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Diversity 2.0: Rethinking Audiences, Participation, and Policies

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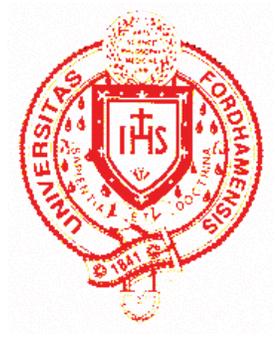
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**DIVERSITY 2.0: RETHINKING AUDIENCES,
PARTICIPATION, AND POLICIES**

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Abstract

The concept of diversity has always been an underlying philosophy in media policymaking and the era of participatory media has not changed that core concern. The idea of diversity of consumption, or, reception is implied in contemporary debates, policy papers and mission statements, although seldom explicitly foregrounded or empirically addressed in policy research. But accompanying the ongoing media revolution is an ongoing process of ‘audience evolution’ in which ‘reception’ is becoming a limited concept in light of the growth in user-generated and distributed media content and experience. In going beyond the idea of audiences as mere recipients of content, even in the more expansive concept of ‘media practices’, the term participation is becoming a popular way to reference the complex dynamics of audiences in diverse identities and their relations with diverse forms of media. This article maps the ways the concept of participation can be understood as a policy-relevant dimension of the broader construct of diversity. We argue that conceptualizing participation in a multidimensional way as three circuits -- in terms of people's engagement with content, in production of content, and within media structures – should be seen as a core concern for media policy-making for the Web 2.0 era.

Introduction: Importance of Participation

The one development that practically all media scholars agree upon is that the media landscape is constantly changing, in diverse, even chaotic ways. The complexity of these transformations has been aptly described by Brian McNair (2006) who labels the numerous and magnificent changes in recent

decades as the shift from a control paradigm to a chaos paradigm. He lists several ‘main constituents’ of this transition, for instance the shift from information scarcity to surplus, from exclusivity to accessibility, from passivity to (inter)activity, from hierarchy to network, and from dominance to competition (ibid., 199). One of the most important changes, according to McNair’s ‘chaos theory’, is from homogeneity to diversity (ibid., 199). Clearly, then, the concept of diversity as a media policy principle is ripe for reconsideration, in light of the ongoing technological and institutional changes in our media ecosystem.

This article repositions the question of diversity from the perspective of participation. In general terms, when the media are discussed, diversity is often conceptualised in terms of content (variety in content). The aspects of content diversity, in turn, are frequently understood as the quantitative, measurable breadth of programme-type supply at a structural level (the diversity of output); the diversity of issues and voices presented in content; or even as form-related aspects such as modes of audience address or communicative styles (see, e.g., Aslama 2008). However, two other distinct, if related, dimensions of diversity are that of media sources (producers of output in a media system) and that of reception (breadth of media consumption by, e.g., media, genre, different audience segments, and so on; see, Napoli, 1999). Most analyses of (Western) media have in the past two decades focused on the diversity of media organizations in a system, and the plurality represented in content offered (e.g., Hellman, 2001; Aslama et al., 2004).

In contrast, this article suggests that in these times of exponential growth and globalization of media markets, rapid technological development, and the mainstreaming of Web 2.0¹, a potentially useful approach to the diversity principle can be found in rethinking media in terms of diversity of participation. As Bridget Griffen-Foley (2005) has pointed out, ‘audience participation’ has existed at least over a century as a part of mass communication – as letters to editors, and the like (see also, Carpentier, 2007a). In the current context, however, the undeniable changes in the nature of

‘audiencehood’ in the past decade (Napoli, 2010) necessitate a re-examination of this notion of audience participation and its relationship to the diversity principle.

