

CfP: Media, modernity, and the transformation of tradition(s) – the role of audiovisual media from an international perspective

Final conference of the Swiss National Science Foundation-funded project “Claiming Folklore – Politics and Practices of Folk Music on Swiss Television (1960s-1990s)” at ISEK – Department of Social Anthropology and Cultural Studies – Popular Cultures University of Zurich, September 8 and 9, 2025

Invitation for submissions

This two-day conference will focus on the various ways in which audiovisual media influence and have shaped the perception, understanding and meaning of traditional, folk and popular music. It seeks to explore the diverse relations of “audiovisualized” forms of music and their social, political, and cultural contexts. In Switzerland, folklore and traditional music have been part of the programming strategy of national television since its inception. Given the significant contribution of these programs to the development of television in Switzerland, many of the editorial documents and programs from this department have been preserved in the broadcaster’s archive. The research project “Claiming Folklore. Politics and Practices of Traditional Popular Music in the Swiss Television (1960s-1990s)” focuses and reflects on the role of television in the transformation of traditions, the co-production of social (self-)images and musical repertoires, as well as the popularization of ideas of authenticity and regional specificity.

The conference provides a platform for showcasing the relationship between musical traditions and media using examples from around the world. It is open to explorations of the influence of audiovisual media on genre production and various forms of music framed as traditional, popular, or entertaining. Additionally, it will examine various audiovisual formats that have functioned not only as conduits for musical and folkloric practices, but also as agents of transformation, thereby contributing to the creation of popular content and the development of cultural heritage. Such formats include, but are not limited to, television, documentary film, and music videos. The conference also offers the opportunity to examine the interrelations of audiovisual and other media forms, such as photography, postcards, radio, print, and digital media.

The production of moving images staging music and folklore performances has frequently resulted in aesthetic assemblages that interweave sound, architectures, craft objects, rural and other specific landscapes, and bodies of musicians, dancers, and other bearers of traditions. They refer directly or implicitly to the social, political, scientific, and aesthetic discourses and changes of their respective times. The relationship of audiovisual media and tradition is characterized by power relations, commodification and commercialization as well as processes of archiving, musealization and heritagization. Modernity and urbanization – along with their perceived drawbacks, such as social alienation, acceleration and anonymization – frequently play a pivotal role in the revival of traditional musical repertoires and instruments, as well as in the use of traditional music as an expression of alternative social visions and aspirations. Not least, audiovisual media are also used as a means of transforming and re-coding traditional knowledge and creative practices in contexts of decolonial, feminist, or queer engagements and activism.

The conference team invites proposals for 20 minute presentations in English or German; the translation of slides will be provided. Emerging, mid-career and advanced scholars are all invited to participate. The project will try to support the travel and accommodation costs of participants in the case of resource-related barriers. If this applies to you, please contact us as early as possible.

Please submit your proposal in the form of an abstract of around 600 characters and a short bio or link to your background by April 10, 2025 to claimingfolklore@isek.uzh.ch.