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## Miscellaneous

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## Ibermedia as a collaborative space for film co-production policy? A stakeholder analysis on decision-making processes

### Abstract

**Ibermedia is the most important institution in the Ibero-American audiovisual space. It was created as a result of a bottom-up project that aims to include stakeholders in policy-making. The paper investigates the participation of stakeholders in the Ibermedia decision-making in order to assess if it maintains its original cooperative character. We applied the salience theory to identify who and why is being taken into account by the organization. Our findings are based on a literature review, qualitative document analysis, and semi-structured expert interviews. The findings reveal that Ibermedia maintains its bottom-up proposal and the stakeholders can impact its policies. The interactions are marked by informal relations and affection. The stakeholders consider Ibermedia vital and are generally satisfied with its functioning, besides its low budget. The paper provides an overview of the internal functioning of Ibermedia, revealing the level of interaction with the stakeholders and contributes to add light in the lack of transparency.**

### Keywords

**Ibermedia, stakeholders, audiovisual policy, co-production, salience.**

## 1. Introduction

Different countries, institutions and stakeholders have aimed to create an Ibero-American space for policy development (Arenal, 2005). The construction of a shared cultural space, amongst other things through audiovisual policies, has been part of this ambition. The creation of an Ibero-American audiovisual market has been a long-lasting project that uses supranational mechanisms to integrate the region's cinematography (Dominguez, 2008; Getino, 2007). Ibermedia is such a mechanism, if not the most important one.

Ibermedia was created in 1997 as a development program. Its objective is to strengthen the Ibero-American audiovisual market by funding audiovisual projects. The latter are mainly co-productions. Ibermedia has an intergovernmental structure. Today, the organization has 23 Member States: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Italy, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Portugal, Puerto Rico, Spain, Uruguay, and Venezuela. Ibermedia is thus not a stand-alone initiative. It has an institutional link with the General Ibero-American Secretariat (SEGIB) and with the Conference of Ibero-American Cinematographic Activities (CAACI).

Although it is an intergovernmentalist organization, Ibermedia was created as a result of a bottom-up project and has from the outset aspired to include stakeholders such as producers, movie directors and scholars in policy-making. However, the formal role of these stakeholders and their power to shape policies is not clear. While previous research mainly focused on the finances of Ibermedia (González, 2020; Moguillansky, 2019), observations relating to its limited budget and related weaknesses only tell one part of the Ibermedia story. Hardly any attention has been devoted to the actual processes (and the inclusion of stakeholders in those processes) that drive the decision-making structures of what is essentially a supranational body. Such a research approach would be relevant, because a lack of transparency in the processes of Ibero-American collaboration is one of the most prominent points of criticism of the organization (Falicov, 2007; Villazana, 2009), notwithstanding the organization's rhetorical commitment to collaboration and stakeholder engagement. Based on the stakeholder theory developed by Freeman (1984; Freeman, Harrison, Hicks, Parmar, & de Colle, 2010), we will scrutinize stakeholder salience on the basis of their urgency, legitimacy and power (Mitchell, Agle & Wood, 1997). In so doing, we will provide an overview of the internal functioning of Ibermedia, revealing the level of interaction with its stakeholders and the disparity of influencing power amongst them.

Hence, this article's core research question is whether and how Ibermedia maintains its original bottom-up cooperational character in strategic decisions-taking. Is there any meaningful stakeholder saliency? Are some stakeholders more equal than others? Or is Ibermedia a prototype of the traditional supranational, member state-led organization? Our findings are based on a literature review, qualitative document analysis, and semi-structured expert interviews (for more on methodology, cf. *infra*).

The article is structured as follows. Firstly, we elaborate on stakeholder theory and stakeholder saliency. Secondly, we outline the methodology. Thirdly, the findings are presented, identifying Ibermedia's interactions with its stakeholders and their salience disparity. After a discussion section, we outline our conclusions. Our main findings are threefold. While the impact of Ibermedia on co-productions might be limited, the stakeholders nevertheless consider it to be vital. Moreover, they regard Ibermedia as an organization that is indeed organized on the basis of multiple stakeholder input and hardly at all by the interests of the nation states. Overall, the stakeholders are happy with what the organization is doing. These findings definitely widen but also change the current perception of Ibermedia as expressed in the scientific research to date.