To be sure, the concept of participation is complex. Nico Carpentier (Carpentier, 2007a: 107) has traced the contested ideological-political history of the term. He notes that the common denominator between different views is that the concept of participation is always seen as a desired goal, and needs to be protected. Participation is, unsurprisingly, one of the core ideas in political theories that deal with democracy, but its different uses in relation to media and communication illustrate the multitude of approaches. For example, participatory communication research has in the past decades dealt with communication directly related to development and social change. Today, however, the term participatory media is used mostly as an academic and popular buzzword in the context of the expansion of user-generated media content. As Carpentier (*ibid.*: 111-112) argues, the discussion about the participatory potential of new media have tended to glorify the power of media technologies (as if specific technologies are inherently more participatory than others) and consequently diminished the focus on the power of old media, as well as on the power of media companies as content producers.

We propose that from the viewpoint of media diversity, the concept of participation could aptly expand the idea of reception, or even of ‘media practices’ by audiences (Hargittai & Walejko, 2008; Karaganis, 2007) – to entail people’s engagement in content production as well as issues pertaining more broadly to media structures. It could also be argued that participation can happen in different ways, in a variety of modalities and levels of intensity, as well as be facilitated in different spaces. This idea of participation, then, can be seen as having specific relevance to rethinking media diversity, at several levels. To use Steven Clegg’s (1989) idea of the circuits of power, participation can be understood not only as (1) an activity of the micro-level circuit of power where it is manifested as interaction by people as individuals or collectives, but also as (2) a meso-level modality of conventional media institutions and different, more or less institutionalised, hubs of new digital media, and (3) a macro-level, structural concern of media-policy making. We will first lay out the media-

related context of the participatory diversity, then describe the framework of three circuits of power as they apply to the concept of media-related participation as well as discuss some of their challenges, and finally assess the idea of diversity of participation in terms of media policy agendas.

Context: Changing Media Landscapes and the Potential of Participation

As has been noted by many observers of the contemporary media environment, the period of tentative experimentation with participatory media is over, and all kinds of digital platforms from YouTube to Second Life are currently being embraced not only by businesses, but by civil society organizations, political parties, universities, and individuals alike. Broadband penetration is extensive in the Western world (and growing in many parts of the world)ⁱⁱ and the importance of mobile communication grows rapidly. Social networks are not only for the younger generations any longer,ⁱⁱⁱ and a variety of organizations, from rock bands to universities, to United Nations programmes, have established their presence in many of the social networking sites.

However, the speedy transformations in media structures, technologies, policies, markets, content, and audiences, are evoking uncertainty over how media ecosystems are evolving locally, regionally, nationally, and globally. There seems to be little consensus amongst scholars (or, for that matter, technologists, business leaders, and policy-makers) regarding how technological, structural or more broadly, socio-cultural aspects of media ecosystems will develop, even in the near future. Some claim that the threat to media diversity lies in the global concentration of new technologies, gadgets and their applications, that will automatically narrow down consumers' options (e.g., Zittrain, 2008). These observers often point to the extent to which national or regional 'traditional media' organizations are still doing relatively well in terms of attracting audiences, and to the prominent presence many of them have managed to establish on new media platforms.

Although a global media sphere might be an emerging reality in some respects, several studies of Europe in recent years seem to indicate that in terms of ‘old media’ content such as television programming, domestic production is still highly valued. (See, e.g., discussion in Aslama, 2008: 80-87). Clearly, Web 2.0 phenomena like Facebook, with its 500 million users (as of July 2010) obviously have progressed beyond being platforms for students and other ‘early adopters’. And the recent examples of the elections in two very different societies, the United States and Iran, provide just two cases where information production by non-professional individuals and loose associations, distributed via informal networks including social networking sites and microblogging, have played a major role in democratic processes (e.g., Williams & Gulati, 2007; Keim & Clark, 2009). Yet, while there are impressive cases of Web 2.0 being an important source of information and political activism, none of the new social media innovations have consistently demonstrated being a comprehensive, or even a truly complementary, alternative to traditional media (and media organizations). News and political campaigns may encourage intense blogging and reach millions via Twitter, but they still rely to a great extent on ‘traditional’ media outlets as sources or counterparts.

