

Public Policies and Research on Cultural Diversity and Television in Mexico

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The issue of how to preserve and promote cultural diversity in Mexico has not been central in policy debates and regulations. However, scholars, politicians, and public officials increasingly are debating how to promote and maintain cultural diversity here. This article reviews the current Mexican debate on policies related to the promotion of cultural diversity through television, using the concepts of source, content, and exposure diversity. The article argues that current commercial strategies in Mexico do not stimulate cultural diversity in media content. Instead, it advocates a mixed system of media with different mandates and modes of financing.

The issue of how to preserve and promote cultural diversity through the mass media has been central in policy debates and regulations both in Europe and in North America. In the beginning of the 21st century, with the huge importance and technological developments of the mass media, the debate about how to reconcile the commercial imperatives of the media with the social goal of the promotion of cultural diversity has become even more crucial. More than any other cultural medium, the mass media (radio, television, and film, in particular) have become the arena where cultural supply is structured and where cultural identities are depicted and shaped. These media create, distribute, and promote the symbols and resources that are appropriated and redesigned by audiences. As Golding (1998) argued, the mass media "are unique in providing both goods that command a critical place in the modern economy as well as providing the vehicles by which the symbols and values that people deploy in making sense of their lives are delivered and disseminated" (p. 16).

The idea of national audiences pertaining to a homogeneous group of people with similar interests, backgrounds, and ideas has never been in agreement with social reality and seems meaningless in the face of the processes of migration and multiculturalism that characterize contemporary countries and regions. This is the case in Mexico, with a heterogeneous audience with diverse ethnic, geographic, and class backgrounds that asks for plural public debates and access to the media.

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What are the alternatives to promote and maintain cultural diversity in a country closely integrated with the United States, not just through economic trade but through the mass media? A starting point may be to discuss whether the media should fulfill a social role and whether they should be prompted or forced to promote cultural diversity. The answer to this question seems to be clear. The legal framework of Mexico, as is the case in Canada and the United States, expects the media, in particular electronic media, to promote diversity. The standing Radio and Television Federal Law in Mexico, although it does not explicitly mention the promotion of cultural diversity as a goal, mandates that radio and television stations foster gender equality and respect for the rights of vulnerable groups (*Reglamento de la Ley Federal*, 2003). It also explicitly prohibits any content that discriminates against ethnic groups (*Ley Federal de Radio y Televisión*, 1962, Art. 63).

As Freedman (2004) argued, references to diversity and pluralism appear in policy or legal documents that are highly deregulatory and liberalizing in character. This is true in a U.S. case, where a recent review by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) of media ownership regulation ended in a decision to loosen ownership rules and sanction further cross-media ownership (Freedman, 2004). It is also true for the Mexican case, where federal administrations have advocated neoliberal policies from the mid-1980s to the present day (Lozano, 2003). Mexican audiovisual and telecommunications industries have experienced significant changes since the early 1980s, consolidated in the 1990s, and have dramatically transformed the supply and consumption of these services in the early 2000s. Many years before the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the Mexican government embraced trends and economic policies geared toward liberalization, deregulation, and privatization of the economy in general, and in particular the audiovisual and telecommunications sectors (Croví, 2000; Gómez Mont, 2000; Sánchez Ruiz, 2000a). In contrast with the nationalistic and protectionist policies embraced by the different administrations since Mexico's independence in 1910 up to the 1970s, the 1980s represented a radical shift toward the adoption of neoliberal strategies and models. After a severe economic crisis in 1982, the administration of Miguel de la Madrid decided to open the economy in unprecedented ways. In his administration, Mexico joined the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, and the government privatized and deregulated many aspects of production and commerce. This was also true of Mexico's electronic media and telecommunications sector.

In the NAFTA negotiations, the Mexican government decided not to ask for a cultural exemption clause, unlike Canada, which had decided to exclude its cultural industries from the treaty to be better able to protect them. Following the logic of the neoliberal policies espoused by the Mexican administration, culture was considered strong enough to be able to defend itself without any governmental policies safeguarding it (Gómez, 2004). The only restrictions imposed by the Mexican government in the NAFTA agreement were limits to the percentage of foreign investment in paid television (49%); the requirement to dub imports in Spanish, and a quota of 30%

of screen time in theaters for Mexican films (a quota that would decrease every year until reaching zero); and the prohibition of foreign nationals owning any percentage of broadcasting stations.