## **2. Ibermedia as a supranational but also stakeholder-based organization**

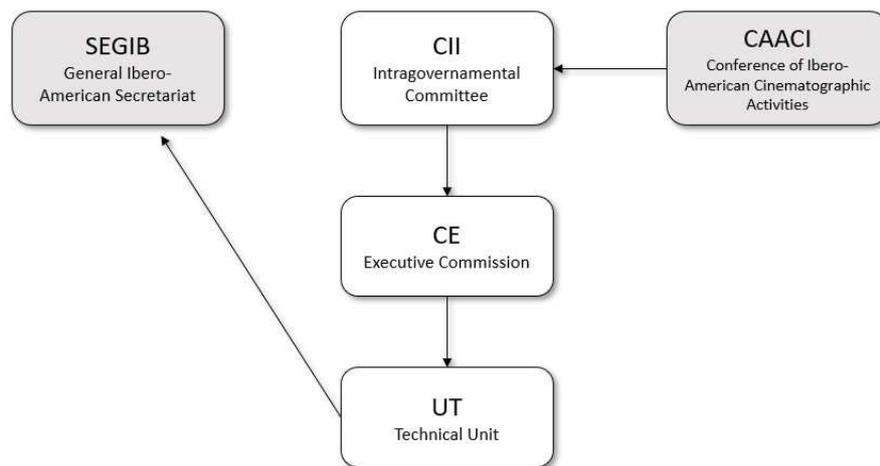
The idea of an Ibero-American audiovisual space was debated for many years in festivals and conferences, with the aim of (re)uniting diverse stakeholders engaged in integrating Ibero-American cinema. This bottom-up process resulted in the creation of the Conference of Ibero-American Cinematographic Activities (CAACI) in 1989. Ibermedia represented a step forward in the institutionalization of this space, making possible the funding envisaged by CAACI (Camacho, 2016).

The creation of Ibermedia was approved in the Fifth Ibero-American Summit of Heads of State and Government in 1995 and officially created two years later. These summits are organized by SEGIB, which is part of Spain's policy to strengthen relationships with Latin American countries based on the principles of democracy and development (Arenal, 2005). SEGIB supports cooperation in education, culture and social cohesion, leading to a diverse set of programs, including Ibermedia. In Ibermedia's case, this relationship was pointed to by some as a neo-colonialist strategy to benefit Spain, by gaining prestige in cultural cooperation and taking advantage of cheaper labor in film production (Falicov, 2007; Villazana, 2008).

The institutional operation of Ibermedia is in the hands of a Technical Unit (UT), located in Madrid. This unit operationalizes the decisions made by the Executive Commission (CE),

composed of six representatives elected by the Ibermedia Intragovernmental Committee (CII), which is the supreme authority, where all member states are represented by a cinematographic authority. To join the program, each country must make an annual contribution to the fund that supports Ibermedia's initiatives. The contribution varies, but all member states have the same voting power. The Intragovernmental Committee and the Executive Commission operate under the auspices of the Conference of Ibero-American Cinematographic Activities, while the General Ibero-American Secretariat provides the necessary institutional and political support.

**Figure 1:** The structure of the Ibermedia Program.



Source: Own elaboration.

As a supranational organization, Ibermedia is situated at the centre of this complex set of institutions, ideas and stakeholders (González, 2020). However, the level of influence that the stakeholders have in Ibermedia's decision-making process remains unclear.

### 3. Stakeholder engagement in policy-making

The role of agents in policy development is well researched (Béland, 2009; McCann & Ward, 2012; Stone, 2012). The same applies with regard to scholarly work on the importance of engagement with stakeholders to achieve better policy results (Cashore, Bernstein, Humphreys, Visseren-Hamakers & Rietig, 2019). More specifically in media policy research, a focus on stakeholders has been relevant in studying how policy is actually made and adjusted (Donders & Raats, 2012; van den Bulck, 2012; Lund, 2016; Steemers, 2017).