The academic responses in trying to address the question of diversity in this somewhat paradoxical situation have so far been limited. The early and mid 1990s witnessed a surge of academic thinking and public debates about the commercialization and dumbing down of ‘old media’ as well as the democratizing potential of the Internet. The most hopeful utopias of deliberative online communication and the formation of active ‘subaltern counter-publics’ (Fraser, 1992/1997) were countered with fears ranging from trivialization, fragmentation, and even the disappearance of widely and commonly shared issues (e.g., Sunstein, 2002), to viral distribution of non-democratic, harmful content. Now the same debates are re-emerging once again in an era that is witnessing the explosion of ‘social production’ on a multitude of digital platforms (e.g., Shirky, 2010; Sunstein, 2009). However, there are great scholarly challenges and gaps. So far academic scholarship has focused on theorization rather than empirical analyses (e.g., Gripsrud, 2009), has tended to emphasize activities of social justice

movements that are by default networked and proactive (Aslama & Erickson, 2009), and thus have tended to romanticize the participatory and democratizing nature of the Internet, Web 2.0 and mobile communications (while most quantitative indicators tend to point towards concentrated and elite communication (e.g., Hindman, 2009), and while digital divides still clearly exist). Participation, then, requires a conceptual-analytical framework that takes a broader view beyond certain technologies, stakeholders, or issues.

Framework: Participation in Macro, Meso and Micro Levels

While interaction and more recently, participation, have been catchwords in public, academic and industry discourses for quite some time, little thought or systematic analysis has actually been given to either theoretical and conceptual aspects or concrete opportunities and solutions that exist in the current media landscape. One of the exceptions is Carpentier's (2007b: 225-226) detailed scheme that sketches different levels of access, interaction, and participation. For example, he distinguishes between access to media technology, to relevant content, and to content- and technology-producing organizations. Similarly, his categorizations include different forms of interaction (user-to-content, user-to-technology, and user-to-user) that at the level of production, mean the ability to use equipment, or to create content, and on the reception side, the ability and skills to use equipment to receive and interpret content. For Carpentier, participation is inherently linked with power and the process of 'co-deciding'. Also, as he suggests, participation can be viewed from the perspective of reception as well as production. We take the idea a step further and propose that the question of participation can be seen from three distinct perspectives.

As illustrated in Figure 1 below, participation can be understood as an *active position* that people take in the micro-level; as a *modal position* that is produced and offered by media institutions in the

meso-level; and as a *policy position* in that it is a concern in policy-making, and increasingly also the aim of civic groups engaged in media-related policy-making. These circuits offer both a conceptual and an analytical framework: Conceptual, in that they define participation in three distinct ways, related to power; and analytical in that they offer a frame in which participation can be operationalized and examined from three different angles.

Figure 1 about here

As depicted above, the circuits of participatory power are interlinked and influence one another. For instance, certain policy decisions may support technologies that inspire production of new services and content, that in turn prompt an individual to take part in a debate on politically and socially relevant issues. Participation may also be realised in different degrees of intensity: An individual may participate in a political debate by (actively) witnessing it via media, or by participating and acting in online and offline forums. A medium may address its potential audiences as information-seeking, active citizens, or create opportunities for joint content creation. A policy decision may merely allow or actively support participation; whether in terms of policy decisions pertaining to media, or in terms of supporting multi-stakeholder, civic participation in media policy-making. These circuits, when empirically mapped, can cross national borders or be locally situated.

To be sure, the circuits represent mere opportunities for participation that can manifest themselves in different forms. For example, as Carpentier (2007a: 112) has noted, ‘the participatory potential of media technologies remains dependent on the way they are used’ and ‘Web 2.0 technologies can perfectly well be used in top-down non-participatory ways’. Consequently, it can be argued that the idea of three circuits of power related to participation are important, if the diversity principle and the ethos of the media fostering democratic societies are to be taken seriously in the new media environment. The circuits illustrate that participation, and especially participation connected to

citizenship and media, is indeed not a question of an active blogger or Tweeter, but can and should be facilitated in different stakeholders of power – and, ideally, in dialogue between those circuits.

