

Television as an intergenerational leisure artefact: An interdisciplinary dialogue

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Abstract:

The convergence of media platforms and the emergence of transmedia audiencehoods have eroded traditional media boundaries and put into question what is (watching) television in the present time. Based on focus groups and in-depth interviews, this paper examines the intergenerational status of television through the exploration of four age groups (18-34, 35-49, 50-64, 65+). The results indicate very similar accounts of television viewing and televisual leisure experiences among age-groups that suggest common/intrinsic leisure dimensions of television viewing. However, there are significant differences between age-cohorts in understanding and experiencing television and in subjective generational affiliations. These similarities and dissimilarities appear to be framed by the coexistence, cohabitation and contact of leisure practices and experiences of generations and reinforce the intergenerational status of television as a leisure artefact. Situated in the cross-section of media (television), leisure and generations' studies, this paper aims to contribute to the understanding of present and future forms of television questioning its nature and personal (both individual and social) significance based on the account of everyday leisure relationships with television of different generations and the roles that television plays in their lives.

Keywords: age-groups, audience research, generations, experience, leisure studies, television

Introduction

In a time of profound technological and social transformations, television and its audiences can and should be researched from very different perspectives, disciplines and methodologies. The present issue of *Participations*, dealing with the generations as (media) audiences is a good example of the diversifying, cross-disciplinary horizon of audience

studies where generations – understood as social formations rather than age-cohorts- interact with media audiencehood. The relationship between media audiences, their media consumption cultures and generations can therefore be (re)examined from various theoretical and methodological traditions. The present paper aims to connect the fields of audience research and leisure studies, with the conviction that the joint exploration of media transformations, qualitative research of audience studies and cultural (rather than demographic) approaches to generations can offer both practical empirical grounding and theoretical insight to describe and explain related areas such as contemporary media ecosystems and everyday leisure relationships with media.

Media-related leisure has gained increasing psychological, sociological and economic weight in industrialized societies to such a degree that it can be argued that leisure and media have become inseparable concepts for the majority of the citizens of affluent societies. Today it is increasingly difficult to portray the leisure of a 21st century citizen without considering the media texts (written, audiovisual, digital, and analog) that we consume and participate in. At the same time everyday spaces – living and sleeping rooms, class rooms, cultural centers, pubs, vehicles – and daily times -routines, habits, frequencies, periods – appear saturated with media texts. Individuals in industrialised countries spend most of their free time watching television, listening to the radio, reading (e)books, browsing the internet, playing on the game console or multitasking with a smartphone. Media have become omnipresent, and they have done it especially through leisure, to the point that it is now unavoidable to study leisure when considering media as well as studying media when considering leisure (Cuenca Amigo & Landabidea Urresti, 2010). Still, media and audience research with an explicitly stated leisure perspective has been relatively rare, much less so has been explored in the light of the concept of leisure experience.

Television, in that sense, provides a fertile conceptual and empirical starting point for the exploration of the leisure experiences of media audiences and for the cross-fertilisation of audience research and leisure studies because, despite the emergence of new media technologies, television has not lost its centrality, nor does it seem fated to lose it neither in a quantitative nor a qualitative sense. The consistent strength of television in relation to the media use in Europe (Aliaga, 2006; Aliaga & Winqvist, 2013; TNS Opinion & Social, 2012) and the semantic centrality of the term in relation to emergent notions such as interactive television (Bennett, 2008; Cesar & Chorianopoulos, 2008: 125) post-television (Leverette, Ott, & Buckley, 2008) or hybrid and smart television (Caldwell, 2004) show television's central –although faceted- reality in contemporary societies. Today, more than ever, we are confronted with evidence of the “complexity and diversity of the international experience of the era of digital television” (Tay & Turner, 2010: 33).

Therefore, the present and the future of television are critical areas for leisure studies, not the least because of the massive aggregate time that is destined to it in and because of its contested, but not still overthrown, centrality in a rapidly changing digital media landscape. Still, most traditional audience research methods have been mostly invested in counting and weighing the time audiences spend in front of the screen and

trying to measure the range, effects and impact of media. They have been relatively less successful in providing answers to questions such as how and why do audiences articulate television in their dailiness, what meanings does television imbue into people's everyday life or which meanings and pleasures do audiences find and build in their relations with it (Fiske, 1987; Fiske & Hartley, 2003).

Leisure and audience studies can no longer avoid these challenges and opportunities: media have become major social manifestations of leisure in contemporary societies and, as artefacts of human choice and the specific articulations of human freedom, are an increasingly valued part of human life (Aristegui Fradua & Silvestre Cabrera, 2012). Bridging the gap between leisure studies and audience research is fundamental and fertile in its possibilities, especially as the changing media ecosystem becomes increasingly significant in defining leisure in contemporary societies, opening new challenges that can and must be addressed jointly. Qualitative approaches are suited to overcome the focus on the quantitative analysis of media consumption and complement research practices traditionally associated with leisure studies such as time budgets that tended to measure observable activities overlooking the meanings given to and taken from those same practices and the interdisciplinary dialogue between media, leisure and generations' studies offers us a unique opportunity to understand the contemporary status of television. A literature review of these three traditions reveals suggestive commonalities, as will be summarized in the next section.

Literature review

Leisure, television and generations share, for starters, a polysemic nature: it is problematic to establish with certainty where do they start and where do they end, and the possible experiences that subjects can derive from the objective nuclei of facts and events are always diverse, multiple and complex.