A stakeholder is defined as "any group or individual that can affect or be affected by the realization of an organization's purpose" (Freeman, 1984, p.53). This broad definition has been the subject of debate, mainly in terms of who should be included in stakeholder analysis. Economic approaches advocate that the shareholders alone should be listened to, while perspectives based on moral and social responsibility adopt broader approaches that include all potential agents (Friedman & Miles, 2006). Although the theory originates from a business-oriented academic field (Freeman, 1984), it has also been applied in various other fields (Gregory, Atkins, Midgley & Hodgson, 2020; Laplume, Sonpar & Litz, 2008), reinforcing its relevance for investigating the inclusion of stakeholders in the value creation and management of different interests (Freeman *et al.*, 2010).

Engagement with stakeholders can be beneficial to policy development when it occurs transparently and constructively. The management of stakeholders is a crucial tool to achieve better results (Pedrini & Ferri, 2019). This applies equally to public and non-profit

organizations, which are better able to accomplish their purpose when they analyze their stakeholders' demands (Bryson, 2004).

Although it has been shown that stakeholders can influence decisions on the basis of their interests, ideas and network (Stone, 2012), their impact on international cultural policies is still under investigated. Stakeholder analysis can clarify their involvement in the policy process. This paper engages in such a stakeholder analysis, making possible the identification of the organization's internal dynamics, which is crucial to understanding who is relevant and what they want, and for clarifying their role in policy development. Its main aim is to analyze the role of stakeholders in Ibermedia and how they affect policy (or not). In so doing, we adopt a stakeholder salience approach (Mitchell *et al.*, 1997).

#### **4. Are all equal? The stakeholder salience framework**

The stakeholder salience framework posits that the most salient stakeholders will have more possibilities to present a claim and consequently will have more influence in shaping policy-making. This framework can guide institutional decisions when dealing with diverse stakeholders.

Engagement with multiple stakeholders offers the potential to strengthen participation and achieve fair decisions by taking account of multiple interests. In practice, however, it does not always assure democratic participation or the increase of transparency in policy-making (Donders, van den Bulck, & Raats, 2019). The stakeholders can be/often are reduced to the status of observers (Hintz & Milan, 2009). In terms of institutional interactions, their input can sometimes overlap with existing memberships and discussions (Raymond & Denardis, 2015) and be impacted by limited resources (Sanderink & Nasiritousi, 2020).

The theory of stakeholder salience makes possible the analysis of stakeholder engagement. The concept was developed by Mitchell *et al.* (1997) and focuses on the institution's perspective of the various stakeholder claims, explaining who and what is being prioritized. 'Salience' helps to understand who is motivating the institution's decisions and who is not being listened to and why. It is a concept widely investigated and is still useful to acquire a more equal and pluralistic view of an organization's role (Wood, Mitchell, Agle & Bryan, 2021). In particular, salience is an essential element when analyzing global projects with a complex set of actors (Aaltonen, Jaakko & Tuomas, 2008), and its use can be recommended in different contexts (Mitchell, Lee & Agle, 2017). The stakeholders are identified and classified according to one or more of the following attributes: power, legitimacy and urgency (Mitchell *et al.*, 1997).

##### **4.1. Power**

The increase of stakeholder participation does not assure an equal position of power for all stakeholders to influence policy-making (Freedman, 2006). Thus, stakeholders can all take part in the policy process but the more powerful ones will have a greater influence (Cammaerts, 2011; Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2006). Consequently, power is usually indicated as the most essential attribute in salience (de Bussy & Kelly, 2010; Parent & Deephouse, 2007).

To operationalize power, Mitchell *et al.* (1997) build on Etzioni's (1964) theory and conceptualize it as a capacity to achieve the desired outcomes by influencing other actors in a relationship to act in accordance with the power-holder's goals. It is defined as having a transitory character, distinguished by three types: coercive, when force or violence is applied; utilitarian, when material or financial resources are used to influence results; or normative, when based on the use of symbolic resources.

Since Ibermedia is a supranational organization, based on voluntary membership and with a non-profit character, the concepts of coercive and utilitarian power are not appropriate to investigate its internal dynamics. Consequently, we drew instead on Barnett and Duvall's (2005) proposal of four types of power. These types are based on two crucial

dimensions of power: namely, the kinds of social relations through which power works (if it is present among specific actors) and the specificity of social relations through which effects are produced (which can be either direct or diffuse).

