



## Audio-visual industries and diversity: economics and policies in the digital era

edited by Luis A. Albornoz and Trinidad García Leiva, Routledge, Liège, 2019, 210 pp., 2 b/w illustrations, £96 (hardback), ISBN 9781138384453, £35.99 (eBook), ISBN 9780429427534

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## BOOK REVIEW

**Audio-visual industries and diversity: economics and policies in the digital era**, edited by Luis A. Albornoz and Trinidad García Leiva, Routledge, Liège, 2019, 210 pp., 2 b/w illustrations, £96 (hardback), ISBN 9781138384453, £35.99 (eBook), ISBN 9780429427534

This book seeks to challenge a conventional wisdom, which argues that the digital era will be a source of diversity on its own because the abundance of cultural content can resolve the asymmetry of cultural flows. The book is an informed collection of twelve articles dealing with the concept of diversity in the field of communication and culture. It discusses the links between diversity, digitisation and audiovisual industries (cinema, recorded music, radio, TV and video games), conscious that in the digital age, transformations in audiovisual diversity are the result of several interrelated socio-economic and policy processes.

Over the last few years, a growing scientific literature has offered useful insights on the interactions between diversity and cultural industries. This work deals with key issues, such as the international politics of cultural diversity (Vlassis, 2015), the sociological links between development, cultural diversity and cultural industries (De Beukelaer et al., 2015; Garner, 2016), the metrics developed across the globe for assessing levels of, and threats to, media diversity (Valcke et al., 2015), the legal challenges from the implementation of the 2005 UNESCO Convention for the Protection and Promotion of diversity of cultural expressions (Richieri-Hanania, 2014), as well as the international role of the European Union in promoting the norm of cultural diversity (Pauwels & Loisen, 2016; Vlassis, 2016).

*Audio-Visual Industries and Diversity* advances the discussion with respect to relations between diversity, audiovisual industries and digitisation and its originality and novelty are based on five key contributions. The first important contribution concerns diversity as a multidisciplinary issue. The book provides a comprehensive vision of the links between diversity and audiovisual industries, combining multiple scholarly traditions, such as media law, media economics, cultural studies, cultural and communication policies. Clearly, a multidimensional approach is necessary to highlight key trends in audiovisual landscapes, as well as to provide practical proposals to improve the diversity of/in audiovisual industries. The second contribution focuses on the book's starting argument that a comprehensive perspective of the diversity of/in audiovisual industries should cover the various phases of their functioning, ranging from the creation-production of contents to their consumption. In other terms, analysing audiovisual diversity requires an overall understanding of how audiovisual systems work, locally and internationally. The book portrays the current digital audiovisual scenario, which is characterised by the dominant presence of a few big corporations with major international dimensions. In this respect, the third contribution the book offers is new insights on the links between diversity and audiovisual industries, by highlighting the new disruptive context generated by the expansion of digital networks and devices.

The book focuses mainly on international and transnational challenges posed by the new digital environment. It pays special attention to a new range of topics in that field: transnational players such as audiovisual online platforms (Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Disney Plus, etc.); diversity issues which transgress national and regional boundaries; international governance efforts, notably the implementation of the 2005 UNESCO Convention for the Protection and Promotion of Diversity of Cultural Expressions; and national policy responses. Finally, the fifth contribution deals with the thesis that diversity in audiovisual industries does not come

naturally; instead, its protection and promotion is a matter of public interest. In this view, the book notably focuses on the regulation of audiovisual contents offered by transnational online platforms through their catalogues, as well as on how public authorities could make platforms part of every national audiovisual production and financing system.

Albornoz and García Leiva succeed in their efforts to move these contributions forward, in part because this collective book is well structured. The book comprises three parts. In the first part, the different authors seek to clarify important notions such as cultural diversity, cultural exception and audiovisual industries and to analyse the current debates around the unbalanced international flows of audiovisual goods and services in the digital environment. They also focus on how various stakeholders, such as international organisations, governmental bodies, civil society and epistemic communities, understand the links between diversity and audiovisual industries in the digital age. The second part of the book highlights the key role of the new players in the audiovisual economy and addresses the crucial issues of corporate media power and corporate concentration, as well as the distribution and visibility of audiovisual productions in the new digital context. The different authors discuss the power of Internet giants in the audiovisual economy and the role played by online platforms in providing audiovisual diversity on the Internet. The third part explores the implementation of measures that support audiovisual diversity and the adaptation of policies to digital challenges. The focus of the authors is both at national level, such as the case of Canada and Brazil, and at regional and international levels, such as the case of European Union and UNESCO.

Taken as a whole, the book succeeds in providing an integral and convincing analysis of the different dimensions embodied by the diversity principle in the new context of digitisation. It also shows the need to maintain a research focus on these topics in order to further monitor the current transformations in the media and audiovisual landscapes due to platformisation and to further explore the impact of transnational online platforms on users habits, production and distribution of audiovisual content, as well as on audiovisual governance. Here, the case of data asymmetries among stakeholders is revealing. At present, transnational platforms handle a vast amount of data, that institutes for cultural statistics, researchers and policymakers have limited access to. Restricted access to supply and consumption data raises major issues in terms of transparency and accountability, of establishing a level playing field in the digital audiovisual market, as well as of defining appropriate policy measures in order to protect and promote audiovisual diversity in the new digital context. In addition, future research would benefit from comparative cross-national perspectives including geographically varied and multiple points of view to understand how the links between audiovisual industries, diversity and digitisation are addressed in European, Latin American, Asian and African countries.

To conclude, the multidimensional approach presented in the book has great prospects. The book expands existing scholarship and opens up a much-needed conversation with respect to the deep mutations underway in the audiovisual landscapes. There is no doubt that *Audiovisual industries and diversity: economics and policies in the digital era* is a solid piece of work and can be recommended as key reading for scholars, researchers and practitioners in various areas, such as media/audiovisual economics, cultural studies, international cultural relations, media law and policies.

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