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The Rhythm of Ages:
Analyzing Mediatization Through
the Lens of Generations Across Cultures

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A criticism raised about mediatization research is that although the concept of mediatization presupposes a long-term temporal perspective, there are few projects that have studied the process methodologically over time. This article argues that a generational approach can serve as one suggested analytical solution to the problem of studying long-term social, cultural, and societal change. The article describes a recently finished project on media generations in Sweden and Estonia and discusses overcoming the problem of conducting research on mediatization as a long-term process. Through intergenerational and cross-cultural analysis, the article shows how media memories from childhood and the formative years of youth can reveal specific traits in the historical process and how the role of the media has changed over time in the minds of different generations. The article focuses on four generations that had their formative years during significant historical moments in the late 20th century; these formative moments were marked by specificities both in the respective national media landscapes and in the vast historical and geopolitical differences between the two countries.

Keywords: Estonia, experience, generations, historical change, mediatization, Sweden

Introducing the Problem: Mediatization as a Long-Term Process

Mediatization theory is an area of fast and dynamic development, but also of intense debate. This debate is, on the one hand, "internal," involving voices that stem from researchers who, in one way or another, critique different aspects of mediatization theory from within the field (cf. Couldry, 2012, p. 135; Lundby, 2009). However, "external" criticism has also been raised against the mediatization concept as such. The most elaborated of these criticisms so far was formulated by David Deacon and James Stanyer, who have questioned the perspective on grounds of "how causal processes are thought about, how historical change is understood, and how concepts are designed" (Deacon & Stanyer, 2014, p. 1032). This criticism has been countered by major proponents of mediatization theory (Hepp, Hjarvard, & Lundby,

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2015), leading to yet more specified criticism from Deacon and Stanyer (2015) and further debate (Lunt & Livingstone, 2016). What all agree on, however, is that mediatization analysis needs to engage empirically in issues of historical change, in order to determine whether the media have indeed had an impact on other institutions or which role the media, as technologies and sign structures, have had in the social and cultural historical process. This is not so much a matter of whether change has occurred, since change is the defining feature of modernity (cf. Berman, 1982/1988), but rather of the ways in which change has occurred and what role the media have played in the process.

This means that the ontological position vis-à-vis historical change is important, and within mediatization theory there are several ways in which historical change is conceptualized—some of which are revealed through the fact that researchers representing different mediatization perspectives work with varied temporal perspectives. A common way to describe the main strands of mediatization theory is to distinguish between an *institutional* perspective, focusing on the (mass) media as institutions in society (e.g., journalism), and a *social constructionist* perspective, emphasizing mediatization as a meta-process stemming from the combination of all media in society (Hepp, 2013; Hepp & Hasebrink, 2014). Broadly presented, the institutional perspective analyzes the impact of media institutions on other societal institutions, such as the institution of politics, health care, education, and so on, on a meso-level (Hjarvard, 2013). In its focus on meso-level analysis, the institutional perspective differs from the constructionist perspective, which rather adopts a macro-level analysis, focusing on the broader role of the media environment. This involves focusing on the media in their totality and on how their integration in culture and society historically have helped shape all cultural and social spheres, thus analyzing it as a "meta-process" on par with individualization, globalization, and so on (Krotz, 2007). I have elsewhere pointed to the fact that there is a third, *technological* mediatization perspective rooted in structural anthropology and semiotics, where culture and society are affected at the level of the communicative abilities of the media as technologies and the signifying codes they privilege. This perspective is representative of Jean Baudrillard (1971, 1976/1993) and his ideas on how mass media technologies make us engage in simulations of communication and how their technological capabilities makes full-scale symbolic exchange impossible (Bolin, 2014b).

These three perspectives on mediatization work with different temporal perspectives. The institutional and technological approaches have shorter time frames for their analysis, dating the mediatization effects on culture and society to the rise and dominance of powerful mass media institutions (e.g., journalism) (Hjarvard, 2013; Strömbäck, 2008) or the development of dominating technological media systems (e.g., television) (Baudrillard, 1971, 1976/1993). This largely means that the mediatization effects are placed in the 20th century, and most often the latter half of that century. The social constructionist approach works with a longer temporal perspective, where mediatization dates back to the earliest communication technologies used by humans, such as cave paintings and other early forms of mediated communication (Bolin, 2014a; Fornäs, 2014; Krotz, 2007). The social constructionist perspective, which regards the media as part of the extended material and symbolic world, could in fact be said to encompass the other two, as worlds naturally comprise both institutions and technologies.