The term television today, far from a unique meaning traditionally associated to it, refers to multiple realities: a household electronic device, a social institution, a content production and distribution system, a leisure resource, a leisure practice, an industry, a market and so on. Alain Le Diberder and Nathalie Coste-Cerdan have referred to it as an unknown social object, our society's "immense and central object, which, unable to avoid, we stop perceiving, like the totem, expressing and concentrating all the hopes and fears of the modern tribe" (Coste Cerdan & Le Diberder, 1990: 12). In its more traditional as well as most interactive and transmedia forms, television is a medium of multiple identities which accumulates socially represented attributes, such as of that of the audience who represents itself in front of the television set (Callejo, 1995) and given that "television does not mean what it once did" (Shimpach, 2010: 1), neither should the study of its audiences. While time and space have been the main parameters in the past century, twenty-first century audience research should delve in the leisure experience of individuals and communities in order to deal with the contemporary polysemies of television.

A symmetrical phenomenon occurs with leisure: it is often difficult to conclude what it is and what it is not. Despite the rich tradition of the classical greek notions of *skholé* in Aristotle (Alonso, Martinez, & Aguirre, 2001; Anagnostopoulos, 2009; Chuska, 2000; Jayapalan, 1999), the roman *otium* in Cicero (Munné, 1980; Pieper, 2003), Horatio (Balsdon, 1969; Harris, 1972; Scullard, 1981) or Seneca the Younger (Cuenca Amigo, 2010; Cuenca Cabeza, 2012) and the strong development of interdisciplinary leisure studies during the twentieth century, a conclusive and universal definition of leisure remains elusive. At the very end of the nineteenth century Thorstein Veblen defended distinguishing leisure from mere “indolence or quiescence” and linking it to a certain “non-productive consumption of time” (Veblen, 1899: 27) and the serious leisure scholar Robert Stebbins defined leisure as “uncoerced activity engaged in during free time, which people want to do and, in a satisfying or a fullfilling way (or both), use their abilities and resources to succeed at this” (Stebbins, 2005: 349). Still, John Neulinger’s proposition that perhaps it is best to realize that there is no answer to this question, or better, that there is no correct answer is generally accepted (Neulinger, 1981).

The social significance of leisure remains, as expressed by Haywood, Kew, Bramham et al., irremediably polysemic (Haywood et al., 1995):

Some might think that leisure is time left over after work and/or other duties and obligations. Others might talk about particular activities such as watching television, taking part in sports, going out for a meal, gardening or any other of the myriad of activities which people find interesting. Still others might indicate a particular quality of experience, that leisure provides the main opportunity in their lives to ‘do their own thing’, to have fun, to exercise free choice, to develop their own interests, to have experiences which are not available in the rest of their lives. Related to this, some people might regard leisure as rest and recuperation from work, and as an antidote to the stresses and strains of modern life.

Equally, leisure can be studied from very different standpoints, each one illuminating certain aspects while overshadowing others. From an objective point of view leisure has to do with available free time, with the time period spent on doing something, with the resources used and related actions. It refers to the employed materials, occupied spaces, repeating habits and practices that are carried out. However, a subjective standpoint gives more relevance to the satisfaction, pleasures and meanings that can arise from the experience. Leisure is an area of human experience which is searched for and composed of freely chosen pleasant activities, but its outcome will never be entirely dependent on the action itself or upon the subject’s free time or indeed economic or education level. As long as leisure is a personal experience, being at the same time individual and social, it cannot be understood as a completely subjective phenomenon because a person’s life always will be situated in a specific social and material context.

The concept of generation presents a similar and characteristic ambiguity, as it is never an easy task to define the limits of a generation. Age is, in that sense, one of the main objective, biographical markers of the personal and collective lived experience, and as such it is almost universally present in the discussion of media and generations. The binomial of age and television has been explored from very different angles, including children's relationships with television (Fisch, 2004; Livingstone & Bovill, 2001), differences in television genre and content preferences (Baiocco, D'Alessio, & Laghi, 2009; Gauntlett & Hill, 1999; Mares & Cantor, 1992; Mares & Sun, 2010; Rubin & Rubin, 1981; Werner, 1989), age and television use (Depp, Schkade, Thompson, & Jeste, 2010), older person's television viewing practices and motivations (Rubin & Rubin, 1982), television, mental health and aging (Nguyen, Wittink, Murray, & Barg, 2008), or the representation of age and gender in prime-time television (Lauzen, Dozier, & Reyes, 2007) to cite just a few.

The joint exploration of age as an objective marker and television as a media technology has provided an important body of literature that continues to expand and deserves serious consideration. But the concept of generation further problematizes the relation between age and media while incorporating cultural and identitarian factors to demographic or biological indicators. In that regard, generations appear in a dynamic balance between the objective and subjective elements, sometimes concurring with age-groups or cohorts, and sometimes emerging as eminently subjective constructs used to label one's own or the other's group of affiliation. Age alone does not warrant (nor impede) the emergence of a generation, or the affiliation to it. As stated by Karl Mannheim, "The sociological phenomenon of generations is ultimately based on the biological rhythm of birth and death. But to be based on a factor does not necessarily mean to be deducible from it, or to be implied in it." (Mannheim, 2003: 168).

The objective, necessary factors of birth, aging and death are not sufficient explanatory factors for understanding generations as social phenomena. The social, historical and biological location (or *lagerung*) tends to distribute the "experiential, intellectual and emotional data that are available to the members of a certain society" unevenly, creating a "tendency inherent in every social location" (ibid: 169). The objective and subjective elements conforming generations appear, once again, in a dynamic interaction. Media, after all, are cultural institutions that trade in symbols, stories and meanings, and that, as such, shape the forms of knowledge and ignorance, values and beliefs that circulate in society (Gillespie, 2005). It is this trade in meanings, stories and symbols that constitutes the core of their social relevance as manifestations, enablers and conditioners of leisure, which we aim to explore, recognising that the meanings of television, leisure and generations are not fixed, but change along history and through human groups and individuals. A leisure studies approach can help to incorporate subjective, experiential factors to the analysis of television audiences while bridging the gap between age-groups and generations from an interdisciplinary perspective.

