INTERGENERATIONAL RADIO AT SCHOOL

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Abstract

The current European sociodemographic context has brought attention to the problems relating the future of the elderly people. In response to this demographic trend, there is an urgent need for political, educational, and social programs that foster preventive and proactive measures that may benefit from the fact that the future elderly population has higher levels of literacy and information. School and media share a democratic responsibility that enables them to intervene in these social issues, fostering intergenerational dialogue. Particularly radio has been successfully used for decades as a medium for education and empowerment that can foster proximity through the use of its informal and unique relation to the ancestral connection with storytelling.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss intergenerational programs associated with radio in the Iberian, Anglo-Saxon and North American contexts. The preliminary results indicate that the few existing programs promote active and healthy ageing, bring generations closer, increase participation in matters related to local communities and foster debate on global and multicultural issues.

Keywords: intergenerational programs, active ageing, radio.

1 INTRODUCTION

In face of the challenges brought by the sociodemographic trends and the ageing of the population in developed countries both school and the media are increasingly being considered as a strategic axis for intergenerational action. Specifically, school radio can be a tool to foster intergenerational inclusion and dialogue. Last February, in connection with the celebration of World Radio Day, UNESCO promoted a series of initiatives around the idea that radio is indeed the driving force for stimulating social and intergenerational dialogue, social change and the engagement of the young. The exchange of experiences, knowledge, feelings and emotions between generations can act as a catalyst for contexts of shared learning and annihilation of stereotypes, in an atmosphere of cooperation and acceptance of the ‘other’.

The purpose of this paper is precisely to discuss intergenerational programs associated with radio in the Iberian, Anglo-Saxon and North American contexts. The preliminary findings show promising results regarding active and healthy ageing and fostering both participation in community matters and debates on global and multicultural issues. These projects expose the reversal of social roles, develop critical and creative thinking, active citizenship, and the literacy of both the younger and the older, in a socially sustainable worldview.

1.1 Media and the new paradigm of active ageing

The phenomenon of demographic ageing in Europe has triggered an increasingly scientific, media and political interest. According to WHO [1], age groups should be conceptualized according to the sociocultural and economic-political characteristics of the countries. This is evidence of the socially constructed nature of the phenomenon of ageing [2], which has been the target of various discursive requalifications by leveraging adjectives such as “positive”, “healthy” and “active” [3].

The new paradigm of ‘active ageing’ proposes a requalification of old age, promoting positive conceptions, and an extension of the social and economic participation of the elderly, against the persistence of stereotypy that associates this phase of life with uselessness, disease and dependence [4] [5]. As one of the major challenges facing contemporary societies, political discourses on active ageing have sought to combat negative social representations. Therefore, intergenerational programs have been proposed as a way to promote active ageing and lifelong learning [6].

Mannheim’s definition of generation [7] states that the media environment can be considered as a ‘generational context’, considering that different age-based groups organize the mediatic or technological experience in a similar way. On the other hand, the author warns that the continuing character of generational changes amplifies the notion of a ‘generational situation’ [7]. Consequently,
"older people have experienced many societal and technological changes, adults follow technology since they were young in a perspective of living with digital media" [6].

Colombo and Fortunati [8] considered that the mediatic experience occurs within the cultural environments of the people, an idea that is associated with group membership. "We-sense", as Corsten [9] states. This means that historical and social experiences, whether individual or collective, within the public or private sphere, allow identification with groups. Therefore, the various generations experience social and technological changes in the perspective of coexistence. In this sense, media experiences can shape a social construction of a "generational identity" that derives from appropriations of the media and digital media.

Bolin and Skogerbø [10] consider that the digital era is contributing to straight generations and intergenerational educational programs can build a bridge between different age groups, enhancing empowerment and lifelong learning in an informal learning logic. "Generational inter-learning processes can be of great relevance to increase different generations relations with the digital" [6].

According to the International Consortium for Intergenerational Programs and the American National Council on Ageing, intergenerational programs provide numerous benefits and can rely on radio as a privileged medium for disseminating educational programs linked to the social function of the environment [11]. These programs promote the discussion of current issues, cognitive and linguistic improvement, fight against sedentarism and disinformation, and help to reinforce self-esteem through intergenerational empowerment.

1.2 Radio and empowerment

Radio has an enormous tradition in the field of education. In one way or another, the majority of developing countries have used broadcasting for educational purposes [12]. Radio has served as a vehicle for distance learning, reaching remote areas [13]. But broadcasting has also served for proximity empowerment: community radios are also an important vector in the history of media and education [14]. The spoken word has a huge transformative potential. The first community radios have proven it, by giving voice to oppressed groups and allowing for the spreading of counter hegemonic narratives in a unique way [15]. Radio has been an obvious choice because it surpasses barriers like illiteracy and budget limitations. Moreover, it is personal, intimate, easy to use and can travel long distances. Hence, radio has been a resource in both informal and formal education. Within the latter, the use of radio in schools is an important dimension. Listening to radio shows and newscasts in the classroom or producing a radio debate are common strategies. However, in the last years, after the first impact [16] was clearly surpassed, radio - or sound media - has found a renovated momentum in its digitized life. With the internet, distance and price barriers were completely dissolved. The access to production was generalized. Today, anyone with a personal computer and a wireless connection can produce and deliver acceptable quality audio content to the other side of the world. Podcasts earned its place as a pedagogical tool in formal educational: easy to produce, to use, flexible and mobile [17] [14]. In fact, with the internet and the generalization of digital consumer products, the production and spreading of audio content has been made a lot easier.