This means that the different perspectives also have a different relation to causal explanation. Ideas about causality are of more concern for the institutional and the technological perspectives, which

forefront either institutions or technology, respectively, as the motor of change. The social constructionist position holds media and communication technologies and practices as central to most human activities, and therefore media and communication are seen as already embedded in human practice. As media and communication are rooted in social and cultural processes, questions of causality become less interesting (Bolin, 2014b; cf. Fornäs, 2014). However, the questions remain of how to study social and cultural change and the role that the media take in these changes.

In the words of Deacon and Stanyer, "much mediatization research depends on a presumption rather than a demonstration of historical change, projecting backwards from contemporary case studies rather than carefully designed temporal comparisons" (Deacon & Stanyer, 2014, p. 1037). While this might be true in some instances, one should, in line with what was just argued here on causality, acknowledge the vast differences when it comes to the temporal perspective of the three approaches. These temporal perspectives also call for different methodological strategies.

This article suggests an analytical approach to the mediatization process seen as a long-term historical process based in the social constructionist perspective described briefly here. It will be proposed that a generational perspective can be used to understand the role that the media take in the historical process and how media can contribute to what Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset called "the rhythm of ages" (1923/1931, p. 15).

The argument will be presented in three steps. The next section briefly accounts for the generation theory and the idea of temporal rhythms. It also includes a presentation of the methodological approach for studying generations and the specific empirical example that will be used for illustration. In the subsequent section, the article gives examples and argues for the benefits of a cross-cultural and cross-generational approach for analyzing the mediatization process. The concluding section then summarizes the learning outcomes from the exercise in relation to mediatization theory and the understanding of the role of the media in social and cultural change and stability.

Generation Analysis and Long-Term Social Change

Theories of generations were developed in the 1920s by Ortega y Gasset and his German contemporary, Karl Mannheim (1928/1952), in order to try to understand how and why societies change. While Ortega y Gasset was the more poetic of the two, Mannheim was the more consistent theorist, developing a full-fledged theory of social generations, involving cohorts of people born around the same time and thus located at the same position in the historical process. Location in history is, however, not enough. In order for a generation to realize itself, it needs to develop a specific generational consciousness, defined by common experiences and formed in distinct generation units with their own specific responses to evolving and dramatic societal events: wars, famine, revolutions, catastrophes, and so on. Only then can people placed in the same historical position recognize themselves as belonging to a specific generation, achieve a "we-sense" (Corsten, 1999), and realize their generational potential.

Important for the generational experience were those events that the individual encountered during the formative years of youth—approximately between 17 and 25 years of age—a time when these

experiences had a tendency to set their mark on all subsequent experience. Mannheim was here clearly influenced by linguistic theory holding that language formation is roughly completed when a person reaches the age of approximately 25 and that dialects and ways of speaking change very little after that. This analogy with language was also used by Gary Gumpert and Robert Cathcart (1985), who suggested the possible existence of specific "media generations," whose media experiences made up a "grammar" through which all subsequent experience was read. As an example, the generation brought up with radio would accordingly read all later media forms they were confronted with through the lens of the radio experience. To Gumpert and Cathcart, this fact became increasingly relevant for the formation of generations in the 20th century.

> Prior to the late nineteenth century media explosion, generations came and went, all exposed to and acquiring the same print grammar. Thus media seemed to have little bearing on human time relationships. Though we still think of people as related, or separated in chronological generation time, the rapid advent of new media and the acquisition of new media grammars implies new alignments, shorter and more diverse than those based on generations. (Gumpert & Cathcart, 1985, p. 31)

Gumpert and Cathcart thus speculated that "media generations" would be more important than what they called "chronological generations" (Gumpert and Cathcart, 1985, p. 33). They acknowledged that this claim was not based in any empirical evidence, but was rather an assumption based on the background of macro-historical analysis that had pointed to the consequences of the invention of writing (Ong, 1967), print (Eisenstein, 1979; McLuhan, 1962), and photography (Sontag, 1977), and also on the thinking among historians of technology more generally, such as Lewis Mumford (cf. Carey, 1981).

Now, the more theoretically stringent approach of Mannheim or Gumpert and Cathcart does not necessarily stand in opposition to the poetic approach of Ortega y Gasset. One could, in fact, argue that his poetic approach (if not his quite static view on rhythms) is complementary to Mannheim's concept of generation. A further inspiration for such a combinatory approach can be found in the writings of French philosopher Henri Lefebvre, whose specific objective for analyzing the rhythms of everyday life implied "separating as little as possible the scientific from the poetic" (Lefebvre, 1992/2004, p. 87). Lefebvre works with a tripartite structure of rhythms: *polyrythmia*, the bundles of rhythms that the human body and everyday life contain; *eurythmia*, the harmonious interplay between various rhythms in everyday life; and *arrhythmia*, the dissonance that occurs when different rhythms interact in a nonsynchronic way, producing a "discordant" state (Lefebvre, 1992/2004, p. 16). Rhythm, according to Lefebvre, is thus not in itself harmonious or disharmonious, but can be so in specific combinations and situations. The result of the interplay between these polyrhythms is what makes up everyday life in the social contexts of, for example, cities (or any other place where there is social interaction). In essence, Lefebvre's "rhythmanalysis" can be read as a specific way of overcoming the classical structure-agency divide, just like Mannheim's theory of generations. In the following discussion I will make an attempt to integrate these two types of generation analysis as a "rhythm of ages."