Participation as an Active Position

To begin with, conceptual discussions are currently emerging about how media audience members position themselves in the context of Web 2.0. Some scholars want to bypass the idea of audiences and talk about ‘audienceship’ as referring to the very interface between audiences and texts; as opposed to the subject positions of audience members.^{iv} From another angle, as Xie et al. (2008) argue, a consumer of any product could be understood as a prosumer, that is, as a co-creator of the value of that product. Thus the traditional notions of mass communication and ‘the work’ of the audiences, are still valid concepts, when appropriately reconfigured (Napoli, 2010): Audiences are indeed ‘working’ in the user-generated environment, if not exactly referring to the theoretical vein of thought of the 1980s, that audiences ‘work’ for programmers and advertisers by watching (e.g. Jhally & Livant, 1986).

A case in point is the flagship of the multimedia audience participation genre -- reality programming. Both academic theorisation and public debate around reality TV tend to recall the 1980s idea of ‘audience participation’ and insinuate that viewers indeed work for commercial media enterprises when they are seduced by the manufactured authenticity of reality programming (e.g., discussion in Aslama, 2010). Others point to the notion of active audiences, and the emergence of multi-platform reality media products that enhance such activity (Tincknell, E. & Raghuram, 2002) – and that could be seen as a particularly poignant example of mediated prosumerism: that is, in value production by audiences. Indeed, many empirical analyses seem to indicate that a part of that ‘authenticity labour’ by audiences around reality programming deals very much with the work on the self – self-development, discovery, identification, and the like. (Aslama & Pantti, in press 2010).

This example illustrates that some traditional perceptions about participation as a position still live on. The polarized audience positions that often have been linked to public service and commercial media – citizens versus consumers – still seem to linger (e.g., Livingstone, 2005) but some researchers have come up with additional roles, or modes of address. Some quite concrete thinking has gone into audience positions and changes in broadcasting. John Ellis (2000) has theorised that the role of television in the new media era would be to offer unifying ‘witnessing’ positions and experiences (in contrast to lone surfing on the Internet). Mats Ekström (2000), in depicting modes of current television journalism, has argued that the imagined recipients of journalistic content are addressed as knowledge-seeking citizens, listeners (of stories), or spectators (of spectacles). Trine Syvertsen (2004) has suggested that broadcasters have indeed begun to address audiences not only as citizens and consumers but also, for instance, as customers and players; and Irene Costera Meier (2004) has advocated for the ‘enjoyer’ as a legitimate position for audiences, in terms of quality programming of public broadcasting.

Another idea of new kinds of ‘audiences’ or media users is the concept of ‘Digital Natives’-- youth who have grown up immersed in digital culture and fluently operate in it, crossing borders and boundaries, and using platforms in new and creative ways. A way to diversify the thinking on audiences of media has in fact been the evident divide between public broadcasting generations in Europe and digital natives, as presented by Gregory Ferrell Lowe (2008). He characterises the public service broadcasting generations as traditionalists, universalists and collectivists, while audiences of new on-demand content and services are ‘acquirers, hedonists, and independents’.

Participation as Modal Position

The new audience positions depicted above offer a diverse array of starting points in terms of how such positions would foster participation and engagement. The kind of participation associated with a consumer is very different from that of a witness. It is clear, however, that the slogan of ‘participation’ – audiences as participants in (or even ‘in partnership’ with) the media – is a marketing strategy of both conventional and new media organizations.

To bring participation to a more concrete level, the concept can refer to specific platforms, content and services offered by conventional and non-conventional or new media. In industry parlance, the term ‘Participation Media’ is frequently used to refer to cross / multimedia content production and products, as well as to interactive possibilities for consumers to take part in content production. Most often, the presumption still seems to be that the framework of participation media is provided by specific, conventional media institutions, and a great part of the content is produced by professionals. As mentioned earlier, reality programming is often quoted as an example par excellence of participation media, and of truly active audiences, since audiences follow television shows, vote by mobile, and chat online (e.g., Tincknell & Raghuram 2002).