The first type is *compulsory power*. This is related to direct control in instances where there is a conflict of interests, and one actor has the power to influence another actor to act in accordance with the former's interests. It encompasses material, symbolic and normative power. As such, this definition is aligned with the proposals of Mitchell *et al.* (1997), but we do not consider it to be a relevant type of power in the Ibermedia case, due to Ibermedia's specific institutional characteristics.

The second type is *structural power*. This refers to the impact of direct, internal and constitutive structural relationships, in which one actor exists in relation to another. The power of these actors is also related but not necessarily in an equal manner. The social structure affects their interests and their social capacities either to dominate or to resist. In other words, it relates to the production and reproduction of internal relationships. Consequently, this type deals with domination and subordination dynamics, which are not the core of the Ibermedia model.

This focus on the role of the social production of actors in shaping their self-understanding and interests is also present in *productive power*. This type relates to the diffuse power of a general nature that is present in social relations, which goes beyond mere structure and takes account of networks, systems of knowledge and the wider discourse in which ideas are developed and have an impact on possible actions. It corresponds with Foucault's perception of power at the micro-level of social relations and how it affects their subjectivities. This type therefore allows the assessment of stakeholder interactions via discourses and informal relationships.

The last type is *institutional power*. This is defined as a form of indirect control established in diffuse relationships, where one actor can only affect others through institutional agreements. It deals with the formal and informal institutions that set the agenda, which implies that it also reflects on the decisions that are not made, thereby raising awareness of media policy silences (Freedman, 2010). This type of power is at the core of Ibermedia's relationships, because of its institutional link with other Ibero-American institutions, such as CACCI and SEGIB, which theoretically play a key role in guiding its actions. Thus, for our analysis, we will concentrate on *institutional* and *productive* power.

#### 4.2. Legitimacy

Legitimacy is formed by a shared social perception, defined and negotiated at different levels. The literature on legitimacy agrees that it is shaped by cultural beliefs, norms and values in a collective process that requires a consensus (Johnson, Dowd & Ridgeway, 2006). Consequently, stakeholder legitimization takes place at the institutional level, but is also affected by social recognition. In particular, the social recognition of a stakeholder can influence the institution's decision to interact with that stakeholder in order to increase its own legitimacy (Prince, 2012; Radaelli, 2000).

In their salience framework, Mitchell *et al.* (1997) build on Suchman's (1995) perception that legitimacy is evaluative, cognitive and socially constructed, and can be identified as a perception that the institution is acting in an adequate, desirable and appropriate manner. However, this approach is related to the organization's legitimacy and not to the stakeholder's legitimacy towards the organization (Barakat, Freitas, Boaventura & MacLennan, 2016).

Considering stakeholder legitimacy from an institutional perspective, Phillips (2003) argues that this legitimacy cannot be separated from power in the salience assessment. As a result, he advocates that institutions should only have a moral responsibility towards their legitimate stakeholders, which assumes that the non-legitimate ones are not to be considered as stakeholders at all. Following this line, Neville, Bell and Whitwell (2011) advocate that the

moral legitimacy of the claim is the only factor that should be considered. However, we argue that the claim's legitimacy is not necessarily the most important aspect to influence its salience. Even if all the claims are legitimate, Ibermedia will still need to decide where to allocate resources and what claims to listen to. At this point, the legitimacy of the stakeholder also plays a role.

In order to recognize and reconcile the different perspectives towards legitimacy, we have adopted Santana's (2012) concept, which identifies three aspects of legitimacy: *entity*, *claim* and *behavior*. The legitimacy of the stakeholder as an *entity* is related to their social recognition: how society and the institution perceive them. The legitimacy of the *claim* is based on an assessment of whether or not the claim is valid and whether or not it is related to Ibermedia's proper role. The third aspect is *behavior*, which refers to the way the stakeholders act to support their claim. For example, do they present a formal recommendation or simply mention a topic in informal conversation? The legitimacy of the claim and stakeholder behavior are more flexible over time and will impact on the legitimacy as an entity. The institution will recognize as 'more legitimate' those stakeholders who combine all three aspects.

