

MARZAL-FELICI, J.; SOLER-CAMPILLO, M.; LÓPEZ-OLANO, C. *Participación ciudadana y medios de comunicación públicos, 1: Conceptos y teorías.*

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### Citizen participation as a tool to promote public media

Public media corporations are in crisis. The cutbacks in their budgets after 2008 and the consequent loss in the range of programmes, audiences and reputation are joined by factors like the lack of regulatory mechanisms from depoliticised governments and the laborious adaptation to the new context of digital platforms and social media. These issues and others are the crux of *Participación ciudadana y medios de comunicación públicos. 1. Conceptos y teorías*, a collectively-authored book which takes a multifaceted look at the burning issue of citizen participation in an effort to 'continue contributing to enriching the debate on the role of the public media and their political, economic, social and cultural importance, the key to progress in our country and our democracy' (p. 46).

The editors of the volume, Javier Marzal-Felici, María Soler-Campillo and Carlos López-Olano, are researchers in the fields of Audiovisual Communication and Advertising and Public Relations at the University Jaume I and the University of Valencia. Their contribution is based on the work promoted by professor Marzal-Felici within the project entitled [PARCICOM](#) (Citizen participation and public media. Analysis of audiovisual co-creation experiences in Spain and Europe), an ambitious study underway with the support of Spain's State RDI Programme geared at Society's Challenges by the Ministry of Science and Innovation of the government of Spain. Its products include other publications on topics related to this field (SOLER-CAMPILLO, GALÁN-CUBILLO & MARZAL-FELICI 2019; MARZAL-FELICI, SOLER-CAMPILLO & LÓPEZ-OLANO 2020; CAMPOS-FREIRE & LORIGUILLO-LÓPEZ 2021).

The volume has divided the reflections of 26 renowned researches in the field into 14 chapters. First comes the robust introduction (p. 25-46), in which the editors provide the updated context of both the status of the public media in the age of platforms and post-truth as a challenge that citizen participation poses for their re-legitimation as actors in the public sphere. On the one hand, participation is a feature that

defines all public media, even more so at a time when their reputation has diminished due to factors like those mentioned above, which are joined by the lack of political independence or 'the widespread belief that any private management model is better' (p. 34). On the other hand, the benefits of implementing participation mechanisms are undeniable in 'the observance of good practices and the exercise of an ethics in both the public and private spheres' (p. 38). In summary, given this media context dominated by commercial media and contamination with disinformation, the editors claim that 'the public media are essential in order to strengthen and improve the health of our democracy' (p. 38).

The authors thus lay the groundwork on which the other contributions are developed. In the first chapter, entitled 'Audience participation in public media. From an instrumental to a goals-based vision' (p. 47-73), authors Anne-Sofie Vanhaeght and Karen Donders paradoxically offer a well-reasoned debunking of citizen participation as it is currently being applied in the public media. Even though participation is unanimously considered essential for their renewed presence as prominent actors in the public sphere, these Belgian researchers base their criticism on deliberative democracy to showcase its application 'without critical deliberation on whether participation truly contributed to the concept of the programme, much less to the democratic mission of public stations' (p. 55). In this way, 'instead of fostering audience empowerment, it is used as a strategic means to deal with the challenges of the digital age [...] but not to achieve social objectives like increasing diversity' (p. 57). To achieve these latter goals, the authors are clear: the main challenge facing the public media is setting aside the threat of vulnerability and confronting the permanent opening of audiences as active participants, not solely as the recipients of content.

Next, in the chapter entitled 'Citizen participation in public media: What it really means' (p. 75-98), Marius Dragomir presents some of the innovative trends in getting citizens involved bearing three main areas in mind: financing via rates focused on

individual consumption; depoliticised, inclusive governance with civil society; and the unflinching opening of their newsrooms to integrate citizens into their news and creative contents.

Directly related to Dragomir's text, in the chapter entitled 'Participation in audiovisual communication: Between the grassroots appropriation of technology and the law of the market' (p. 143-162), Emili Prado i Picó and Matilde Delgado offer a comprehensive overview of the evolution in the paradigms of participation which have come in response to technological developments from antenna-based telephone calls in the 1960s to user-generated content.

In turn, in 'The participative function of public audiovisual media in the context of the great mediatisation' (p. 227-244), Laura Cervi and the current president of RTVE, José Manuel Pérez Tornero, examine the transformations stemming from the impact of the web and the Internet, with a particular emphasis on their status as social entities. According to the authors, participation should avoid replicating the use of commercial operators' engagement strategies in the digital media and instead focus on their role as public services.

Due to a lack of space, we can only make a bare mention of the entire chapters devoted to such timely topics as participation in the governance of public TV and radio stations (CAMPOS-FREIRE, RODRÍGUEZ-CASTRO & VAZ-ÁLVAREZ; p. 199-226); scholars', professionals' and experts' participation in social promotion (SOLER-CAMPILLO, LÓPEZ-OLANO & MARZAL-FELICI, p. 245-267); citizen participation in news programmes (LAMUEDRA-GRAVÁN, MATEOS-MARTÍN & BROULLÓN, p. 269-294); the participative mechanisms in the Basque public broadcasting service EITB (JUAN CARLOS MIGUEL, CARMELO GARITAONANDIA, SIMÓN PEÑA & MIGUEL ÁNGEL CASADO, p. 295-312); and the right to access and participation from the legal standpoint (JOSÉ M. VIDAL-BELTRÁN, p. 313-362). These contributions are joined by those of authorities on the matter, such as the late Enrique Bustamante (prologue), Ana María López-Cepeda (p. 163-184), Ignacio Bergillos-García (p. 125-141), David Fernández-Quijada (p. 185-197) and Manuel Ángel Vázquez-Medel (p. 363-385), which only serves to highlight the many different angles of the book.

For researchers specialising in the field of communication, this volume is an essential window onto the ever-changing landscape of audiovisuals produced by public media. Its second part, planned for 2022 and also open-access, promises to serve as a complement to these reflections thanks to the 'study of prominent experiences of participation in public media, both domestic and international' (p. 44). By doing so, this pair will be an intriguing introduction to the thrilling transformations occurring at the crossroads between the European public audiovisual system and the atomised audiences of today.

## References

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