
MEDIA LITERACY IN MEXICO

Towards a Critical Pluralist Approach



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The aim of education is the knowledge, not of facts, but of values.

–*William S. Burroughs*

Abstract

The primary purpose of this thesis is to address the present status of the media system in Mexico in order to determine how media literacy can contribute to matters of civic participation and the democratization of media. The research uses qualitative interviews as a primary method with expert media participants or observers, supplemented with policy, economic and political analysis of the Mexican media system.

The research identifies that there is a pivotal media scenario driven by the constitutional telecom reform in 2014 in which the introduction of a regulatory frame guided by democratic principles is being challenged by the longstanding media structures. The research shows that the historical relationship between the political and media elites has been a determinant factor in the formation of a concentrated scenario, driven forward by the general neoliberal economic policies that came into effect in the late 80's. At this juncture the thesis argues that the highly concentrated and privatized media system has framed people only as consumers, diluting their role as citizens into a form of 'spectral participation' in media policymaking.

The second facet of the thesis discusses the construct of media literacy positioned within the context of Mexico in order to engage with matters relevant to this setting. The research also presents the recent adoption of media literacy by scholars and advocates in Mexico as part of a wider media literacy movement in Latin America promoted by organizations such as UNESCO, and within this frame examines the implications of a civic-oriented media literacy approach that promotes active participation in media policymaking. This results in a normative model of media literacy underpinned by agonistic democratic principles sensitive to the needs and struggles in Mexico.

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I dedicate this thesis to my mother, a presence touched by grace that will echo in eternity.

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Introduction

Media literacy in Mexico and Latin America is in a pivotal moment. As mass media and other forms of mediated communication grow ever more ubiquitous in societies across these regions, envisaging and defining the points where media and education can join paths becomes an increasingly important endeavor. In both formal and informal educational settings across the world, mediated communication has turned into an essential pedagogic constituent.

For decades there has been an interest in Latin America in media education and ensuing endeavors to bring together a field composed by a multiplicity of approaches mostly rooted in audience reception studies. More prominently in the late 70's Brazilian scholars managed to round up media education colleagues scattered throughout the Latin American region under the umbrella term of 'edukommunikation'. Despite continual cooperation, the translation from Portuguese to Spanish and vice versa has proven to be a hurdle.

Very recently, with the backing of UNESCO and a host of other organizations, Spanish-speaking scholars have been shifting in the direction of 'media literacy', joining a much broader international enterprise of media education. The US and Europe represent important regions for media literacy, where the scholarship and curricula experiences have had more time to spread their wings. In this line, the literature review chapter will rely on these regional examples as theoretical and experiential benchmarks.

Media education has to the challenge of meeting the needs of a world in constant motion. It has become a commonplace to say that the world is shrinking due to globalization, and the contribution that media have had in this perceptual shift cannot be overstated. Changing times have brought in their wake new needs and requirements from media education: in this line, this research will argue that nowadays media education cannot afford to ignore civic and democratic matters. In Mexico, the main site of this research, media literacy as an object of study acquires its relevance by dint of the country's concentrated media landscape. This research will show how the secondary civic duties that media education may have in other parts, here become a prerequisite.

Through the insight of elite interviews with people who are at the forefront of media literacy in Mexico, this thesis has identified that there is a gap in research: media literacy in these regions, as promoted by UNESCO, lacks a robust civic thrust. The thesis will set its sights on this absence and attempt to fill in the gap by studying the current media landscape in Mexico, while

taking into account its context as well as the broader economic and social processes that determine it. In order to complete the picture, this project will then set out to study the current state of media literacy in Mexico as part of a wider Latin American movement. This two-way journey will allow this research to tie in current media affairs in Mexico related to democracy with media literacy.

The stark finding that media literacy policies do not exist in Mexico gives this project the opportunity to demonstrate *why* the experience of media literacy could be significant, and *how* it could be tailored to the particular needs of this context. As such, this project will draw a parallel with civic education: if civic education in schools seeks to teach the emerging citizens about democratic matters, media literacy education in Mexico could engage with democratic affairs that directly involve the media. An example of this is media policymaking, an object of study that will be of significant relevance throughout the research. Initially explored in the literature review chapter through themes such as citizen participation, the use of empirical evidence versus normative principles in their design, and ownership and content regulation, the analysis chapter will then argue that, in the Mexican context, media policymaking represents an important conjunction for media literacy.

The overall aim of this research is to determine how media literacy can provide publics with the insights and critical knowledge to exercise their citizenship by participating in democratic affairs that involve the media –understood as part of broader political, cultural and economic structures– in the Mexican context. The questions this thesis sets out to answer are:

1. What are the connections between media literacy and democracy?
2. Why is media literacy absent in the Mexican media system?
3. How can media literacy provide alternative strategies to critique and change the market ideology of the Mexican media and political landscape?
4. How can media literate publics contribute to democratic affairs that involve the media, thus encouraging greater civic participation?

The second chapter, the review of the literature, will introduce relevant discussions, theoretical concepts and benchmarks that will allow the research to thoroughly explore the link between media education and democracy. This chapter will not limit itself to providing an overview of the existing literature on the main topics of this study. Instead, it will offer a synthesis and

analysis of the literature while being mindful of the context. The themes guiding these discussions will be the concentration and pluralism of media ownership, the prominence of broadcast television, the digital, cultural and socioeconomic divides, the alienating character of policymaking, the liberal market-oriented ideology of the media system, the implications of an agonistic approach to democracy as an alternative, media literacy as a construct, and the hopeful notion of media literacy education as an alternative to the ineffectiveness of regulation.

The third chapter will present the methodological commitments critical realism that underpin this research, and report in more detail the research design. The thesis uses qualitative interviews as a primary method, supplemented with policy, political and economic analysis of the Mexican media system. The chapter will then weigh in the specific advantages that the elite interview method brings to this research, and the rewards of gathering first-hand data from relevant social and political actors in Mexico. This will be followed by a description of how this research carried out the sample resulting in the depiction of the interview process. To complete the chapter, a reflection about methodological considerations and limits will ensue, including the position of power held by the respondents and the geographic distance.

The fourth chapter will forward the discussions and concepts explored in the literature review and gauge them against the data and new findings that emerged from the interviews. This will allow the research to situate the discussions and ideas within the context of Mexico. By taking this path, the analysis will advance towards a political and multifaceted approach to media education suited to engage with issues and struggles inherent to the heterogeneous and complex media environment in Mexico. The analysis will culminate by setting the groundwork for a model of media literacy committed to the vision of a normative critical-pluralist understanding of democracy concerned with citizens who can participate in a media landscape that is grounded in the basic values of political and economic liberalism.

As stated, the theoretical framework will draw on research developed for the most part in the US and Europe, where the term ‘media literacy’ has been in circulation for decades, but the novel adoption of this specific term in Latin America places this research at the forefront of media literacy debates in Mexico, making a contribution to knowledge in media literacy as sensitive to regional differences, situated contexts and most importantly as a strategic intervention into media and democracy.

Literature Review

More and more media literacy is regarded as an important field for the conduct of civic learning. In increasingly mediatized societies, media literacy can provide people with the critical resources they need to understand, engage and, if necessary, as we will see may be the case in Mexico, to challenge the media that have become an integral part of their daily lives (Buckingham, 2007). It is in this spirit that this thesis emphasizes the importance of media education as part of a more general form of democratic citizenship. Such approach requires an exploration of how the media are enclosed in broader social, economic and institutional contexts of communication and politics.

In this chapter, the research will adopt a top-down approach when delving into concepts, ideas and contexts that are important to understand the conditions that media literacy education has to face in Mexico. One section will examine the theoretical background of media policies that deal with issues of democracy; a latter section will explore more mindfully the idea of media literacy education as an alternative to regulation, theoretically establishing media literacy model based on a normative radical-pluralist understanding of democracy for students –the emerging citizens– to critically navigate a media landscape that is grounded in fundamental values of political and economic liberalism.

Media concentration

The reason why media ownership concentration is an important issue to examine for the general aim of this project is that, in any large society, the media probably constitute the most vital institutional structure of the public sphere (Baker, 2007). This follows that democracy implies a wide dispersal of power within public discourse offers universal opportunities to present preferences, views and visions.

A good part of the literature dedicated to democratization of the media rests on the following premise: media concentration is anti-democratic (Freedman, 2014; Noam, 2007; Baker, 2007). The claim that the concentration of media ownership contradicts the central principles of democracy is almost universal (Barnnet, 2010), and as such pluralism and diversity have been historically emphasized in policies statements in Europe and the US. It is established among media concentration critics that more recent policy initiatives have moved towards chipping away restrictions in favor of greater consolidation (Barnnet, 2010; Freedman, 2014).

Others reject such pessimistic accounts and believe that market and technological forces are breaking open the barriers to a flowering period of media and information (Noam, 2009). Opponents of media concentration in advanced western democracies fear effects as what is referred to as the ‘Berlusconi’ effect. According to Baker (2007, p.18), dispersal of ownership structurally prevents scenarios such as this from happening, where the Italian media mogul used his massive media power to catapult himself into the Prime Minister position for two periods. Later we will review the historical conditions that made these episodes commonplace in Latin American media systems.

Many scholars of media concentration emphasize pluralism and diversity of media as a foundation for democracy, about media content and its impact on citizens, and about the potentially irresponsible power of the few over the many. Noam (2009) alerts us that the prevalence of media concentrations trends around the world might have more fundamental forces at work than media moguls such as Murdoch, the Azcárraga family in Mexico or Berlusconi.

Picard and Dal Zotto (2015, p.56), claim that, conceptually, ownership itself is not good or bad, and consider that different forms of ownerships have different advantages and disadvantages, with different outcomes that can be good or bad. For them, the determinant problem with current complaints about ownership is that they have nothing to do with ownership, but rather the commercialized pursuit of media. However, this way of framing issues of media ownership seems to recoil from broader democratic debates. A number of political and media scholars consider that this form of de-politicized debates happens within the framework of a naturalized neoliberal project and global market forces (Mouffe, 2005; Raeijmaekers and Maesele, 2015). Previous ideological struggles between ‘right and left’ have now taken a rationalizing and moralizing turn dealing with what is ‘right and wrong’.

A rationalized approach to media concentration is adopted by Noam (2009), who in an attempt to give closure to the debate on whether media are becoming controlled by the few and closed to the many in the US, delivers an impressively comprehensive research on media ownership providing facts and numbers. His approach is in direct opposition to what several media scholars maintain: empirically-based statistical evidence by itself offers an illusory belief that quantifiable facts can give answers to normative questions, such as media quality, social responsibility, pluralism and diversity (Baker, 2007; Freedman, 2014; Karppinen, 2015).

This gap represents one of the most fundamental ruptures in media ownership research and policy-making. Even if media policy is not focused on matters of economic efficiency (Noam, 2009), issues concerning industry concentration and market structure are often dominated by lawyers, economists and business analysts who privilege empirical data, at the expense of developing a more comprehensive approach (Freedman, 2014). To a lot critics of media ownership, the debate does not focus on whether media are concentrated or not, as oppose to Noam's intention, but rather on the implications of media systems that privilege particular ways of assessing and ordering the world. To Baker (2007, p.8), the principle of distribution of media ownership is "an end in itself", not a means predicted by quantitative data to lead to a desirable result. "Normative appeal, not empirical evidence", he says, supports its justification.

Normative and ideological debates

This comes to show that the broader debate on ownership is a democratic and ideological debate. As shown, even some critics of ownership have come to assume post-ideological frameworks that have naturalized neoliberal principles. Circumscribing concepts such as pluralism and diversity (relevant to the discussion) to ideologically-neutral empirical data, rather than to value-laden notions (Karppinen, 2015), should be treated as an expression of a particular neoliberal worldview. Noam (2009, p.13) argues that the negative aspects of media do not necessarily derive from trends of media concentration, but are product of the same force: profit orientation. Commercial pressures, he says, have led even small and medium-sized media firms to assume irresponsible and profit-driven behaviors. This seems to suggest that media ownership, whether concentrated or diversified, operates within an ideological economic system that favors pure profit maximization, rather than social responsibility and other principles. Even if Noam assumes an impartial approach, his insights are important to analyze in the context of this section: if dynamics of profit growth do not influence big media firms more than small or medium-sized ones, then commercialism, diversity of content and patterns of concentration have to be analyzed as ideological processes.

The issue of diversity of content provides an interesting example of the debate on empirical frameworks set against normative ones. Diversity in concentration does not necessarily imply diversity in content (Noam, 2009). If founded on an empirical base, this datum can be used as an argument in favor of concentration (Entman, 2003). Content diversity, from the perspective of Baker's (2007) democratic distributive value, pales in significance when compared to *source* diversity, as it misses the point about why democracy calls for diversity. To him, "when people

freely agree” (p.15) and reach an egalitarian ideal, democracy does not require viewpoint or content diversity. However, this argument draws on a model of deliberative democracy (Habermas, 1996) that requires a coherent and unified consensus irreconcilable with the heterogeneous nature of society, which is the cornerstone of democracy (Mouffe, 2005).

Baker’s invaluable contribution to media ownership research is putting forward a normative response in light of the the failure of empirical data to make sense of complex communication environments. To him, the democratic distributive value is a principle that ought to be relevant for any democratic model without the need for complicated empirical research or debatable economic analyses. This argument alone could refute Noam’s 400-page complicated economic research, but he adopts a sensible middle-ground, providing valuable insights for both ends of the debate.

Concerns in relation to media ownership need to consider alternative understandings of democracy. One of the tenets of liberal democracy is that markets need to be free of structural controls to operate effectively and allow equal representation of all perspectives. This model has made it possible for certain actors to hold enormous, unequal and hence undemocratic power (Baker, 2007), as the previously evoked case of Berlusconi. In Latin America, media concentration is not a frequent topic in the discourse of political and social actors when referring to the necessary conditions of an authentic democracy (Trejo Delarbre, 2015). Guerrero (2015, p.211) considers the political systems have shaped to a large extent the contours of their media systems: Historic clientelism –understood as the relations between political and media elites– and market deregulation are the defining variables that have naturalized and modeled the Latin American media landscape. Baker’s warning about the risks of the abuse of communicative power by media is typified by this region’s media systems.

Picard and Dal Zotto (2015) have identified that most small countries usually have two dominant media companies, and larger about four to six, making it a highly concentrated industry by comparison to most others. To contextualize, Mexico, the most populous Spanish-speaking country in the world (INEGI, 2015), has two dominant media companies who control 90% of the broadcasting sector (Guerrero, 2015). The case of Mexico displays many of the traits described by media scholars as to the outcomes of acute media concentration in a democracy: it has restricted cultural, political and linguistic diversity (Becerra & Mastrini, 2009); it has reduced the outlets from which citizens can acquire and exchange the information and ideas necessary to navigate the public life (Baker, 2007); it has emphasized the role of the

audiences as consumers rather than citizens (Buckingham, 2013), with 72% of their income corresponding to advertisement (Lizárraga Salas & Bravo Torres Coto, 2015). This latter piece of data conveys a more advanced stage of concentration of media ownership than the bulk of advanced industrial democracies studied by scholars from the US and Europe. A clear indicator of this is the audience share of broadcast television: as of 2010, Televisa had 70% of the segment; 63% of Mexican homes do not have cable television (Newsline Report, 2013), making broadcast television the most conspicuous outlet in the media landscape. Furthermore, the complicity between the state and the private corporations has positioned community and indigenous media in an uphill situation where they have struggled for adequate funding, the awarding of licenses and even legal recognition (Guerrero, 2015).

Freedman (2014, p.176) has analyzed the ideological backdrop of media ownership politics, which to him embody “systems of thought and action that are related to specific ways of ordering the world” Televisa’s extensive dependence on advertising revenue and the concentration of the audience share reveal attitudes and values of the wider ideological position that they espouse. The ideological approach of media ownership represents a central element in this thesis’s broader analysis framework, because it allows to explain how, despite the democratic tilt of regulations and policies (Freedman, 2014; Picard and Dal Zotto, 2015) the predominant media model is constituted and reproduced within a specific, economically-driven, viewpoint. How else, if not for these practices, could a broadcast television company in the 60’s can currently partake in broadcast television, cable television, radio, telecommunication networks, magazines, internet, cinema, and own football teams and stadiums? (Lizárraga Salas & Bravo Torres Coto, 2015) Freedman (2014) and other communication scholars have identified that structures of media ownership such as this one are central to secure consent to “market-driven politics” (p.177). This implies that the media structure in Mexico has managed to naturalize capitalist relations and systems of thought, revealing their ideological underpinnings.

With such conditions, the basic argument that pluralism of media ownership is an essential element of a healthy democracy feels almost passé. The Mexican media landscape could be seen as an exemplar of the consequences that the concentration of media has on the health of a democracy. Structures of media ownership are able to naturalize capitalist relations that stimulate concentration (Freedman, 2014). Attempts to promote pluralism and accountability *only* through ownership regulations and policies feel somewhat disingenuous to achieve in such

an enfranchised scenario of media ownership concentration (or disenfranchised media pluralism?).

It could be argued that pluralistic media ownership is as crucial, if not more, for a media landscape such as this one; however, what is reasoned here is that the concentration of the media is so rooted in the bodies of the Mexican and other Latin American democracies that it has degraded the democratic character conferred to the media to a point of obsolescence. Questions of great concerns to media scholars from Europe and the US such as the identity of TV audiences as consumers or citizens seem to a point immaterial in such settings. Media companies have been operating within an economic model that fosters the concentration of ownership (Guerrero, 2015), giving them, in turn, the position to influence deregulatory policies (Freedman, 2014); media ownership is wholly seen as a vehicle for business, rather for both its commercial (for consumers) and formative elements (for citizens). On paper, media regulatory policies do not entirely enable this structure; as this research will review later, the democratic character made explicit in policy documents finds limited resonance in practice.