In order to provide a model to approach television as an enabler, limiter, conditioner and changer of leisure experiences it is necessary to explore television not as a particular

communication technology or a specific leisure practice, but as a complex, multi-dimensional entity framed by and framing the leisure experience of its audiences as potential members of generational units (Mannheim, 2011). Recognising the inherent complexity of leisure, Cuenca Cabeza has proposed four leisure coordinates as ideal manifestations of leisure which have “their own area of action as different experiences of leisure” (Cuenca Cabeza, 2011: 34): autotelic, exotelic, absent and harmful leisure (see Table 1).

Table 1: Coordinates of leisure

Coordinate	Main characteristics
Autotelic leisure	Ideal type of humanist leisure. Free, satisfying, non-utilitarian. Leisure with an objective in itself.
Exotelic leisure	Educative, therapeutic, beneficial, useful leisure. Leisure as a means to an end.
Harmful leisure	Contrary to the basic conditions of a positive leisure. Brings personal or social harm. Self-destructive leisure.
Absent leisure	Lack of leisure experience. Addiction to work, emptiness, boredom...

Source: adapted from (Cuenca Cabeza, 2011).

These leisure coordinates have been employed as analytical anchors to collect and collate the variety of televisual leisure experiences of the informants. As abstract, ideal types they do not reflect the variety of experiences that continuously spill over clearly cut categories, and display combined, hybrid forms with mixed characteristic traits. But they can be used to analyse the concrete, historical and materially situated, and more complex, manifestations of leisure as a social and personal phenomenon.

In this respect, exploring the everyday connections that different age-groups make between television and leisure is one of the keys elements to understand their conceptions of what place television has in their lives and to discern the evolution of these two terms, charged with multiple meanings. Comparing the narrative of different age-groups regarding their relationship with television and their account of generational belonging, allows us to explore the possibilities and manifestations of social and individual interactions with television.

Methodology

The general methodological approach of the study has been structured around a notion of leisure experience beyond the univocal conception of watching television as a leisure practice. An in-depth case study of four age-groups of Basque speakers in the region of Biscay, Basque Country (Spain), has provided an opportunity for a detailed examination of particular cases (Flyvberg, 2004) that has been used to advance explanatory hypotheses of the everyday leisure relations of different generations with television. Following that intensive study provides understanding whereas extensive does not (Herskovits, 1954), a

systematic examination of the participants' accounts has been conducted, as well as the detailed coding and recoding processes of the data corpus.

No territorial representation has been sought in the sense of generalising the findings to all the population of Biscay, instead, the priority has been to unravel the multiplicity of meanings that television has in the leisure life of the participants. In that sense the methodological ambition has been one of understanding, instead of one of totality (Velasco & Díaz de Rada, 2006) and the case study has been chosen as a research strategy offering specific opportunities best suited for an in-depth study of the subjective account of the everyday experience of television. The research was designed to gather a varied account of the televisual experiences of the participants. This has been achieved by the combination of two methodological techniques based on the same semi-structured questionnaire (see **Table 4** in the Annexes), the focus group and the in-depth interview, followed by a written account of the participants containing a numeric, ponderable subsection (see **Table 5** in the Annexes). The oral account has been coded and analysed using the ATLAS.ti qualitative analysis software, while the written account has been employed to outline the age-groups' characterisation according to the four leisure coordinates.

In order to explore the similarities and differences found between generations the participants from rural and urban areas of Biscay in the field work were segmented in four different age-groups. These age groups were labelled as *Youngs* (between 18 and 34 years old), *Adults 1* (between 35 and 49 years), *Adults 2* (between 50 and 64 years) and *Elders* (over 65 years old).

Table 2: Selection criteria and sessions.

Participant selection criteria	Sessions (location and number of participants)
Maximum variation sample	Focus groups: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youngs: Durango (7), Mungia (5) • Adults 1: Bermeo (6), Bilbao (6) • Adults 2: Santurtzi (7), Mungia (6), Lekeitio (8) • Elders: Bilbao (5), Aulestia (8) • Pretest: Getxo (10), Bilbao (8)
Critical cases	In-depth interviews: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youngs: Bakio • Adults 1: Bilbo, Larrabetzu, Muskiz • Elders: Lezama, Lekeitio
Total number of participants	73

Eleven focus groups have been conducted according to a maximum variation sampling criteria (Jensen, 2012) focusing on two variables: age and place of residence (see **Table 2**). Age variation has been reflected both in the representation of all age-groups and the inner variation in each group, seeking the maximum representation possible of different ages.

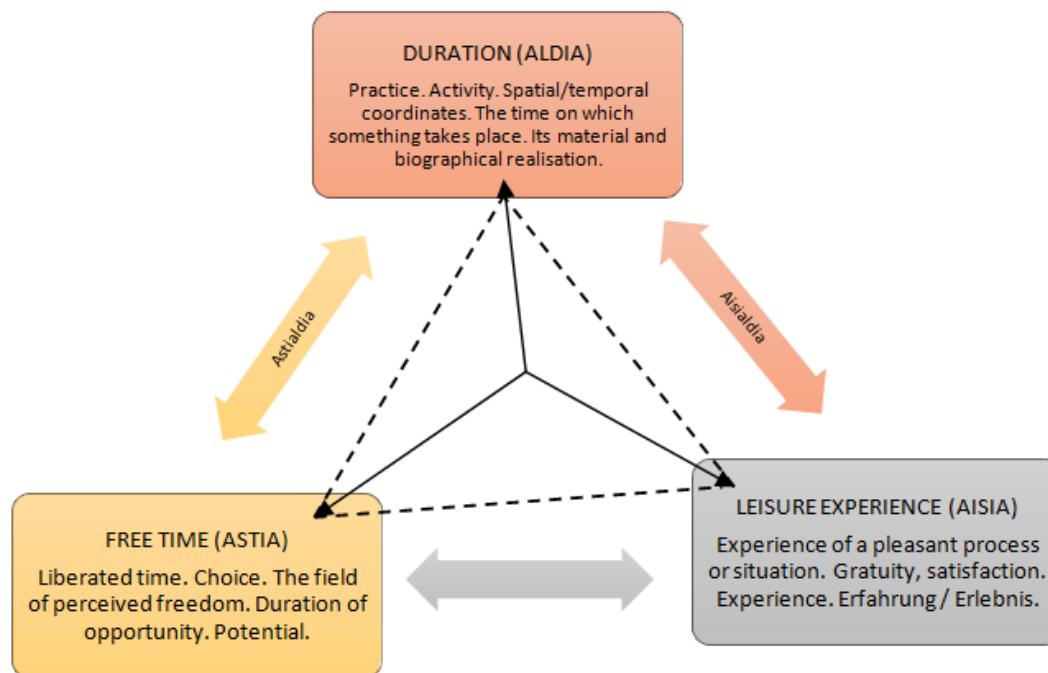
Regarding the place of residence, a balance has been sought between residents in the metropolitan area of Bilbao and smaller towns. Two focus groups out of eleven have been conducted in the capital of province, while nine have been conducted in smaller towns of the region. Focus groups have proven especially useful to help bring out agreements and disagreements between the participants and to promote the reflection, negotiation and discussion around the proposed topics. Therefore, they have proven strongly suited to the exploration of generational belonging and differentiation related to the leisure relationships with television.