At the same time, non-traditional media outlets and social media tools have taken on some tasks of mass media. This kind of non-professional and/or informal communication also facilitates serious political activism (boyd, 2008). Facebook and Twitter provide recent current examples regarding the crisis in Pakistan, the Mumbai attacks of 2008, and, as noted before, in the elections in Iran and in the U.S. And there have been earlier but similar instances where the production by amateurs has outdone mainstream media output in relevance and speed of communication, such as the diving sites in the case of the Tsunami news coverage in 2005 (Kivikuru, 2006).

It could be argued that in between old-media led participation and relatively spontaneous, informal use of social media is yet another variation of the theme of user-generated content production, systematic yet independent from mainstream media: participation as in non-commercial, non-institutional blogging and participation as systematic crowd-sourcing. With the latter, the central aim is

the joint production: While there is a hub that gathers the information, the production is not facilitated by and/or channelled through conventional, professional means of media production and distribution. The Wikipedia online encyclopaedia may be the most famous and successful crowd-sourcing activity. However, there are also (unfortunately, often short lived) projects of crowd sourced journalism and some recent experiments include a Facebook-directed animation^v, or a collaborative translation service for TV shows^{vi}.

All of these non-conventional media activities could be seen as participation at the micro-level, but at the same time they can be political or ‘proto-political’ (Dahlgren, 2009) contributions that extend to the meso-level. There is a mediation that is in some way institutionalised and directs information, participation, and creativity for a cause. Or, to follow Carpentier’s (2007a: 114) model of (social change-oriented) media organizations, one can distinguish membership- or non-membership organizations that offer modal positions of access and interaction; examples of the former being community Wi-Fi projects, and of the latter blogging and social network sites. In addition, his model includes membership- or non-membership organizations that facilitate access, interaction, and participation. Such membership-based organization would be Alternative Radios, non-membership organizations Community Radios.

Participation as Policy Position

Participation at the structural level has often been associated with visions of ‘e-governance’ and ‘e-citizenship’; that is, how new technologies can assist, enhance, and support the interaction between the public sector and an individual citizen. The concrete ideas and experiments have ranged from accountable, transparent, and easy access to public information, to voting via the internet. For instance, Finland has had specific government strategies for the ‘Information Society’ since 1995, including

considerations for e-commerce and Finnish competitiveness, as well as concerns for participatory possibilities of ‘specific groups of end-users’ such as elderly and disabled people. An illustration of the meso-level issue of participation would be the question of universal access to the Internet. The latest Finnish Information Society strategy includes a goal for universal broadband access, at equitable speeds throughout Finland, and the Ministry of Communication decided in October 2009 that this must be realised, at a speed of 1Mbps, by the summer of 2010. The ultimate aim of the decision has been related to regional disparities in access – and thus, in the possibilities to participate.

At the same time, it must be noted that media policy initiatives and practices in Europe and elsewhere seem to have no consensus on how to tackle ‘new media’ and the Web 2.0 era. National and transnational approaches differ greatly (e.g., Aslama & Syvertsen, 2006; Moe, 2008). For example, regarding the policies on public service media organizations taking on new media platforms, there is an entire array of policy solutions, from restricting public broadcasters from entering some area of new media, to requiring them to provide content and services on multiple platforms (there is, however, very little concrete support for such activities, see Aslama & Syvertsen, 2006). Such macro-level policy solutions can be seen to have direct relationships to the diversity of opportunities for participation at the meso and micro-levels.

In addition, there's yet another aspect which is becoming increasingly crucial, in terms of content and access to communication in the Web 2.0 era. People's awareness of, and participation in, media policy-making could be seen as a crucial aspect if participation is understood in a broader sense. The so called media reform or media justice movements are not very common to Europe but are prominent in North America, in the U.K., and are becoming increasingly global. These civic organizations are specifically concerned with diversity, whether in reference to ownership concentration and alternative media outlets, diverse voices presented in media output, access to media technologies and content, net neutrality, and so on. (e.g., Hackett & Carroll, 2006; McChesney, 2007). And the importance of public participation in media policy deliberations, and, also in media governance, is also becoming a topic of

European-wide discussion. This is evident in a recent report from the Council of Europe (Scifo, 2009): In terms of internal organisational governance, recommendations urge media organisations on every platform to redefine their relations with their audiences and open their processes to real conversation in order to build and maintain a constant dialogue with clear and accountable procedures (ibid: 21).