The consensus among communication scholars in Mexico—along with many of their colleagues in Canada and the United States—is that much more needs to be done to make sure the mass media will in fact promote and maintain cultural diversity. In fact, what is needed is the development and adoption of long-term communication policies because Mexico has never had a comprehensive state policy on media and telecommunications, only short-term reactions to what is already happening in the media market (Casas, 2006; Lozano, 2003).

This article uses as a basis for discussing cultural diversity policies in Mexico the analytical framework developed by Napoli (1999), who distinguished among three broad components of media diversity: source diversity, content diversity, and exposure diversity. Next, Napoli's components and subcomponents are used to review today's situation in Mexican television.

Dimensions of Diversity

Source Diversity

In many policy debates, source diversity is seen as the most important factor to foster diversity in the mass media. According to Napoli (1999), this dimension has been traditionally conceptualized by policymakers in three separate ways: "(a) in terms of the diversity of ownership of content or programming, (b) in terms of the diversity of ownership of media outlets, and (c) in terms of the diversity of the workforce within individual media outlets" (p. 9). The distinction between content ownership and outlet ownership is relevant only if networks buy their television content from independent companies that sell their programs to the networks. This was the case in the United States from 1970 to the early 1990s, due to the Financial Interest and Syndication Rules (or "Fin-Syn") of the FCC that "constrained the then three networks (ABC, CBS, and NBC) from producing all but a small amount of the programs they broadcast in prime time and barred them from participating in the syndication of prime-time series" (Bielby & Bielby, 2003, p. 574). The goal of this policy was to force the owners of the channels of distribution to look for independent producers for sources of programming. The rules attempted to promote diversity and competition in the supply of prime-time entertainment programming and to forestall vertical integration. In the mid-1990s the FCC removed these regulations, allowing the networks to either produce their own prime-time programming or to continue buying it from independent producers. The result, according to Bielby and Bielby, has been "a reduction in the number of organizational settings in which those who create television series are employed, and an increase in corporate control over the circumstances under which they practice their craft" (p. 593).

Mexican regulations have never put any constraints on Mexican media networks in relation to in-house productions. Television conglomerates like Televisa and TV Azteca are free to produce whatever percentage of programming they want, and there are no policies or incentives that may prompt them to buy programming from national independent sources. In fact, both networks handle their total national programming in-house (Estrada, 2004). In its beginnings, due to its lack of experience and capital to produce all of its programming in-house, TV Azteca made an alliance with Argos Producciones, an independent producer that provided the network with successful *telenovelas* like *Nada Personal* (1996), *Mirada de Mujer* (1997), and *Demasiado Corazón* (1998). By the end of the 1990s, however, TV Azteca decided to produce all of its programming and reduced the number of hours produced by Argos from 5 to 1 daily, and later completely broke off its relationship with the independent company. Televisa, on the other hand, had the tradition of producing everything in-house and was not interested in buying content from independent producers. In 2000, Argos signed an agreement with Telemundo in the United States. Today, this network broadcasts Argos productions on its TV affiliates and participates in their distribution and commercialization in other countries (Lord, 2005). Argos president Epigmenio Ibarra has publicly asked for a license to start a new TV channel, criticizing the existing duopoly, but the government and current regulations have not allowed that to happen.

This situation in the Mexican media market reflects the historical disinterest of federal officials in tackling the issue of how to foster diversity in the national television system. The issue of how to make companies that control the distribution of content to the audience balance their own productions with alternative and independent sources of production has not been addressed.