In order to empirically get to the rhythmic character of the mediatization process, that is, the temporal role of the media in social and cultural processes, I shall, first, adopt a *cross-cultural*

comparative perspective to help illuminate the role that the media play in social and cultural change (and stability, for that matter). A cross-cultural or cross-national comparison can set each national generation's experiences in relief with one other, thus highlighting the cultural and social specificities of generations in each national setting.

Second, a *cross-generational* analysis will be adopted, that is, comparing different generations that are situated in different locations in the historical process, in order to more clearly illustrate the mediatized process of change. Many generational analyses focus on one single generation and study the experiences leading up to its formation, for example, the 1960s generation (e.g., Jamison & Eyerman, 1994; Wyatt, 1993). While this approach can highlight historical conditions for the forming of such individual generations, it is less suitable for understanding how media influence cultural and social change, and thus a cross-generational analysis is needed.

A combination of the cross-cultural and the cross-generational can help highlight those instances where generational features covary with the cultural, and where the culturally specific experience clearly impacts the generational "we-sense." A cross-cultural perspective thus prevents overgeneralizations in terms of, say, "radio generations" or "TV generations," and makes it clear—as will be revealed in the analysis—that there are differences *within* generational cohorts as compared across cultures. As we shall see, "radio generations" respond differently to the medium depending on whether they are Estonian or Swedish. The historical-cultural process always differs among national settings, and for the purpose of trying to grasp the relation between the generational process (since generations are not just there, but are continuously formed and shaped in relation to other processes in society) and the more general historical process, a dual analytical perspective is beneficial.

An empirical approach to account for this situatedness in the historical process is to place different generations along a time axis depicting the specific national and cultural "media landscape" (cf. Bolin, 2003). The next section describes an empirical study involving four generations in Sweden and Estonia and the geohistorical media landscape in which they live.

The analysis builds on both quantitative and qualitative material. The quantitative material consists of biennial national surveys in Estonia and in the south Stockholm region in Sweden from 2002 to 2012, thus spanning a decade. This material was used, together with contextual historical data from both countries (e.g., major societal events), to identify breaking points in the use and preferences of media, on the basis of which four focus groups were constructed and interviewed in each country (for contextual detail, see Opermann, 2014). The analysis in this article builds on these focus group interviews. The focus groups can be placed along a time axis spanning from about 1900 until today. Figure 1 shows this "objective" media landscape, that is, the landscape as defined through the actual appearance of diverse media technologies and significant historical events. This landscape is objective in the sense that these things occurred irrespective of whether they were mentioned by the respondents in the interviews. It has its own technological rhythm, parallel to the social rhythm of events occurring over the duration of the 20th and 21st centuries. These are the techno- and sociohistorical circumstances into which the respondents were born, and they will later be set in relation to the subjectively perceived media landscape, that is, the landscape as it is individually perceived of, and remembered by, the respondents

(and accounted for in interviews). The meetings between these two landscapes illustrate the rhythms that are produced as a result of the meeting between the technological and historical structures, on the one hand, and the socially produced experiences and actions of individual subjects, on the other.
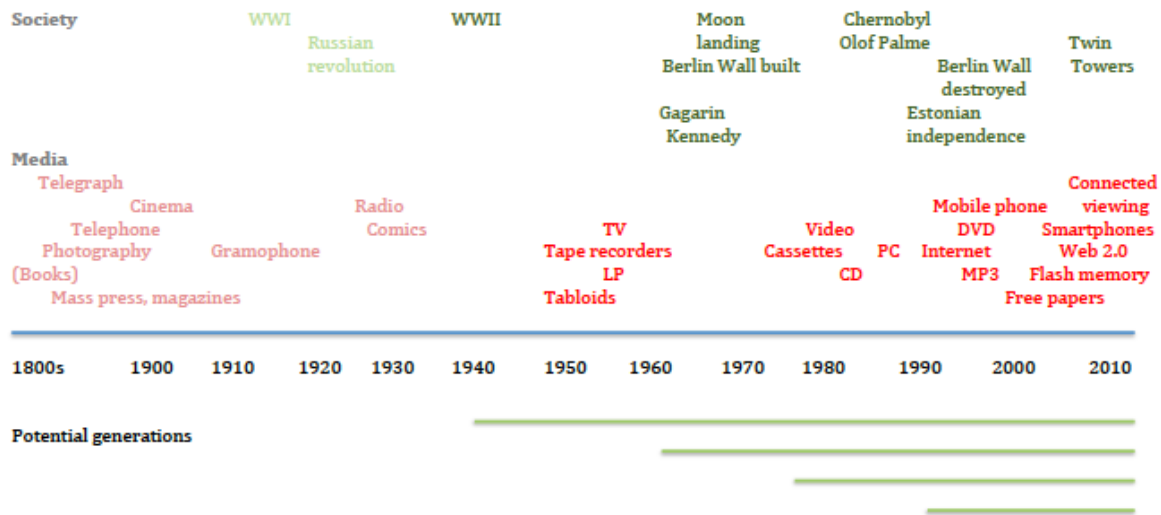