Assessment: Degrees of Diversity and Participation

It is clear that the intense interest in media-related and induced participation is not a fad but a rainbow of interrelated phenomena that have some very real and practical socio-cultural consequences. A vision of diversity of participation is provided by Jessica Clark and Pat Aufderheide (2008) in their report on Public Media 2.0. They note that ‘the people formerly known as the audience now are at the center of media’ and present a model of new ‘public media’ as ‘people-centric.’ With this idea the authors suggest that people deal with their needs, identities, affinities, services, emergencies, work, creativity, communities, issues, education, as well as organizations they belong to and products they consume more through media, but also more directly than before: ‘Connectivity, participation, and digital media creation will only increase’ (ibid., 4).

What does this mean for media diversity? The classic claim would be that the proliferation of content, and now participatory opportunities, will by default take care of the diversity dilemma. Yet, empirical evidence has begun to suggest that the online world, in a mainstream sense, is quite concentrated. As Matthew Hindman (2009) has convincingly argued, the diversity of sources on the Internet is, in some sense, an illusion. As he notes, speaking does not mean that one is being heard: For instance, the political bloggers with a significant following form only a small, elite group, very much resembling political commentators in the old media (and to some extent, the two groups overlap). Hindman’s systematic analyses prove that the popularity of web sites is very concentrated around

certain sites (and, for example, only some three percent of web traffic goes to news and media sites; *ibid*: 60-61), the search engines guide one's choices of sites, and so on. Similarly, to paraphrase Hindman (*ibid.*), to some extent the infrastructure of participation limits the kinds of participation that will take place. Also, the diversity of participatory practices available is no automatic guarantee for (political, engaged, democratic) action and experiences. As a recent report on digital natives states: The natives have a potential impact as agents of political and social change, but they should be fostered in their development as responsible and active citizens rather than on their digital exploits or technologised interests (Shah & Abraham, 2009).

Further, if the traditional diversity principle is to be taken seriously, then it would encompass providing different kinds of audience segments different ways of participation. While phenomena like Facebook could be said to have become mainstream, the micro-level practices are not uniform: Not everyone wishes to engage in microblogging, or choose the ending for an interactive drama. For instance, sending and receiving emails has maintained its popularity as a way of communicating on the Internet, despite the rise of instant messaging and social networking sites (Madden & Fox, 2006). There is relatively little research, as of yet, beyond some aggregate statistical data, on the everyday uses and meanings of Web 2.0. Still, studies of fans of multimedia products such as reality television, and online fandom in general, suggest that even if the platform is offered there is a scale of intensity of participation. Multimedia products may evoke increased participation in several platforms, from TV programme viewing to chatroom gossip – but not necessarily. Some research has uncovered what has been termed an online 'participation divide' across demographic groups (Hargittai & Walejko, 2008).

For example, a study on viewers who took part in an online activity involving a television series (Costello & Moore, 2007) revealed a variety of approaches that audience members took regarding participation. In the lower end of the 'activity continuum' were audience members who merely wanted to share their experiences with other fans/viewers. Participation for them thus meant a more informed and pleasurable position as a consumer of a media product. However, they were not interested in

influencing a program or the entertainment industry in general. They were indifferent about influencing the direction of a program or the entertainment industry. On the other end of the scale were those who wanted inform the production process and create their own, ‘improved’ versions of their favourite program.

Also, as was noted earlier, it seems that participation is created at the meso-level more readily for entertainment purposes, but that innovation of true participatory journalism by traditional media institutions is still limited.^{vii} Journalists share their blogs and offer options for commenting or sharing their stories. But, for example, a survey of citizen-based media in the U.S.^{viii} verified that citizens are mostly used as sources rather than given opportunities to really produce journalistic content. Also, the possibilities for participation may not directly translate into the sense of engagement. A recent Finnish survey (Karppinen & Jääsaari, 2007) produced the clear result that respondents felt that the least likely parties to have any influence on media content were audiences.