### 4.3. Urgency

The final attribute is urgency, which adds a dynamic to the proposed framework. Urgency has a temporal perspective and relates to the way in which the importance of a claim may result in immediate action being taken. Although Neville *et al.* (2011) argue that urgency should not be considered as an element of salience, other research points to urgency as the strongest of the three attributes: Agle, Mitchell and Sonnenfeld (1999) and Wood *et al.* (2021) all underline its importance in the framework. As far as legitimacy it concerned, urgency can either refer to the stakeholder or to the claim that the stakeholder makes. We agree with Eesley and Lenox (2006) and consider that the urgency of the claim matters more than the urgency of stakeholder, since, in our opinion, it is less appropriate to attribute urgency to a person than to an action.

This urgency attribute is related to the relevance of exogenous factors in policy settings (Heikkila & Gerlak, 2013). The alignment of factors that give an impulse to policy change is known as a 'policy window'. The concept was developed by Kingdon (2014) and proposes that when three key elements are aligned, a policy window opens and a policy action is more likely to happen. The first element is the *problem*: what is perceived as the problem that needs to be solved? If different stakeholders are making the same claim, it is more likely that the claim will be perceived as a problem. The second element is *policy*, which is related to the possible solutions proposed. If the claim can be addressed by ongoing action or is related to planned forthcoming actions, it has a better chance of being heard (Eesley & Lenox, 2006). The third element is *politics*, which is related to a contextual change in the macro-level, such as administration or political change.

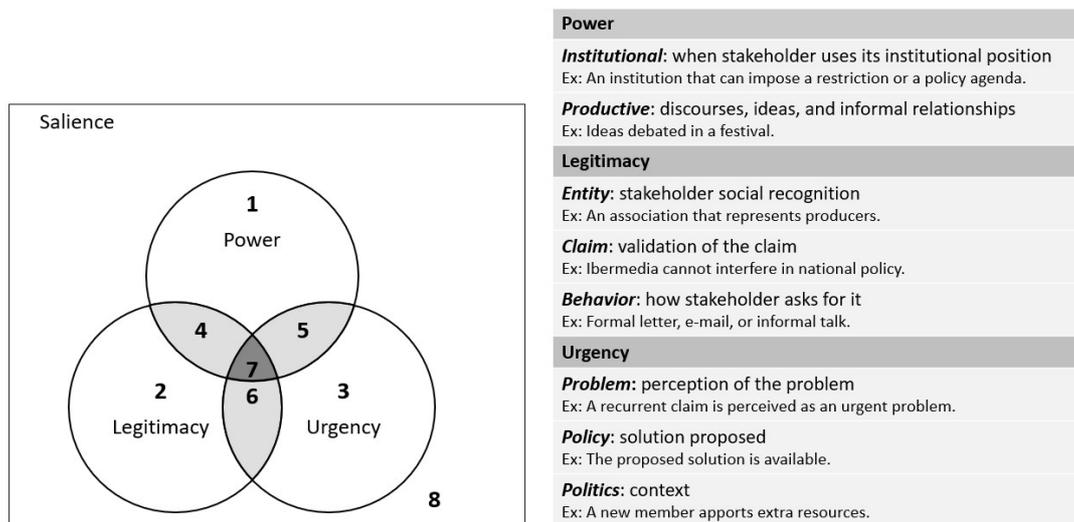
An open policy window adds urgency in terms of impacting an institution's decisions. Consequently, we will operationalize urgency based on this concept as a relevant tool to identify what leads to change in media policy (Herzog & Karppinen, 2014).

### 4.4. Salience

The combination of the three attributes of power, legitimacy and urgency allows us to assess a stakeholder's salience in an institution's perception. The more attributes a stakeholder possesses, the more likely that the stakeholder will be listened to by the institution. People and organizations that have no attributes are not considered as being stakeholders, thereby limiting the broader definition of the concept proposed by Freeman (1984) and allowing its operationalization. This framework results in the identification of eight classes, as presented in Figure 2.

The stakeholders' positions in the framework map are dynamic, since they can acquire or lose attributes over time. In addition to its transitory character, the map also provides a guide to understanding how institutions perceive and interact with stakeholders in practice, beyond the discourse of bottom-up cooperation. This is particularly relevant when investigating an intergovernmental organization based on a cooperative discourse, where it is expected that the stakeholders will have a predominant role and an equal voice.