One has to wonder how issues of democracy and citizenship can come into view in a scenario where the media market configuration and commodified consumer habits have been structured for decades. Despite the possible emergence of new private players in the Mexican market of broadcast television and the legal recognition of community media, as legislated in the telecommunications and broadcasting reform in 2013-14, there is little indication that they will alter the current commodified character of the content in the foreseeable future (Lizárraga Salas & Bravo Torres Coto, 2015). This resonates with the previous discussion on content diversity as elucidated by Baker and Noam. However, Guerrero (2015) has identified a shift of trends in some dimensions: the government, driven by pressures of social sectors and civil society groups, is starting to promote policies in areas such as antitrust regulations and access to new technologies.

In a context of reduced regulatory capacities by the state brought about neoliberal reforms and historical trends of political groups fostering mutually beneficial relationships with media elites, the topic of media ownership concentration and pluralism are topics of great concern to Latin American media scholars, journalists, publics and policy makers that require an expanded conceptual framework that includes dimensions of media and civic education.

Media pluralism

Given the considerable level of concentration of media ownership in Latin American countries, it is pertinent to flesh out current approaches to media pluralism that emerge from different models of democracy. By engaging with democratic theory we can question normative claims made in academic and political debates. This will allow us to understand how regulations that promote dissemination of ownership within a liberal model of democracy will struggle to discontinue the ongoing naturalization of neoliberal worldviews by existing media structures. In this way, we can steer away from ideal-types of regulatory behaviors (Just, 2009) as the panacea to the democratic ailments of Latin American media, to avenues in harmony with the aims of this research that will explore the educational relationship between media and democracy.

Jakubowicz (2015, p.49) considers that the determining factor in media pluralism policy is, ultimately, of an ideological and political character. The assumption is that, if not approached from a certain understanding of democracy and pluralism, media policies will do little to reform the media landscape; however, a more holistic approach that incorporates education might have a more realistic chance to enable the formation of citizens capable of navigating critically between their identities as consumers and citizens, with the ability to situate the role of the media and themselves in relation to broader social, cultural and political contexts (Mihailidis, 2015).

Talking about pluralism and diversity always requires a frame of reference in which it has political meaning (Karppinen, 2007). Raeijmaekers and Maesele (2015, p.1042) state that 'media pluralism' has become a sort of buzzword in political, public and even academic discourses, with little operative clearness. In an effort to underpin the meaning and implications of pluralism and diversity, they examine different conceptual and normative beliefs about pluralism against the backdrop of three democratic models (liberal pluralism, deliberative democracy and radical pluralism) and develop a two-dimensional framework that embraces a distinction between pluralism and diversity. By doing so, they lay the theoretical foundation on which to identify why different studies on media pluralism have different expectations and outcomes.

Isolating diversity from pluralism is relevant, as they elicit different approaches to policy-making. According to Karppinen (2013), diversity is descriptive and more empirically-based, reproduced in the broader tendency of policy makers to hinge on what they see as more reliable

quantitative methods; pluralism, however, is related to normative judgments, currently marginalized from policy frameworks. This resonates with the earlier claims by Lizárraga Salas & Bravo Torres Coto about the emergence of new actors in Mexican broadcast television not necessarily signifying a more plural landscape, but rather a more dispersed reproduction of the same content.

According to Karppinen (cited in Jakubowicz, 2015) these three broad traditions of democratic theory offer distinct frameworks for understanding media pluralism. As established previously, media politics in general, and media ownership and the debate on concentration and pluralism in particular, are still largely grounded in liberal values and ideology: individual freedom, dispersion of power, self-government, and the belief that market behavior represents these values (Jakubowicz, 2015). Following the global trend of the late 1980s, Mexico embodies the liberal model as a result of liberal-ridden market reforms (Guerrero 2015). Within this model, media is supposed to have a representative role committed to monitoring all kinds of information on society as to inform the “individuals’ divergent needs and views” to political elites (Raeijmaekers and Maesele, 2015, p.1045). Behind the liberal model lies the assumption that media, in order to ensure its independence from the government’s compromising influence, has to be fixed to the free market, with the liberty to operate like commercialized entities regulated through consumer choice (Anand et al., 2007).

As previous discussed, one of the central ideas of deliberative democracy is the attempt to reconcile disagreements through the discursive formation of public opinion. Much in line with has been presented this far on media practices in Mexico, scholars of the deliberative democratic model argue that market-oriented media manage information like a commodity: simplified, customized, and decontextualized— addressing publics as consumers instead of citizens (Habermas, 1989). This of course would demand a more participatory structure over the current professional-commercialized media organization, favoring tools like the internet which are expected to stimulate citizen participation (Mihailidis, 2015).

Much in line with the discussions hitherto, Jakubowicz (2015) points out that ever more, the deliberative model is considered in media studies as an outdated ideal with decreasing practical relevance in contemporary societies because its “emphasis on rational deliberation and consensus ignores unequal relations of power, the depth of social pluralism and fundamental value differences” (p.25), thus offering little foundation for democratization. Media scholars such as Mihailidis reveal their adherence to a deliberative model of democracy, positioning the

participatory trait of digital media at the center of their normative educational model of citizenship. Other scholars are not so quick to exalt the plural and emancipatory character of media emanating from the internet (see Hindman, 2008).

The ideological discussions of media ownership staged above by Freedman are in tune with the radical-pluralist model of democracy, which is distrustful about the liberal and deliberative practices of the first two models for their post-ideological basis (Raeijmaekers & Maesele, 2015). According to agonistic scholars such as Mouffe (2013), it is undesirable for democratic politics to reach consensus and overcome ideological struggles and conflict because it requires the sedimentation of dominant power relations and the exclusion of discourses embodied by dissident social groups. Agonistic pluralism offers an alternative to the deliberative democracy utopia of rationalizing society through universal principles, and instead emphasizes views of contestation and disarticulation of hegemonic powers (Karppinen, 2009).

These ideas at first bring to mind Baker's (2007, p.8) "complex democracy", which involves a struggle among different groups with their own projects and interests according to their conception of a desirable world. Both models conceive media for their pluralist function. Ultimately, however, Baker's complex democracy asserts liberal ("egalitarian dispersal") and deliberative ("inclusive common discourse" (p.9)) foundations, abandoning any notion of struggle. In an agonistic model, the idea of pluralism conceives the media as sites of struggle, concerned with the discursive contestation of ideological viewpoints. In normative terms, this model holds that society is pronounced by hegemonic ideological assumptions, "which are either reproduced by or addressed and contested in media representation" (Raeijmaekers & Maesele, 2015, p.1054). However, according to Karppinen (2009), few theories, institutional or concrete political questions have been formulated about the consequences for these debates and discursive struggles in the media and the public sphere.

The appeal of radical pluralism as evaluative ideal to gauge contemporary liberal media systems such as the one in Mexico is that it contests the *status quo* in terms of existing exclusions and inequalities. The media market in Mexico can be construed as the naturalization of power relations in which struggles of an ideological nature have been concealed behind the singular and unified depiction of the dominant media that is more reconcilable with liberal democracy. As such, the framework that underlies the existing model seeks to overcome and neutralize ideological conflict. Nonetheless –making use of agonistic lexicon– the hegemonic media concentration that came as a result of discursive sedimentation is often contested by

antagonistic groups formed by smaller media outlets, community media, academics, journalists, and advocacy groups.

Considering its post-colonial identity, the Mexican social reality has been characterized by diversity and unequal power relations, with a small amount of arenas for struggle and contestation. As such, the ideals of deliberative democracy ignore the depth of this social heterogeneity by being too reliant on the view that social order must be established on the ideals of unanimity and consensus. It would seem that, given the socio-political order of Mexico, agonistic pluralism offers a democratic model more in tune with the need to situate and evaluate media in broader social, political and cultural debates, concerning issues of power and inequality. Even the ideals of the European public sphere are being challenged and deemed unsuitable to represent the increasingly diverse and plural social reality of the region (Karppinen, 2009). Picard and Del Zotto (2015) state that the fundamental failure of ownership regulation to address pluralism is that ownership is not the real problem, but a proxy for other issues. In light of this discussion, it is possible to assess the previous discussion about the media's role in regard to the naturalization of neoliberal, market-driven ideologies, and envision a departure with a radical-pluralist orientation. This dissertation assumes a similar position in regards to media and democracy in Mexico. As such, one can examine why media policies that enshrine democratic ideals represent a problematic basis to adequately deal with issues regarding democracy and media.

Media policy: empirical evidence and public participation

It has been unavoidable to raise theoretical and political concerns regarding policy-making in previous discussions on media ownership. This section will take a closer look at current debates on media policy, particularly the underlying factors and implications of recent trends that have seen a shift from normative and political questions to more measurable, empirical definitions of the media environment.

According to Freedman (2015, p.96), high-profile participants often claim that media policymaking is an impartial and depoliticized area of activity. In this *official* account of the media policy process, policies themselves are framed by experts and developed in formal spaces, written in cryptic parliamentary language and applied disinterestedly, expected to attain measurable results. This account of media policy process has been challenged by theorists on the basis that communicative power in contemporary decision-making situations is not adequately distributed (McChesney, 2003; Baker, 2007). This line of reasoning endorses earlier

discussions about dominant media structures with the capacity to secure political consent. However, this understanding of media policymaking is hardly exclusive to European contexts. In Latin American, the previously outlined phenomenon of clientelism reveals that media policy (or politics) has been an area dominated by special interests, in which money and influence are pivotal (Freedman, 2015; Guerrero, 2015).

Media policy is hardly a clean, depoliticized evidence-based process. In 2012, *The Guardian* had access to documents that linked the current president of Mexico, Enrique Peña Nieto, to Televisa by the way of several deals dating back to 2005, still as governor, to promote his image at a national level in preparation for the presidential run (González Amador, 2012). The agreements included a dirty campaign against Lopez Obrador, his biggest contender and representative of the left party. This exemplifies how the media system in Mexico is a matter of politics which cannot be separated from ideological inclinations and self-interest. To a considerable degree, Freedman's (2015, p.98) claim that media policy "is messy and dirty" is an indicator of a bigger political and cultural framework. This is the reason why media policymaking has to be conceived as a sphere of activity that is not detached from social practices. The thesis argues that policies of any kind are culturally specific, dependent upon the particular political and economic arrangements prevailing in a specific context. Media, despite being a vital institution of the public sphere, as Baker calls it, do not exist in a political and economic vacuum.

These concerns are marked by current debates on media policymaking. According to Karppinen (2015, p.289) there is a growing demand for "objective, empirical data and performance metrics in public policy-making", seen as a safety measure against vested political interests and an instrument to take more objective decisions. Baker (2007, p.77) has argued that the empirical approach to media issues "represents a misguided but increasingly common empiricist belief that quantifiable facts can give answers to normative questions – and can do so without any coherent explanation for how the quantified facts even relate to the normative questions". In correspondence to earlier discussions, the successful adoption of pluralism and diversity in policymaking, as oppose to value-laden notions such as media freedom and quality, is due to their seeming measurability and apparent ideological neutrality (Hay, 2004).

If we subscribe to Freedman's idea that policymaking is a messy process, the aims to ensure a more objective and evidentiary basis for media policy debates to bypass political disputes are misleading. As stated by Karppinen (2015, p.288), empirical indicators are hardly neutral. Any

empirical definition will involve choices about which criteria are considered valid. These kinds of arguments that reject the policy process as scientific and hygienic seem to be broadly grounded in the so-called science wars debates, where notions of objectivity and neutrality regarding scientific knowledge are challenged, claiming that scientific practices share the idiosyncrasies and political nature of other human practices. As such, the selection of empirical indicators and criteria leads to the question as to what political and ideological ideas they rest on. These aspects of policymaking can be enclosed in what Freedman (2015, p.99) calls “media policy silences”: in broad terms, the gaps in process and unspoken assumptions. These analyses are not entirely posed against the use of empirical evidence in policy making. The big argument here is that empirically-driven data “should also be seen as political” (Karppinen, 2015, p.288).

Reducing the complexities of media values to mechanical, ‘objective’ indicators, more comfortably shaped after economic or administrative angles, can ignore alternative, social or cultural perspectives, such as the dissent of concerned citizens (Freedman, 2008, p.99). One example of this is the recently proposed classification criterion which will affect young audiences in Mexico (Ávila, 2015). The classification will allow content targeted to adults previously aired at 8:00pm to be transmitted at 4:00pm, in which, for instance, occasional alcohol and cigarette consumption can be shown. According to Andrés Chao Ebergengy, head of Media Normativity, for the development of these guidelines they consulted Tv Azteca, Televisa, the National Chamber of the Radio and Television Industry (CIRT) and the organization *A favor de lo mejor* (In favor of what is best), financed by major advertisers in the country, including the food industry, supermarket chains, breweries and banks. The process is evidently underpinned by a business scheme that excludes citizen participation. Private actors, rather than public, have defined the policy. The only non-income-driven participant involved in the process, the association *A favor de lo mejor*, later released a statement on their website expressing disagreement with the proposed guidelines.

This is an exemplary case of “media policy fetishism” (Freedman, 2015, p.103). The two main analytical dimensions relevant to this case are: the alienation of public participation from decision-making processes, and the previously eluded fixation with evidence and metrics. A situation in which the two dominant media companies and array of major commodity-oriented businesses are involved in the decision-making process of policies concerning such a vulnerable section of the audience not only demands a deep examination of the regulatory organs, but also of the kind of environment that leaves the door open to private rather than public participants in the policy process. This paper argues that the hegemonic framework underlying media

policies needs to be brought into the open and scrutinized. For such a thing to happen, there is a need to look beyond the naturalized horizon of institutional policies and regulations, and envisage ways to give power to citizens in the media environment. Hesmondhalgh (2001), a critic of marketized social relations, questions whether ownership is a sufficiently extensive frame with which to make sense of complex media environments. The argument is that education would allow audiences and the general public to acquire the literacy to help them navigate the complexities of their democracy in crucial matters such as media policy-making and accountability. The alienating distances derived from policy fetishism could be reduced if the public gained the media literacy to pose questions such as: How can we as citizens gain decision-making power? Where are the access points to participate in the policy process? How can we fight adult advertising at the 4pm slot?

Noam (2009, p.12) offers an observation to consider: since media systems are held partly responsible either as contributing or causing many of society's problems, too much is expected from a reform of media. He is speaking within the framework of media ownership reform; however, his argument can be reexamined from a different angle: media reform as social reform could not only be unpacked from ownership policies, but also from education-oriented ones. The educational element of policy initiatives has been taken up recently by some scholars dedicated to explore pluralism of ownership. Even if media literacy is not explicitly articulated, Jakubowicz (2015, p.47) proposes a public policy agenda to help safeguard social and citizenship objectives in which "a reconceptualization of *media education*" is required as a way to promote media and social pluralism.

These sorts of claims are of significant value to this research, since they come to show that there is a recent trend in media pluralism studies that are starting to incorporate, or at least explore, the dimension of education. This project wants to take this exploration further and bring literacy to the forefront, along with regulation, of media policymaking. It is not to say that fundamental concepts to media ownership scholars such as of pluralism and diversity need to be abandoned; on the contrary: these concepts are fundamental to a critical-pluralist model of democracy. Rather, what is proposed is to turn the arrangement on its head: in order for it to be relevant to—and participate in— political and ideological debates, a media literacy education model has to be built upon normative values that embrace pluralism and diversity, but also media freedom, accountability, contestation in public spaces, etc.; notions which are notably missing from empirically-driven policies.

Conceiving education as an alternative to regulation should not be the standard; they should be articulate each other. However, as it has been stressed before, to make the dimension of democracy a categorical aspect of the media environment in Mexico, there is a need to blow the lid off and problematize the liberal political and ideological basis in which media policies are rooted. The relationship between democracy and media is therefore a matter of both institutional regulation and a civic media literacy. Silverstone (2007, p.165-170) offers an insightful metaphor on this subject when he says that regulation is like grammar: “it addresses the rules of language, not how the language is spoken or what is said”. Along the line of what has been previously argued, he calls for a shift away from narrowly conceived forms of media regulation, towards the possibility of developing a project informed by media literacy as a civic activity, one that recognizes the characteristics and needs of the mediate world.

The project thus far has precisely focused on fleshing out the characteristics and needs that call for a particular model of media literacy based on a radical-pluralist approach to democracy in Mexico. The next section will elaborate on the different debates and approaches regarding media literacy, as the characteristics, settings, and forms that help to conceptualize this concept. This will allow us go into more detail about the particular position that this paper has taken so far.

The construct of media literacy

Media literacy is a relatively new concept but there is a lot available on the matter. As with any topic that has been written about a lot, it can mean two things: that the subject is important to a lot of people, and that this wealth of ideas creates a challenge to organize it, providing an even bigger challenge to reach a consensus. Some scholars have made great efforts to organize these concepts, so, as it is their intention, this project will reap the benefits of this work.

There are two dimensions for analyzing the definition of media literacy: literacy, and how it is conceptualized, and the idea of media to which literacy is linked. Potter (2004, p.29) wonders whether the first dimension should be conceptualized as a “skill”, “an accumulation of knowledge”, or “a perspective of the world”. If anything, this comes to show that media literacy is a complex phenomenon that can be conceptualized as a number of literacies. For example, Adams and Hamm (2001, p.1) view media literacy “as a junction point between disciplines that can serve as a vehicle for pulling fragmented elements of the curriculum together”.

Defining the second dimension –media– is important to this project because some scholars emphasize certain media over others. The need for digital skills and competencies are increasingly needed for sailing across media and information-rich societies (Hobbs, 2010). As set forth, however, television in Mexico still stands on the most visible platform in the media arena. This does not mean that the media literacy model explored in this research should just contemplate television. Rather, it implies that the understanding of the *media* attached to *literacy* has to comprise different kinds of media (Adams & Hamm, 2001). Following the increasing trend of situating digital media at the core of media literacy models (see Mihailidis, 2015; Hobbs, 2010) would misrepresent this particular media ecology, and possibly add to the existing social, economic and technological divides in Mexico, constraining, rather than multiplying, the channels of communication.