Furthermore, it is not clear that the audience position of the information-seeking citizen would be a thing of the past. To continue with the example of Finland, numerous surveys and other research on audiences suggest some discontent – but do not indicate any major disengagement from – politics since the beginning of the 1990s. Studies, rather, imply that the citizen-viewer still exists, wanting to be addressed (among other identities and needs) as a citizen and remaining concerned, for example, with the diversity of television programming (Aslama, 2008; Jääsaari, 2004). The dilemma seems to be a more complex disconnect between the media, the decision-making elites of official politics and the citizens (discussion, e.g., in Nieminen et al. 2005, 6–12).

Regarding the macro-level understanding of diversity, it is clear that the issues of the diversity of participation are in some ways analogous to the questions of diversity of sources and content. Abundance does not automatically translate to diversity. Diversity must not be one-dimensional (i.e., not understood as amount of possibilities) but two-dimensional (i.e., multitude of possibilities that differ from one another). As noted before, there is plenty of theorising – and some empirical analyses,

especially around social movements – suggesting that Internet-based communication creates alternative platforms, those platforms support political participation, and they also often connect the local and the global around a particular issue (e.g., Aslama & Ericksson 2009). While all of this may be true, there are the challenges of online communication, ranging from digital divide and net neutrality questions, to privacy issues and ‘harmful content’ (infamous examples being child pornography and hate speech). In addition, little is known about participatory practices of those on the other side of the digital divide; whether locally, nationally or globally. The question is not only about people whose lives are to various degrees affected by new media ecosystems but who, are ‘left out’; it is also about recognising alternative ways to participate, and understanding their potential significance (see Dailey, et al., 2010). Consequently, the question of ‘Diversity 2.0’, in the era of Web 2.0, requires careful re-thinking, since the developments in the media landscape are rapid and sometimes contradictory.

Conclusion: Making Policies for Diversity of Participation

The diversity dilemma, in real life and in policy terms, cannot be isolated to concern merely sources, content or ‘reception’. And it could be argued that the Web 2.0 era really blurs the boundaries of these three categories; thus, a paramount task is to agree on new concepts and terminology such as diversity of participation. Secondly, in the macro and meso-levels, the diverse forms of positions of participation have to be coupled with support for different practices of participation. Thirdly, the question is how to assess the positions and related concrete practices in terms of citizenship. The importance of that kind of assessment has been recognised, for instance, in the recommendations of a recent report by the Council of Europe on measuring media diversity (CoE 2008: 13): ‘It would...be useful to explore the use and creation of media by the audience, which is changing with the new technologies, and examine if it is nowadays enough to offer what has traditionally been considered important information for a

democracy.’

All of these points highlight the extent to which the kind of empirical diversity assessments regularly conducted (and relied upon) by researchers and policymakers need to move beyond the assessment of institutional structures and outputs, and to better integrate ‘de-institutionalized’ sources of ideas and viewpoints into the calculus. In many ways this is a long-standing refrain, as it is an extension of previous calls for diversity assessment to examine not only content production and distribution, but consumption as well (see, e.g., Napoli, 1997; Webster, 2007). Now, however, it is not just audiences’ consumption of content that needs to be taken into consideration, but their production of content as well.

We have seen some progress in this direction in some of the ongoing efforts to assess the state of linguistic diversity in the online realm (for a review, see Napoli, 2008). Linguistic diversity refers to the extent to which different languages are being spoken online. However, as this article has hopefully made clear, diversity of participation has many more dimensions than simply linguistic.

This discussion also has highlighted to the extent to which diversity assessments directed at traditional institutional communicators (certainly, such work should not be abandoned), need to go beyond traditional criteria such as sources and content and also consider the extent to which such outlets offer the array of structures and platforms that facilitate opportunities for greater citizen participation.