Figure 1. "Objective" media landscape from the 19th century to the present, and the trajectory through that landscape by the four generations.

In the upper row of Figure 1, are listed events of societal and historical significance. Some of these, such as the Russian revolution, occurred before the birth of the respondents but have a lasting historical significance, making them relevant to the social rhythm of the respondents. The experiential dimension of these events would supposedly differ substantially between the two national settings. The most obvious example is that the experience of World War II was dramatically different for people in Sweden, a state not involved in the war, than for people from Estonia, where the war was played out on their own territory, under occupation first by Nazi Germany and then later by the Soviet Union.

The second row of Figure 1 in the time axis marks out the different media technologies at the approximate moment that they appear in the two countries. In general, the media technologies arrived at around the same time in both countries, which mean that there was *a possibility* for having access to them at the same time. As we shall see, however, there are differences between informants in the focus groups, both individually and between countries.

The focus groups were constructed out of four tentative generations, that is, four groups of generation members identified at a similar point in the historical process. Generation members were born in the early 1940s, early 1960s, late 1970s, and early 1990s (with slight variations in the age ranges in

the focus groups of Sweden and Estonia respectively). There were four to eight respondents in each group, and they were interviewed for about 2 hours each. The prompting questions in each occasion were, "Which media did you have in your home as a child? Can you tell us about your earliest media memories?" (See Bolin, 2014b, for a fuller account of the methodology.)

Generational Media Landscapes of Sweden and Estonia

Figure 1 indicates the road traveled by each generation through the "objective" media landscape (the two media landscapes of Sweden and Estonia are collapsed in the figure). Although the media technologies were introduced at approximately the same time in the two countries, there was a stark difference in content, especially when it comes to certain genres, such as news. This is obvious when it comes to the mass media during the Soviet times, but there are also differences in content structures during the post-Soviet times. The rest of this section describes, first, some of the cross-cultural differences between the two national settings, and, second, the intergenerational differences between the four interviewed generational groups and how these relations produce the "rhythm of ages." Finally, the section presents the overall pattern of mediatization that can be discerned through the analysis of the cross-cultural and the cross-generational differences.

Cross-Cultural Differences in the Estonian and Swedish Generational Landscapes

There are many similarities between Estonia and Sweden, especially when it comes to when technology was introduced and established. And although the spread and domestication of technology were uneven, both between countries and within different regions within them, there was a general awareness of the existence of specific technologies. Television, for example, came later to the north of Sweden compared to the big cities, but those who lived in the north of Sweden were highly aware of the fact that other Swedish citizens could watch it. This means that the oldest group of respondents, who were born during World War II and had their formative years in the late 1950s and early 1960s, were born into a media landscape where radio, newspapers, music media, literature, cinema, photography, and telephones were already present, in the sense that they had been introduced to the populations in the two countries. They saw the arrival of television during their formative years, when their media grammar was supposedly formed and established, and they were also introduced to media such as LP and EP records and the tape recorder. In that sense, these media technologies could have been expected to be natural components in the respondents' everyday life.

However, the generations born during the war were not only confronted with new media technologies; they also faced a number of dramatic societal events. There is a stark arrhythmia produced by the meeting of the geosocial (or geopolitical) and the technological rhythms, however. This may be most obvious when it comes to the telephone—a technology that had been introduced and established in both countries long ago. Cross-cultural and geopolitical differences are revealed from the fact that the telephone was already a domestic medium in Sweden in the postwar period, whereas in Estonia it was not. Just to take one example, the penetration of landline telephony has been almost total in Sweden

since at least the 1970s.[1] But at the time when the mobile phone was introduced in Estonia, around 1993, landline penetration was only 43%. This increased to 60% in 2002, after which penetration stagnated and then decreased after 2007 (Bolin, 2010).

