having grandchildren of the same age they were when they first experienced children's literature (although evidence of this is absent in the interviews). If this holds true, however, we can expect the Cold War generation to gradually move away from their nostalgia for their formative years, to the benefit of childhood nostalgia. In this way the generational component would interact with age, life phase or life situation, and produce

the mix of social and psychological features that impact on lives as they move through the ever-shifting 'objective' media landscapes.

Theoretically, then, it can be concluded that generation as locality needs to consider not only *temporal locality* in the historical process, but also *spatial locality*; that is, the locality of geopolitical, media technological and cultural space. In terms of fresh contact, and formative years, it can further be concluded that there are two kinds of formative years: one in childhood and one in youth. While Mannheim held the latter to be more important, it is clear from the focus group interviews referred to in this article that nostalgic childhood memories also have a formative dimension, and are important for the self-construction of generation as actuality. And even if these memories are more subjective than the collective experiences in youth, they bring in the dimension of age and life situation to the generational experience in a qualitatively different way compared to the youth experience. This inter-relation between age, life course and life situation, and generation is an avenue that obviously needs to be further explored in generational research.

Biographical note:

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Notes:

[1] For a thorough critique of the buzz discourse around 'global digital generations', see Aroldi & Colombo (2013).

[2] In a similar way, Zukin et al. (2006) and many others construct a successive string of generations whereby one follows upon the other (pre-1945; 1946-64; 1965-76; 1977 and after), as if all people within an age span of 18 years would share the same experience. This is an example of generation being reduced to age cohort.

[3] In addition to the societal events, two quantitative datasets were used in order to identify breaking points in media use among users related to year of birth. For a detailed account of the methodology, see Signe Opermann's (2014) PhD thesis. Ms. Opermann also conducted the Estonian focus groups.

[4] The Swedish group consisted of four people born between 1940 and 1945 (one man, three women). They were born in different parts of Sweden, but now lived in Stockholm (where all four Swedish focus groups were conducted). The Estonian group consisted of five people born between 1939 and 1946 (two men, three women), all living in Tartu at the time of the interview. All were in retirement/early retirement. The interview was conducted in Tartu.

[5] The Swedish group consisted of four people (two women, two men) born between 1962 and 1964, all living in Stockholm except for one of the women, who was born in an African country to Swedish parents. The Estonian group consisted of eight people (seven women, one man) born between 1959 and 1966. The interview was conducted in Tallinn.

[6] The logotype can be seen at http://muuseum.err.ee/content/fafe9453-810a-40fb-add0-e7dbbea77af4, last accessed 26 November 2013.

[7] A clip can be found at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Grws71nIFpc, last accessed 26 November 2013.

[8] In 1971 Yleisradio built a new television transmitter in Finland, which meant that about a third of Estonians could access Western popular culture. In addition, in 1979 a new television tower was built in Tallinn, and people could then watch Estonian TV, Central TV (Russian) 1 and 2, Leningrad TV (Russian), and the Finnish channels YLE 1 and YLE 2.

[9] http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1421032/plotsummary?ref_=tt_ov_pl. Last accessed 26 November 2013.

[10] For its 60 anniversary, the newspaper *Postimees* published a review: http://www.postimees.ee/216738/lasteajakiri-taheke-peab-50-sunnipaeva, last accessed 26 November 2013.