Potter (2004, p.31-32) states that, despite the many types of definitions and elements, they are “more complementary than they are competitive”. The differences in definition are contingent to what is most important to the writer, an aspect much in line with this research’s aim to develop an understanding of media literacy contextualized in Mexico. However broad and relative, Potter (2004, p. 32-33) identifies recurring ideas across these definitions: A) Media literacy is not limited to one medium, B) media literacy requires skills, C) media literacy requires certain types of knowledge and D) media literacy must deal with values. This last idea is inserted in a particularly relevant debate that links to discussions explored in previous sections. Masterman (in Potter, 2004, pp.33-34) argues that media education does not pursue “to impose cultural values” or ideas on what constitutes good or bad content. The problem with this position is not only that in itself is value-laden, as Potter notes, but its deliberately decontextualized character. Of course, no subject in the curricula of schools should seek to “impose” any form of knowledge. However, even if the ultimate goal of learning in schools is to develop critical, independent thinking, the project argues that, just as any language needs a grammatical structure, acquiring skills and knowledge related to the media requires a certain conceptual and ethical framework. Otherwise, such an approach to media literacy education would assume that the media exist in a vacuum.

Many scholars have protested that, given the amount of ideas, it is hard to make sense of the construct of media literacy. As such, many of them have periodically joined efforts to craft consent, as it happened in 1992 with the National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy in the US (Aufderheide & Firestone, 1993). This research agrees with Potter’s (2004, p.35) argument that general definitions “can provide a sense of the perimeters of concern by showing

what ideas are included under a term”, but are of little use to people interested in carrying out concrete strategies or plans. So far this project has tried to make sense of the ‘big picture’ of media literacy in order to realize the extent of its civic potential. Potter (2004, p.35) considers this “process is a spiral”, where grasping the specifics allows a better understanding of the context, which leads to shedding light on the specifics. As such, this project is seeking to harmonize the specifics with big ideas such as citizenship, democracy, political, pluralism.

Buckingham (2007, p.149) argues that any definition of literacy is “necessarily ideological”, meaning that literacy is inevitably a contested field. Along this line, the position this project assumes is that no single, absolute consented definition of media literacy is desirable. In consonance with the discussions staged earlier, overcoming disagreements and reaching consensus would render a post-ideological understanding of media literacy, as it would ignore the pluralistic media environments across societies, with their particular needs and conditions.

Media literacy: citizenship, ownership and the digital liberator

Buckingham (2000, p.220-222) has been one of the most vocal advocates in recent times for the case of media education as a site to define future opportunities for citizenship. Taking as a basis a tradition of political education or ‘political literacy’, he distinguishes between two models: the liberal, premised on a division between the political and the personal domains, and the participatory perspective, which challenges this distinction and implies a more egalitarian interplay among a range of social fields. He argues that, aiming to avoid political controversy, schools consider that children are unable of making complex political judgements and leave the business of political education to sources such as the media. From this perspective, he considers that the curriculum should assist young people to become actively involved in their surrounding media culture, encouraging their critical participation as cultural producers.

Some scholars find in new media a venue to practice this form of participatory citizenship. Mihailidis (2015) places digital media at the center of a new culture of citizen participation, making a case as to why (digital) media literacy must be incorporated to educational systems. His works rides on the premise that the internet offers new public spheres, dissolving the centralized control of information and political discourse. Mihailidis understands that sophisticated forms of cultural and political expression are not a guaranteed consequence of technological innovation, and rather than recurring to cultural policies “to foster and support them”, as Buckingham (2000, p.222) suggests should be the case, he forwards an educational perspective. Buckingham is openly suspicious about this form of technological determinism,

and considers that such accounts tend to underestimate more traditional forms of communication and political activity. Furthermore, Hindman (2008) offers a comprehensive research which challenges the notion of the internet as the quintessential democratic technology that has come to redistribute political influence and involve citizens in previously untapped political activities. Indeed, his research finds that internet traffic is dominated by a few media companies, producing new forms of monopoly that recall the processes of ownership concentration of traditional media systems.

In order to bring these discussions into the context of Mexico, it is important to assume the more skeptical position of Buckingham. Not only because of the wager that adopting a technological triumphalist outlook supposes, but for a factor considered by Hindman (2008, p.9) in his case against digital democracy that feels patently relevant to the divisive social reality of Mexico: the digital divide. Recent figures show that 44.4% of the population has access to internet (INEGI, 2014), a remarkable statistic that is not easy to dismiss. However, even if the gaps are narrowing, it is equally hard to disdain the potential correlation between this datum and the reported figure of 46.2% of the population living under the poverty line (CNN México, 2015). We need to consider this evidence in light of the inequalities inherent to the social structures of a country that has historically gone through a process of decolonization and, in recent times, the culmination of a democratic transition with the political party PRI losing the presidential elections in 2000 after seventy-two years in office. Differences in the digital divide brought up by Hindman such as age, race, ethnicity, and education have to be valued in this context.

The topic of the digital divide was placed in the agenda of the telecommunications and broadcasting reform of 2013-14 and several initiatives were launched aimed at promoting the universal adoption of ICTs, in accordance to the constitutional right established in Article 6. In this setting, the government project *México Conectado* (Mexico Connected) sets out to “usher Mexico into the information and knowledge society” (ITU, 2015, p.6) by 2018 as defined by five objectives. One of these goals seeks out to incorporate digital technologies into the educational process with aims to develop digital skills in students. The fifth objective, in tone with Mihailidis’ views, states that the program is developing mechanisms that will support society “resolve issues of public interest by promoting citizen participation in public policy development”. The goal is remarkable in itself, but no further information is offered as to how citizens will be able to take part in policy processes. If accomplished, this would establish a framework that directly engages with the alienating process of policymaking, as identified by

Freedman. These “mechanisms” of citizen participation are as intriguing as absent in this document and the official website, but this concept will be revisited in a forthcoming chapter.

Even though the nationwide program has clear objectives that incorporate dimensions of education and citizenship to face the digital divide, the link between the two is not explicit, each representing separate objectives. It could be argued as well that the educational objective only incorporates *functional* aspects of media literacy; digital or otherwise: it describes the acquisition of mechanical skills, but not the critical understanding or knowledge of the media and political culture that surrounds the students. If one of the objectives seeks the involvement of public participation in policy process, it follows that the educational goal should be thematically consistent in its civic character. This form of institutional civic engagement needs the public to understand and learn about the channels and processes to be able to participate.

If anything, *México Conectado* makes the case for media literacy in the curriculum of schools with a direct link to issues of citizenship and democracy even stronger. Furthermore, Buckingham (2000, p.222) reminds us that if rights of access to cultural expression are to be fulfilled, more traditional forms of civil and political rights must in the balance. As elucidated earlier, the prominence of television, the digital and socioeconomic divides, the alienating character of policymaking, and the liberal market-oriented ideology of the media system, calls for a more holistic, political and multifaceted form of media literacy education suitable to engage with issues and struggles inherent to a heterogeneous and complex media environment in Mexico.

Moreover, we cannot ignore that the advent of the internet has been opportunistically embraced by advocates of deregulatory policies of media ownership on the basis that free markets and technology will take care of media concentration (Noam, 2009, p.19). The claim is that the internet has taken audiences and advertising away from traditional media, making these sponsors question if “ownership rules are even relevant in today’s media market” (Freedman, 2014, p.178). The argument goes that, in a media environment of digital advances and consumer choice, worrying about oligopoly or lack of diversity is beside the point. Doyle (2015, p.303) considers that it is debatable whether the proliferation of accesses to information has contributed positively to diversity and pluralism. As Hindman, she explains that search engines tend to direct audiences towards highly popular content, which poses a threat to diversity (p.304). Ultimately, there is a need to assess whether projects such as *México Conectado* operate on the assumption that the internet has done away with the need for ownership

regulations. To illustrate, the terms ‘innovative’, ‘entrepreneurial’, ‘productivity’, ‘businesses’, ‘economy’ ‘services’, ‘products’, are inscribed in the headlining goals.

Envisaging a critical-pluralist approach

Instead of *assuming* that media literacy is a good thing, this project has set the groundwork through debates on concepts such as ownership, pluralism and democracy to delineate the significance of being media literate in many of today’s societies, with particular focus on the Latin American and Mexican ones. Potter (2004, p.34) claims that the common purpose of media literacy is focused on improving individuals in one way or another, with the underlying assumption that “society at large will experience benefits”. Potter stresses notions of what being media literate is in terms such as meaning-making, the risks of harmful effects, dangers of exposure.

Taking into account these ideas should be vital to any media literacy educative model, but this research discerns that this approach encloses the outcomes of media literacy within a protectionist shell, limiting the democratic potential of media literacy as a whole. This brings the project to a key dispute in media literacy education, as identified by Buckingham (2005): the effects debate. He differentiates between teaching media effects to *protect* students from making students *aware*. To him, media education should be about engaging students with media, rather than protecting them. Enclosing media education within the effects debate presupposes a powerless audience facing an all-powerful media. As said before, even if teaching about media’s effects is important in media literacy education, this framework avoids many of the complexities involved in the political and ideological context and role of media.

Very illuminating to this thesis’s position, Buckingham (2005, p.19) elaborates this idea by saying that “..we can only understand the role of the media in the context of other social, historical and cultural forces, and that seeing this in terms of simple notions of ‘cause and effect’ often leads us to ignore the complexity of what are concerned about”. To a point, this project agrees with Mihailidis (2015, p.37) that positioning media literacy as a protectionist field will not deliver a holistic approach that teaches about, and engages with, society, democracy and culture. The point of departure is when he situates ‘digital culture’ at the core of media literacy education.

The idea is not to regress the field of media literacy to pre-internet and social media times, but to recognize the need for a dynamic definition of the concept, etched with values and seeking

outcomes that are open to debate. Of course, all of this presupposes a democratic center, and yet even the foundations of what democracy means are not undisputable. Kellner & Share (2005, p.371) have already noted that media literacy education, as a way to avoid prohibition and gain appeal for K-12 educators, lost sight on establishing outcomes that were tied to any political ideology.

From this understanding, media literacy should not turn away from political and ideological notions. This in itself, as seen above, is not a new idea, but usually the bulk of scholars that engage with the civic dimensions of media literacy do not shed light on the democracy model they are committed to. If we bring to the fore previous discussions held in this paper, even if literacy is necessarily an ideologically definition (Buckingham, 2007), it means that there are normative post-ideological frameworks underlying certain approaches to media literacy. The core of this project has embraced an alternative understanding of democracy with emphasis on contestation: an agonistic-pluralist approach to democracy. In this sense, a critical-pluralist media literate publics would not only take part in debates regarding the naturalization of uneven power relations between the media and the public, but also lead them to conceive the role of the media as a provider of “agonistic public spaces in which there is the possibility for dissensus to be expressed or different alternatives to be put forward” (Mouffe in Carpentier & Cammaerts, 2006, p. 974). A critical-pluralist approach to media literacy, for instance, can engage with issues of concentration of ownership in media industries and the lack of source and content diversity (Baker, 2007; Potter, 2004) as well as discussing representations of class, gender and race (Kellner & Share, 2005, p.375).

Methodology

In order to assess the political landscape in which the media system in Mexico is founded upon, this research used the testimonies of ten respondents who represent experts in the field of media literacy. It is considered that by analyzing the various accounts given by the experts, this research can contribute in forming a clearer picture that is sensitive to the complex landscape of the Mexican media system.

Given that the main research questions inquire about the *hows* behind unquantifiable issues such as principles, values and democratic standards, a qualitative approach to data collection was employed. More specifically, semi-structured interviews were conducted regarding the topics of media and democracy and media literacy. However, there are certain issues as to how the researcher is able develop explanations about the object of the study. This method ensues from a specific methodology, which in turn entails particular ontological, epistemological assumptions. Indeed, one important discussion found in this research relates to the use of empirical evidence and normative assumptions in policymaking. The critique that scholars of media pluralism aim at the use of empirical evidence policymaking is expressed through the questioning of their supposed objectivity and neutrality. This is very much in line with the debate found at the heart of the so-called ‘science wars’ (Hacking, 1999), denoting the divide between qualitative and quantitative research accompanied with their respective ontological assumptions and methodologies.

By utilizing respondents who are labeled as ‘experts’, this research accepts that knowledge and representations of the world are expressed by adopting a certain position within this world, but that there is a need to take notions of power and practice into account. This portends that knowledge is constituted under conditions of power and can refer to real objects. With this in mind, the critical realist approach allows this project to conflate the empirical with the constituted. The social character of knowledge does not mean that it cannot effectively make sense of real objects which exist independently of the researcher (Sayer, 2000). This research studies objects that are socially constructed and concept-dependent, such as publics, institutions, democracy and literacy. However, these are objects which often operate with substantial independence from the constructions which observers have of them (p.91). Even discourse theorists are not denying the existence of the material, but rather the discursive is regarded as a needed component to ascribe meaning to the material (see Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). Critical theory requires going behind the observables by looking into the mechanisms behind a

phenomenon (Jackson, 2011; Sayer 2000). By embracing this approach, this project –in dealing with the link between literacy and participation, the correspondence between knowledge and things– tries to answer the research questions that are situated in the conjuncture between the discursive and the practical, between media education and democracy.

Primary method: Semi-structured elite interviews

In order to have a deeper grasp of the relationship between democracy and the media, the analysis chapter will use first-hand testimonies from participants and observers of these policy processes and real world events in Mexico. Such approach is particularly crucial when dealing with broad and divisive issues such as the democratization of media in a convoluted context like Mexico. In this way, the interviews also help the research supplement and/or challenge “official accounts with first-hand testimony” (Tansey, 2007, p.7). Another relevant aspect is that interviewing experts on these matters leaves the door open to theoretically-guided questions about issues that are specific to the objectives and aim of this project, thus establishing explanations that lay behind the scenario. By interviewing participants situated in different nodal points of the media system, this research has collected data about processes, events and concepts of the Mexican media system that will shed light and advance the discussions explored in the literature review.

Semi-structured interviews is a useful form of data collection when the study has a clear objective and focus, as it does not limit the acquisition of information to pre-determined categories imposed by the researcher as structured interviews do. According to Bryman (2008), in this method there is a marked interest in the interviewees’ point of view, and the non-structured approach encourages respondents to go off at tangents to give insights into what they consider relevant and important (p.437), which is consistent with this research’s decision of relying on the perspective of experts. This method tends to be flexible, and may allow the interviewer to depart from the guides or questionnaires used, leading to open-ended questions and follow up questions. The aim is to get rich and detailed answers (Bryman, 2008, p.437), which may bring forth themes that the interviewer had not previously considered, benefiting from the respondents’ ‘elite’ status and allowing them to fully flesh out their expertise.

The ten interviews were conducted from December 2015 to April 2016. The two pilot interviews happened face-to-face in Mexico. The rest of the interviews were carried out via Skype and had an average duration of one hour. Carrying out interviews via Skype or telephone conveys certain considerations. The interviews were audio-based; there was no reliance on

video. The interviews were restricted to these medium for economic, practical and institutional restraints. One disadvantage with telephone interviews is that it is not possible to observe body language, but an advantage is that it is more effective to ask sensitive questions (Bryman, 2008). The interviews were conducted in Spanish and then translated into English. All of the participants gave their consent to use their names and the content of the interviews in full disclosure. Nine out of ten agreed to receive a transcript of the interview. It was not established that they would receive a report of the finalized project.

The interview guides emerged from the research questions, but did not incorporate the questions themselves. Instead, the interview questions derived from the themes of the research questions, bounded to events, processes and even concepts within the context of Mexico and the objects of study. In this way, there was a subset of open-ended questions and themes designed accordingly to the area of expertise of the respondent, which gave way to follow up questions that were not previously considered, were formulated differently or had a different place in the overall sequence of the questionnaire. There were two pilot interviews, after which the themes of the questions were tightened up according to the research aim. Each interview subsequently influenced the questions of the next one. For example, after the pilot interview with Jose Carlos Moreno, digital media featured as a recurrent topic in the succeeding interviews and became a prominent theme throughout the overall research. In a similar way, Aleida Calleja's interview, rich in matters of citizen participation, shaped the following interviews (See Appendix C for an overall interview guide).

Secondary method: Policy analysis

This research analyzed policy documents in order to complement the data collected from the interviews. In particular, an official document of *México Conectado*, a project ensuing from the constitutional reform which guarantees universal access to internet through a public network installed across the territory. The analysis of this document was carried out through concepts and debates regarding the ideological nature of media policymaking in liberal democracies. Furthermore, there was an analysis of certain sections of the Law of Telecommunications and Broadcasting, specifically the ones regarding the new media regulator, media education, audience rights and community and indigenous media. Here the data collected from the interviews became crucial, and certain questions were designed according to these sections in order to be able to triangulate the literature, the policy documents and the data gathered from the interviews. The goal was to probe beyond the democratic intonation often found in these

documents in order to examine their ideological footings, and see if these courses of action really open the door to a less concentrated, more plural media landscape. A finding of this policy analysis, for example, is the problematic use of both ‘information society’ and ‘knowledge society’ in policy documents, a debate that will be examined in the analysis chapter.

Sampling

According to Tansey (2007), sampling for elite interviews presupposes different approaches that should be in line with the aim of the research. Tansey argues that deciding an approach will be a function of the research questions, but a combination approaches is an optimal method. The research did not carry out the sampling with the aim of producing generalizations about the characteristics, beliefs or actions that can be applied to the entire population, but rather the criteria was based on obtaining information and insights about events, processes and concepts (p.15) drawn from relevant actors to these matters.

However, sampling considerations were not only dependent on methodological issues, but also on practical ones. During the sampling process some limitations emerged from the beginning, in particular in regards to the availability of their contact information or their limited agendas. Nevertheless, once the participants agreed to an interview and dates were set, there were no issues of time restraint on their part, and the duration of the interviews were determined by methodological rather than practical considerations.