The telephone system was also restricted and controlled in Estonia in a way that it was not in Sweden, with an absence of telephone directories and tight control of who had access to a telephone in their home; "There was an enormous waiting list" if one wanted to have a phone, in the words of one focus group participant. As Lars Kleberg (2012) has pointed out, the limited circulation of telephone directories in the Soviet Union and the constant threat of being wiretapped deprived citizens of the means for interpersonal communication and was a consciously utilized political means for avoiding counterrevolution and conspiracy.

Furthermore, the content also varies between the two national contexts. This holds especially true when it comes to the traditional mass media. In Soviet Estonia, that content was heavily controlled by the authorities. The press, for example, meant something different in the two national settings: to Estonians the press connoted propaganda and represented the official party line (see, e.g., Lauk, 1999), whereas for the Swedish respondents it represented an adult medium that their parents—foremost, their fathers—engaged in, a finding that echoed results from other Western countries (cf. Volkmer, 2006).

When comparing the focus groups from the two cultural contexts, there are some notable thematic similarities related to news events such as, for example, the space race between the Soviet Union and the United States. However, thematic similarity does not equal identical approaches to the space race. When Swedish respondents emphasized the moon landing of *Apollo 11*, Estonian respondents talked about Gagarin as the first man in space. Both these events indicate the importance of the space race, but from different cultural horizons. While Gagarin's space travel was widely reported internationally, including in the Swedish press (Åker, 2015) and on Swedish television (Lundgren, 2012), this event does not seem to have stuck in the minds of the Swedish respondents, whereas the moon landing has—as it had for several informants in Höijer's (1998) study of media memories of Swedish media users. There is thus an emphasis on the space race in both countries, but with characteristic differences in the way in which it was reported in the mass media in the different national settings (cf. Jirák, 2006). These differences are illustrative of the arrhythmia produced in the meeting between the social reception of media messages and the actual symbolic environment, that is, the news reporting of the two events. Figures 2 and 3 account for the subjectively felt media landscapes in the two national settings.

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[1] In the 1970s, Sweden had among the highest telephone penetration in the world, second only to the United States. See www.ericssonhistory.com/company/an-emerging-global-company/A-new-market-situation.
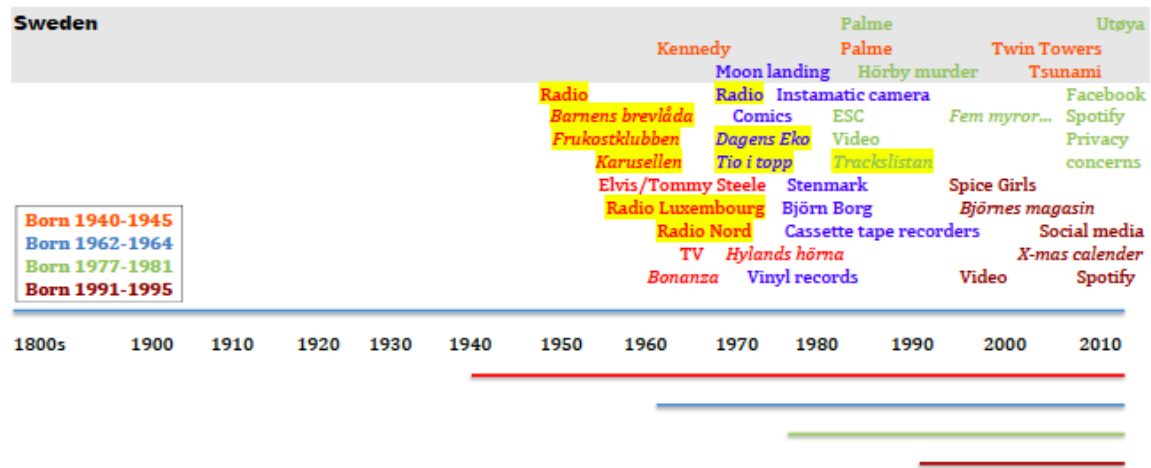
Figure 2. "Subjective" media landscape of the four Swedish focus groups. Each potential generation is indicated with a different color. Italics represent content. References to radio are highlighted in yellow.
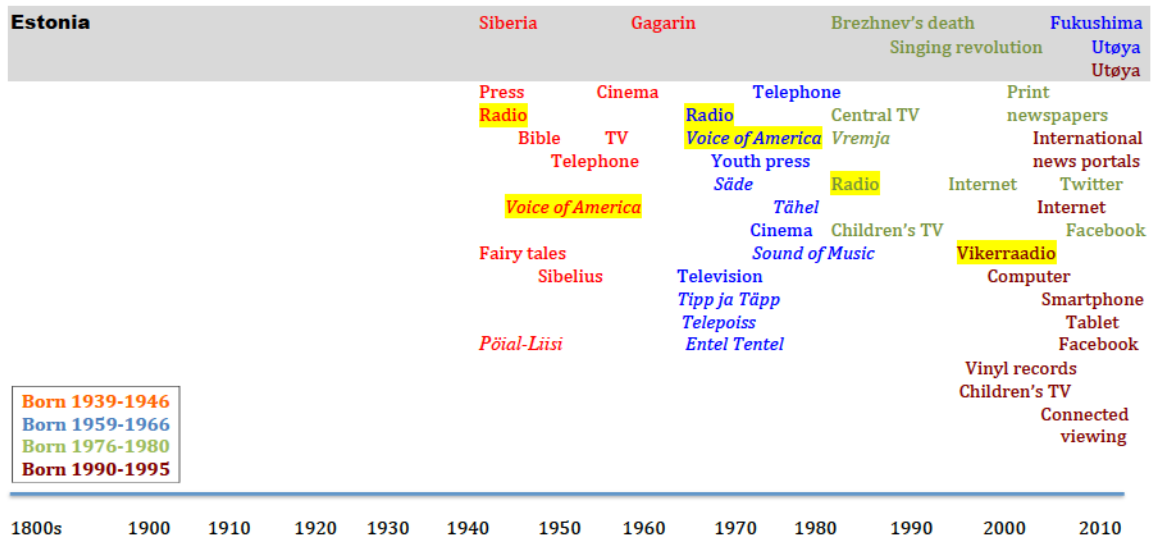