In the last couple of years, podcasts were responsible for giving back audio storytelling to people. In fact, ever since Benjamin [18] declared in the 1930’s that the urgency of the news was killing the place for stories in radio, that things only got worse. Music format radios took over the sector and the Twitter era showed that people generally don’t have time for long speeches. However, the success of podcasts like Serial or S-Town [19] [20] has been showing that there is a public for slow pace personal stories and that sound is a unique way to convey the personal and intimate experience of life.

2 METHODOLOGY

As we mentioned previously, demographic patterns often refer to the decrease of birth rate, emphasize ageing and length of life hope worldwide. Taking in account this scenario, we questioned how has radio been used as a tool to promote dialogue and cooperation between generations at school. In this exploratory study, we also wanted to identify the benefits that have been associated with the participation in these intergenerational projects.

Initially, intergenerational radio projects were identified through a search on the internet, using "radio intergenerational projects" as keywords. We came up with meaningful and successful programmes developed in the European, Australian and American landscapes. On a second phase, we excluded
projects that did not involve schools. The description of the selected projects is based on the analysis of the websites, the projects’ final reports and academic articles written on these specific cases.

3 RESULTS

In 2016, a scholarship given to a research project in Social Sciences by deputies of A Coruña, in Galicia, contributed to the design, programming and evaluation of four intergenerational radio projects that were produced with the cooperation of Laboratorio de Radio, whose work is based on an inclusive, therapeutic and pedagogic radio for children and adults. The Asociación Cultural San Campio in Miguel de Sarandón (Vedra), the CEIP Barouta, the CPI Virxe da Cela (Monfero), as well as the Centro Cívico Cidade Vella (A Coruña) were associated with local schools and some local radios in order to establish contacts between children, youngsters and elderly people around radio programming [21].

The projects “Generaciones en Sintonía” [22] in Segovia and “Miradas” [23] in Salamanca were also responsible for the dissemination of communicative, technical and cultural skills among these age groups. All these radio programmes face ageing as a multi-generational issue and promote both social and cultural capital through debates around current themes, interests and problems regarding the young and the elder people, integrating journalistic practices or raising and developing musical, literary and geographical awareness.

In the United Kingdom, ALLFM intergenerational radio project was part of the Manchester Generations Together bid whose main target aimed at community action in south, central and east Manchester using formal and informal educational methodologies. Engaging, informing, promoting health and well-being, social cohesion and indispensable skills leading to employment are among the radio station’s goals. Using radio comedies and plays, debates, programming involving the participation of live bands and/or artists indoors and outdoors are some of the challenges that help vanishing the generation gap [24].

The Department of Communication in the College of Letters, Arts and Sciences of the University of Colorado, in the United States of America, integrates another strategy to include local old generations by inviting them to share their memorable long life testimonials in a storytelling format at the university radio station. The project is called The Intergenerational Radio Storytelling Project [25].

The Australian intergenerational radio project called “Radio Holliday” was run by Big hArt, an organization dedicated to social intervention. It started with at risk teenagers who were trained to collect stories among the elder community in the island of Tasmania and members of shack communities. The ABC Radio joined this project [26].

According to these projects’ reports and collected participants’ testimonials, the benefits that the interaction between school, social and media ecosystems bring up are huge: intergenerational radio projects allowed the exchange of knowledge, skills and experiences between generations; helped building social ties; eradicated multidirectional stereotypes; developed literacy competences and proactive citizenship behaviors, the sense of responsibility, cooperation, commitment and belonging; enlarged the construction, maintenance and revitalization of community facilities and public infrastructures, and managed to increase self-esteem and resilience attitudes across generations. In the Spanish case, radio programming worked well for the promotion of the local cultural heritage but all projects represent a very clear sense of their communities’ needs.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Despite the tradition of radio as a medium for empowerment and its enormous potential for storytelling and for communicating the intimate, intergenerational radios are not common. However, there is a significant number of benefits associated to the implementation of these projects that should be considered. The development of intergenerational radio projects, particularly when associated with other dimensions of the current media ecosystem, like social media and mobile platforms, can be a strategic way to foster intergenerational dialogue, lifelong learning and a prolific digital citizenship in engaging and inclusive forms. Intergenerational radio offers a promising field for the promotion of community, social and ethical values, and it represents a concrete way to address the new challenges posed by the sociodemographic changes, including active and healthy ageing.

REFERENCES