Even though the sampling was focused on obtaining the testimony of visible actors in their fields, the aim of this research is to assess the media system in Mexico as a whole, which necessarily comprises a sizeable sample despite their elite status. In this sense, the research adopted a ‘purposive sampling’ approach, which is a “selection method where the purpose of the study and the researcher’s knowledge of the population guide the process” (Tansey, 2007, p.17). The initial idea was to identify a particular set of respondents deemed most appropriate for the research needs; however, it became clear that an approach based upon the idea that the researcher has sufficient knowledge to identify from the start the type of actors needed can be limiting. The notion came to be when the respondents themselves started to bring up names that they considered key actors.

The approach was then recalibrated, and the initial set of respondents were then asked to initiate a chain-referral process by providing names of people they felt were influential and relevant in the fields of media and democracy and media literacy. This approach is known as

‘snowball/chain-referential sampling’ (Tansey 2007). This process was continual until the sampling met the criteria for the scope of the project, which had to consider the limitations that a relatively new topic such as media literacy represents in Mexico. Even if it bears no relation to the method’s approach, the sample is comprised by five women and five men (refer to Appendix A to learn more about the respondents). Seven of the respondents reside in Mexico City, the capital, one in the state of Jalisco and two in the state of Morelos. The political and economic power of Mexico is centralized in the capital which represents an important hub for institutional and civic matters. In this sense, the sampling was carried out prioritizing the relevance of their positions as experts in their fields, rather than basing it on gender or regional considerations. The selection was distributed according to the main themes of this research, given that it examines different angles constituting the media system in Mexico. Some of the interviewees were particularly knowledgeable about public participation, the democratization of media, concentration and pluralism, or media literacy in Latin America.

Nine out of ten interviews were conducted in a single session. The first face-to-face pilot interview with Velasco required a follow-up, which took place in her personal property. A good rapport was built in the different interviews. For example, Moreno and Padilla offered the opportunity for journalistic collaborations in their publications; Aleida Calleja requested a radio interview on her show on the topic of public service media in Sweden; Gómez-Mont offered ideas for future research projects and contact information of relevant actors; Orozco showed an active interest in the research and recognized it could be a valuable contribution to the media literacy efforts in Mexico, offering advice on how to proceed and encouraging future contact with him.

Data analysis: coding and theory

The interviews were transcribed based on verbal responses; no contextual or non-verbal markers were registered. The interviews were then coded using a combination of first and second cycle coding methods, as suggested by Saldaña (2009). These were ‘descriptive coding’, which summarizes the main topic of the excerpt (p.3), and ‘theoretical coding’, the moment where the categories and subcategories are connected with the central categories (p.163). The desired result was to find emerging patterns in the codes to organize them in over-arching themes in line with the research questions and the content addressed in the literature review. This process was both creative and analytical (p.30).

There were two general cycles of coding as to the descriptive and theoretical segments. On the first cycle, after the interviews had been transcribed a code was attached to certain words or

parts of the answers which only described the content of that excerpt. After the process was finalized with all the transcripts, the coded extracts were organized into themes and subthemes confined to each individual interview. The themes emerged from the more relevant concepts and topics of the literature review, and the subthemes looked to offer a more nuanced differentiation. This first-cycle file contained an overall of twenty themes and close to seventy subthemes, producing a total of twenty pages. The second-cycle theoretical set out to organize the vast amount of themes and subthemes into broader categories. This required a level of abstraction which took the descriptive into the theoretical. The categorization was no longer delimited by each individual interview, but was rather separated into two different matrixes. The subject of the first matrix was ‘media and democracy’, structured into eleven categories, such as ‘ownership’ and ‘public participation’. The second subject was ‘media education’ and was organized into a system of twelve classifications, including ‘absence and opportunities’ and ‘civic democracy’. These two matrixes together made a total of twenty-four pages (refer to Appendix D for examples of the coding). With the themes fully fleshed-out, the data will be put together with policy, economic and political analyses in the next chapter in order to bring to the surface the intricate elements that dwell in the depths of the media system in Mexico.

Methodological considerations

There are, however, methodological considerations which are important to acknowledge.

Bryman (2008) says that it is well established that the concepts of reliability and validity need to be adapted in qualitative research. According to him, within these definitions is rooted the concept of repeatability of measurements and the existence of an objective value. According to LeCompte and Goetz (1982) reliability, or the degree to which a study can be reproduced in a different context, is a difficult standard to meet in qualitative research because it is not possible to ‘freeze’ a social setting and its circumstances.

Tansey (2007, p.9) highlights that the reliability of the interviewee’s statements can be conditioned if their involvement in the events or processes is important, as with politicians who “may attempt to slant their accounts”. Recognizing this restriction, the interviews were carried out with people who are familiar to the events and processes but do not have direct influence in policymaking. Rather they emerge from the civil society as observers, analysts, scholars, activists, public figures, and/or policy advisors. As discussed previously and in a forthcoming chapter, their position as policy advisors does not necessarily translate into actual influence on the policy outcome. As such, the reliability of the statements is not dependent on the

respondents' need to inflate or minimize their own role in the events or processes in view that there was no "political capital to be gained or lost from association with the issues in question" (Tansey, 2007, pp.9-10).

To guarantee the reliability of the responses, the research consulted multiple sources for all significant data points, as advised by Davies (2001). However, as most research that relies on interviews, this project could have always benefited from conducting more interviews to guarantee and exhaust all possible perspectives. Rudestam and Newton (2007) say that real saturation never occurs because each new respondent has something new to contribute, but that the saturation point happens when the researcher feels he or she has collected sufficient data to represent the scope and depth of the phenomenon, which happened in this case with valuable data that was omitted as a consequence of space limitations.

Furthermore, the position of the researcher within the research has to be considered. This presumes that the respondents held a position of power during the interview. In this sense the interviews were performative, in which the identities of the respondents as experts were constructed and performed through their answers. In order to assure validity, by which one can harmonize the observations of the researcher and the answers offered by the respondents, their statements must be given the status of both discourse and action, through which they express a position of power. To interpret what the respondents mean there is a need to relate their discourse to its referents and contexts (Sayer, 2000, p.20). This means that social reality is only partially textual or discursive. There is, however, the need to recognize that since this method is used to study social reality –which is an open system (Jackson, 2011)– it means that there is a first level of interpretation or hermeneutic level by the respondents, and a second level of interpretation by the researcher when relating their responses to their context (Sayer, 2000), so validity is never fully realized (Bryman, 2008).

Analysis

Media and Democracy

This project has offered a panoramic view of the media and political environment in Mexico to understand why media literacy is central as both a subject of study and a potential contributor to democratic issues. As such, the starting point has been that media systems do not exist in a vacuum, and are shaped to a large extent by the political systems. Political systems are complex entities, articulated by an inestimable number of institutions, agents, structures, discourses, values, practices, etc.; it has been stressed that Mexico is a liberal democracy with a neoliberal economic model. The contours of the media system are fashioned after conditions of privatization and deregulation. On these grounds, the analytical variables have been selected to make possible a critique: if the aim of the project is to support the need of media literacy, it follows that it has to be positioned critically facing said conditions. Jose Carlos Moreno (2015), founder of the activist news portal *Morelos 3.0* and former human rights coordinator of the student movement *#YoSoy132* considers that ‘Mexico experiences a simulation of a very intricate democracy, with many actors and participants’. The aim of this project has not simply been to bridge the gap between media literacy and the exercise of citizenship, but constituting it as a single unit that shares a dual core: education and democracy.

The project has gathered data to progress, challenge or verify these ideas by carrying out elite interviews with academics, policy advisors, media observers and public servants at the forefront of media and democracy and media literacy in Mexico. Using the data provided by the interviews, the analysis will be carried out within a macro-meso-level frame, looking at the bigger picture in order to understand the conditions that media literacy education has to face. Some of the guiding themes are the democratic transition, media public policy, citizen participation, the relationship between media and political elites, and the tension between functional and critical approaches to media literacy.

The ‘perverse relationship’

Concentration was a recurrent theme in the interviews, often considered a defining characteristic of Mexico’s media system and a cause of concern for advocates of democratic media: ‘when the media are concentrated, and especially when they are highly concentrated in a few hands, as has been the case of Mexico, it happens that media, on the one hand, acquire excessive power, preventing other sectors of society to exercise a counterbalance’, reflects Raúl Trejo Delarbre (2016) who is a prominent public intellectual, author of eighteen books on media

and democracy, and current president of AMEDI (Mexican Association of the Right to Information), a civil organization that has played a crucial role in pushing forward audience rights. However, the proliferation of such model should not be simply understood as the product of unforeseen conditions. In this line, Janeth Trejo Quintana (2016), academic, policy advisor and one of the main people behind the first media literacy forum in Mexico, claims that ‘the media system which was *created* in Mexico, is of a strong concentration of private media’ [emphasis added].

Manuel Alejandro Guerrero (2016), media and policy researcher of Ibero-American University, policy advisor and member of the committee of the UNESCO chairs in Communications, explains how the media system has reproduced traits of the political system by affirming that their relationship was forged during the transition from an authoritarian regime to a democratic-electorate one: ‘these political actors were desperately after screen time. Before, during authoritarianism, it was not even important. With electoral competition, you have to please everyone’.

The transition period to a *more* democratic system represents a conjuncture in Mexico’s history to understand how the current media system came to be; such was the basis for what has been labeled a ‘perverse relationship’ (Trejo Delarbre, 2016; Ávila, 2016). Guerrero explains that during the eighties the process of transition to democracies coincided with the arrival of a new political elite that sported an electoral-democratic discourse. It must be clarified that Mexico was not formally an authoritarian regime, but the country was ruled by one party, PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party), without any virtual opposition for over seventy years, until the party lost the elections of 2000. At the time, it was termed “the perfect dictatorship” by the Peruvian Nobel laureate Mario Vargas Llosa —an authoritarian regime disguised as a democracy—, with what the renowned political magazine *Nexos* more recently described as a citizenship birthed by “one authoritarian parent and one democrat” (Zuckerman, 2016).

As such, *democratic transition* is both a descriptive and analytical term that serves to understand the processes and conditions that allowed democracies to asymmetrically develop in the second half of the XX century in Latin American countries (Boron, 2003). Guerrero explains that the advent of electoral competition gave visibility and importance to social sectors that were excluded from political participation during the authoritarian regimes. In this new electoral context political parties are reliant on votes and the exposition given by the media: in many cases to reach these social sectors ‘they will continue using clientelist policies through

professional channels without using populist rhetoric, but a technical discourse about fighting poverty’.

According to Guerrero (2016), these practices persist during electoral periods, ‘in Mexico there is a very clear strategy to impoverish rural, suburban populations and arrive every six years with a pantry of groceries’. The evidence is that the three states that have received the most resources through poverty-aid programs are the states that continue to have the highest percentage of the population living in poverty, ‘this means that the outcome of the programs to fight poverty is not to fight poverty, but to politically manage poverty’. To him, this clarifies why narrowing existing socioeconomic divides is not part of the agenda of political parties, similarly shedding light as to why clientelism became a common praxis during and beyond the period of democratic transition: people in these conditions represent ‘paradoxically, the tier of voters that takes them, through an open and democratic competition, to power’. Initially, he says, it seemed that the arrival of new actors in the electoral arena would go against the ‘clientelist spirit’, bringing along a more modern discourse of institutional efficiency, but in reality clientelist relations with different social and economic group prevail.

To Trejo Delarbre (2016), clientelism has principally an electoral character, and would disagree with the idea that the relation between media and political elites can be defined as such: ‘in this case I think this is a mutually beneficial relationship’, each having different spheres of authority and possibilities. He explains that clientelist practices occur when political parties ‘distribute money or goods among voters and thus manage to keep their votes’. An evenly balanced relationship, he affirms, was forged many years ago when the government, in exchange of a complacent disposition, granted a few media companies ‘licenses, tax exemptions, advertising, exemptions in the payment of fees’.

Despite divergences in definition, it is well acknowledged that there has been continuity in the beneficial character of this relationship. However, the telecommunications and broadcasting reform of 2013-14 unveiled an erosion of their long-standing ties, thereby opening up the possibility for stronger regulation, recognition of certain rights, and the addition of new actors. The attrition of their relationship represents a vital phase in the political and media timeline, as it allowed the constitutional reform to make room for longstanding citizens’ demands. Aleida Calleja (2016), former member of the advisory board of the media regulator, coordinator of advocacy of Observacom (Latin American Observatory of Regulation, Media and Convergence) and central associate of AMEDI in matters of citizen participation, affirms that none of the

significant changes in the constitution were proposed by the political parties, ‘all that was raised in the constitutional reform has been part of the citizens' demands for a good time’. Despite the shift in the country’s political make-up at the turn of the millennium, it would be premature to talk of a fully realized democratic transition; nonetheless, the dwindling relation between media and political elites has left an opening for citizen participation, suggesting that democracy is moving forward.

The ‘diluted’ reform: the advent of media regulation

According to Carlos Padilla (2016), who has been one of the sharpest observers of the media landscape over the last fifteen years through his magazine *Zócalo*, a specialized publication dedicated to media and political communication, the Telecommunications and Broadcasting reform of 2013-14 represents a turning point in the media landscape, one thirty years in the making. The year 2012 will witness the comeback of PRI to the presidency led by Enrique Peña Nieto, who inaugurated his tenure with a grandiose reformist discourse; indeed, the telecom reform would be part of a larger wave of constitutional reforms, including one relevant to this research: education. In view of the lack of regulation that favored the concentration of private media ownership while diminishing the relevance of public service, media observers consider that the reform was long overdue, ‘since 1971 we had been operating with a Federal Law¹ on radio and television that came to change just a year ago. The lag we have in this area is impressive’ (Trejo Quintana, 2016).

The telecom reform might have been visibly introduced with triumphalist partisan discourses in a big political stage, but it concealed a public spirit: ‘the constitutional and legal reform in broadcasting and telecommunications was adopted by the parties in 2012 because it was a demand that had decades, that had a social thrust’ (Calleja, 2016). Some of the incorporated demands were ‘the recognition of public media’ (Padilla, 2016), ‘the right of the audiences’, ‘the right to universal access to information and communications technology’ (Calleja, 2016), and the legal recognition of ‘indigenous and community media’ (Gómez-Mont, 2016).

It is agreed upon that the constitutional reform represents a new chapter in the way media was to be regulated in Mexico, as typified by the autonomous character of the new media regulatory organ, IFETEL (Federal Telecommunications Institute): ‘there was already a telecom regulator, but it was not independent. This constitutional reform created the organ and also its autonomy’, displays Padilla (2016). In a way, the emergence of a new regulator was possible thanks to the

deteriorating relationship between the media and the political elites, ‘Televisa appeared very vulnerable... it seemed that the scale was finally beginning to tilt’ (Guerrero, 2016).

Indeed, the modification and inclusion of several constitutional articles (refer to Appendix B to see the most relevant changes) suggested the advent of a more plural and diverse media landscape, characterized by its ‘regulatory spirit’ (Guerrero, 2016), the legal consolidation of public and community media, and the tardy recognition of the audiences. However, many of the changes established in the constitutional reform were to be watered down in the steps towards legislation², as noted by several observers: ‘This constitutional reform was positive, but its best intentions were diluted in Federal Law of Telecommunications and Broadcasting’ (Guerrero, 2016); ‘The reform was progressive and yet... in the Federal Law much of this intention of change was diluted in several ways’ (Padilla, 2016); ‘It seems to me that what the constitutional reform does is to take up citizens' demands which are then diluted with the Secondary Law, but some principles remained’ (Calleja, 2016).

Some of the reasons the reform was ‘diluted’ conform to the discussions held in a previous chapter, particularly in regards to policymaking hardly being a tidy, depoliticized process. As a reminder, Freedman (2015, p.98) asserts that media policy “is messy and dirty”. As such, media policymaking cannot be regarded as a sphere of activity that is detached from social and political practices. Guerrero explains that during this process ‘there was a moment of tension and some would say almost a rupture... between the federal government and Televisa’. In a way, we can understand the ensuing reform as a tug-of-war between the demands of the citizens and the will of the private media owners. Compelled both to uphold their new commitment to regulate the media, and to avoid their relations with influential media owners to sever entirely, the government had to find a compromise, ‘At some point, the federal government, in a boastful display of complete autonomy... really considered the possibility of regaining control over the guidelines of economic competition of the State’ (Guerrero, 2016).

Certainly, this attenuated version of the reform insinuated the restatement of the relations between the political and media elites. According to Guerrero (2016), ‘there are a number of situations that will make the government rethink their alliance with the television’. The year 2014 witnessed some of the most high-profile political scandals in recent memory in Mexico, representing a severe ‘blow to the image’ of the government, not least the mass disappearance of the students in Ayotzinapa, which gained considerable media resonance around the world, the civilian massacre in Tlatlaya, allegedly carried out by the military, and the corruption affair

of *Casa blanca*, in which a lavish multimillion dollar property was traced back to the president Enrique Peña Nieto and his wife, a former actress of Televisa. ‘The discredited image of the federal government incited by these cases, particularly the presidency, makes their collusion indispensable’, signals Guerrero.

The mechanisms through which media owners influence legislation and policy are hard to miss: the pressure to thin down the ‘regulatory spirit’ of the reform was not exerted exclusively from the outside: ‘Congress is taken by the *telebancada*’ holds Ivonne Velasco (2015), academic and journalist specialized in media and communication who has worked as producer and host for public service media. *Telebancada* is a composite term which refers to a group of legislators with links to the broadcasting industry, acting in Congress with correspondence to this link (Mejía Barquera, 2015). Who are the members of the Commission of Radio, Television and Cinematography in the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies?, questions Guerrero (2016): ‘Former employees of Televisa, TV Azteca, Carlos Slim... there you have a very clear capture of the legislative bodies that are passing versions of the law’.

