

Neskatoties uz to, ir vērojami daži atšķirīgi aspekti, kas raksturo tieši šo respondentu loku, piemēram, ar mūziku saistītā atmiņu darba nozīmīgums identitātes veidošanā. Turpmākajos pētījumos būtu jāsalīdzina vecāka gadagājuma cilvēki ar jauniešu un vidējās vecumgrupas pārstāvjiem un jāanalizē citi iespējamie sociālie aspekti, kas ir nozīmīgi mūzikas preferenču attīstībā.

THE ROLE OF FOLK-LIKE SCHLAGER MUSIC FOR ELDERLY PEOPLE: A CASE STUDY ON THE LATVIAN DIASPORA AND GERMANS IN GERMANY

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Summary

Popular culture scholars show a lack of interest in the scientific examination of folk-like schlager music. They prefer to stay within a framework of high and low culture, and analyse the everyday appropriation of the products of the culture industry. While doing so, they concentrate on such 'common' forms of popular culture as rock music, TV series and celebrities, and ignore folk-like schlager music. Furthermore, most of these studies typically target young audiences and ignore older audiences.

The article aims to fill this research gap, showing the role folk-like schlager music plays as a form of popular culture for older audiences. How do they deal with the negative public stereotypes of their musical taste? To what degree is this music relevant to their cultural identities? Finally, the article seeks examples of age-specific music preferences in order to launch a discussion on the existence of a typical 'senior pop music'.

Based on two qualitative studies, this article discusses the role of folk-like schlager music for elderly people in Germany, i.e. Germans and members of the Latvian diaspora. In the spring of 2012, eight qualitative interviews were conducted with individuals aged from 47 to 80 of German descent who have a preference for folk-like schlager music. The open-ended interview guide contained questions about individual and collective aspects of musical preferences and related media use. In addition, socio-demographic characteristics were surveyed. All interviews took place in north-western Germany. The second study took place in the spring of 2014 in northern and eastern Germany. Ten Latvian migrants aged from 48 to 66 were interviewed regarding their cultural preferences and identity aspects. These interviews were part of the research project *The Emigrant Communities of Latvia: National Identity, Transnational Relations, and Diaspora Politics*¹, conducted at the University of Latvia. The interviews were fully transcribed and were analysed through a process of (open) coding oriented to grounded

theory (Strauss & Corbin 1996). This coding was guided by the research aim to describe the meaning of folk-like schlager music for older people. The interpretation was thus oriented on typical patterns of the process of musical reception.

The various aspects of cultural identity and the musical preferences of older people in this study can be described within the theoretical framework of studies of fandom (Jenkins 1992; Fiske 1997), which were originally developed for the analysis of youth cultural practices. The respondents show a long-term identification with their fandom of folk-like schlager music. They acknowledge this identification in their everyday life, and distinguish themselves from 'non-fans'. They build communities with like-minded people and peers with whom they share their musical preferences. Furthermore, the respondents accumulate intense popular cultural capital in the form of CDs, records, autographs and knowledge. In this sense, the results here are similar to those from studies conducted on the role of music in adolescence (see Müller et al. 2007; Hitzler & Niederbacher 2010; Lorig & Vogelgesang 2011). In addition, the respondents can be described as occasional fans or fans interested in popular culture overall (see Sūna 2013). Except for one person, none of the respondents can be called a member of the fan elite.

The study showed aspects which, due to the short-term perspective of the existing youth studies, could not be elaborated: mainly in the area of the discussion of musical socialization and the sustainability of musical preferences. All respondents in the study reported a long-lasting preference for folk-like schlager music. It is particularly the media and the community that stimulate and promote the sustainability of musical preferences. Moreover, a relatively constant intensity of fan activities can be observed and connected with a multi-layered everyday practice. However, the chances of developing a greater fan career decline over time. A change in the functions and importance of music in later life becomes clear. With increasing age, music supports the aspect of identity work as memory work (see Keupp & Ahbe 2006). The main tasks for identity work at an advanced age are to determine the socially ascribed roles typical of a certain age and to synchronize them with one's self-perception. Memory work provides a comparison with different stages of biography. In doing so, individuals have the potential to find durable identity aspects to stick to in the transitional stages of aging. Furthermore, this memory work provides an escape from loneliness – through memories of friendship, love and cosiness, they may feel less lonely in their everyday life. The need for memory work via folk-like schlager music is one of the reasons music is such a strong daily companion for older people.

If we compare the Latvian diaspora members to the Germans we can observe many similarities in the role of music in everyday life. Living abroad complicates fandom of Latvian schlager music. However, various

new forms of media such as the internet live stream of the favourite channel Latvian Radio 2 or the opportunity to listen to their favourite songs via the Latvian social media platform draugiem.lv strengthens musical preferences. All in all, both groups of respondents confirm the role of schlager music in strengthening the sense of national identity, which is especially strong in the group of Latvians living abroad.

In conclusion, with this article I want to emphasize the need to scientifically investigate the effect of time, popular culture and popular music, as the study fills the research gap by providing the initial analysis of the role of popular music in a listener's later years. The comparison to the youth studies shows that the overall patterns of the role of music for older people are similar to those in adolescence. At this point, we cannot confirm the existence of age-specific musical preferences; but again, as I show on the topic of memory work, there are some age-specific patterns. The analysis shows that the elderly are not a homogeneous group. Therefore, it is necessary to use different social aspects as explanatory variables in order to understand the role of popular music in identity formation processes. Further cross-generational studies – quantitative and qualitative – need to be carried out in order to discuss the degree to which these described patterns are common for particular age, gender, lifestyle and culture groups.

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