

UPLOAD summary report

Besides providing main findings and policy implications, this summary presents 5 major milestones of the 2-year Urban Politics of London Youth Analyzed Digitally (UPLOAD) project (September 2013-august 2015). The main aim of the proposed study was to investigate the lived experience of cultural difference among young Londoners of different cultural backgrounds. This remains a highly relevant question because London is arguably the most cosmopolitan city in the world, with more than half of its population being of non-white British origin (ONS, 2012). London is also a young city, with a higher growth of children and youth in its territory compared to other parts of the country (ONS, 2012). This is also a city with rich communication infrastructures. Young Londoners in particular are well connected: 98.8% of those between 16 and 24 use the Internet (ONS, 2014). The study confirms London's vibrant diversity among its young people and the extensive systems of digital connectivity that characterizes their everyday life. 84 in-depth interviews were conducted with young Londoners between fall 2013 and winter 2014. The group consisted of 41 young men and 43 young women, living in the boroughs of Haringey, Hammersmith-Fulham, and Kensington-Chelsea. These three boroughs are highly diverse and respectively reflect working class, middle class, upper-middle class environments.

MAIN FINDINGS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

As observed across London's territories, the global city's cultural diversity becomes the platform for imagining the self in the world and digital connectivities become tools for making worldliness manageable. Those living in working class environments are deeply aware of their limited physical mobility and the symbolic and material marginality of their neighborhood. Their sedentary experiences contrast heavily with perceptions of nomadic unboundedness and limitless opportunities shared by those living in upper-middle class settings. Their engagement with difference is a naturalized lived reality coupled with an ordinary sense of solidarity that is inevitable and less about choice but more about pragmatic co-existence, intercultural learning and inevitable cultural translation.

Those from upper-middle class families assert a discursive, ideological, post-racial cosmopolitan imaginary. Their taken for granted mobility enables them to explore difference in London and abroad, but their digital connections are mobilized to retreat and sustain familiarities, which is indicative of a globally transferable parochialism. Largely disengaged from the local diverse spatial context they perceived as hostile, they are sheltered and feel at home in elective global and digitally networked bubbles of similarly privileged subjects. Ambiguities do surface among some informants who voice guilt and regret when realizing their cosmopolitan ideals contradict their narrow social media networks, their dominant narrative is one of elite, individual(-istic), non-emphatic tolerance and unobstructed mobility.

This study shows that policy initiatives should consider young people as shaped by intersecting power relations (class, gender, race), offline, and online. Digital practices for all urban youth involve transnational practices with family members and loved ones overseas, whereas working-class youth digital networks are extremely diverse, while upper (middle) class youth live in gated communities and use social media to sustain gated communities.

Therefore, council, city, national and European policy initiatives should acknowledge spatialized and digitalized differences. Simultaneously they should enable young people to bridge local distances (spatial, gender, racial, class). This holds both for advantaged and disadvantaged population segments. Youth are themselves drivers of change, their physical and digital practices display social innovation in practice, which remain much needed for an equitable, participatory, and flourishing knowledge economy.

FIVE MILESTONES

The five training objectives (p. 11) mentioned in the proposal parallel the project's major milestones: 1) Theoretical refinement, 2) mixed-methodologies, 3) publications, 4) international network and 5) lecturing and leadership skills.

Milestone 1: theoretical refinement

New information and communication technologies (ICT's) and cultural diversity are two fundamentals of cultural globalization however as expected I found that the links between the two remain under-theorized in the literature. Aiming to mobilize critical theory to speak back to the rich data, I developed an interdisciplinary framework. Focusing on social media use in relation to spatial relations, gated communities and the imagination I have drawn on concepts from urban studies, sociology and migration studies and I have brought into dialogue media, communication, feminist and postcolonial theory. This framework was developed in tandem with an innovative mixed-methodologies setup.

Milestone 2: mixed-methodologies

UPLOAD aimed to develop new digital methods that would be ethical and suitable to acknowledge (offline-online) contextual dynamics. After learning about the pros and cons of big-data research by participating

in 14 local, national and international conferences and meetings and 2 digital methods winter schools I became convinced of the merits to combine insights from creative methods, participatory methods with digital methods. During these meetings I had the chance to present my setup and analyses with prominent figures in the field including Prof. Sonia Livingstone (LSE), Dr. Suzy Hall (LSE), Prof. Saskia Sassen (LSE), Dr. Mark Graham (Oxford University), Dr. Matthew Zook (University of Kentucky), Prof. Dana Diminescu (Fondation Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, Paris) and Prof. Richard Rogers (University of Amsterdam). As a result of this training I have been able to develop, test, deploy and capitalize upon a distinct creative, participatory and digital methods approach to study digital practices:

Firstly, the informants were invited to draw a concept-map by hand showing what their view on the Internet looked like. These maps structured and informed the interview questions. Secondly, we created and analyzed visualizations of personal Facebook friendship networks together with the informants. This digital technique was used to have informants research their own digital practices with us. The commercial but freely accessible Facebook application TouchGraph was chosen to generate a visualization of the informants' Facebook networks. This algorithm processed the informants Facebook friendship network and subsequently grouped and color-coded mutual Facebook friends into clusters. Clusters often emerged around schools, sport clubs, but also around transnational family networks. The informants were prompted to reflect on gender, age, religious, ethnic and class dynamics of their different friendship clusters. This digital mapping exercise allowed informants to direct the course of the interview as they studied their own interactions. The data collected in this study is rich, revealing patterns in digital practices but also continuities and fractures in the ways young people locate themselves in their city and next or against proximate and distant people of other cultural backgrounds.