In many countries of the world, media policies promoting diversity have focused mainly on curbing the concentration of ownership. The assumption has been that a diversity of owners will result in a diversity of content and points of view for audiences. Although this causal link has not been supported by empirical evidence (Napoli, 1999), many scholars and policymakers continue advocating strategies to avoid concentration of media ownership. In the United States, as has already been argued, recent rulings loosening ownership rules and allowing cross-media ownership (Freedman, 2004) and even the FCC policy of minority licensing preferences have come under sharp scrutiny by the courts. Horwitz (2004), however, argued that although modest, there is significant evidence of format variety brought by minority ownership of broadcast stations. Van Cuilenberg (1998), analyzing the European case, also defended the need for media policies focused on competition, preventing media concentration through setting maximum levels to media ownership.

Mexican policies, however, have not paid consistent attention to these kinds of structural regulations, opting rather for general and abstract guidelines geared toward promoting what scholars call *behavioral regulation*, regulation directed at the actions of the sources. The liberalization and deregulation reforms of the broadcast sector in the last decade have not been particularly objective and balanced. The government's neoliberal policies that were supposed to promote competition and growth have

managed to favor some groups or companies over others, generating a preferential consolidation in the different sectors (Crovi, 2000; Sánchez Ruiz, 2000b). According to Mexican scholar Sánchez Ruiz (2000a), the Mexican market structures today are highly oligopolistic in movies and television, and there is a high degree of transnational articulation, uneven in relation to its major commercial partner.

As Lawson (2001) argued, economic liberalization may have certain consequences for the mass media that work against increasing media competition:

One cautionary note suggested by the Mexican case is that unrestrained economic reform often leads to the establishment of private monopolies or oligopolies, including in the media. Mexican television, for instance, remains dominated by a duopoly that continues to constrain diversity and independence. (p. 241)

That Televisa and TV Azteca represent a duopoly in Mexico is supported by the following data: Combined, they own 98% of the total number of TV stations in the country (Estrada, 2004). Televisa has interests in television production and broadcasting, production of pay television programming, international distribution of television programming, direct-to-home satellite services, publishing and publishing distribution, cable television, radio production and broadcasting, professional sports and live entertainment, feature film production and distribution, and an Internet portal. Televisa also owns an unconsolidated equity stake in Univision, the leading Spanish-language media company in the United States. In 2005, the company aired 91 of the country's top 100 programs, capturing 71.3% of the sign-on to sign-off audience share (Televisa, 2005). TV Azteca, on the other hand, operates two national television networks through 315 owned and operated stations across Mexico. TV Azteca affiliates include a television network in the United States (Azteca America Network) and Todito.com, an Internet portal. TV Azteca also operates Azteca Internacional, which reaches 13 countries in Central and South America, and Azteca Music, a recording company with strategic associations with multinational producers and radio stations. TV Azteca also has 46.5% equity stake in Unefon, a wireless telecommunications provider, and a 50% equity stake in Cosmofrecuencias, a wireless broadband Internet access provider (Televisión Azteca, n.d.). Both Televisa and TV Azteca participate in the New York Stock Market.

An attempt in 2002 by Mexican legislators to pass a new Federal Communication Law established a limit of 25% of total market share for a media company in any city of the country, an unprecedented measure in Mexican media regulation. The initiative was the result of months of negotiations among a plural group composed of legislators, scholars, media representatives, and civil organizations. However, without prior warning, President Vicente Fox passed a new regulation on October 10, 2002 updating the 1973 provisions of the Federal Radio and Television Law with no mention of the limit of 25% of total market share or any other limit on ownership. Mexican legislators, scholars, and opposition figures reacted angrily to this decree, but they were unable to change it. At the end of that year, the Mexican Senate received a new