The six in-depth interviews have followed the logic of the selection of critical cases (Flyvberg, 2004). The selection of interviewees has been conducted looking for cases especially suited to validate or refute the study's previous assumptions: three tech-savvy profiles, a young woman who almost doesn't watch television, a widow in a rural area and an unmarried elder woman in a coastal town. These accounts, while statistically negligible, have provided very interesting and idiosyncratic profiles of leisure relationships with television and have allowed the detailed exploration of individual relations with television and the informants to have the time to elaborate and articulate the more significant elements of a complex issue. It has also provided the participants with the opportunity to think about and discuss at length about their relationship with television in their everyday life. The written account that has been required from the participants at the end of the sessions has also proven invaluable to anchor their narrative in objective and subjective elements and enable more quantitative analyses.

The criterion followed to delimitate the age-groups has been to create four groups of similar range (a cohort of 15 years), excluding minors, in order to introduce objective age as a variation and delimitating factor. While arbitrary, this criterion has enabled a structural-comparative description of the corpus in order to identify and compare the key structuring elements of various age-groups' relationship with television. This structural-comparative description has been presented around three analytical vertices: in relation to the *practices* related to television, in relation to the conceptualisation and experience of *spare time* and in relation to the *experience* and understanding of televisual leisure following the proposed integral approach to televisual leisure. *Astia* in Basque stands for free or spare time, *aldia* means the time or period where something takes place, and *aisia* stands for leisure. The three vertices model allows an integral approach to the relations with television, articulating both objective and subjective elements into it (see **Figure 1** below).

The practices related to television have been first examined including *what* is watched in television and *when*, the *times* of television in everyday life, the *quantity* of television, the *places* where television sets are located, the *channels* of major extension, television and *company*, simultaneous *activities* in front of television, the specific *contents* of television, the *attention* to television, television as a *topic* of conversation, *zapping* and

Figure 1: The integral approach to televisual leisure (Astia-Aldia-Aisia model)



advertisement, adjacent *technologies* of television, *online* television and *pay-per-view* television. Subsequently, the concept of free time has been explored in its relation to television, starting with the notion of one's own *spare time*, continuing with television's *relative importance* in this spare time and the nature of the *time of watching* television and ending with the different practices and experiences of television during *working days and holidays*. Lastly, televisual leisure is described and compared: the *concept* of television and the understandings of its reality, television's *evaluation*, emotions and *experiences* related to television, *uses* of television, *definitions* of television and the *ideals* of television.

This conceptual case analysis is grounded in systematic comparison enabled by the coding of the corpus based on aprioristic categories and presents a "theory driven" or deductive examination of the report of the four age groups. This approach has facilitated the comparison between the different age groups, but is also bound to the pre-existing criteria defined by the researcher and to the question-and-answer dynamics that have taken place during the focus group and in-depth interview sessions. The successive stages of data analysis and coding, as well as the information retrieval and visualization aided by software, have been crucial in the systematic analysis and the generation of theoretical categories following the QDA model. Five coding strategies (attribute coding, focused coding, structuring coding, in vivo coding and theoretical coding) have been assigned to three reasoning logics: deductive, inductive and abductive. This multiple approach has enabled a methodological and interpretative triangulation of data, a structural-comparative description and to the construction of an interpretative-explicative model grounded in the participants' narrative that will be summarized in the following section.

Results

Significant differences have been registered between the four age groups along all three vertices (duration, free time and leisure experience) regarding the leisure relationships with television. Although noteworthy similarities can be found in all groups, Adults 1 and Adults 2 age-groups are related to more similar configurations regarding television as practice, with the Elders, and especially the Youngs' age-group, drifting apart.