Figure 3. "Subjective" media landscape of the four Estonian focus groups. Each potential generation is indicated with a different color. References to radio are highlighted in yellow.

There is a strong emphasis on the radio medium in both focus groups (as highlighted in Figures 2 and 3), but whereas one could presume that this similarity would produce a similarity in responses, this is not really the case. Although radio was considered the most significant medium, especially for the older generational cohorts, the stories they tell about radio differ considerably. To the Swedes, radio on the one hand was a symbol of the world outside, and they mentioned international radio stations for light entertainment music such as Radio Luxembourg or Radio Hilversum (cf. Höijer, 1998). On the other hand it meant specific programming directed toward children and young people, for example the program *Barnens brevlåda* (The children's letterbox), which was immensely popular among children from its start in 1925 and onwards for decades until it stopped in 1972 (Höijer, 1998). Also, top-of-the-charts programs (*Tio i top, Trackslistan*) are significant markers for the cohorts born in the early 1960s and late 1970s. To Estonian respondents, however, radio signifies something completely different, as radio receivers were forbidden during the Soviet era:

> *Urve*: I got my own radio in 1967. We once had a radio in the country, but these were confiscated during the war.
> *Mare*: That's why ours was hidden.
> *Interviewer*: But why? To prevent people from getting information or what was the reason?
> *Maido*: Yes.
> *Mare*: Russians confiscated them elsewhere too.
> *Urve*: They were taken away.
> *Mare*: We had both of ours hidden. Village men came and took them.
> *Urve*: Ours was taken away too. My mother said it was a beautiful and expensive German radio.
> (Estonian focus group, born 1939–1946)

As the quote shows, radio was more thought of in terms of the technology and its status as a forbidden medium, one that had to be used secretly if at all. The materiality of the medium is further enforced by Urve's comment on the very design components and the sign value of the object. Such comments are absent in the Swedish interviews.

For the two oldest Estonian cohorts, Voice of America is also a significant feature of radio. In a similar way to Radio Luxembourg for the oldest Swedish generation, it signifies the world outside, but an outside with quite different connotations. This is not "the world outside" of international popular culture, but the world outside the Soviet Union.

The cross-cultural analysis illustrates well the importance of situating the generation, not only in the historical location, but also in specific geocultural and geopolitical locations. One cannot presume that just because the media technologies are the same in two national contexts, media users will relate to them in the same way. Generational experience is clearly culturally specific to the specific location in which the experience is had.

Intergenerational Differences in Sweden and Estonia

The previous subsection discussed the cross-cultural differences and similarities in the material. We shall now turn to the intergenerational relations and analyze how generations relate to both older and younger generations, thus trying to identify the rhythms produced by generational exchanges. Already from Figures 2 and 3 we can see that the generational succession produces a rhythm through the remembrances of the respective generations as they account for their early media memories. But the rhythm is also revealed in how the focus group participants relate to preceding and succeeding generations. Two types of relations will be accounted for: indirect and direct intergenerational relations.

Indirect generational relations are those relations that are not explicitly addressed by the respondents in interviews, but that are revealed in the different media technologies and content that respondents account for or emphasize in the interview situation. This means that respondents do not explicitly reflect on their media preferences by way of relating them to other generations, but rather present them more in the form of intergenerational relations that appear in the analysis, which are then identified as a difference by the researcher. One example of this can be the emphasis that the postwar generational groups have made on the radio medium, which distinguishes them from most other groups of interviewees. Thus one might say that the individuals in these interview groups are formed as a generation through their shared relation to the medium of radio.