law initiative based mainly on the proposals of the original group, and by the end of 2005 the Evaluation Commission of the House and Senate had ended the stages of diagnosis, evaluation, analysis, and consulting of relevant actors in different Mexican cities, and were ready to present the project to the other commissions in Congress. One of the most interesting proposals included in the initiative was the creation of a National Council of Radio and Television, with the authority to grant authorizations and sanction broadcasters who would not fulfill their legal obligations. In addition, the initiative established that no additional radio or TV station would be granted to any private organization controlling more than 35% of the local market in question (Villamil, 2004). Due to the strong lobbying of Televisa and TV Azteca, this comprehensive reform was never considered. Instead, in the first week of December 2005, the Chamber of Deputies approved in record time, without a single vote against, a new bill presented by a PRI representative and a former employee of Televisa, and turned it over to the Senate for discussion and approval. The Senate attempted to discuss it and approve it quickly, but public outcry, an avalanche of press coverage, and lobbying by the Minister of the Interior of the Fox administration convinced enough senators to stop the fast track and take more time to discuss it and analyze it (Villamil, 2006). The initiative was called the "Televisa law" by some senators and journalists, who accused Televisa of drafting the legislation itself (O'Boyle, 2005; Padilla, 2006). Senator Javier Corral, one of the authors of the original bill that was never able to move from commissions to the plenary, accused the new proposal of trying to benefit Televisa and TV Azteca by giving them the right to offer new channels in the spectrum freed up by the transition from analog to digital terrestrial broadcasts without a government concession. The new law, according to Corral, would allow Televisa, just by submitting a simple application, to double its number of channels to eight without tendering or bidding against other parties. The Senate discussed the bill, and on March 30, 2006, the bill was approved 81 votes to 40 with 4 abstentions. Televisa's aggressive lobbying during a presidential campaign was seen by some analysts as the main reason the bill was finally approved (O'Boyle, 2005).

Content Diversity

According to Napoli (1999), content diversity has three different subcomponents: format or program-type diversity, demographic diversity, and idea-viewpoint diversity.

Format or program-type diversity refers to the category designations given to radio formats and individual television programs. It addresses the range of different types of television shows from which a viewer can choose during an hour of television time. Programs should provide comprehensive and factual coverage of the different opinions relevant in society, and the various social and cultural groups must be allowed to voice their opinions (Hoffmann-Riem, 1987). Here, the assumption is that the greater the scope of genres and different types of programs, the greater the satisfaction of information, entertainment, or education needs of diverse audience groups. Some

genres appeal to women, some to men; some to particular groups of youngsters, some to old people; some to one particular ethnic minority, some to another ethnic group. Many studies in the United States, however, have documented the reliance of TV commercial networks on a few repetitive genres designed to appeal to all kinds of audiences (Croteau & Hoynes, 2001; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1994; Gutiérrez Gea, 2000). Although this makes sense in commercial terms, it represents the worst possible strategy for fostering diversity. In Mexico, several studies have shown that diversity in program and genre type is extremely low (Covi & Vilar, 1995; Huerta & Lozano, 2001; Lozano & García Nuñez de Cáceres, 1995; Sánchez Ruiz, 1995). A study of 4 weeks (1 week for each trimester) in 1999 by Huerta and Lozano (2001) corroborated this conclusion: Only three genres (fiction, children, and information) accounted from between 70% and 80% of total time, a very high concentration of genres.¹ Genres like sports, variety shows, documentaries, game shows, comic shows, talk shows, and cultural and educational programs appeared only marginally. Martínez and Lozano (2005) reached similar conclusions in their vast longitudinal study of 12 weeks (1 week for each month) of 2003: Concentration of genres was extremely high in Mexican open national TV whether the content originated in Mexico or in the United States.

What about diversity within programs in the same genre? Have scholars found significant differences in the characters, topics, stories, locations, and ideas presented within a single genre? Current research shows this is highly unlikely. Commercial programs tend to rely on repetitive formulae, using very similar situations and characters to be attractive to the widest possible audience (Hoffmann-Riem, 1987; Van Cuilenberg, 1998). Recent findings at the Center for Communication and Information Research of the Tecnológico de Monterrey show local and imported television content in Mexico lack meaningful diversity when looking at characters and images portrayed in each category of genres (see Flores & García, 2005). In the United States, White, male, adult characters are the rule (Gerbner et al., 1994). In Mexico, less research has been done on this topic, but the available evidence shows that White, adult male and female characters are much more frequent than *mestizos* (brown, dark-skin, hybrid features of White and Indian mix), and that Native Mexican Indians are almost nonexistent in the world of TV (Flores & García, 2005).