**Figure 2:** The salience framework, adapted and updated from Mitchell *et al.* (1997).



Source: Own elaboration.

This framework is key in our analysis of the expert interviews that we conducted in relation to the functioning of Ibermedia. This will be developed further in the framework below.

## 5. Methodology

To identify the stakeholders and the decision-making processes of Ibermedia, we first engaged in a literature review. Further, a qualitative document analysis (Karppinen & Moe, 2011) was carried out. We analyzed 18 official policy documents, mainly looking for factual information relating to the creation of the Ibermedia program and its agreement updates. We also examined the SEGIB Operational Manual and its reports published between 1997 and 2020, totaling 719 pages. These documents are publicly available in Spanish. The insights from the literature and the findings from the document analysis were largely used in the first (previous) section.

The actual stakeholder analysis, the findings of which are presented in the section below, is based on expert interviews. This is a particularly suitable method to access non-codified knowledge of policy-making (Herzog & Ali, 2015). The selection of experts covers various geographic locations, including 16 member countries of Ibermedia with different sizes, different levels of audiovisual development and different interests, as well as different types of actors, such as producers, directors, scholars, associations and institutional representatives. All the stakeholders we interviewed were invited to recommend other stakeholders, creating a snowball effect. Additional stakeholders were selected randomly from the database of films funded by Ibermedia. This strategy aimed to avoid the representation of just one group by introducing an element of randomness. The sample reunites Ibero-American audiovisual stakeholders that are part of a broader audiovisual and supranational space, which can also be part of other networks (Padovani & Pavan, 2011) or coalitions (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1999). However, the network established among them is out of the scope of this paper.

**Figure 3:** Overview of the stakeholders interviewed.

Role	Stakeholder Code
Producer / Director (n=13)	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17
Institutional (n=6)	1, 10, 11, 16, 19, 21,22
Researcher (n=2)	18, 20
<b>Ntotal = 22</b>	

Source: Own elaboration.

Twenty-two semi-structured expert interviews (Herzog & Ali, 2015) were conducted in Portuguese and Spanish between January and March 2021. We anonymized the interviewees to encourage openness. Some interviewees also requested this. Figure 3 shows an overview of the participants. The minutes were translated into English and analyzed through a qualitative document analysis, based on the salience framework proposed in the theoretical part of this paper (cf. *supra*) (Puppis, 2019). In addition to this deductive analysis, we also engaged in an inductive analysis of the data. We further carried out a thematic analysis (Herzog *et al.*, 2019) to identify the themes that emerged recurrently outside the salience framework that forms the core of this article. In that way, we hoped to ensure the inclusion of relevant findings that have perhaps not yet been considered in previous stakeholder research.

## 6. Stakeholder salience in Ibermedia

The findings will be presented in accordance with the attributes of the salience framework. A fourth and a fifth category were added inductively to discuss the human factor and the general positive appreciation of stakeholder involvement in Ibermedia –something that is not often mentioned in the literature. These additional aspects appear to be particularly relevant in the Ibermedia context and emerged from our thematic analysis.

### 6.1. Power

Institutional power is strongly in evidence. Even Ibermedia recognizes that institutions are more salient (Institutional, resp. 22). This power manifests itself in two main ways. First, in the formal link that Ibermedia has with CAACI and SEGIB. CAACI is responsible for proposing policy and for a long time Ibermedia was treated as just one of its many activities, with no clear distinction of their interests (Institutional, resp. 21, 22). In 2016, SEGIB published an Operational Manual (SEGIB, 2016) that enforces a more precise separation between CAACI and Ibermedia, consequently reinforcing Ibermedia's link with SEGIB as an institutional umbrella that guides procedures. Although CAACI remains in charge of the policy-making and has a predominant role in decision-making, Ibermedia needs to follow SEGIB guidelines when operationalizing these policies and must report to them.