This is not exactly the same generational labeling as that which is produced by the quantitative data on which most generation analysts rely, which I have argued elsewhere is merely generation as location (that is, not as actuality) (Bolin, 2014b). Indirect generational relations are not only defined by common habits, they are also expressed in vivid engagement in the focus group discussion, as when one focus group member mentioned a radio or television program and the others supported and confirmed the similarity in feeling.

> *Aire*: I would like to add that there was a bedtime story.
> *Ruth*: I remember it too.
> *Aire*: I think they still use the signature.
> *Helle*: Yes, they do.
> *Toomas*: Yes.
> *Helle*: It is still my favourite show.
> *Toomas* [reciting in a soft, tender voice]: "Mom is still busy in the kitchen, I don't want to fall asleep yet . . ."
> *Aire*: Yes, that's the one! And on TV there was this *Tipp and Täpp*. And the Teleboy marched across the screen, and I think there was a girl too.
> *Helle*: The Teleboy. *Tipp and Täpp* were from another show.
> *Aire*: Yes, yes. *Tipp and Täpp* was a programme. It was such . . .
> *Toomas*: That was later.
> *Aire*: Yes, and the bedtime story.
> [. . .]

> *NN* [unidentified female]: The song was also along these lines . . . "Everyone going to sleep."
> *Toomas*: Yes. A time for peaceful play.
> *Aire*: Yes, yes, yes.
> *Toomas*: 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)

Direct intergenerational relations, on the other hand, are revealed by way of explicit reference to other generations than one's own, for example, through statements about "the younger generation," or the "parent generation." This does not necessarily involve the exact word "generation," but can just as well be in the form of someone referring to his or her children by way of emphasizing difference:

> *Maria*: 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.
> [. . .]
> *Mikael*: 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)

> Our generation seems to have quite a lot of similarities in their media use. When you look at people who are 10–15 years younger, they are many times more superficial. It's another world actually.
> (Focus group, Estonia, born 1976–1980)

These quotes point to the marking of a sense of generational belonging that differs from that of younger generations. By pointing to how different younger persons are, there is produced (in the interview situation) a common understanding that "we" in the focus group have something in common that distinguishes us from younger persons. There is thus a specific "we-sense" implied by the person making the statement. This we-sense is also produced in relation to older generations:

> I think the most important thing with the Internet is . . . er, yes, maybe not the most important but still a very central part of it is the possibility to search for information. There I can see a very big difference towards my parent generation, and some are . . . some are very good at Internet and [know how] to Google and so on, and others do not even know how to upload a picture on the screen, sort of.
> (Focus group, Sweden, born 1962–1964)

An interesting feature in some of the interviews is that the interviewees are reluctant to see themselves as less technologically savvy compared to younger generations, although at the same time marking distance toward the older generations, who are indeed seen as technologically incompetent. In

the Swedish focus group of people born 1940–1945, for example, the respondents emphasized that the difference in regard to younger people is not that big when it comes to the use of digital media, and that the lesser use of social networking media and various applications on mobile phones and the Internet on their part is not because of lack of competence or skills, but rather because they see no need to spend so much time with these media. At the same time, this group points out that there was a vast difference to their own parents, who were never capable of understanding new media such as mobile phones or television:

> *Carin*: What I remember is when my sister and I went up north to see my mother, when she had . . . my sister had gotten herself a mobile phone. And mum, she just couldn't understand how she could . . . we were in a grocery store and then my sister called her husband to ask if there was anything specific she should buy, and she said: "but can she really talk with Kjell here in the store? Don't we have to get back home first?" It was really difficult for her to grasp that this telephone could connect from wherever you were.
> *Lennart*: It was the same with the telvision. Many believed that the TV signal came through the electric wall socket.
> (Focus group, Sweden, born 1940–1945)

This marking of a distance toward the parent generation is echoed in other interviews, with younger focus group members:

> *Göran*: Do you sometimes watch together with siblings or parents?
> *Ronja*: Yes, I do. I mostly watch with my sister. But also with daddy. I have taught him how to connect the laptop to the TV so we can watch SVT Play [the SVT TV video demand service] on the TV.
> *Göran*: OK, so you watch on a larger screen?
> *Ronja*: Yes, and then it is like watching in the ordinary way. Then I watch with him.
> (Focus group, Sweden, born 1991–1995)

In general, then, respondents point out that they are not in any way restricted when it comes to knowing how to use new media technologies. Moreover, the older respondents are on Facebook and other social networking media, and they strongly underline that there are no technological obstacles for them—it is merely a question of relevance, as they do not feel the need to spend so much time using these media. At the same time there are several indications of a perceived distance to the parent generation, who have not had the technological abilities to use the new media or never really understood the respondents' media use, and who have thought it to be too loud or too vulgar.