Geographic location is another category where scholars find very low diversity. Instead of locating their information and fiction stories everywhere in the country, so that they can depict and represent the widest range of situations, events, cultural traits and characters, fictional and nonfictional TV programs, whether Mexican or U.S., focus their attention on the central powerful cities, like New York, Washington, and Los Angeles (in the case of U.S. content) or Mexico City (in the case of Mexican content). There is no available research on this topic in Mexico, but it can be argued that current content transmitted on Mexican TV is far from the ideal of including local, regional, national, and international locations. News programs, *telenovelas*, game shows, and so on, with some exceptions, tend to be located in Mexico City.

Idea diversity, unfortunately, has not been studied consistently either, despite its relevance. It is a possible outcome of source diversity and program-type diversity; it may also come from within a particular program. For democracy to be reinforced and cultural diversity to hold in a society, idea diversity in television content should be actively and permanently promoted. Methodological and operationalization problems, however, make the measurement of idea diversity in television content difficult, which explains why research in this line of study is so rare.

Exposure Diversity

The final approach to measuring and evaluating cultural diversity in television is looking at the patterns of exposure of audience members. Many policymakers do not take into account how audience members tend to consume the available supply of television content, believing that regulating supply should take care of consumption diversity. Some scholars, however, convincingly argue that exposure diversity is a fundamental variable to be taken into account in policy discussions and strategies.

According to Napoli (1999), the concept of exposure diversity is divided into two components: horizontal diversity and vertical diversity. The former "refers to the distribution of audiences across all available content options, whereas vertical exposure diversity refers to the diversity of content consumption within individual audience members" (p. 26). Surveys about the exposure of audience members to different programs and genres show that the distribution of audiences across available content options is too restricted. A large survey carried out in the three largest Mexican cities—Mexico City, Guadalajara, and Monterrey—found that audience members preferred news programs, U.S. movies, sports, and *telenovelas* (Cerdeña, 1999). Although Cerdeña found some significant differences between men and women, each group was still restricted to very few different types of programs. In Monterrey, Mexico, a recent telephone survey also confirmed the same patterns (Lozano, 2004). What is needed in Mexico, however, is to carry out studies like the one done by Napoli (1997), looking at the distribution of rating points for television programs to determine whether audiences consume program types in proportion to their availability. If this is the case, and Napoli found a very strong positive relation for the U.S. case, then it could be argued also for the Mexican case that audiences do not select purposively the type of programs they really need or want, but choose only among what is most widely available.

Also according to Napoli (1999), vertical diversity refers to the exposure patterns within the individual audience member over time. For this, the media behavior of each individual must be tracked, as opposed to aggregated rating points. This kind of research is even scarcer in Canada and the United States, and almost nonexistent in Mexico. Future studies on the relation between media content and cultural diversity will need to include this dimension as a priority if one is to understand the real degree of diverse cultural content to which individual audience members are exposing them-

selves. Studies about the other kind of exposure, for the time being, suggest that vertical exposure may be as limited and focused on a very small number of genres and program types as horizontal exposure.

Discussion

Unfortunately, current commercial strategies and goals both at the national and international level do not stimulate cultural diversity in media content. As Hoffmann-Riem (1987) argued, because of the market structure, certain content and program fields find it more difficult to be considered in the media market than others: "Commercial broadcasters prefer programs with a favorable ratio of revenue to production or purchasing costs" (p. 64). He mentioned other reasons for the electronic media's lack of interest in promoting cultural diversity: (a) the tendency to transmit programs with mass appeal, reducing their content to the lowest common denominator for the largest possible audience (these programs can be broadcast in many areas and can be shown as repeats at a later date); (b) entertainment programs have a structurally induced advantage over other programs, especially if they do not relate to current events; programs that refer to regional, local, or even national topics, and programs for less wealthy target groups such as children, the elderly, or society's fringe groups have poor commercial potential; and (c) to reach as large an audience as possible, the media try not to offend the target recipients in any way: "Dropping controversial issues, omitting cultural differentiation, taking greater care when dealing with clashing interests, and exercising restraint when formulating opinions are just some of the recipes for success" (p. 65). The commercial television markets, consequently, offer insufficient incentive for the full consideration of local, regional, and national, cultural and social diversity.

