

## Cultural Industries and Policy In Mexico and Canada After 20 Years of NAFTA\*

RODRIGO GÓMEZ\*\*  
ARGELIA MUÑOZ LARROA\*\*\*

### ABSTRACT

The main objective of this article is to present an analysis of 20 years of the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in the area of cultural policies, specifically, those related to cultural industries. Our main focus is to compare the positions that the Canadian and Mexican governments have taken *vis-à-vis* the world's number-one audiovisual power, the United States. Within this scenario, we have spotlighted the Mexican case.

**Key words:** cultural policy, cultural industries, NAFTA, audiovisual, Canada, Mexico.

### RESUMEN

El objetivo principal de este artículo es presentar un análisis de los veinte años del Tratado de Libre Comercio de América del Norte (TLCAN) en el área de políticas culturales, específicamente las relacionadas con las industrias culturales. Nuestro enfoque se centra en comparar las posturas que los gobiernos canadiense y mexicano han tenido frente a Estados Unidos, el poder audiovisual número uno del mundo. Dentro de este escenario hemos destacado el caso de México.

**Palabras clave:** política cultural, industrias culturales, TLCAN, audiovisual, Canadá, México.

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\*\* Communications Department, Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana-Cuajimalpa, México.

\*\*\* PhD candidate at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand.

## THEORETICAL STAND

In theoretical terms, we consider cultural industries goods and services that have a higher symbolic value than their practical use, as they are sources of communication, entertainment, artistic appreciation, and information (Scott, 2000). They are also industrial processes, since they are multiplied into tangible or intangible copies for consumers (Bustamante, 2003). With this in mind, we position our study under the political economy of culture approach that examines “the power relations, which mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources” (Mosco, 2009: 2), including cultural industries. The political economy tradition has “a strong commitment to historical analysis, to . . . the study of social value . . . and, finally, to social intervention and praxis” (Mosco, 1996: 17). Additionally, the political economy foundation on institutional economics has highlighted “the constraints imposed by social custom, social status, and social institutions on all behaviour, including market behaviour” (Mosco, 2009: 52). For those reasons, it is an appropriate approach for studying industrial development and cultural policies under the social framework of a free trade agreement.

We conducted a historical and critical analysis to identify the different ways in which NAFTA members have addressed cultural industries, specifically, in terms of the different configurations between public intervention and private enterprise (Golding and Murdock, 2000: 72).

Consistent with the political economy of culture approach, we employed a critical realist methodology, which is based on the assumption that although “objective reality” is unattainable, through a critical examination, it is possible to “get empirical feedback from those aspects of the world that are accessible” (McEvoy and Richards, 2006: 69). This methodology combines analyses of qualitative and quantitative data, as well as original and secondary data (that is, from previous research) (Cohen and Crabtree, 2006). To collect the data, we drew on previous research, official statistics, and media reports as well as original document analysis and statistical systematizations. This triangulation allowed us to compare different sets of information, to reveal different facets of the topic, and to contextualize it (Cohen and Crabtree, 2006). This research logic allowed us to establish links between cultural public policies and economic indicators.

Our focus on cultural industries acknowledges that they are at the economic core of the cultural sector in each country. This has been especially true over the last two decades, in which cultural industries have grown constantly and more than the average of the other industrial and economic sectors (Hesmondhalgh, 2013). In that context, several countries and international organizations have participated in

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