Generational Rhythm and Mediatization

The two types of generational relations represent the two sides of generational formation: On the one hand, *commonality* is produced through the sharing of collective memories among participants in the focus groups, a process that actualizes the generation (if only for that moment). Through this construction

of a "we-sense," other generations are implicitly "excommunicated" in the literal sense of that expression. On the other hand *distinction* from other generations is produced through direct reference, by pointing out the lack of competence among the older generation and the seemingly wasteful attitude about time among the younger.

Even if the distance marked out by some toward other, older generations is not reciprocal, one could argue that the distancing by the young of the previous generation of parents is what produces the generational rhythms by which social change is at least perceived to occur. In this distancing, and in the perceived belief that there actually is a difference in the mastering of technology (which may or may not exist), the cultural and media preferences play a significant role. Together with the more implicit production of a "we-sense," these preferences function as a distinctive factor between generations, mainly directed toward the older generations' inability to master technology or understand how it works.

This rhythm is thus not harmonious: The older generations lay claims on the knowledge of the young, trying to bridge the gap between their own generation and the younger ones, with their new technological means and their new tastes and preferences. However, these claims are not confirmed by the young, who rather forefront the difference. This arrhythmia can be seen as a kind of generational negotiation, where the young consider the previous generation as less competent, while the older generation is reluctant to acknowledge the difference and explains it away on grounds of having no need for new technology or finding it less useful than the young do. But there are also moments where the generational differences are acknowledged, and these moments are painful and passionate (Bolin, 2015) in their realization of the generational gap:

> 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 on Spotify, 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 three hundred 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)

In this quote, the interviewee, a mother of two boys in their early 20s, realizes the unbridgeable difference between her own media use and that of her sons, who are now at the threshold of leaving their formative years. Since this is the moment at which their media habits will become more stable and fixed, just as it was for her when she was that age, the generational difference becomes established, and there it is the realization of this difference, the acknowledgment of the very different approach to ubiquitous music availability that also produces the gap between the two generations. This is the moment of establishment of an intergenerational distinction, and the moment at which a generation as actuality is realized. Ultimately, this is what produces the specific generational rhythm, and each generational wave in

this rhythm reveals the character of the mediatization process through the harmonies and dissonances between the various generations as they relate to the surrounding media environment.

Conclusion: The Rhythm of Ages

The mediatization process deals with structuration of time. "Time," says Lefebvre, is "an aspect of a movement or of becoming" (Lefebvre, 1992/2004, p. 89). Time has to do with movements in space, and when generations actualize themselves, time is produced. Through the specific media component in the generational rhythms, mediatization can also be studied empirically. The rhythm of ages is, then, the time produced by generational movement in space. In this article I have given some examples of how this occur, how a certain "we-sense" is created by "waves of generations" (Colombo, 2011) in the specific media landscapes of Sweden and Estonia since World War II.

This "we-sense" of generations, however, is more easily expressed by the older respondents, who have—during the life-course—continuously elaborated on their generational identity, involving the remembrances: the stories told to children, grandchildren, and others, in class reunions and other occasions when people born around the same time congregate, or when one is expected to step into the role of representing one's age and one's generation. This might also be why previous generational studies have found more homogeneous generational patterns among older generations and a larger plurality of generational responses among younger cohorts (e.g., Volkmer, 2006). A question for future research would be to see if those younger generations will develop a we-sense over the course of their lives, as the memory work they will engage in now and then may produce a more coherent narrative over time.

A generational perspective does more than simply shed light on the mediatization process over the years spanned by the lives of the interviewed respondents. It also explains the repetitive nature of societal change, the rhythms at which it occurs, and how it relates to historical events—some of which are related to the appearance of "new" media technologies and the changing communication patterns they involve. Quite naturally, the focus group methodology only reaches as far back as living interviewees can remember, and the longer processes of change will have to be analyzed through other data sets, for example, historical documents and historical analysis more generally. Such approaches have been convincingly adopted by, for example, Ong (1967), Eisenstein (1979), and others. Despite these limitations, the merits of the generational approach and the focus group methodology is that it reveals in more details the mechanisms of the mediatization process, how the media—as technologies and as structures of content—become embedded in the lifeworlds of people and are incorporated as parts of the generational experience and "we-sense." It reveals how the generation process in itself, with its specific social rhythms of arrhythmic or eurhythmic character, is confronted with the material and symbolic features of the culturally and socially specific (national) historical landscapes, and the specific nature of these landscapes.

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