

## **“YOUNG PEOPLE AND MEDIA: A GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE AND BAROMETER”**

The CSA (Higher Audiovisual Council) published in 2013 a first “Youth Barometer”, a study of the image and the portrayals of children and young people (3-30 years of age) in the televised media of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation. The aim of the study was to amplify, under a more qualitative approach, the “youth” data derived from the “Diversity – Equality Barometer”. While the latter already showed the scarcity of children and adolescents in the televised media and how infrequently they are given a say, the “Youth Barometer” seeks to ascertain “HOW” youth is portrayed on screen.

The crux of this question is that the image conveyed can influence the young people’s own perception of their participation in the public realm, whether that of the media or that of society.

The study was carried out on a sample of one-week programmes (home grown). Over 11 000 young participants were identified and described, for a total of over 1 500 hours of programmes. Some thirty indicators were defined in order to analyse the portrayal of young people. These related to their social and socio-economic identity, their roles in the media and society, their speech, the context where they appeared, etc.

### **Results of the “Youth Barometer”**

The results of the study show a definite insufficiency in the representation of young people on the screen, whether in terms of social identity or of participation (speaking, media and social roles). While they have their place on television – essentially on the public and especially the local channels – it is limited, circumscribed, even stereotyped, in particular where adolescents (13-18) are concerned. The overall image reflected by the media is of a speechless, passive youth, uninvolved in general audience programmes.

Young people are passive on screen:

- when they are not journalists; more than  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the young participants (82.33%) do not speak;
- young people’s speaking time is also very limited (36 hours, 10 minutes and 37 seconds for 1 598 hours, 51 minutes and 55 seconds of programmes): the journalists alone, who account for only 5.20% of the young participants, take up nearly half the speaking time;

- three-quarters (76.13%) of young people have a mere walk-on role, 8.92% have a role as the *vox populi* (unidentified person, witness or individual relating a personal experience), but very few are assigned a more socially esteemed role as expert (1.87%), (principally in sport) or spokesperson (0.95%). They practically never speak in debates;
- while young people are often placed at the centre of the narrative (talked about), they are seldom invited to express themselves directly.

Young people are seldom involved as actors of society:

- they often come from the intermediate socio-occupational categories (49.20%);
- they are often cast in the social roles of young workers (47.08%, principally adults), pupils/students (23.47%, principally children and adolescents), and artists (12.55%, strongly associated with youth). On the other hand, they are hardly ever representatives of associations, youth centres, parties, etc.
- the young people on screen are more often from towns (63.72%) than from the country (27.53%), a phenomenon accentuated with age;
- they are readily associated with culture/recreation (54.84% of the factual subject-matter in which they appear relates to these topics), sport (28.98% of the contexts where young people appear are "playing-field"). Other topics have distinctly fewer young representatives: subjects concerning society (9.89%), education (4.73%) or economics (4.61%)... Young people are less frequently seen in places like schools (9.00%), associations or youth centres (9.02%), home (3.28%) or enterprises (1.43%).

A difference in treatment between young adults and children and adolescents:

- children and adolescents are generally less clearly identified on the screen (mention of name, forename, occupation/status, age);
- young adults have much more speaking time than children and adolescents (the former, young people other than journalists, 92.91% compared to 7.09% for the latter), their speech is also more consistent;
- the registers of appearance associated with young people are equally positive and negative but more often negative for adolescents and more often positive for young adults;
- adolescents who are interviewed resort more often than others to vulgarisms of speech and their look is slightly more often "tribal" (gothic, street wear...) than casual;
- sequences with young people as the target audience are the likeliest to show young people (86.85%). Thus programmes directed at young people (7.26% of programmes) attract 1.7 times more young people than all-audience programmes.

## **A good practice guide**

Because young people's presence in the media is essential to avert their exclusion from the public realm, the study is backed by reflection on practices. Thus, on the pattern of the approach followed by the Plan for equality and diversity in the media, based firstly on objectification of diversity on the screen and secondly on exchange between users of the existing good practices, the "Youth Barometer" logically found applications in advocacy of initiatives that de-partition relations between young people and the media. Presenting practical examples and young people's testimonies in turn, this good practice guide offers encouragement for children and young people to be taken into account at all stages of media production, on and behind the screen: allowing them to speak, giving them access to broadcasting, combating stereotypes, handing them the controls, engaging in dialogue with them on the making of images and representations... The intermingling of viewpoints does indeed convey the impression of a dialogue carried on remotely, but necessary between young people, journalists and media managers. Turning the pages, one thus realises the role that might be performed by a neutral go-between (observer, facilitator, mediator?) who would enable all concerned to re-tie the threads of a media reality rather more similar to real young people, though without neglecting occupational imperatives and criteria.

The full study is available (in French) at this address: <http://csa.be/documents/2137>

The good practice guide (in French) is also available on: <http://csa.be/documents/2139>