The up-and-coming media regulator

As a media regulator with unprecedented autonomy, attributions and mechanisms of accountability, IFETEL has a lot to prove. For instance, the regulator has assumed the authority of allocating broadcasting and telecom frequencies, an attribution that was the president’s alone (Padilla, 2016). However, in view of a democratic transition patched with corruption and lack of accountability, clientelist practices, compliance to private interests, etc., media observers and publics are paying careful attention to the regulator’s movements, often with generous doses of critical skepticism, ‘there are aspects that lead us to think that... their ascribed functions have some weak angles that lessen their authority’ (Padilla, 2016). Calleja (2016), who was a member of the advisory board of IFETEL in 2015, offers insight into one of these weak angles: ‘the relationship of IFETEL with the advisory council, at least where I was until January of this year, is almost zero, or conforms more like a space of symbolic presence than an actual process of discussion and dialogue with the decision makers’. Despite its possible weaknesses, it would be unfair to say that the regulator has not made its presence felt. Trejo Delarbre (2016), considers we have a regulatory authority whose decisions are antagonizing the big telecom and broadcasting companies in Mexico: ‘when there are players in this scenario outraged with what the regulator does, I think the regulator is performing well’, but then strikes a balance in his

appraisal: ‘However, I recognize that there are very strong omissions, very questionable decisions by IFETEL, errors and tardiness’.

It would be reasonable to say that, at such early stage, the regulator has a long way to reach institutional maturity. It would also be sensible, however, to question whether initial missteps might be an indicator of future trends. In light of previous discussions held in this research, it is relevant to keep in mind that the regulator coexists with a media system rooted in liberal democratic principles, which has given way to a market-driven economic model that favors deregulation and privatization. As such, there is a need to factor in ideological forces and naturalized political practices when considering the obligations and challenges –current and forthcoming– the regulator has to face. If left alone, the regulator might sustain a selective relationship with privileged actors during the policymaking process, detached from public participation, ‘It’s a thing discussed between the regulator and the companies, but the big ones, not necessarily the smaller ones’ (Calleja, 2016).

Public policies and ‘spectral’ citizen participation

Among its functions, the regulator has the obligation to hold media companies accountable, and in order to sustain a democratic logic the regulator has to be accountable to the public. On these grounds, the previously alluded ‘symbolic’ relationship between the decision makers of IFETEL and the advisory board has important implications: within the legal framework, the board is intended to represent and articulate citizen participation, ‘the participation mechanisms as such are still quite weak, firstly because they are not established with transparency. Even with the case of the advisory board of IFETEL, its recommendations are not binding’ (Calleja, 2016). Trejo Delarbre (2016) complements this picture by clarifying that the advisory board ‘is composed primarily of people with technical knowledge but with little direct relation to the society’.

If the advisory board embodies to a significant degree institutionalized mechanisms of citizen participation, Calleja’s assessment would suggest that the public’s involvement in the policymaking process is 1) lacking in dialogue and transparency, 2) is selective, and 3) its contributions are not legally binding. These points are congruent with Freedman’s (2015) previously examined idea of the alienation of public participation from decision-making processes. As it has been argued, media literacy could be a means to reduce existing distances between the citizens and public policy processes, or encourage the public to question the symbolic character of their involvement and demand decision-making power, ‘these processes

continue to occur unattended, without discussion, without even being used by sectors of society that could benefit from them if there was more interest and more information. The discussion about these issues is sometimes difficult because it seems very technical even if it's not, as such it still only interests very discernible but small groups within civil society' (Trejo Delarbre, 2016).

This assessment is reminiscent of Freedman's (2015, p.104) description of the "spectral quality" of media policy: "the perception that policy environments require a level of expertise and resources" that are unattainable for most citizens. The equivalence does not end there: Freedman himself, being a British academic involved in media policy, states that despite receiving invitations to attend policy seminars, "access to the core of the decision-making process always seems out of reach, shaped by external forces that are often neither present nor accountable", which resonates with Guerrero's (2016) own appreciation: 'when the legislature wants to act as if they take society into account, they usually organize forums and in these forums they invite academics, but it's practically to ratify decisions that have already been made'. Facing this setup, media literate citizens could demand a more comprehensive interpretation of citizen participation, one that does not only take into account an (rhetorical) advisory council comprised of experts, but also ordinary members of civil society, 'citizen participation should go through the full cycle of public policy, from the location of the public problem to the evaluation', and as such, redefining the edges of what this project terms 'spectral participation' in policymaking.

Calleja (2016) further offers valuable insight into the limitations of such understanding of citizen participation:

'...it seems to me we have a serious problem in general in bureaucracies to understand what citizen participation is. Usually citizen participation in IFETEL has to do with issuing public consultations, talking with some of the regulated, not all, and is an institution that takes criticism very badly. Instead of thinking that criticism is an input to improve public policy, helping locate the bottlenecks in public policy, it is assumed as an attack. And if you look at this sector, the problem in public policy and civic participation starts from the definition of the public problem, because an essential part of public policy is that you determine what the public problem is so that you can derive strategies, goals, indicators, the entire cycle until evaluation.'

This appreciation is of interest as it opens the opportunity to revisit and examine under a new light one of the main debates previously explored regarding media policies: the use of empirical data and metrics in policy decisions. The discussion was guided by scholars from the US and Europe whom share the idea that the use of empirical evidence in policymaking is based on a questionable premise; mainly that it is rooted on the assumption that empirical indicators presuppose an apolitical, objective and neutral approach. The main contention is that normative questions cannot be easily given quantifiable answers and they need to be more adequately contextualized, an argument that is relevant to any context.

But what shape does the empirical/normative debate take in a media landscape such as the one in Mexico? If one considers that the autonomy of the regulatory body has just recently been instituted, relations between political and media elites remain vigorous, and constitutional reforms are diluted in the process to legislation by pressure groups with direct influence in legislative spaces, there is a need to reassess the role that empirical evidence can play in policymaking.

Pitting normative against empirical accounts

In Mexico, it would appear that Freedman's (2015, p.99) "media policy silences" –the gaps in process and tacit assumptions– are overturned, 'The design of public policy in the Mexican case rarely, and only for very specific areas, has taken into account empirical studies that benefit collective values such as pluralism, accountability and equality' (Guerrero, 2016). Given that in Mexico these "silences" often occur without any identifiable substantiation, there is a perception that empirical evidence would make policy decisions more transparent, accountable and legitimate.

The arguments posed by media scholars in Europe and the US are reasonable: certainly, like Karppinen (2015, p.293) suggests "the reliance on empirical measurements tends to skew policy-making towards market-driven objectives and prejudice against intangible cultural and social objectives, which tend to be by nature abstract and more difficult to quantify". However, the scenario in Mexico comes to show that more normative-driven policy decisions embedded in cultural values can also fall short without empirical support.

For instance, despite indigenous and community media attaining legal recognition in the reform –an intangible and normative demand founded on cultural principles– their operative and financial autonomy remains obstructed without the evidence accounting for their need

to use their airwaves as they see fit, ‘the indigenous media are still struggling to get permits to be able to do advertising... the most delicate issue in indigenous communities is the radio, because the radio in these communities is part of the structure of their whole life, it’s not a radio to entertain, it’s a radio to inform, and often in the geographically difficult locations they inhabit the only thing that works to give warnings of hurricanes, droughts, pests, and medicine, is the radio’, says Carmen Gómez-Mont (2016), an academic specialized in the use of information and communication technologies in educational, social and cultural contexts who has focused her research on indigenous communities for nearly two decades.

In a similar line, public service media are not entitled to commercialize airtime under the unbacked (and extravagant) argument by the CIRT³ (National Chamber of Radio and Television Broadcasters) that it would represent ‘disloyal competition’ (Padilla, 2016). The consequence of not having financial independence is that, to many, public service media often function as an extension of particular political regimes: ‘we can discuss a lot about how we call them *public service media*. To me they aren’t, in any case they may be government-owned media’ [emphasis added] (Trejo Quintana, 2016); ‘The radio and television stations in the states remain under the control of the governors’ (Padilla, 2016). Along this line, Calleja (2016) calls for ‘strengthening public service media to prevent them from being government-owned media’. Unlike Sweden and the UK, where the financial and administrative autonomy of the public service media is safeguarded by TV licenses, the policies in Mexico make public service media financially reliant on the government.

In this context, Karppinen’s (2015, p.288) important claim that empirically-driven decisions “should also be seen as political” is not annulled, rather empirical evidence could serve as a handhold when navigating the obscured environment of policymaking, ‘if you look at public documents of IFETEL, on many issues there are no indicators, there are no metrics, there is no evaluation, there is no support that let us clearly locate why a particular public policy is being implemented’ (Calleja, 2016). These insights find a supporting voice in Freedman (2014, p.176), who is aware that in certain contexts, as this research validates, there is “always a danger that by choosing not to focus on empirical data, some normative accounts lack verifiability, or more precisely, relevance to particular political and economic contexts. Of course, there is no reason why normative accounts should be counterposed to empirically based studies”.

Policy decisions require public and academic participation to establish the underlying principles of a desirable model. As we have seen, the reform has incorporated demands that have a democratic thrust (i.e. the autonomy of the regulatory organ; audience and community media rights), but, at least in part, the lack of practical, observable evidence has resulted in the dismantling of some of these underlying assumptions. As such, the argument is that this environment requires an approach to policy making that integrates both normative assumptions and empirical evidence, while being mindfully attentive to the limitations and possibilities of each line. In other words, a normative architecture held together by empirical substance.

Media literacy education can prove an important contribution to help forwarding this debate by providing citizens with participatory tools and knowledge: ‘What is clear is that if you do not have enough information to know how the media system operates, you lack elements of participation. That is, when people start to realize that what is in the media is part of their rights, the logic changes’ (Calleja, 2016).

The ‘new communicative scenario’: concentration, pluralism and new media

Developing media literacy in citizens can be relevant to matters beyond public awareness and participation in policy matters; as we have seen, the majority of media literacy literature focuses on the skills and knowledge of people in their interaction with the media, either as audiences – in particular with traditional media such as TV or radio– and more recently as users/producers of new media. Later this project will show how the recent media literacy movement in Latin America and Mexico as promoted by UNESCO does not diverge considerably from this sort of approach. Thus, in order to understand the scenario that media literacy education faces, it is important to examine the dichotomy of the old/new media as they presently exist in the Mexican context.

It has been emphasized that ownership of media is an important analytical and ideological category. Two angles of the telecom reform that have been subject to scrutiny by media observers are the emergence of the autonomous regulator and the approval of two new television networks. Diversifying the broadcasting landscape in an era of rapid growth and expansion of digital media may seem like an outmoded demand in certain media contexts. In Mexico this is not the case, and it serves as the foundation for a vibrant and multi-layered debate, ‘over fifty maybe sixty million Mexicans have no other choice of entertainment and information than the same television of always’ (Trejo Delarbre, 2016). In line with earlier discussions, the

increasing presence of the internet and digital media in the contemporary media landscape has led free-market supporters (private media stakeholders like the CIRT) to question the relevance of ownership regulation: ‘what they think is that we are over-regulated’ (Trejo Quintana, 2016), which offers a glimpse of their underlying ideological assumptions about ownership: regulation as a ‘barrier’ to growth and a ‘violation’ of free speech (Freedman, 2014).

Despite the increasing relevance of digital media, ‘even if the internet’s coverage in Mexico has increased a great deal, it’s not yet reached the majority of the population. Approximately 50% have regular connections. The other half do not and are still dependent on television’ (Trejo Delarbre, 2016). In reality the estimated number is closer to 45% (INEGI, 2015), and if one adds to this that the two new TV networks are yet to surface (Padilla, 2016), and take into account the limited coverage of public service broadcasting (Ávila, 2016), it means that a sizeable amount of the population is still captive to the kind of content engendered by a concentrated broadcasting market that lacks quality (Padilla, 2016) and diversity (Trejo Delarbre, 2016), reproduces gender (Velasco, 2015), ethnic (Gómez-Mont, 2016), socioeconomic and racial (Ávila, 2016) dominant representations, and conveys their audiences as consumers rather than as citizens (Orozco, 2016). These severe critiques are consistent with the exodus of specific audiences who are migrating to other platforms, ‘quite a few segments of society who disagree with the traditional behavior of television are simply no longer watching television, more and more Mexicans watch other options, such as cable television, the internet or DVDs’ (Trejo Delarbre, 2016).

In light of this, Padilla (2016) believes that IFETEL should put into effect their authority and demand better quality and pluralism in content from private broadcasters. In opposition, Calleja (2016) is of the view that content regulation can be a thorny conduit, ‘there is no doubt that we must establish policies that encourage internal pluralism in the media, but that runs into a very thin fabric that has to do with censorship and freedom of expression... the best way to protect freedom of expression is to promote pluralism and diversity in media ownership’. Much like Lizárraga Salas and Bravo Torres Coto (2015) stated earlier, Trejo Delarbre (2016) is not as confident about the effectiveness of this approach to ensure pluralism: ‘Diversity of media ownership initially enables different content, but it does not guarantee it. In Mexico, when Televisa began to have commercial competition in TV Azteca, what TV Azteca did was to mimic the content that Televisa produced rather than offer new one’. Trejo Delarbre’s assertion is compatible with Noam’s (2009) former claim: diversity in ownership does not portend diversity in content. His argument goes that the negative characteristics of media do not

necessarily derive from trends of concentration, but need to be understood as products of profit-oriented media structures, which is equally consistent with Trejo Delarbre's further take: 'I think they're going to keep betting on the old schemes with which they have done business for many years. There will be diversity with other companies, initially yes, but there is no absolute certainty that it'll be so, because, I insist, the Mexican public that still watches television is the most conservative audience in terms of media preferences, having fewer options to access and consume content'.

Nevertheless, Trejo Delarbre (2016) believes that 'we are in new communicative scenario'. The arrangement of this new scenario, however, is an ongoing, intricate process. In view of a social reality that withstands any uniformed and consistent categorization, understanding the role that digital media is playing presumes similar complexities. As such, the causes that have led to the digital divide are hardly homogenous and do not entirely correspond to the socioeconomic divides, 'the non-connected are not necessarily the poorest... rather, it's a regional and generational gap that goes all across the country' (Trejo Delarbre, 2016).

In Mexico the topic of digital media has given rise to multiple debates, each with numerous perspectives. As a result the consents found in other media discussions shine for their absence. This is important because, as will be shown, in the more institutional agendas of media literacy the borders between digital and media literacy are being effectively blurred. In a scenario of such acute concentration of private media ownership, the advent of digital media has brought about enthusiastic discourses of deliberate democracy. This research has made an effort to avoid the trap of letting digital media command the fundamental needs of media literacy in Mexico (see Mihailidis, 2015), not least because it would misrepresent the current media landscape or consolidate existing divides. Trejo Delarbre's claim that Mexico has entered a new communicative scenario gives off a deterministic and overly optimistic fragrance. In any case, it would be more accurate to say that Mexico is in a transition period. Irma Ávila (2016), social communicator who has received numerous national and international awards as a media educator of children and youth in Mexico, affirms that 'Television is still *the big one*'.

As previously stated, the political and media elites have an interest in sustaining a well-oiled relationship; keeping certain social sectors below the poverty line with deficient education and restricted access to diverse sources of information is crucial to keep the electoral mechanisms running, 'education is the subject through which the country can begin to have information, can make more demands and ask for more justice... obviously the government is not interested in

having an intelligent population’, reflects Gómez-Mont (2016) who has spent the last twenty-five years educating public schools teachers about the adoption of media equipment in the classroom, ‘Television is a large element of disinformation in Mexico, but people have the TV on six, eight hours a day’. To Gómez-Mont, this entails that students without a regular internet connection at home find in television their only source of information, ‘if you look at the quality of Mexican television, it’s regrettable in every way... and reading levels are very low, I think the average is two books a year’.

It would be equally valuable, however, to look across the divide to those with regular connections. Guerrero (2016) submits an encouraging view about some of the benefits that digital media have brought about: ‘the journalists who are failing to publish their research about sensitive issues for public opinion such as corruption, drug trafficking, etc., are using digital spaces with great success in middle-class urban sectors. Not everyone but say, qualitatively, there is a group demanding much more accurate, more critical information’. This demonstrates that among certain sectors of educated, middle-class, urban populations, digital media have offered alternatives to the hegemonic sources of information. Newspaper readership in Mexico is distinctly low and in decline. *La Prensa*, a tabloid focused on sensationalist news known for its graphic front pages, is the highest circulating newspaper in Mexico with a daily rotation of 276,624 copies (SEGOB, 2016), a number that represents roughly 0.25% of the population. This suggests that until the emergence of the internet and digital media, television had gone virtually unchallenged as the main source of information for the non-indigenous population.

Following Guerrero’s perspective, the increasing access to the internet in educated, middle-class segments and the ensuing proliferation of alternative news outlets begs the question: are existing news readers simply migrating to digital platforms, thus finding more availability of content diversity; or are digital media helping previously disengaged people to become interested in news and civic matters? In other words: have the internet and the diversification of news sources engendered interest in news? To some media observers it seems unlikely: ‘of those who are connected to the internet, only a small portion is interested...in news spaces’ (Trejo Delarbre, 2016); ‘you’ll see that most internet users in Mexico are under twenty-four ... and they mainly use it to chat, to check movie showtimes, theater, sports’ (Gómez-Mont, 2016); ‘there is a strategy to draw the attention of internet users to the same kind of content already offered by mass and hegemonic media’ (Moreno, 2015).

Moreover, the idea of the internet and digital media as fertile spaces for democratic deliberation in which traditional models of concentration of ownership are displaced by plural and diverse ones is challenged: ‘if you go to an analysis of how the internet functions... you'll realize that there is a process of brutal concentration’, states Calleja (2016), who goes on to reference the different layers of concentration one can come across on the internet, from infrastructure and service providers, to search engines. According to Mouffe (in Carpentier & Cammaerts, 2006, p.968), new media are not automatically “supportive to the creation of an agonistic public space”. Furthermore, this confirms the formerly examined positions of Hindman (2008) and Doyle (2015), who question whether the proliferation of accesses to information has contributed to diversity and pluralism, taking into account that search engines tend to direct users to popular content.