The hesitation of governments to regulate and force media to do a better job in the stimulation of diversity may come from a tension between the dual role of the mass media and the interests and expectations of audience members. As Golding (1998) explained, governments must take account of the media's standing as cultural institutions, "serving the political and cultural needs of the community in unique fashion, while at the same time they must consider the contribution of the media as industries at the key nodes in the nation's economic fabric" (p. 10). In addition, governments have to recognize that their populations confront the media in two roles, as consumers and citizens. "In these two roles their needs, and their demands for government action, may well be incompatible" (p. 10).

What Van Cuilenberg (1998) argued for the European case seems completely valid for the North American countries:

There is a clear and distinct relationship between diversity and tolerance. In our multicultural and multi-ethnic societies tolerance is of utmost importance. Diverse information on different cultures and different patterns of values, norms and ideas may contribute to mutual respect and acceptance. (p. 39)

However, as Hoffmann-Riem (1987) concluded, if proper communication policies are not adopted, the viewing patterns and perceptions of reality of the mass audience will probably be shaped primarily by other types of programming, especially mass entertainment: "It will be difficult to preserve specific traditions, moral concepts, or self-awareness of a society if the media content provided and consumed by the majority of the people is determined by the commercially induced characteristics already outlined" (p. 66).

Suggesting and adopting communication policies useful to promote cultural diversity, on the other hand, it is not an easy task. Some policies that may be considered unquestionably adequate to promote cultural diversity may achieve the exact opposite. The current tendency in the countries of North America is to formulate policies designed to regulate competition and ownership in the media with the objective of maximizing the number of outlets and emphasizing audience choice between these outlets. However, as many scholars have shown, deregulation and liberalization have generated more concentration and consequently a reduction of diversity in production and program type, geographic, and idea diversity (Bielby & Bielby, 2003; Freedman, 2004; Horwitz, 2004) despite the multiplication of outlets.

Some scholars have also warned that it is not just a matter of increasing the number of media channels or the type of content in each genre. It sounds paradoxical, but this in fact may lead to a less diverse diet of programming. If each particular individual would find content especially suited to his or her own demographic, ethnic, religious, and cultural characteristics, he or she would not watch programs with other values, ideas, representation of groups, or geographic locations. This is why policymakers should take into account not only content diversity, but also exposure diversity:

Without greater empirical attention to the exposure dimension of diversity, policy-makers are guilty of dangerously uninformed decision-making. ... Policies need to be assessed and critiqued not only from the perspective of how they contribute to the diversity of content available, but how they contribute to the diversity of content consumed. (Napoli, 1999, p. 29)

What would be reasonable policy alternatives for the promotion of cultural diversity in Mexican mass media? Scholars differ and are more prone to pointing out the shortcomings of current policies than to making proposals that overcome the limitations and failures of the current ones. One suggestion that is more appealing and sensible for Mexico is the one advanced in the European case by scholars like Curran (1991), Horwitz (2004), and Thompson (1995). According to Curran (1991), for example, what is needed is

a more mixed system of mass media with different mandates and different modes of financing. It is some combination of a mixed system of media and curbs on media concentration that will best secure a diversity of viewpoints and content. (p. 65)

Thompson (1995) proposed a similar model, calling it regulated pluralism. In his view, this principle should advocate the traditional liberal emphasis on the freedom of expression and on the importance of having media institutions independent of state power. However, it should also recognize that the market left to itself "will not necessarily secure the conditions of freedom of expression and promote diversity and pluralism in the sphere of communication" (p. 241). Thus, Thompson suggested legislation restricting and limiting mergers, takeovers, and cross-ownership in the media industries, and also concerned with actively promoting "favourable conditions for the development of media organizations that are not part of the large conglomerates" (p. 241). The British scholar acknowledged that the form of ownership and control in the media industries frequently is not a reliable indicator of the content and orientation of the material produced, and explained that a commercial basis may not lead to less criticism, quality or scarcity of public discourse. He ended his proposal arguing that because contemporary media are increasingly transnational in character, any public and national policy should put the international dimension at the center of the debate.