While the creative innovations and practices of the micro and meso-level may evolve and feed one another, it is the task of the macro-level power to assess and support relevant developments. If the main aim of diversity policies still is, as it has been, to guarantee a diverse media system to support a functioning democracy, then the obvious participatory position to be supported would be that of the citizen. And if participation is understood not as a buzzword, but as a true opportunity for democracy, then the macro-level power should indeed focus on the diversity of aspects that foster contemporary citizenship. The paramount strategic policy task, then, would seem to be deciding what participatory

positions are being marginalised and should be supported, and how those positions translate into concrete participatory opportunities.

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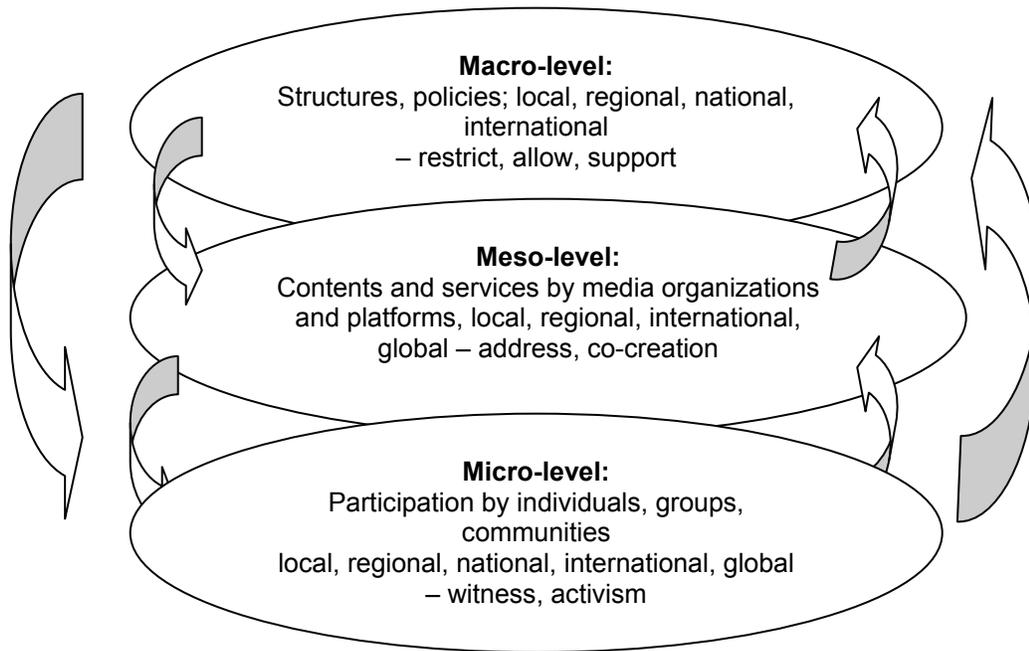
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Figure 1: Participation and Circuits of Power – A Conceptual-Analytical Framework



ⁱ The term ‘Web 2.0’ is vague and can be contested (Madden & Fox 2006), but it is making its way from everyday use to academic analyses (Aslama & Ericksson 2009). Here, it is used broadly to refer to refer to the participatory, user-generated applications and practices online.

ⁱⁱ E.g., <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm> (accessed 17 July 2010).

ⁱⁱⁱ E.g., http://www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/272/report_display.asp (accessed 17 July 2010).

^{iv} Conceptualisation by Li (2009): <http://canarytrap.net/2009/05/audiences-and-audienceship/> (accessed 17 July 2010).

^v See, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/16/movies/16mass.html?_r=5 (accessed 18 July 2010).

^{vi} See, <http://canarytrap.net/2009/06/collaborative-transational-audienceships-viikiinet/> (accessed 18 July 2010).

^{vii} There are, and have been, several experiments, such as the BBC World’s citizen journalism project: http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/haveyoursay/2009/04/090406_yourstoryexplain.shtml (accessed 18 July 2010).

^{viii} See, http://www.stateofthedia.org/2009/narrative_special_citizenbasedmedia.php?media=12&cat=0 (accessed 18 July 2010).