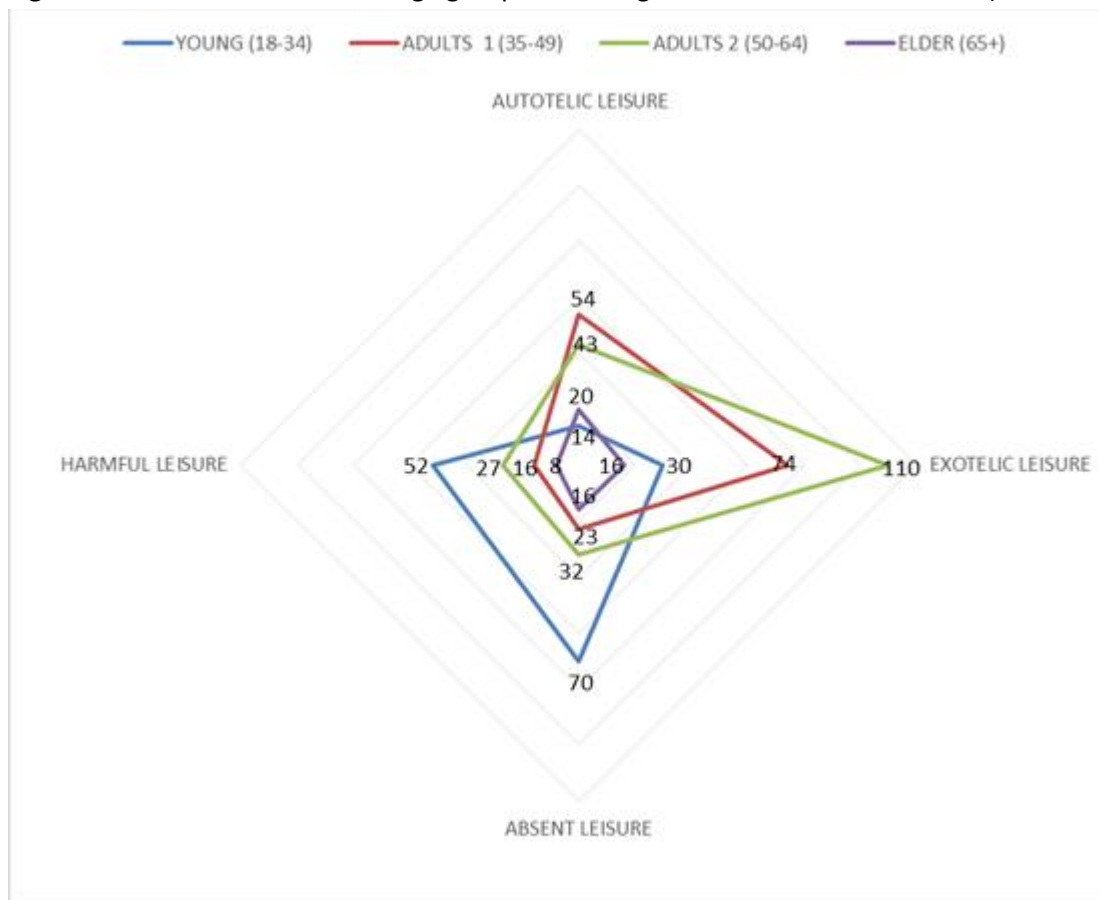
Regarding the conceptualisation and experience of spare time Youngs and Elders have shown a more similar pattern referring to a free time that must be filled (usually by television), while the two Adults groups have referred to a more scarce and valued conception of spare time, where television's worth (and meaning) is more mutable. Finally, very different reports have been collected regarding the nature of the television experience in each age group's everyday life, which suggest the existence of generational "change of location" or a "tendency inherent in" each age-group referring to their leisure relationships with media (Mannheim & Wolff, 1993: 169).

The previously discussed classification of leisure coordinates has also proven valuable to propose a comparison between the four age-groups. In that regard the written account of the participants has revealed significant differences between them. The numeric subsection of the written questionnaire (see **Table 5** in the Annexes) has enabled weighing the individual importance given to each the proposed sentences in relation to the others in a ranking scale giving a value from 1 to 4 to each selected item according to its relative position (4 points to those selected in the first place and 1 to those selected in the last place. See **Table 5** for a relation of the proposed sentences to the leisure coordinates).

It must be noted though, that the elders' age group has presented methodological difficulties (see "Discussion, limitations and next steps") leading to a significantly more reduced array of answers in that group, and that all answers are presented in an "as is" basis, without averaging the responses with the number of participants which limits the quantitative generalizability of the scale. The characterization of the age groups according to their leisure coordinates is therefore presented as an illustrative portrayal of the differences between age-groups, and as a guideline for the exploration of these characteristics (see **Figure 2** below).

In any case, each age-group emerges as an effective cluster of accounts of the televisual experience in aggregate terms, distinct from the others and internally coherent (although with significant internal variation): participants appear as more similar to other participants in their own age-group than to participants in other age-groups, irrespective to the particular session they participated in. The combination of oral and written discourses reinforces the idea of significantly distinct profiles of the televisual leisure experiences in terms of the four ideal categories, and the four different age-groups have been labelled according to these intra-similarities and external dissimilarities.

Figure 2: characterisation of the age groups according to their leisure coordinates (written account)

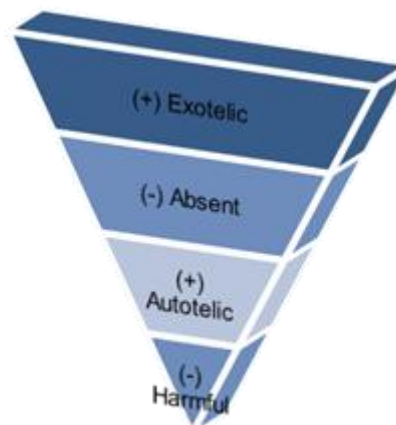


Youngs' relationship with television has been characterised as “the need to fill the void” reflecting the prevalence of absent leisure in the account of their experience and the seemingly contradictory relationship between their critical views of television and their alleged dependency on the medium. The *Adults 1* age group’s televisual leisure is characterised as “the prize at the end of the day” as a consequence of their strong association between watching television and the experiencing of one’s own free or spare time, and the markedly positive directionality of their leisure account predominantly linked to exotelic and autotelic leisure. *Adults 2* relate to television as a “multipurpose companion box” which can be adapted to the needs and desires of the moment and place, supplying relax, rest, entertainment, information or company when it is required. Their strong affiliation to exotelic leisure suggests an utilitarian, pragmatic understanding of television as an everyday life leisure resource. Finally the *Elders* take television as a “open window to the world” and relate to it with a sense of wonder and amazement that cannot be found in the other age-groups. They explicitly display admiration and gratitude for it, and admit that their world would be much poorer, much duller, without television.