In a media landscape such as the one in Mexico, the skepticism conveyed by Calleja is reasonable: conceiving digital media as mechanisms inclined to disrupt naturalized processes of concentration can pose considerable risks to the efforts realized in regards to attaining pluralism and diversity in the overall media system. They can also be used to articulate opportunistic policies accompanied with a surplus of triumphal, *progressive* discourses such as the aforementioned project *México Conectado*, which promises to “usher Mexico into the information and knowledge society” (ITU, 2015, p.6). These arguments follow the same logic as Freedman’s (2014, p.178) criticism of free-market supporters who question if “ownership rules are even relevant in today’s media market”. It is, at its core, an ideological discussion, ‘what you have is an overwhelming presence of dominant discourses and information that breed in different areas, but there is no room for local content, regional content, for pluralism, and the truth is that there is an illusory situation with social networks above all: they move in concentric circles’ (Calleja, 2016). Trejo Delarbre’s (2016) view takes off from the same epicenter: ‘the digital environment is very conducive for exercising freedom, but there are limited formats and little demand of its users for a real discussion of ideas to happen’. This means that the resulting diversity and pluralism brought along by new media does not presuppose a mindful and far-reaching use by its publics, forwarding the case for media literacy.

In light of these discussions, the research will examine the emerging media literacy movement in Latin America and Mexico as understood and promoted by its main sponsor, UNESCO, and how it might complement with, and diverge from the kind of critical pluralist media literacy principles put forward by this project.

The path towards media literacy in LATAM

Buckingham (2007, p.148) argues that the analogy of ‘literacy’ as the acquisition of competences, knowledge or skills is more difficult to make in other languages, “where the equivalent term is more overly tied to the notion of writing”. He gives the example of the French word ‘*alphabétisation*’, analogous to Spanish’s *alfabetización*. It may be partly for this reason that, unlike in the Anglo-Saxon world, in Latin America ‘media literacy’ (*alfabetización mediática*) was established as the unifying term which refers to the outcome of media education or the everyday encounters with the media until very recently. Critical studies, critical reception, media education, active reception were some of the prevailing perspectives that studied the relationship between the media and the receiver (Trejo Quintana, 2016; Orozco, 2016).

The conceptual diversity and the failure to articulate a cohesive understanding of media education studies with their European and Anglo-Saxon counterparts during a global congress held in Toronto in the 90’s, lead Latin American researchers to bring the regional trends provisionally together under the term ‘edukommunikation’, as proposed by Ismar de Oliveira and other Brazilian colleagues, ‘we Latin Americans fought for the translation into Spanish, and they said yes, but the translation was from them, who spoke English, to us, who supposedly didn’t understand anything. We were never translated, which showed a total lack of interest... well, there's when the utopia of making a single congress collapsed’, reflects Guillermo Orozco (2016) who, as one of the leading audience reception researchers in Mexico and Latin America for more than twenty years, was recently appointed as director of the UNESCO chair on Media and Information Literacy in Mexico.

This project argues that the adoption of ‘media literacy’ as a concept is not simply a matter of semantics. ‘Media literacy’ is a loaded term that cannot be confined to the isolated meeting between the ‘media reader’ and the ‘text’. It has been stressed repeatedly how media literacy is inevitably an inclusive phenomenon, which has to take into account the context in which that encounter takes place; meaning the broader social, political and economic processes that determine it (Buckingham, 2007). Such perspective would explain the efforts of UNESCO to initiate and articulate a movement in Latin America *from* the perspective of media literacy: ‘this is the name that is adopted thanks to the convening power of UNESCO’ (Trejo Quintana, 2016). Orozco (2016) asserts that the involvement of UNESCO has not been trivial, ‘UNESCO got seriously involved six, seven years ago with the subject of literacy, before they had been a bit on the outside, sympathizing’.

UNESCO: Media and information literacy?

The motive that UNESCO became actively involved in the subject has to do, to some extent, with the increasing presence and relevance of the media and other information sources in societies around the world. From the outset, UNESCO will press to bring ‘information literacy’ and ‘media literacy’ together, ‘UNESCO will take up two things: one is media, and the other is information’ (Orozco, 2016). UNESCO labels it ‘media and information literacy’, and this is the form media literacy will be adopted in the Latin America region. Their website defines it as a “holistic approach to literacy”, recognizing that “Media literacy and information literacy are traditionally seen as separate and distinct fields” (UNESCO, 2016). Orozco (2016) explains that the ‘media’ end of the equation refers to any form of communication media and ‘information’ stands for ‘everything else’. Some of the literacies borne by ‘information’ are: “internet literacy”, “computer literacy”, “news literacy”, “library literacy”, and even “freedom of expression literacy”.

Taking this a starting point, this project wants to contest UNESCO’s term on four levels:

1. ‘Information literacy’ unpacks a multiplicity of sources that do not reveal an explicit connection to ‘literacy’, if one is to be somewhat committed to the original meaning of the analogy. Indeed, UNESCO espouses a generous notion of literacy. Buckingham (2007, p.148) says that this fashionable proliferation of literacies “raises some significant questions”. To begin with, such compliant use of ‘literacy’ expands the application of the term to the point where the original analogy is lost.
2. It can be argued that the intention behind bringing together fields traditionally seen as “separate and distinct” can follow a similar to logic Buckingham’s (2007) argument that the term ‘literacy’ conveys a degree of social status: attaching it to lower status forms (such as television) “is to make an implicit claim for the latter’s validity as an object of study” (p.148). This project argues that in view of the legitimacy that ‘media literacy’ conveys for its broader tradition as an object of study and curricular development, it carries a higher status than ‘information literacy’. As such, there seems to be an implicit intention to validate the latter using the status of the former. Buckingham (2007, p.146) explains that media literacy has faced an uphill struggle to gain recognition within education systems and policymaking. Attaching ‘information’ to ‘media literacy’ raises some questions about whether this arrangement was devised as a shortcut, as a way of latching ‘information’ onto the laboriously-achieved recognition of ‘media literacy’ as a field of study and its acknowledgment by policymakers.

3. 'Information' is a disputed and value-laden term, in particular framed within the 'information society' and 'knowledge society' debate that arose from the World Summit on the Information Society conferences that took place in 2003 in Geneva and in 2005 in Tunis, where much was 'questioned about why information society and not knowledge society, because these are two very different concepts...that have crossing points, but are not compatible' (Gómez-Mont, 2016). Gómez-Mont further explains that there was a widespread belief that through the 'information society a more egalitarian and just society was going to be achieved, and that's how this project started'. However, she points out that when crisis hit big business, they found in the 'information society' a highly profitable data-processing society, 'Microsoft, Google, you can scroll through them one by one and you'll realize that there isn't a big difference between them and what General Motors, Ford, Renault were doing at the time'. The project will come back to what this implies for media literacy.

4. Their aims lack a robust citizen-democratic component, 'UNESCO is very involved with cultural rights... but there isn't a very strong concept of citizenship, from what I've seen so far it receives no attention' (Orozco, 2016). This point represents a crucial departing point and will be revisited later.

This is the main basis why 'media literacy' is a less problematic term and one that is closer to the aims of this research; nonetheless, in view of the role UNESCO is playing in the adoption and articulation of this subject in Latin American and Mexico, it is important to engage with it. At the same, it is necessary to be aware that, despite having a cultural powerhouse actively promoting media (and information) literacy, the responsibility of developing an understanding of the concept suited to the particular needs and demands of this context lies with local actors: scholars, organizations, citizens, institutions and even media hailing *from* the Latin American region in general, and Mexico specifically, 'political culture as well as the social and economic context that exists in Mexico are different from England or Spain ... where the media system is constituted mainly by state television, and that makes differences when implementing certain measures, policies or public programs' (Trejo Quintana, 2016).

Mexico as a platform for media literacy in LATAM

There have been two events in Mexico that have served as assembly points for an array of actors to 'start exploring the subject in a more articulate, more systematic way in Mexico and the [Latin American] region', says Trejo Quintana (2016), who in December 2014 coordinated the first media literacy forum, 'we took on the task of contacting different experts who are not only

in academia, but also on other fronts that seem very important... such as the private initiative, the civil society, even artists'. The forum was pushed forward by the then director of TV UNAM in alliance with the Autonomous University of Barcelona, sponsored by the Public Broadcasting System of the Mexican State, so its management and aims were not under the control of, or determined by, the vision of one single entity. 'Out of this came what is now the Latin American and Caribbean Observatory of Media and Information Literacy' says Trejo Quintana, which reveals an ambition to approach media literacy in a regional and concerted manner, 'different universities in the region are willing to do efforts of dissemination, from research as well as direct actions, field work, experiences that have to do with media literacy in the region'.

This, however, also comes to show this project has a long way ahead to attain maturity, both in terms of the conceptual framework surrounding it and because of the complexity that arranging a pan-regional approach to media literacy entails –with its diversity of perspectives, ambitions, capacities and needs. Thus, despite the regional support from certain institutional actors, media literacy should be conceived as an open-ended subject of study with distinct aims and policies that cannot be applied across-the-board in such a diverse region, 'you always have to see how it's being done, from which outlook, from which perspective, with what kind of scope', claims Trejo Quintana (2016) concerning the challenges posed by the diversity of the educational system in Mexico, a point the project will revisit later on.

Furthermore, the Observatory runs the risk of ultimately being a symbolic exercise, 'it's a very interesting project, it would be very regrettable if it faltered along the way', admits Trejo Quintana, who disclosed that she serves as the only regional liaison of the Observatory, an organization that has proven a challenge to operate continuously given the of lack of stability in the institutional and academic support and her own workload as a post-doc researcher, 'I'm doing everything alone... I proposed... to get at least two more people to help me; it has been a lot of work'.

The other event is the UNESCO-UNITWIN-UNAOC Chair on Media and Information Literacy and Intercultural Dialogue hosted by the University of Guadalajara. Inaugurated in November 2015 and directed by Orozco (2016), he considers that 'in Latin America it is a very new subject, in fact media and information literacy is quite new, most do not understand what it is about'. He illustrates this point by recounting his involvement as the representative of Spanish America in a UNESCO project that examined media literacy education programs worldwide to see if they include privacy violation and harassment issues in digital spaces as part of their curriculum,

‘In Latin America, of the ninety programs I found, only eight mention it in a way that is left unclear’.

Orozco also perceives media literacy as an open-ended subject, and believes that encounters like the forum and the Chair can serve as important platforms to ponder and refine the communication rights of media audiences ‘but there is much to be done’, he admits. These events have been followed by the production of documents as of now unpublished, and have yet to help placing media literacy on any policy agenda. As one would expect, Orozco is not ill-informed about the inaccessibility of legislation and government policy, ‘it’s complex because one thing is that we define them, and one that we manage to enclose them in a general regulation. We must dream to ever be put in the constitution of the media’.

His restrained optimism opens the door to an important discussion: to organize the event they required the consent of the Ministry of Public Education (SEP), suggesting that the highest government authority in education in Mexico is aware of the increasing need and demand for media literacy programs. Nevertheless, Orozco reminds us that, ultimately, institutions are comprised of people: ‘when we made the request to get support there was an ambassador, after the change of the Minister of Education the ambassador is no longer there. In less than one year they changed all the authorities of the SEP’. This kind of detachment from the State is consistent with what this research has previously established, as it corresponds with the disengagement displayed by IFETEL in regards to matters of civic education. In light of the increasing interest from academics and international agencies such as UNESCO, it is relevant to examine what government institutions can do and are doing for media literacy.

The role of State and private media in *functional* literacy

Attempts to insert a form of media education in schools is not something new, ‘I always had that goal’ says Orozco (2016), who has had to struggle with the disinterest from the Ministry of Public Education and the distrust of teachers towards media, ‘teachers don’t believe that the media can educate, just as they cannot understand that if there was media literacy we could take advantage of the negative effects of the media ... they believe that the media is something that students interact with outside the classroom’. He thinks that, with some exceptions, it comes down to teachers not desiring critical students who can question their position of authority, ‘it is a vice of teachers in educational systems, they believe they have the truth and what they want is for students to learn and repeat by heart down to the last comma, they don’t what them to think’.

However, the responsibility of endorsing media literacy education should not fall on the Ministry of Public Education alone. In the UK, together with the Department for Education and Skills, the media regulator Ofcom was appointed to promote media literacy in formal education (Buckingham, 2013). In this regard, IFETEL should be playing a significant part; yet, not only are their efforts virtually inexistent, but it looks as if they are leaving the task of promoting media literacy to private companies:

‘The project guidelines of IFETEL on the rights of audiences state that the dealers will have to create campaigns of media literacy, which received a lot of criticism because many believe that this is a responsibility of the State. In any case the concessionaires are obliged to broadcast these campaigns, even to generate resources for these campaigns, but the design of the campaigns should be borne by the State... I cannot see them really making media literacy campaigns talking against their own talk shows. I find it completely absurd.’ (Calleja, 2016)

Calleja’s criticism is hard to object, and no matter how perplexing IFETEL’s guidelines may seem, they fall within the ideological framework previously established in this project: the media structure has managed to naturalize capitalist relations and secure market-driven politics. The implications of this are significant, as it means that the same structure of media ownership that has been able to stimulate concentration (Freedman, 2013) and gain access to regulatory spaces (Guerrero, 2016; Padilla, 2016), also has the capacity to secure and shape media literacy according to their needs, as oppose to the democratic needs of the publics. Ávila (2016) thinks that ‘no organization or association with strong investors in media companies and advertisers’ should be in charge of media literacy. Moreno (2015), suggest that ‘there is already a form of media literacy done by Televisa’. Velasco (2015) completes this picture: ‘Their criteria are economic. They are training the new client, they are alphabetizing the audience, and they’re being taught what to consume, what to believe, what else they should like, they are promoting the type of consumer they need... the media are already doing it, because our ministries of education are not’.

What kind of ‘alphabetized’ publics would result from media literacy campaigns as conceived by private interests? This project argues that, optimistically, it would yield *functional* media literate people. Buckingham (2007, p.150) says that a ‘literate’ person is not simply defined as a person with basic competences, and that the notion of literacy implies a more reflexive approach, “it involves a broader understanding of the social, economic and institutional

contexts of communication, and how these affect people's experiences and practices". To him, *functional* literacy denotes the basic skills needed to perform specific operations without going far beyond this, an idea endorsed by Velasco (2015), 'in Mexico...we have a large margin of illiterate people, and yet literate people are functional literates... if we don't understand what we read, the truth is that it's very likely that we cannot understand what we see'.

This discussion has multiple points of tension. For instance, Buckingham (2007) considers that there is a tension between a social or critical model of media literacy and a competency-based approach. It can be argued that this same tension is found between the more critical pluralist media literacy model this project advocates and the one forwarded by UNESCO, which seems to embrace a competency-based approach with its emphasis on 'information'.

In line with what Ávila, Calleja, Moreno and Velasco state, the fact that the private industry is at the helm of media literacy campaigns means that there is a natural point of tension between their commodity-oriented way of managing their information, and the purpose of media literacy which, at its basic, should seek to teach audiences about responsible and critical engagement with the media. Naturally this means that private media would gain from targeting *functional* literate publics, 'we have the right to be addressed not only as consumers but also as citizens' (Orozco, 2016). This research argues that, facing the media, consumers need functional literacy; citizens need critical literacy. But Trejo Quintana (2016) would not immediately dismiss the contribution of the industry, 'I think that companies, even the companies that have a monopoly on television in Mexico... have to join in, because what we have seen is that there are many important players', but acknowledges the evident risk, 'but of course, if the law says that those who must do media literacy are the private [companies], then we are toast, they do not care because it doesn't yield them any profit'. This research argues that for publics to be treated as citizens, media literacy has to go beyond endowing people with basic competence. The contribution of private media to media literacy makes the involvement of State institutions, in particular IFETEL and SEP, ever more crucial. In this context, it is vital for media literacy programs to become part of formal education.

Media literacy education in Mexican schools: challenges and needs

The educational system itself represents one of the biggest challenges to media literacy, 'the topic of education in Mexico is *the* topic, in capital letters', considers Gómez-Mont (2016). Velasco (2015) ponders that learning how to move in an increasingly complex and mediatized world is 'is as important as knowing how to add, subtract, multiply'. This research has shown

that, in this complex context, designing media literacy policies and introducing media literacy to school curricula is desirable. But this same complexity demands thoughtful attention and ever-finer considerations as to how to move towards media literacy in schools in Mexico.

As it has been pointed out, there have been previous efforts to make media education part of the curricula of basic education, 'It's been a battle of a long time for some organizations. They have been able to do media literacy but always as an extramural activity' (Calleja, 2016). Along this line, Irma Ávila (2016) has developed an 'extramural' participatory methodology which considers children as subjects and citizens. She believes that part of the reason media literacy has not made its way into formal education is that Mexico is not a society of dialogue, in which people are 'not prepared to listen, and least of all a child'. To her, the educational system reflects this 'adult-centric' worldview, 'the adult-centrism in schools is so great that when adults talk children remain silent. When they reach adulthood, what happens with their obligations as responsible citizens who must participate in the development of the country?', she wonders, understanding that in the context of Mexico media literacy education's aim is ultimately that of civic engagement, 'in this broader context of a democratic country, media education becomes essential for children to take advantage of the tools that the society of information and knowledge gives them'. But what does that educational system look like when placed within broader social and institutional contexts?