At this level, money also affects power. In the beginning, Spain was the principal investor and consequently had a more prominent role in the decision-making (Institutional, resp. 21). However, this scenario has changed: due to an economic crisis, Spain decreased its investment in Ibermedia and has no longer been the predominant investor since 2013 (Ibermedia, 2020). This change, combined with adopting a new formula to allocate the available resources between the different projects after 2016, positively impacts the power disputes amongst the members and reinforces the collaborative tone in meetings (Institutional, resp. 21, 22).

In addition to the connection with top-down institutions, the second way that institutional power is evidenced is in the relationships that Ibermedia establishes with bottom-up institutions, such as the Ibero-American Producers Association (FIPCA) and Association of Services for Audiovisual Producers (EGEDA). It also has close contact with the international school of cinema and television in Cuba (EICTV) and several cinema festivals.

FIPCA works closely with Ibermedia: “Our institutional relationship is very good, very fluid; we talk at least twice a month” (Institutional, resp. 1). EGEDA also has a good relationship with Ibermedia and FIPCA, and they organize activities together, such as Platino Industria, a media market event “at which Ibermedia will have a stand in an event of this kind for the first time” (Institutional, resp. 10). In other words, there are strong connections between all these bodies:

If EGEDA has a claim, our closest contact is FIPCA, because we, like FIPCA, also represent the producers. So, our first point of contact is usually FIPCA. FIPCA will then contact CAACI or Ibermedia. But since our relationship with Ibermedia is also good, sometimes we go directly to them, but we keep FIPCA informed, I have a weekly meeting with FIPCA. FIPCA is on the administrative council of EGEDA and EGEDA has a seat in the FIPCA committee (Institutional, resp. 10).

Considering its specific relevance to their profession, the producers tend to direct their claims towards FIPCA (Institutional, resp. 10, 16; Producer, resp. 9, 14): “We prefer it that way: having one consensual claim from all Ibero-American countries is better than all the countries making separate claims” (Producer, resp. 9). FIPCA can then serve as a filter:

Everybody thinks that Ibermedia has lots of resources. Every time the producers and organizations have a new initiative; they think: let’s ask Ibermedia for support. But I, as the producers’ representative, have to limit their requests, because at FIPCA we know that Ibermedia has a limited budget that is being reduced still further by shrinking national contributions, so that its resources are not so big (Institutional, resp. 1).

This same close relationship was not evidenced at the CAACI level, where the Ibermedia policies are developed. However, this has changed for the better in recent years: “The relationship between CAACI and the sector, represented by FIPCA, was almost non-existent, but with the appointment of the new CAACI president, Pierre-Emile Vandoorne, the connection was finally made” (Institutional, resp. 10). This collaboration was formalized at the Berlinale in 2020, when FIPCA and CAACI signed a mutual cooperation agreement to strengthen their partnership, reinforcing the bottom-up connection.

Productive power encompasses the ideas debated in the field that could influence competing claims. These debates occur at cinema festivals and are mainly focused on technical aspects (Institutional, resp. 1, 21, 22; Producer, resp. 4, 9, 14): “The technical and artistic collaboration in the co-production was discussed at a roundtable [...] Ibermedia is becoming more flexible” (Producer, resp. 9). “Now they are accepting digital release, not just release in movie theatres, so that the program is constantly adapting to the sector” (Producer, resp. 4). In that sense: “There is an opening for improvement; they know how to evolve with the sector” (Producer, resp. 15). However, some stakeholders argue for a debate that goes beyond these technical aspects. For example, a common concern involves the digital transformation that is having a major impact on the sector and needs to be addressed, because “a fund for distribution is not everything; it [digital transformation] is a complex topic that needs debate” (Producer, resp. 7) but Ibermedia is not leading it (Producer, resp. 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14; Researcher, resp. 18). At the same time, the distribution of Ibero-American cinema remains a challenge (Producer, resp. 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 17; Researcher, resp. 18, 20). As a result, the lack of relevant studies and processes of reflection limits academic engagement (Researcher, resp. 18, 20). This is perceived as a weakness (Institutional, resp. 19; Producer, resp. 12, 14, 17; Researcher, resp. 18, 20) but one that could be addressed with more engagement: “We are close and call Ibermedia often to ask a lot of different things. But I was never invited as an expert to reflect on their role. That is something I miss: the creation of debates that would lead to studies” (Producer, resp. 14).