Cross-checking the informants’ oral and written account has also enabled an examination of the different leisure coordinates that television activates (or negates) and to propose a global aggregate (and average) characterisation of the leisure directionality of television, with exotelic leisure at its top and harmful leisure at its bottom (see figure 3).

That is to say: in terms of the ideal categories of humanist leisure and taken into account all the written and oral accounts of all informants in all age-groups in an aggregate manner, television is a complex, alternant entity composed by exotelic, absent, autotelic and harmful experiences, where very significant differences can be found between the examined age-groups.

Figure 3: general categorisation of televisual leisure directionality and coordinates.



In any case, despite and because of the obvious differences between the studied age groups and their inner consistency in terms of the general characteristics of televisual leisure, it is crucial to examine the concept of generations as something related but different to the examined age cohorts. That is to say, to explore in what sense do the examined/constructed age groups function as generations. In order to examine how do generations relate to their relationships and experiences with television, the connection between the age-groups and generations is explored based on emic (or insider) and etic (or outsider) perspectives and on the relevance of generational belonging and generational differentiation.

In **Table 3** (below), rows display how different age groups tend to portray their own generation (central column) and how do they portray the previous and next generations in comparison with their own. This etic/emic characterisation clearly shows that the characteristics that an age group projects into “other generations” are often projected towards it by members of other age groups. At the same time, while age-groups are clear cut and can be clearly distinguished, generations tend to mix and superimpose, blurring or sharpening distinctions depending on the situation (or the interlocutors) and even allowing multiple memberships to more than one generations.

It is nonetheless interesting to note that all four age-groups refer to a technological change where their own “generation” was pivotal: the emergence of television and telephone, the proliferation and familiarisation with new media technologies, the adoption of the *Game Boy* handheld console, cellphones and portable technologies... A sense of being witness (and participant) to epochal transitions constitutes the nucleus of all reported

generational self-definitions simultaneously with the differentiation with previous and next generations.

Participants in the *Youngs* age-group recognise themselves as fully integrated in a technologically saturated social sphere where cellphones and smartphones are essential, but they also remember a time where it was possible to function without these devices:

WOMAN (21): I do see, for example, that we have been the change, a little. I mean, we have been without a cellphone, I mean, I have gone out to the street and the friends? Well, they'll be at the usual place...

WOMAN (24): But we started using those stuff a lot eh? We started a little with Game Boys, also with cellphones, internet caught us squarely... I mean, I remember spending hours in the messenger and then... well, that change of mentality....

Technology (especially smartphones and the internet) appear strongly linked to the image of the younger generation (both in their self-portrait and their characterisation by other groups), although many of the participants in this age-group don't display particularly savvy habits beyond the daily use of the smartphone and the digital social networks. Nonetheless, televisual references have often been quoted by participants when self-portraying a generation. In the case of the *Adults 1* age-group, the perceived change in television programming for children is also referred as a change of epoch characterised by a broadening of choices and a shift in tastes in the younger generation:

Table 3: etic and emic characterisation of generations (by age groups)

	Previous generations	Own generation	Next generations
Youngs	Either very "hooked" to television, or don't watch at all. Conformists. Don't really expect anything from television.	Generation of a change of epoch. Cellphone and "game boy" generation. Technology consumers. Television "always been there", unavoidable.	Lack of criteria. More conformists. Peer pressure. Television not as important.
Adults 1	Never switch off the screen. Television "on" all day long. Father figure typically decides what to see. Westerns. No internet whatsoever.	Transition generation. More television-loving than the younger ones. Starting to get familiar with the internet.	Either very fond of or just ignoring television. Cellphone much more important. Heavy internet users.

Adults 2	<p>Radio in the morning, television in the afternoon. Have changed less than what television itself has changed. The force of habitude.</p>	<p>Witnesses of changes, adapting to them. New opportunities of technology (radio, internet...). Television used to be more important.</p>	<p>Online television. Virtual television. Used to see what they want when they want (a screen for each). Less limited when using technologies.</p>
Elders	<p>Pre-written culture (mathematics...). An age without watches. An age before television.</p>	<p>Remember when television and telephone arrived. Witnesses of an accelerated change. No internet.</p>	<p>Totally machine-dependent. Less patience. More things to to (in school, after school, in the internet...).</p>

WOMAN (40): Once when we were out, we started singing old television songs...
Candy Candy, Sesame Street, what else... those were from our days!

MAN (38): *Mazinger Z! The bear Misa...*

WOMAN 2 (40): V...

WOMAN (37): *Marco too, I did watch it quite a lot...*

MAN (38): *Marco, Heidi...*

WOMAN (40): There may have been a change too, there. We watched Heidi and Marco... and now they may be boring. Now they watch other things...

WOMAN 2 (40): More violence. Well, *Mazinger Z* was violent too...

This kind of reflective self-portrait and hesitant differentiation with other generations is typical of both Adults groups, where the objective references to television content and media technologies are agreed upon, but their significance becomes quickly disputed. Although “differences” between generations are universally taken for granted, the exact nature of these differences are put into question as soon as they are mentioned. A conversation from the *Adults 2* age-group illustrates this:

WOMAN (52): Maybe we are more tied to it, well, of course, think when did my mother first know of television, no? Much later on, but well, I think we tend to watch it more like they do, I think.

WOMAN (53): We are closer to our parents than to our children, maybe?

MAN (57): I don't know, I think...

MAN (59): Our son wants to watch television series more than films. Myself I prefer films to series, and grandma... I don't know what she wants to watch.