The wave of reforms of 2013-14 did not leave education behind. This reform however, had an administrative spirit rather than a pedagogical one, resulting in an intense and still ongoing conflict between the unions and the State 'the approach is completely focused on the control of teacher unions... instead of at the same time raising the issue of quality' (Guerrero, 2016). Along this line, Trejo Quinta (2016) considers that the education reform 'has received lots of criticism because precisely the last thing it did was to get into content and pedagogy'. Adding to the educational system's weak angles of pedagogy, quality and content, the measures taken by the authorities to guarantee the application of the educational evaluation –the core mandate of the reform– call into question its democratic character, 'you cannot speak of a great democratic government with a fledgling information society if they have to send in the army to make sure the teachers answer the questionnaires during the evaluative tests. This happened in Oaxaca, Guerrero and Chiapas' (Gómez-Mont, 2016).

The fact that such incidents have transpired in these three states cannot be easily dismissed. As previously noted, they represent the three poorest states and the main beneficiaries of

politically-administered anti-poverty programs. This is an important insight because electoral clientelist practices seem to flourish on the same grounds as some of the rooted practices that the education reform is trying to overhaul: misinformation, ‘the problem with the teachers is that they used to buy their positions, and some people thought it was legal... they also think it’s legal to sell the vote...imagine the level of misinformation in Mexico that these legal and democratic issues are not clearly understood’.

These three states not only represent significant clienteles for political parties, but also typify another of the challenges that media literacy faces: the diversity of social realities in Mexico, ‘Guerrero, Oaxaca, Chiapas are the states that make up about 60% of the indigenous population and linguistic diversity’ (Gómez-Mont, 2016). This echoes the argument made in light of Hindman’s contention over digital democracy about the need of valuing the digital divide in this particular context. ‘Diversity’ and ‘divide’ are not interchangeable terms, but both terms are essential analytical categories to understand the full range of the landscape media literacy faces in Mexico. The educational system in Mexico could be understood as an embodiment of the diversity and divides seen in the country. For instance, in K-12 education, around 15% of students attend private schools (Abundis et al, 2014), ‘the disparity between the public and private sectors in Mexico is an abyss’, admits Gómez-Mont (2016) in regards to the available resources in class.

Trejo Quintana (2016) agrees that making broad media literacy policies and applying them indiscriminately would be counterproductive, ‘in Mexico we have this partition by region where we must always consider the context for any type of intervention, and any kind of public policy we want to implement. If you do not know them well, I find it difficult to conceive that an idea like this may fructify’. This scenario defies any standardized approach to media literacy, meaning that the viability of UNESCO’s pan-regional curricular ambitions is undermined in the face of vast diversity of Latin America. This does not mean that their role as a promoter and sponsor is not important, on the contrary, their involvement has been decisive for media literacy to acquire more visibility and credibility in the region; this project merely disputes, to some extent, their conceptual and curricular application.

Towards a critical pluralist media literacy model

In line with Buckingham’s (2007) reflections, the different discussions addressed in this research have sought to insert media literacy within broader social, economic and institutional contexts, in order to offer a critical and evaluative reflection of a desirable model of media

literacy for Mexico. As it has been stressed, the kind of approach to media literacy that this project espouses has to provide democratic and civic benefits. This is the material from which the normative framework is assembled. But throughout analysis, there have been points where the research has tried to offer more refined looks into the internal workings and assumptions of such normativity. In consideration of the above findings, this project will envisage a consistent model of media literacy. As stated in a previous chapter, the limitations are numerous, so this section does not seek to develop a fully-fledged methodology or a curriculum for teachers, but rather to round up the main aspects of a prospective model to lay the ground for possible policy recommendations:

Citizenship: It has been established that UNESCO's approach to media literacy has an emphasis on the cultural, lacking an explicit civic-democratic component. Orozco (2016) agrees with the broader aim of this project: 'I think it is worth working with that, precisely because it is lacking, and for Mexico it would be a very good contribution'. Trejo Quintana (2016) thinks that, taken to its logical conclusion, media literacy is not only about learning or acquiring skills to be critical before the messages we receive from the media, 'but that it would bring benefits to improve our reflection as citizens, and therefore the quality of democracy'.

This fits well within the confines of the democratic debates found throughout the research, in particular matters of concentration and pluralism of ownership and content, the existing divides and citizen participation in public policy. In this way, much like Buckingham (2005) and Mihailidis (2015) put forward, media literacy cannot be restricted to the effects debate, where the objective is to 'protect' powerless students and other citizens from negative media effects, 'it should not only be an instrument for protection', coincides Ávila (2016); rather, in order to make media literacy relevant to democratic issues in Mexico, the keywords should be 'critical', 'awareness' and 'engagement'.

Knowledge over information: As such, if the government pretends to "usher Mexico into the information and knowledge society" by guaranteeing internet access to everyone and make the promotion of citizen participation in public policy development one of their objectives, then it follows, like Calleja affirms, that citizens must acquire elements of participation together with these tools. This goes in line with this project's critical stance towards a competency-based approach that could engender *functional* literacy, rather than *critical* literacy. As it was mentioned, information society and knowledge society are not interchangeable, and each have diverging implications, 'The information society is completely vertical, and obeys to all the

demand for data processing from very big companies...By knowledge we understand it as the use of information to transform the very different realities that each person may have' (Gómez-Mont, 2016). Going with both "information and knowledge society" seems like a political compromise rather than an authentic democratic aspiration, 'they use the term *information society* because they do not want to commit to *knowledge societies*, because it involves a whole democratic project that Mexico has not yet taken up', points out Gómez-Mont. Rather than an information-focused, competency-based approach that seeks productive and functional literacy, this project espouses a democratic, knowledge-based critical literacy, one which gives citizens knowledge and resources to navigate their democracy with decision-making power.

Educate to regulate: In a scenario with an incipient media regulator and where market-driven politics have been naturalized and reinforced by mutually beneficial relationships between political and media elites, this project deemed important to embrace and explore Silverstone's (2007, p.180) idea of media literacy education as "an alternative to the blunderbuss of media regulation". The findings show that, as things stand now, regulatory matters cannot be put aside. IFETEL so far has been an organ with certain aptitude, albeit with acute shortcomings and questionable decisions. Given the lack of precedents of autonomous media regulation in Mexico, IFETEL has yet to reach a stage of institutional maturity. This makes the reliance on empirical evidence in policy-making particularly important, without setting normative ideas aside.

Trejo Quintana (2016) agrees that 'at least now, under current conditions, it couldn't be the alternative to regulation'; rather this project considers that media literacy could be an important input to strengthen institutional accountability. This is in line with Calleja's argument about the change in logic once people learn that what is on the media is part of their rights. In the Mexican context, Silverstone's (2007, p.185) slogan "education, not regulation!" becomes "education to improve regulation!".

Formal and informal education: A recurrent benchmark for this research has been Europe and the US where media literacy, both as a subject of study and as part of curricula in schools, has been around since the late 80's. Still, this project has made an effort to mindfully assess the socioeconomic and institutional-political contrasts between these regions and Mexico, and what this can mean for media literacy. As it has been established, there are conditions and needs in Mexico to develop media literacy education policies in formal education. Nevertheless, there are three things to consider: 1) educators, policy makers and researchers –in collaboration– would have to determine the schools grades in which media literacy could be put into practice;

this project, however, stands for a comprehensive application. Trejo Quintana (2016) considers Europe as an example to follow, where they have sought to incorporate media literacy in basic education ‘it seems fantastic, and it’s also a captive audience, you have assured access to a lot of kids’. She also thinks that ‘we could make good use of it in secondary education and higher education, because in all these stages there are many things to learn’; Orozco (2016), who wrote a manual ‘aimed at teachers, parents and children’, similarly subscribes to a wide-ranging application.

2) There is a need for educators, policy makers and researchers to be mindful of the diversity, needs and possibilities of the different regions when determining the general curricular approach of media literacy. Trejo Quintana (2016) alludes to the EU, where one can find countries with a stand-alone subject ‘about media literacy in the curricula of basic education, and some countries where they have done it transversely, that is, doing different activities related to media and information literacy through all subjects’. This appreciation fits with two of the models identified by Masterman (in Potter, 2004, p.249): “media studies as a specialist discipline in its own right” and “media education across the curriculum”. Trejo Quintana considers the need for empirically-backed diagnoses of the various contexts in Mexico to know whether it is worthwhile to incorporate a single subject or do it transversely, rather than applying standardized policies. In this regard, she offers a sensible example: ‘it’s not the same to increase a subject in primary schools in Mexico City as in the mountains of Guerrero, Oaxaca or the rural schools in Veracruz’. This goes in line with this project’s position about the need of a dynamic understanding of media literacy education.

3) Even though this project has visualized media literacy in formal education, the findings show that informal education cannot be left aside. Within a similar logic, IFETEL conferred private companies the license to broadcast media literacy campaigns. But more importantly, endeavors such as Ávila’s (2016) workshops with children, who has explored non-hierarchical methodologies through participative groups, and the computer literacy workshops for elderly people organized in the Media and Information Literacy forum, lead this project to envisage the benefits that critical pluralist media literacy could provide in both formal and informal education settings.

Not digital, but multi-media: The discussion throughout the research on the digital divide was not trivial: ever since the exponential growth and adoption of the internet and digital media, the field of media literacy has made an enthusiastic effort to ‘keep up’, leading to a host of

publications dedicated to digital technology in education. One ensuing consequence is that, in some contexts, media literacy has virtually become a synonym for digital literacy (see Mihailidis, 2015; Hobbs, 2010). This project has claimed that there is a particular need in a setting such as Mexico to moderate the current enthusiasm for digital media on different levels: 1) for its opportunistic appropriation in political discourse; 2) for the ideologically-laden justification that regulation of ownership is no longer needed (Freedman, 2015); 3) for its emphasis on functional and mechanical competences (Buckingham, 2007); and 4) because an emphasis on the digital would misrepresent the current media landscape, turning a blind eye to the existing divides and diversity in the population.

The idea is not to regress media literacy to pre-internet times (or as Buckingham (2007) puts it, abandon digital technology in favor of a return to ‘basics’), but to recognize that the ‘media’ in media literacy has to stand for different kinds of media, and the emphasis of certain media over others will depend on the context. Potter (2004, p.250) reminds us that “students have profoundly different motivations and agendas for their education”. For instance, Trejo Quintana (2016) is of the opinion that putting an emphasis on television ‘in places where the media is the radio because there is no electricity but in the church and the town hall’ is not likely to yield desired results. Additionally, as it has been settled, television is still the main medium through which the Mexican population is entertained, informed and assimilates a (dominant) representation of the world.

Pluralist: A good portion of the research has been devoted to understanding ownership as an ideological process and to the normative perspective of pluralism on ownership. As reviewed earlier, in media studies pluralism has an inexorably democratic spirit. If one of the main purposes of this model of media literacy is to enable people as full-time citizens with the capacity to improve the quality of their democracy, it follows that pluralism has to be an essential part of the model’s normative architecture. In a media landscape with such acute levels of concentration and lack of content diversity, a pluralist approach to media literacy could offer people the elements to contest the hegemonic assumption that concentration is the ‘natural’ outcome of any media system, thus allowing citizens to have the widest possible range of views when participating in public life. Furthermore, a normative pluralist model would be valuable in allowing them to conceive ‘democratic’ ownership structures and regulatory practices, and to challenge structures and practices that are not (Freedman, 2014).

For instance, by demanding stronger, independent public service media with wider coverage, audiences could more likely find content that represents them in their diversity, and not feel marginalized for not having the ‘correct’ skin tone or consumer lifestyle: ‘Because I am poor, because of my indigenous origin, because I am dark’, are some of the answers given to Ávila (2016) by children when asked the reasons they cannot appear on TV.

Critical/agonistic: This project has argued that to fully understand and transform the media system in Mexico, it is necessary to examine it as the product of systems of thought and practices that are in line with specific ways of ordering the world. Potter (2004) says that media necessarily have ideological and political implications. From this perspective, attitudes towards concentration, political-media affiliations, regulatory practices, dominant narratives in content such as the use of stereotypes or the exclusion of certain worldviews, to name a few examples, are revealing for their wider ideological positions.

A critical pluralist media literacy approach conceives the media as ‘fields of contestation’: it is founded on the notion of pluralism, and it seeks to contest the hegemonic ideological assumptions reproduced by media structures and representations. This derives from an agonistic model of democracy. This model is in conflict with the deliberative model which, as pointed out earlier, puts forwards ideas of social heterogeneity incompatible with the diversity of social realities in Mexico, as well as the prevailing liberal democracy.

Earlier this research examined how public service media have not been granted licenses for financial independence based on certain ideological positions: when needed, the government can manage them as State-controlled media with propagandistic ends. For private media stakeholders, their commercial autonomy ‘represents’ disloyal competition, revealing a neoliberal position that presses public service media to have limited presence in the landscape in order to keep privatized structures in place.

From this perspective, to be able to address democratic challenges and the role of neoliberal principles in liberal democracies, a critical-pluralist approach to media literacy would have to avoid the kind of ideological ‘middle grounds’ often found in policies. Buckingham (2013, p.531) says media literacy policies in the UK have made an “uneasy compromise between broadly social-democratic and neoliberal values” where the terms ‘consumer’ and ‘citizen’ are used interchangeably or combined (citizen-consumer), indeed reminding of us the way ‘information society’ and ‘knowledge society’ have been lumped together in policies in Mexico.

Orozco (2016) says that media education theory in Latin America used to have a marked political tradition infused with a Marxist ideology with aims to contest imperialist cultural values carried out through the media, but one that lacked a 'critical' component. He claims that, from UNESCO's perspective, the latter 'is what is being promoted, not from any one ideology, but from a fundamental agreement of human rights... this is not an ideology, but human rights'. If this is so, it would mean that UNESCO espouses a post-ideological worldview in which liberal democracy and neoliberal capitalism are conceived as the only possible form of governance. But this project has made clear that media have ideological implications, and that something can be both critical *and* political. Furthermore, Buckingham (2007, p.149) reminds us that literacy is a phenomenon contained in social practices, determined by broader social and economic processes. For him, this means that literacy is inevitably a contested field, making any definition of literacy "necessarily ideological, in that they imply particular norms of social behavior and particular relationships of power". For this reason, the meaning of media literacy is open to negotiation and debate.

From the analysis in this project, a critical pluralist approach to media literacy comes forward as a model able to integrate normative assumptions, empirical data and ideological critique into a vigorous assessment of the media system in Mexico, acknowledging the role of students and publics as citizens and encouraging a debate as an expression of their democratic rights.

Conclusions

This research has aimed to connect media literacy and citizen participation together. In this way, the aim of the research was not to develop a fully-fledged methodology of media literacy or a school curriculum, but to depict the normative frame of a prospective model that could pave the way to policy recommendations for media literacy, citizenship and democracy. As such, this research set out to answer the following questions that emerged from this juncture: What are the connections between media literacy and democracy? Why is media literacy absent in the Mexican media system? How can media literacy provide alternative strategies to critique and change the market ideology of the Mexican media and political landscape? How can media literate publics contribute to democratic affairs that involve the media, thus encouraging greater civic participation?

The research questions emphasized the emancipatory potential of media literacy, hence this research's affinity to *critical media studies*. If concentration of ownership is revealing for its wider ideological position, it follows that a pluralist approach to media literacy has to assume a diagnostic and contentious position facing systems of thoughts and practices that have helped fashion such concentration. The policy agenda of the telecom reform which incorporated long-standing public demands into the constitution served as the backdrop to the aims of the research. This project has examined how the reform has, to a point, ushered the country into a new communicative scenario, not least for introducing a regulatory body with autonomous competences. However, the subsequent dilution of the reform towards legislation hinted at the reinstatement of the relationship between media and political leaders, propelled by pressure groups within congress that hold de facto relations with private media companies.

Rather than ushering in a new communicative scenario, the reform set in motion a transitional scenario identified in this research as a pivotal point typified by a democratic tug-of-war between the long-standing and dominant media structures and the new constitutional guidelines, which opened the door to democratic principles such as pluralism, diversity and the recognition of the rights of audiences, community and indigenous media – demands promoted by citizens for almost thirty years. In a robustly concentrated media landscape dominated by private media companies looking to defend their interests, resistance to change does not come as a surprise.

If the former scenario was shaped by the mutually beneficial relationship between media and political elites, then it follows that for a new scenario to ever spring from this parched soil the roots needs to come from 'the society that is left in the middle' (Padilla, 2016). In this way, this

research has addressed this pivotal scenario by arguing that a crucial step to fulfill this transition requires publics who are literate in democratic affairs that involve the media. An important obstacle on this road is the ‘spectral quality’ of policymaking, an idea developed by Freedman (2015) which refers to the perception that policy processes require a level of expertise and resources that most citizens do not have. Owing to Freedman’s term, this research identified a form of ‘spectral participation’ in the policy environments in Mexico, an idea that implies institutionalized mechanisms of citizen participation in policy processes without performative capacities. As stated by two of the interviewees, Calleja (2016) and Guerrero (2016), such practices take place in spaces where members of the public –including the advisory board of the regulator and civil advisors such as academics– have a symbolic presence, lacking any actual decision-making power.

In this way, the research has critically examined existing literature, policy documents and elite testimonies on the civic appeal of media literacy in this transitional scenario in Mexico. The argument is that, developed to its broad potential, media literacy can provide democratic benefits. There are normative and practical assumptions underlying this statement. Potter (2004), as we saw, believes that society at large will experience benefits if individuals are media literate. Trejo Quintana (2016), who has had a central role in articulating media literacy efforts at a pan-regional level, made clear that even trivial everyday interactions with media technologies require a degree of literacy. In a democracy, the exercise of citizenship conflates the basic with the critical, and media literacy has the capacity to engage with the whole spectrum of interactions between the publics and the media.

In this sense, the project has made an attempt to engage with the analytical and normative questions regarding media and democracy, delineating the contours of the broader structures in which the media system is fixed. If promoters of media literacy in Mexico are concerned with democratic and civic matters, then it is important to consider the kind of media system that took root during the democratic transition and promote media literacy correspondingly. This project has argued that if the media are indeed part of the publics’ rights, people should be able exercise their citizenship by being involved in the decision-making of such affairs.

