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CALL FOR PAPERS

The future of audience research: Agenda, theory and societal significance

**Open Conference of the COST Action IS0906
Transforming Audiences, Transforming Societies**

**Presented in collaboration with ECREA (Audience and Reception Studies section),
IAMCR (Audience section) and ICA (Communication and Technology division
& Mass Communication division)**

University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, February 5-7, 2014

Since March 2010, the COST Action Transforming Audiences, Transforming Societies has been coordinating and stimulating research efforts into the key transformations of European audiences within a changing media and communication environment, identifying their complex interrelationships with the social, cultural and political areas of European societies.

The final conference of the COST Action will be held in Ljubljana on February 5-7, 2014. This is an open conference and the COST Action explicitly invites non-members to submit proposals.

The contributions should reflect on the future of audience research from three different but interrelated perspectives:

Research agenda. The agenda of audience research has changed substantially along with social changes and new media developments. Social changes are visible in phenomena such as globalisation, transnationalisation, individualisation, commercialisation, or mediatization. Changes in the technical possibilities of the media system, for example the development of the internet and subsequently of social media and user-generated content, have brought about yet more conditions and opportunities for audiences. Considering these transformations reception-related issues have lost their centrality in audience research, and the topics of (prod)usage, participation and social networking have gained much importance to a point where they can now be considered as key components of a new mainstream agenda. The conference provides a timely moment for a critical discussion of this new agenda – which means interrogating merits and weaknesses of current research, and defining new priorities for the future. Among other questions, one can ask:

- In what ways do the ongoing cultural, political and technological transformations challenge the agenda of audience research?
- How can “traditional” aspects of audience and reception research be reconciled and integrated with recent lines of research? What are the “old” questions that still need to be asked in the contemporary media and communication environment?
- What aspects of social media and user-generated content are still unaddressed or unresolved, and what are the means that need to be developed in order to move the field forward?
- How does the changing agenda of audience research impact on the identity of the field (in relation to other fields and disciplines within and outside media and communication studies)?

Theoretical visions. The transformations of audience practices have given rise to new theories or approaches where notions such as user, collaboration, participation, convergence, crossmedia, transmedia and (social) networks are seen as cornerstones. The conference aims to evaluate how fruitful these theoretical shifts are, and to discuss further visions that could pave the way for future audience research. Thus the conference invites paper proposals that address conceptual issues and theoretical approaches in the light of changing audience practices. The following questions, among others, can be addressed:

- What conceptual or theoretical developments are needed in audience research in order to better account for and understand contemporary audience practices?
- What can be gained from audience theory so far for developing frameworks based on concepts such as collaboration, participation and social networking?
- How to make sense of people’s diversity of modes of engagement with/through media as texts, genres, organizations and technologies?
- How to relate agency to structural changes in the contemporary media and communication environment?
- In what ways can other fields and disciplines (e.g. education science, information science, performance studies, museum studies, marketing) feed the conceptual and theoretical reflections in audience research?

Societal significance. The significance of academic audience research for stakeholders is an issue often overlooked or only debated in relation to the industry and market research. Yet this issue touches upon the social legitimacy of academic audience research and concerns a wide range of stakeholders among the state (policy makers, regulatory bodies, etc.) and civil society (general public, journalists, associations of viewers and listeners, NGOs, community media, grassroots civic movements, etc.) as well. The conference invites paper proposals that discuss whether and how academic audience research should/could build bridges with stakeholders. The following questions, among others, provide relevant starting points:

- What factors shape the relationship between audience research and social practice?
- What kinds of successful communication or collaboration between the academia and specific groups of stakeholders can be implemented?
- How could audience research be useful for which stakeholders in the future?
- How could the knowledge, experience and competences of stakeholders feed audience research?
- How can audience research strengthen the position of media users in the communication environment?
- What is the role of audience research in forming public discourses on media- and communication-related issues?
- What are the challenges and possible solutions for audience research with regard to the Europeanization and globalization of media industry and media governance?
- What pressures are exercised by public and private funding institutions on the applied perspective and commercial usefulness of audience research, and what consequences do these pressures have among audience researchers?

The COST Action Transforming Audiences, Transforming Societies invites paper proposals from within or outside of the Action that address any aspect of the conference themes. Papers that connect

with the topics covered by the working groups of the Action are particularly welcome. The working groups are:

- New media genres, media literacy and trust in the media
- Audience interactivity and participation
- The role of media and ICT use for evolving social relationships
- Audience transformations and social integration

Apart from individual submissions, panel proposals of 4-5 individual presentations in a coherent context are also welcome.

Submission guidelines

- Abstracts should highlight the original contribution to at least one of the conference themes. Empirical research papers are welcome as long as the empirical study serves as an impetus for discussion on research agenda, theoretical visions or societal significance.
- Word count: 250 words max. (excluding references). For panel submissions, the panel abstract and the individual abstracts should have no more than 250 words each.
- Submissions should contain a title page with the title of the presentation (in case of panel submissions: title of the panel *and* titles of the presentations) and the names and email address of all authors.
- Please send the document containing title page and abstract in a Word file, and be sure to remove all author identification from the abstract itself, as proposals will be submitted into blind peer review.
- The deadline for submission is **September 1st, 2013**. Submissions should be sent via email to patriarche@fusl.ac.be and igor.vobic@fdv.uni-lj.si.

The abstracts will be submitted to blind peer review; participants will be notified about results by October 15, 2013.

The overview of the programme is available on the conference webpage at <http://www.cost-transforming-audiences.eu/node/1030>.

Registration

Registration will open on **October 15, 2013**. The deadline for early bird registration will be November 15, 2013. The final deadline for registration will be January 7, 2014.

Organization

For the local organizers:

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