Public service media should exist and be supported to achieve higher and deeper levels of cultural diversity provided they are not forced to look for advertisement to subsist. Research evidence shows that the degree of different content, program types, geographic locations, and so on between private and public channels is much higher than between private channels owned by different organizations (De Bens, 1998). Following Curran (1991), Horwitz (2004) explained that these public service organizations should be fed by peripheral media sectors, "three of which are intended to facilitate the expression of dissenting and minority views": (a) a civic sector, (b) a professional media sector, and (c) a social market sector. The proposal of Curran and Horwitz may be considered more viable in Western Europe (in fact, it is inspired by different practices of different European countries), but may be the best policy Mexico could adopt if it is really going to establish policies useful for promoting diversity. Canada has a long tradition of public broadcasting service that in one way or another, with emphasis varying according to the ideological positions of the government, has been able to differentiate substantially from the content, goals, and characteristics of private media (Collins, 1990). In the United States, the Public Broadcasting Service is also a significant source of diversity and differentiation in comparison with the commercial networks.

Although in Mexico public television has a long history, it has never been a priority for the government. The first public channel (Channel 11) was founded in 1959 by the National Polytechnic Institute. For more than 3 decades it was only seen in a small part of Mexico City, but today it is included on most cable systems in the country. In 1972, the administration of Luis Echeverría Álvarez turned XHDF, a D.F. private channel, into a public channel and founded the Mexican Rural Television Network, which in 1983 became the Mexican Television Institute (IMEVISION) to bring together the different federal television channels available at the time. With two national channels, 7 and 13, IMEVISION had the potential to become a real alternative to the pri-

vate monopoly of Televisa, but never received enough funds and in practice was only used as a propaganda machine by the government. In 1993, the Salinas de Gortari administration privatized the national channels of IMEVISION, except for Channel 22, which became a cultural channel (Mejía Barquera, 1998; Zarur, n.d.). Today, the two main national public TV channels, Channel 22 and Channel 11, are distributed in most of the country either by open air or through paid TV, providing content and formats strikingly different from the ones supplied by commercial channels. In addition, 24 other public stations operate in the different states of the country through a special permit of the Mexican government that prohibits them from selling advertising, and with funds coming from the local state governments. Ten years ago, these 26 federal, state, and academic public TV stations decided to create the Educational and Cultural Radio and Television Stations Organization. One of the main goals of this organization has been to convince the federal government to establish a legal framework for the proper functioning of this type of broadcasting. For example, public stations want legal mechanisms guaranteeing the participation of other public sectors and citizens in the programming, content, and evaluation of their stations (Granados Chapa, 2004). Despite their importance and tradition, however, public stations were left out in the bill approved by the Mexican Congress. The Red de Radiodifusoras y Televisoras Educativas y Culturales de México, A.C. (Mexican Network of Educational and Cultural Radio and Television Stations) sent a letter to the Senate before the final vote questioning the lack of references and provisions for strengthening public radio and television stations in the new initiative (Velázquez, 2005), but the bill was approved without any amendment in favor of the public stations.

To suggest the adoption of policies supporting and expanding public service television in Mexico's audiovisual space, in a time when deregulation, liberalization, and privatization seem to be the processes championed by current administrations may seem out of order. In fact, according to Casas (2006), the Mexican government has never developed nor adopted formal communication public policies except for a *laissez-faire* approach in which regulations have typically been established after commercial mass media have grown, and then only to guarantee technical aspects, instead of supervising source and content diversity (Casas, 2006). She argued that historically the Mexican government has allowed the emergence of cultural industries that have been able to develop their own operating rules, with regulations appearing much later primarily as an official acknowledgment of the current state of affairs.

As shown earlier, available research shows clearly that policies and positions like the former have not contributed to fostering cultural diversity in broadcasting. If governments are serious about promoting cultural diversity through the mass media, and if they are really worried about the potential loss of the rich and extraordinary diversity of cultural, social, and ethnic manifestations that are so important for the success of societies, then they will have to acknowledge the relevance of public media to achieve the objective of allowing all groups of society to be represented and to be able to communicate and influence all others.

Note

¹The category of fiction included movies, sitcoms, and *telenovelas*; the category of children included cartoons, game and contest shows, comedies, and educational programs; the category of information included news programs, current affairs programs, and panel or interview shows.

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