This is how we arrive to the core question of this thesis: how can media literacy enable publics to contribute in matters of media regulation and policymaking in Mexico? A critical pluralist approach to media literacy has a twofold civic component: first, it advocates that media vital in a broader democratic context, and that what happens in and with the media is part of the rights

of both younger and older citizens. Second, it must meet the challenge of offering skills, training and a range of actions in support of media and democracy. In line with what Trejo Delarbre (2016) said, a vital step to achieve this is to demystify misconceptions about these matters being too complex for the common person to understand. This can be done in formal and informal educational settings by deconstructing cryptic lexicon found in policy documents in a simple and transparent way, supported with practical examples that demonstrate how people can put into effect their rights through existing institutional mechanisms of participation, but also through extra-institutional activities that are not provided by the government.

As this research has shown, in the context of an arguably unfulfilled democratic transition the first constituent of this dual arrangement –education– has to necessarily engage with issues of a democratic nature, such as concentration and regulation of media ownership. This is why the model’s core is underpinned by values that are fundamentally democratic: pluralism and diversity. If the long view is to inhibit processes of ‘brutal concentration’ (Calleja, 2016) in Mexico and the dominant ideology that maintains them, there is a need to envision education and regulation as components that articulate each other, functioning in a spiral process where education is seen to contribute to regulatory matters through public participation and, in turn, improved regulation asserts a sound institutional context for education. In this sense, the policy and political landscape in Mexico serves as the basis to forge the kind of media literacy model promoted by this project.

Many of the critical approaches to media literacy refer to the relationship between the reader and the (mediated) text, and the need to tie in this relationship with larger socio-political issues of culture and power. This research has sought to expand on the understanding of the *critical* by inserting it into matters of media policymaking. This of course presupposes that such mechanisms exist. As stated earlier, the ones that do exist by the way of advisory councils maintain a symbolic character. From this understanding, this project espouses that media critical literate publics understand that it is well within their rights to demand access points to participate in media policy processes.

In this sense, the second aspect in this composition takes education one step further towards concrete actions: demand access points in policymaking in order to discontinue the alienating spirit of ‘spectral participation’. An active citizenship vigorously involved in media affairs could strengthen the regulatory body, IFETEL, which has a central role to play in the renovation of the telecom scenario. Even if critical pluralist media literacy emphasizes participation of

publics in the policy process, holding the regulator accountable for its decisions is a form of low-intensity involvement that does not require full immersion in policymaking. By the way of public accountability and participation, the regulator could become more resilient when dealing with powerful private media conglomerates.

The long view is that, through media literacy education, the emerging generation of citizens can help rupture the progression of brutal concentration by demanding stronger regulation, robust and independent public service media and community media, and pluralism and diversity in ownership and content, and ultimately help turn a fledgling information society into a fledgling knowledge society. As such, the transitional media scenario has to be framed within the broader democratic scenario in Mexico.

In this way this research cannot and should not be conceived as an isolated contribution. As shown through the investigation, Mexico and Latin America are witnessing the initial stages of media literacy articulated as a wide-ranging, unified project, bringing together scholars and specialists who have had been advocating media education for decades in more isolated groups before the involvement of organizations like UNESCO and UNAOC. This project looks to supplement the arising movement of media literacy in these regions by offering a situated analysis that is sensitive to the media landscape in Mexico. The fact that Orozco (2016), as examined earlier, acknowledges that UNESCO's media literacy project lacks a sharper civic thrust shows that this project can contribute to develop nuanced approaches to media literacy that can move their project towards democratic matters.

The social reality in Mexico makes any reform to education particularly problematic, and the topic of education in Mexico in itself is of great complexity which cannot be exhausted within the scope of this research. However, this project has made an effort to show awareness of the current circumstances in order to envision the challenges that media literacy could face in spaces of formal education. So far, the restructuring of education brought about the constitutional reform is reduced to the administration of the unions and evaluation of the teachers, leaving matters of pedagogy and content on the side.

One of the challenges that this research has been sensitive to is the diversity of the educational needs in the different regions of the country. Following this path, this project can contribute to the pan-regional ambitions of UNESCO by providing an entryway into the Mexican scenario. As one of the diverging points from UNESCO's approach, this project established that being mindful of diversity is not trivial. However, there is no reason these approaches should be

exclusive from each other. This research acknowledges that critical pluralist media literacy can profit not only from UNESCO as the driving force behind media literacy in Latin America, but also from the media literacy methodology they have developed. Indeed, this project would like to set forth a dialectic relationship in order to attain a comprehensive approach; to engage in a plural and critical dialogue. This project has a critical pluralist normative frame with the capacity to negotiate with, and adjust to, UNESCO's methodology and curriculum for teachers. Achieving this goal is an enterprise for future projects. Nonetheless, it is important to start envisioning the next steps in the form of concrete actions that can help realize the considerable challenge of arriving to a truly new media scenario.

The media literacy model advocated by this project is situated in the polar opposite of the spectral model of participation in media matters in Mexico. For this reason, the fundamental outcome of this approach occurs when citizens take action in the media landscape. However, it is necessary to visualize this result as part of a continuum. As things currently stand, concrete actions need to be taken in order to even begin the journey. To start with, it is crucial to include an array of actors that are not only in academic environments or government institutions in civic-oriented media literacy efforts. In this line, the support of advocacy groups and non-profit organizations such as AMEDI and Observacom is needed to start mobilizing media literacy policies for policy agendas. It is also important to engage with other media literacy efforts and approaches in Mexico, as exemplified by UNESCO and Irma Ávila, one of the interviewees. Another action is demanding that media literacy campaigns are not exclusive to private media, thus giving room to civic-sensitive public service campaigns. The constitutional telecom reform, even if partially, exemplifies that grassroots pressure can have tangible effects on policies. This same public thrust from below could ultimately lead, as it has been Guillermo Orozco's dream, to incorporate media literacy into curricular designs.

This project has made an effort to introduce an alternative understanding of democracy which is founded on contestation rather than consent. If the media are meant to seek and represent the plurality of citizens' experiences and points of view, it follows that democratic politics should create the conditions for the encounter to find its expression in dialectic terms (Mouffe in Carpentier & Cammaerts, 2006, p.969), and channel the irreconcilable character of plural democratic debates in a positive way. One way, as seen, is encouraging participation of non-professional citizens in media decision-making. This is one reason why this project's model has an affinity with the values of agonistic democracy.

This project has shown that if practices of media ownership are preserved through systems of thought and action by favoring private and exclusionary ownership, then media literacy education should seek publics to think critically about these matters and act accordingly through structural participation. For instance, it was established that the official discourse about the regulated performance and funding of public service media is founded on administrative and technical grounds, but when the CIRT argues ‘disloyal competition’ by public service media on the one hand and objects about ‘over-regulation’ of private media on the other, they are revealing for their wider liberal market-oriented ideological position.

Indeed, within the long view critical pluralist media literacy seeks to unearth the current ideological underpinnings of the media system in Mexico in order challenge the naturalized notion that a media system rooted in liberal democracy and neoliberal capitalism is the only conceivable arrangement. This can be compatible with the broad media literacy project promoted by UNESCO because, as we saw through Buckingham (2007), ‘literacy’ is an ideological definition that is open to negotiation and debate. In line with values of agonistic democracy, arriving to an absolute and undisputed definition of media literacy is not desirable or even attainable. This is why this project has made an effort to be attentive to the diversity of needs and possibilities found throughout the different regions in Mexico when envisioning the application of media education policies. The discussion about the current emphasis on digital media in media literacy education hinges on this notion. A multi-media approach emerging from the contextual needs can engage with heterogeneous media cultures experienced one way or another in Mexico.

This thesis set out to explore the potential link between media literacy and democracy only to find that in Mexico these ideas come naturally together by dint of the fact that there is the promise of a new media scenario looming on the horizon, struggling to shed the systems of beliefs and practices that were forged during the transition from an authoritarian to democratic region. The final aspiration is to form a new generation of media literate citizens emerging from a knowledge society who can actively contribute defining the coming years, opening a new chapter in the democratization of media in Mexico. Indeed, media literacy has found fertile grounds to take root.

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Notes

¹ Mexico is a federal republic comprised by thirty-one sovereign states and a Federal District as the capital. Each state has its own local constitution, congress, and judiciary, and is ruled by governors elected for a six-year term. Nonetheless the local constitutions should be best understood as laws regulating matters reserved to the Federal Constitution, authority which they cannot exceed.

² Officially, the Constitution is the fundamental law in the country and the Secondary Laws derive from the constitutional articles. Carlos Padilla (2016) considers that Mexico is not governed by the Constitution, but by the laws that give shape to constitutional decrees. The steps towards legislation involve debates and negotiations by the different parliamentary groups in both chambers of the Congress. For instance, during this process pressure groups with ties to the media industry were able to partake in the shaping of the Federal Law of Telecommunications and Broadcasting.

³ The National Chamber of Radio and Television Broadcasters, or CIRT, is an organization that institutionally represents radio and television broadcasters in Mexico. As the institutional agency through which the media industry enacts, the CIRT has had a central role in developing and safeguarding the interests of the private media sector. Within this frame their protests about censorship and over-regulation of media referenced in the thesis take place.

Appendix A

Elite interview respondents

Dr. Ivonne Velasco

Academic and journalist specialized in media and communication. Has worked as producer and host for public service media and is the former head of the Institute of Women in Morelos.

José Carlos Moreno

Founder of the activist news portal *Morelos 3.0*. Former Human Rights coordinator of the student movement *#YoSoy132*.

Carlos Padilla

Founder and collaborator of *Zócalo*, a specialized publication dedicated to media and political communication that assembles some of the most important media observers in the country.

Dr. Manuel Alejandro Guerrero

Media and policy researcher of Ibero-American University, policy advisor and member of the committee of the UNESCO chairs in Communications.

Aleida Calleja

Former member of the advisory board of the media regulator, coordinator of advocacy of Observacom (Latin American Observatory of Regulation, Media and Convergence), former president of AMEDI and current collaborator in matters of citizen participation and regulation.

Dr. Raúl Trejo Delarbre

Researcher and public intellectual, author of eighteen books on media and democracy and current president of AMEDI.

Irma Ávila

Social communicator who has received recognitions by UNESCO and UNICEF as a media educator of children and youth in Mexico. Founder of the festival for children *Apantallados*.

Dr. Janneth Trejo-Quintana

Media literacy researcher, policy advisor and coordinator of the first media literacy forum in Mexico.

Dr. Guillermo Orozco

Leading audience reception researcher in Mexico and Latin America for more than twenty years, director of the UNESCO chair on Media and Information Literacy in Mexico.

Dr. Carmen Gómez-Mont

Has served for twenty-five years as an academic specialized in the use of information and communication technologies in educational, social and cultural contexts with emphasis on indigenous communities, and as an educator of teachers in the adoption of media equipment in the classroom.

Appendix B

Main features of the Telecommunication and Broadcasting Reform (official information)

Public Services of General Interest

It is established in the Article 6° of the Constitution that telecommunications are public services of general interest, so that the State shall guarantee to provide them under conditions of competition, quality, plurality, universal coverage, interconnection, convergence, open access and continuity.

Audience Rights

The rights of audiences are considered, including among others, the right to access content that promote educational, cultural and civic learning, and the dissemination of impartial, objective and timely information.

New television broadcasters

In order to enable users to have a larger offering of content in broadcast television, two new television channels with national coverage were put out to tender.

Creation of the Federal Telecommunications Institute (IFETEL)

The Institute is created as an autonomous body whose powers are to implement and enforce fundamental rights under the Articles 2°, 3°, 6° and 7° of the Constitution.

Prohibition of discrimination

In providing telecommunications services all discrimination based on ethnic or national origin, gender, age, disability, social status, or any other discrimination that violates human dignity is prohibited.

Establishment of the figure of the ombudsman for audiences

Dealers who provide service broadcasting must have an ombudsman who will be responsible for receiving and following up on comments, suggestions, or requests for people who make up the audience.

Multiprogramming in broadcast television

The viewer will have greater choice of content on broadcast television.

Net Neutrality

For Internet users, the law provides the main characteristics of the neutrality of the network to which companies that offer the service of internet are held to, such as: free choice, non-discrimination, privacy, transparency and information, quality.

Provision of telecommunications services to unconnected populations through the shared public network

The shared network can provide services and telecommunications infrastructure to promote universal service.

Appendix C

Interview guide - themes

Media and democracy

1. What effects can media concentration have on the health of a democracy?
2. In a media landscape of high concentration dominated by commercial actors, how can pluralism and diversity of content be guaranteed?
3. How would you define the relationship between the media and the political class?
4. How autonomous are regulatory spaces in the face of strong media corporations?
5. What kind of media environment is being promoted by the telecom reform?
6. Do you think IFETEL fully meets its autonomous role as a regulator of the media?
7. Do you consider that diversity and pluralism of media content is a natural consequence of the diversity of media ownership?
8. What can ask from television to serve as a public sphere for democratic deliberation?

Digital media

1. Can the digital space be conceived as an alternative to the conditions of strong concentration of traditional media?
2. Is the digital divide in Mexico a reflection of other gaps?
3. Is there a need to worry about oligopolies or lack of diversity of traditional media in a world of rapid digital developments?
4. Do you consider that the internet and digital media will have an impact in the short or medium term in the Mexican media model?

Citizen participation

1. Are the access points for citizens to participate in the public policy process?
2. How can citizens gain power in decision-making in the current climate?

Media public policies

1. Does media policymaking incorporate empirical, quantitative evidence?
2. Are there examples in which citizens were involved in the development of public policies in Mexico?

Media education and citizenship

1. Can media literacy contribute to democratization and pluralism of the media system?
2. Can we foster a culture of citizen participation through media education?
3. Have there been efforts to incorporate a subject of media literacy in the curricula of schools?
4. Is there any civic dimension or any explicit link to democratic issues in media literacy models promoted in Latin America?
5. Is there a fundamental difference between the 'information society' and 'knowledge society'?

Media literacy in Mexico

1. What were the goals of the Forum of Media Literacy and Information, and how it can be understood within the media context in Mexico?
2. Where does media literacy stand in Latin America and Mexico?
3. How much emphasis is given to digital media literacy?
4. What were the general experiences of the UNESCO chair of Media Literacy and Information and what comes next?
5. What contribution or what impact has media education had beyond academic circuits in Mexico?

Appendix D

Coding – examples of the matrixes

Media and Democracy				
Media and Political elites	Hegemonic media	Ownership: contrn/plsm	Regulator/Regulation	socioeconomic/political context
IV., no han sido maestros, nunca han estado frente a grupos, no tienen un desarrollo educativo ³² ...	IV. que por ejemplo hacer televisión en los medios comerciales es imposible por los costos ¹⁹	CP. ya no para la televisión abierta como actualmente se tiene todavía, y que con la reforma constitucional ya dejó de permitirse por televisión analógica ¹⁷	CP. también la posibilidad de que existiera un órgano regulador autónomo, ya existía un regulador de telecomunicaciones pero no era autónoma ⁵ .	IV que en México hay siete tipos de familia ³ .
no porque esté comprometido con la educación o porque entienda algo sobre esto ³³	JC. la teledictadura y la dictadura de todos estos medios hegemónicos. ⁷	CP. dos cadenas de televisión que se supone vendrían a competir con Televisa y TV Azteca ¹⁸ .	CP. un órgano para competencia económica también autónomo ⁶	IV. Con este modelo económico ⁹
IV. El congreso está tomado por la Telebankada, están interesados por sus intereses ⁴² .	MAG. cuando empieza el debate, televisa saca un desplegado público, y eso normalmente lo hace televisa ¹¹	CP. no hay una competencia en televisión, no hay nuevos contenidos ²¹	AC. comisionados y de cómo se procesarán las recomendaciones y las discusiones ⁴	la familia ya no pueden estar cerca porque todo mundo trabaja ¹⁰ .
El congreso está formado para representar la sociedad en general pero si la mayoría son iletrados. ⁴³	RTD. siendo el medio de entretenimiento e información de la mayoría de los mexicanos ¹⁷	AC. no me parece que realmente exista esta apertura como algunos optimistas lo ponen ⁴⁸	AC. la relación del IFETEL con el consejo consultivo es casi nula ⁷	Entonces el niño está solo. ¹¹

Media Education				
Audiences	Media literacy	Private media	Objectives	Absence
GO. pero también en las redes sociales que tiene que ver con la privacidad ¹⁵	JTQ. Nos dimos a la tarea de contactar a los diferentes expertos que no solo están en... la academia ⁵	JTQ. pero claro, si en ley... dice eso, sobre que quienes deben hacer la alfabetización sean los privados, ahí si estamos fritos ⁴⁹	IA. sino ciudadanos con la capacidad de participar y dialogar con los adultos ²⁹	CP. el hecho de que por un lado se entregue a los niños tabletas, por el otro, los maestros no sepan usarlas entonces hay una deficiencia que hay que eliminar ⁴² .
GO. pero no solamente con la privacidad sino también por ser interlocutores ¹⁶	JTQ. y estos frentes son por ejemplo la iniciativa privada ⁶	JTQ. uno de los tres temas es la sobre-regulación ⁵¹ .	IA. es una metodología que parte de considerar a los niños sujetos y ciudadanos ³¹	AC. Es una batalla de hace mucho rato de varias organizaciones ⁴³ .
GO. tenemos derecho a que nos aborden no únicamente como consumidores, sino también como ciudadanos ¹⁹ ,	JTQ. TV UNAM, Ernesto Vázquez Briseño, impulsó la idea que México fuera el país que albergara el foro ⁸	JTQ. Y platicando con ellos te das cuenta que entienden la alfabetización en cierto sentido ⁵²	IA. Todo el rollo teórico no salió de la teoría sino de la práctica ³²	IA. Lo consideramos como se considera internacionalmente. El adulto-centrismo como esta forma de discriminación por edad. ⁴