Perceptions of the similarities and differences with previous and posterior generations are not evenly distributed among the participants, and characteristics allocated to certain generations are co-opted by individuals according to their own experience. Still, the images of the younger and older generations remain consistent enough to separate one's “own generation”, and the tacit understanding that all members of the age-group belong to the same generation hasn't been put into question. Individuals affiliating with “other” generational practices or world-views appear to do so by reconciling these co-opted characteristics to the primary generational unit, except in one critical case examined through an in-depth interview, where the objective generational location and the subjective generational affiliation appear clearly separated:

MAN (40): Well, I know my generation is the generation of television, that it is the FM radio generation, but I see myself as of the internet generation, and I proclaim it. (...) Although by age and by lived experience I should say that I am of the generation of television, and paper and all that, and I do love all these media; paper, radio, television... I consider myself of the internet generation

since the 94 and therefore all my pondering about media, culture, politics, about things, I do it from the standpoint of the internet generation.

The internet does provide the clearest “objective” divide between generations and the allure of the multiple (and multiplying) non-television screens function as the images of the drifting away from the television screen of the younger generations for the *Elders* age-group, but so do the modern schooling system and the proliferation of extra-curricular activities for the youngest ones:

MAN (71): The thing is that younger ones are using less the television.

Computers, today they have so many... machines as they have...

WOMAN (85): They go to the internet now.

MAN (77): Well, the very young ones still watch cartoons...

WOMAN (85): But when they are a little older they use the internet and...

MAN (71): They have less time left for television...

WOMAN (75): They don't have time, no. They don't even have the time eh?

MAN (77): The school, the homework and...

MAN (67): And then they must study music, dance, English... they must study...

WOMAN (75): Yes, everything!

WOMAN (74): Children today don't live. We have one, eight years old, the things he must do apart from school!

The bigger the distance between age-groups, the more solid and objective the differences appear between generations and the “change of epoch” discourse becomes anchored in social, technological or cultural shifts (as well as to habits linked to biological age). Changes occurring in media constitute constant references for generational characterisation and differentiation. The moment of insertion of a new media in one's life (early years, adulthood, retirement) is employed as a biographical and generational marker, and has a lasting effect on the relationship with television. For instance expertise is mentioned especially regarding younger generations and new digital technologies. But even these apparently clear cut delimitations find individual and collective exceptions that are then adapted to the general etic and emic imagining of generations.

Far from being isolated, solid and airtight categories, generations are reported to be in constant interaction and contact in everyday life. Therefore they emerge as relative constructs in constant revision, constantly rebuilt and negotiated according to intersubjective criteria. Participants watch television with members of other generations than their own, learn and dispute with each other, they move away and come closer in their leisure relationships with a television in transition. Generational belonging and differentiation appear to mediate the televisual experience and the overall leisure

relationships with television, and, in turn, the leisure relationships with television are incorporated to the narrative of generations.

The televisual leisure experience happens not only on the treble level of spare time, duration and leisure experience proposed by the *astia-aldia-aisia* model (see **Figure 2**), but also on the level of the (inter)generational daily interaction of imitation, learning, distantiation and opposition, cohabitation, contact and negotiation. Televisual leisure is never disconnected from the generational belonging and differentiation processes of identity.

Discussion, limitations and future research

Although age and television have been dance partners for quite some time now, the issue of generations offers new ground for the exploration of contemporary media audiences. The development of the generations-audiences binomial has the potential to shake the dance floor and change not only the theoretical approaches, but the empirical work to be done in the field of audience research in the near future.

This paper can be situated in the tradition of the cultural approaches to the problem of generations and agrees with the idea that there is need for more than an equation of age to generation to understand contemporary media usage (Aroldi & Colombo, 2007; Vittadini, Siibak, Reifova, & Bilandzic, 2014). Based on the explored accounts of televisual leisure experiences, generations emerge as multifaceted phenomena that help tackling present and future understandings of television. Emic approaches to generational self-definitions (Boccia Artieri, 2011) and etic approaches to generational differentiations (Herring, 2008) between age-cohorts have proven fruitful and worthy of further inquiry in that direction.

Based on a threefold approach of audiences, generations and leisure I have argued that generations provide revisable identity frameworks where each member of the audience can build and imagine her/himself and others in front of the television, and doing so give form to television's daily significance. In that sense, television has been depicted as an intergenerational leisure artefact whose significance is constantly created and recreated in relation to a complex and dynamic media ecosystem. Television functions as an artefact *for* leisure in the sense that its functions of entertainment, information and even education appear consistently linked to leisure: even in a scenario of digital convergence where new media practices and habits are mushrooming, watching television remains as a major recognisable leisure activity across different age-cohorts. In that sense the evolution of television reflects and has an impact in the social understanding and conception of leisure and leisure time: its development is sure to mirror and influence future social manifestations of leisure as a social construct that is simultaneously an indicator and an agent of social transformation.

Television is also an artefact *of* leisure because it is through the various leisure relationships that individuals and collectives develop in relation to it where its conception and experience are drawn. If television has transformed the conception of leisure, the way leisure is understood and experienced certainly effects the present and future notions of

television. The collected evidence shows that different participants engage in significantly different manners with that the same television content. The same can be said about the notion of watching television, which can be related to as anything from a waste of time to the best moment of the week, an opportunity to bring the family together or a chance not to engage in conversation. Therefore it is concluded that the key to television's present and future lies not in its objective, inert characteristics or in the technological development per se, but in the daily experience and in the meanings that subjects are able to derive from it (Gorton, 2009; Williams & Williams, 2003). Television's social and personal reality is primarily and inevitably one of leisure and it is in that respect that generations will continue to be relevant, constantly redefining themselves in front of and in relation to television (Mittell, 2011).