Milestone 3: publications

The innovative theoretical and methodological frameworks resulted in an excellent number of publications in high quality journals, edited volumes and volumes. From the total of 22 publications, 8 publications were directly related to the project and 14 were indirectly related to the project (see publications for further details). I am currently negotiating with a world-renown academic publisher for my proposed monograph 'Social Media: Gated Communities', this book will be based on the UPLOAD study.

Directly related to the project:

- 1 book proposal
- 3 journal articles in international high quality peer-reviewed journals (1 published, 2 currently under peer review)
- 1 journal special issue, international, high-quality open-access peer reviewed journal
- 3 book chapters in international, English-language edited books
- 1 book chapter in Dutch handbook
- 2 encyclopedia entries

Indirectly related to the project:

- 1 monograph
 - 1 edited book
 - 2 journal articles in international high quality peer-reviewed journals
 - 3 journal articles in national high quality peer-reviewed journal (the Netherlands)
 - 1 journal special issue, international, high-quality peer reviewed journal
 - 4 book chapters in international, English-language edited volumes
 - 3 encyclopedia entries
- (see publication overview)

Milestone 4: international network

During UPLOAD, I have made an inventory of international scholars working at the intersections of digital technologies, the city, migration and race. For this purpose, I actively participated in the LSE department's international and national events including the Research Dialogues meetings and Polis Lunchtime Talks, and I presented the findings of UPLOAD during the MediaCities@LSE Research Dialogue. In addition I participated in the university wide Children, Youth and Families research group and established connections with Fran Tonkiss and Suzy Hall from LSE Cities. International opportunities include international conferences including the International Communication Association (ICA), International Organization for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR), the British Sociology Association (BSA) and the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA). It is my aim to formalize this international network in the near future. *Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW)* Awarded me and my co-applicant 16.500 euros to organize an expert colloquium in 2016 titled 'Connected Migrants: Encapsulation or cosmopolitanism'. The award allows us to invite 15 international experts for a 2 day symposium, as well as to organize a 1 day master class for early career researchers.

The colloquium is planned for 14-16 Dec 2016. I submitted this application February 28, 2015, and it was awarded on June 8, 2015. Selecting 15 invited experts is a good opportunity to think about who would be a good member in cross-national networks, future research opportunities and collaborative projects, for example in the context of future European H2020 funding applications.

Milestone 5: lecturing & leadership

UPLOAD supervisor Myria Georgiou, has triggered me to become more reflective about my own identity as a researcher and lecturer. Georgiou, together with the LSE Teaching and Learning Centre guided me in translating innovative research approaches to innovative teaching. For example, I learned from giving guestlectures and seminars sessions for Georgiou's course *Identity, Transnationalism and the Media*. In the second year of my Marie Curie, LSE Department of Media and Communications head Nick Couldry was appointed as my mentor, and he also stimulated me to reflect more about my future academic trajectory, in terms of publishing, funding and research strategies. Furthermore I participated in formal training sessions organized at the LSE such as 'Planning your academic career', 'Job interview practice' and 'Research funding opportunities'. The overall experience of being uprooted and living in London, operating outside of my disciplinary comfort zone of gender and media studies as well as working across new fields (urban studies/ sociology/ communications) has not only improved my international profile but it has also enabled me to explore hard questions such as how I want to position and develop myself in research and teaching in the future. I realized the importance of thinking about research and publication strategies, in this stage of my career, where and with what aims. Furthermore I am beginning to orient myself towards the medium-long term and I'm aware of the urgency to develop and maintain a distinctive line of enquiry, to create a research team, set up a network and working collaboratively across Europe and internationally. A specific objective mentioned in the proposal was to secure a tenure-track assistant professorship position upon completion of the Marie Curie. This achievement was met, as I have accepted a tenure-track position as assistant professor Gender and Postcolonial Studies in the Media and Culture Department at Utrecht University, the Netherlands. Furthermore, I have benefited from formal training at LSE and dialogue with colleagues while writing a grant proposal '*Young connected migrants: Comparing digital practices of young forced migrants and expatriates in the Netherlands*' (deadline January 4, 2015). The Dutch Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research has funded this application with a 3 year, 250.000 euros, Innovational Research Incentives Scheme VENI (July 17, 2015). This study will be conducted between Feb. 2016 and Jan. 2019.

More information on all publications, conferences and funded projects is available on www.koenleurs.net.

References:

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