Bringing notions from leisure studies to audience research opens many opportunities for empirical research and for building new theory from the native terms found in the participants' discourse. In fact, the true limitations of this study are necessarily linked to the complexity of televisual leisure relations as a research object and the richness and depth of the information gathered from the sessions with the participants. The need to synthesize the gathered accounts (both collective and individual) clashes with the inherent complexity and diversity existing within age groups and individuals, inviting subsequent analysis of the corpus. The coding architecture developed in ATLAS.ti and the proposed explanatory-interpretative framework allow different approaches to the richness of the data. Gender issues have also been only marginally considered, although much could be said on the differences and similarities between women and men in relation to their televisual leisure as age have been prioritised before other variables such as gender, sociocultural situation, economic revenue or participation in the community. A comparison of values associated to language in a multilingual contexts or a study of the correlation between socio-economic differences and televisual leisure experiences with television could for instance be undertaken, in order to produce more socially anchored knowledge.

Regarding methodology, working with the Elders' group has proven to be more challenging than initially expected, and the written questionnaire presented problems when dealing with the older participants. In that sense the questionnaire must clearly be reformulated and a backup technique should be included in order to make it more accessible in future fieldwork. Also, no minors were interviewed during this study, which remains a huge limitation when dealing with the generations' leisure relationships with television. Children, as we know, do watch television, talk about television and have opinions about television. If they have been left out it has only been due the legal and procedural complications of getting their tutors' consent to participate and because the items in the semi-structured script were thought to be too complex for the younger ones to answer. In that sense future research could profit from interdisciplinary and multi-methodological approaches and would be especially interesting in order to work with children and older people: the combination of quantitative, generalising techniques with

qualitative language-based techniques, and even creative methodologies involving building, drawing, filming, writing... (Gauntlett, 2007; Pink, 2008)

I started pointing that television and its audiences should be researched from very different perspectives, disciplines and methodologies in a time of profound technological and social transformations. The same goes for leisure studies that need to fertilise and to be fertilised by other disciplines as well, not only because interdisciplinarity has the potential to reflect, assess, and even re-structure how social life is experienced and understood (Mair, 2006) but because categories should be re-examined in the light of disciplines other than our own, concepts appropriated, techniques experimented and notions re-evaluated in order to respond to the challenges we face as researchers and audiences in a changing media ecosystem. This essay and the research that it is based on represent a first and modest attempt to promote the dialogue between different areas of enquiry: leisure studies, audience research and the study of generations. I would be glad if it has in any way contributed in that way.

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Appendices:

Table 4: Semi-structured script for focus groups and in-depth interviews

VERTEX	FOCUS CODING	ITEMS
INTRO		Presentation of the research, permission to record...
		Self-introduction of the participants.
1. Duration of practice	1.1 Television YES/NO	Do you watch television? What do you watch? (All participants required to respond).
	1.2 Times of (watching) television	When do you watch television? In which moment of the day? In what days of the week?
	1.3 Quantity of Television	How much television do you watch? Is that more or lees than before?
	1.4 Places of television	When do you watch television? Where is it at home? Where do you watch it if not at home?
	1.5 What television(s)?	Which television channels do you watch?
	1.6 Company	Who do you watch television with?
	1.7 Simultaneous activities	What else do you do in front of the television? (eat, talk, red, homework...)
	1.8 Television contents	What do you watch most in the television? (kinds of programs, particular programs...). How do you decide what to watch?
	1.9 Attention	How closely do you pay attention to television, when it is switched on?

	1.10 Talk	Do you talk in front of television? Do you talk about television?
	1.10 Zapping	Do you usually do zapping? When? How? Why?
	1.11 Technologies adjacent to television	Do you record television programs (VCR, digital recorder...). Do you have satellite/cable television? DVD/Blu-Ray? Consoles?
	1.12 On line television	Do you download television content over the internet? Do you watch television via streaming? When? How? Why / why not?
	1.13 Pay per view television	Do you watch paid content in the television? How?
2. Free and spare time	2.1 Free time	How much time do you have free in an average day, for yourself? During a week? Is it a lot? Too little? Enough? How do you call that time?
	2.2 Spare time and TELEVISION	What part of that time do you employ in watching television?
	2.3 Vacations and workdays	Does that percentage change along the year? (holidays, winter, summer...)? Why?
	2.4 Television's time relative to the spare time	How would you describe the time you spend watching television? Does television take you time away from doing other stuff?
3. Leisure experience	3.1 What is (watching) television?	Has television changed? And the way you understand television? Has technology anything to do with it? Have you noticed new ways of watching television?
	3.2 Beneficial / harmful	Is watching television good or bad? Why? Do you watch it even when it's harmful?
	3.3 Experiences / emotions	What kind of emotions do you feel with television? (amusement, curiosity, boredom, joy, anger, relaxation, wrath...)
	3.4 Definition of television	How would you define television from you in three words?
	3.5 Uses / functions of television	What is television useful for? What do you use it for?
	3.6 Ideal TELEVISION	How would your ideal television be? Is actual television far or near from it?
4. Generations	4.1 Generational belonging	Do you consider yourselves part of a generation? Which one? In what sense? Does that have any effect on your relationship with television?

	4.2 Generational differentiation	What do different generations expect from television? Are there differences?
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(translated from the original)

Table 5: Questionnaire (written account)

Personal data	
Name and surname	
Age	
Gender	
Town	
Occupation	
Level of education	
Marital status	

Relationship with television

How much TV do you watch a day or less (in hours)?	
And during the week?	
How many people live at home?	
How many TV sets do you have at home?	
Which devices / appliances you have connected to your TV? (VCR, DVD...)	
Do you watch TV on the Internet?	

Choose four affirmations that you agree with and order them from 1 to 4 (1 being the most agreeable sentence)

Autotelic leisure	I like television.	
	I find what I want in television.	
	It is a pleasure to watch television.	
Exotelic leisure	Television informs me about the world.	
	I learn from television.	
	Television is useful.	
Absent leisure	Television bores me.	
	I watch television when I'm bored.	
	Watching television is a waste of time.	
Harmful leisure	Television is addictive.	
	Television takes time away from doing other things.	
	I watch too much television.	

(Translated and modified from the original to include the relation to the leisure coordinates)