## 6.2. *Legitimacy*

The first aspect of legitimacy is entity. The main factor that affects Ibermedia's perception of a stakeholder's legitimacy is if the stakeholder is institutionalized or not. This also relates back to institutional power, but not simply to the power of the institutions closest to Ibermedia, such as SEGIB, CAACI and FIPCA:

I once participated in a meeting where producers suggested to Ibermedia the creation of a fund for animation. It was primarily the associations representing the interests of the animation sector who advocated this measure. But Ibermedia listened. A year later, support for animation was launched and that support scheme was clearly inspired by what had been discussed during that meeting (Producer, resp. 2).

Ibermedia also quickly accepted the claim made by women's associations to give extra points to projects with women in leading positions (Institutional, resp. 19). In other words, an association has institutional power and entity legitimacy, while claims made with no institutional support have less legitimacy, as was confirmed by Ibermedia (Institutional, resp. 22). This was also illustrated by a producer who argued that the unused funds of Bolivian movies that were not produced should be redirected to other Bolivian movies in post-production. This claim was presented without institutional support and was not listened to (Producer, resp. 5).

The second aspect is the legitimacy of the claim as it relates to the authority of Ibermedia to address the claim. As a Technical Unit, this authority could be used constrainingly. However, Ibermedia engages in listening and in consultation with other institutions to address stakeholder claims. For example, presenting the claims to CAACI (Institutional, resp. 1, 21, 22); providing active support to facilitate the participation of new members (Producer, resp. 2, 9, 12; Institutional, resp. 16); and solving the specific problems of supported projects (Producer, resp. 7, 8). These are all evidence of flexibility in legitimizing claims.

The third aspect, behavior, is marked by informal relationships that are mainly formed at events. "I know almost everyone in person. We meet at festivals and events, and established personal relationships" (Producer, resp. 4). In this way, communication happens "not only institutionally but also directly and personally" (Producer, resp. 12). For example: "When I met Elena at a festival, she recognized me and invited me to the table for discussion, but it was not an official discussion" (Producer, resp. 2). Although it is not official, the evidence suggests that this is a common way to present a claim. Some stakeholders even argue that, because of its importance, it should happen more often and with more room for debates (Producer, resp. 3, 5, 6, 14). During these moments, the contact starts in an informal, personal way, but can later evolve into formal propositions.

## 6.3. *Urgency*

This attribute is responsible for adding dynamism to the policy. When more stakeholders are making the same claim, it strengthens the credibility of the problem. Our findings evidence a significant lack of a clear claim from non-institutionalized stakeholders. Most of those interviewed did not present a specific claim to Ibermedia; they usually have a general perception of what should be improved, but rarely offer a straightforward solution. There is also a difference in the level of expectation among the stakeholders. Stakeholders in countries with poor audiovisual policies tend to demand more. They would like Ibermedia "to act as an ambassador for Ibero-American cinema, to help connect with other institutions and markets" (Producer, resp. 3). It could also help to solve national challenges, such as "informing the producers about the funding situation, because the national authorities are inefficient and do not contact the sector on these matters" (Producer, resp. 5). Similarly, Ibermedia could "lobby for national legislation" (Producer, resp. 9) or "help the national institutions to function again" (Producer, resp. 13), even though they are aware that Ibermedia's ability to intervene at the

national level is restricted. The stakeholders who have access to more funds and have a solid national audiovisual policy tend to demand less, conscious of Ibermedia's institutional and budgetary limitations (Institutional, resp. 1, 10; Producer, resp. 4, 8).

It is primarily associations that present claims. Because they represent a group of stakeholders, this also affects the perception of the problem. The recent changes in the funding, with the inclusion of support to TV series and the additional points given to projects with women in leading positions (Ibermedia, 2021), were a response to claims made by organizations representing several stakeholders. In this respect, an important factor is the availability of the solution (policy). The funding modification was a readily available solution, since it merely proposed an adaptation of the already existing program but did not affect the existing budget. Claims that require new action, such as support for distribution and promotion, may be constrained by the limited budget. As the budget is made up by national contributions, the "lack of interest from national authorities" (Institutional, resp. 16) impinges on the third aspect, politics. When "member states do not value Ibermedia enough, their economic investment is small, so that the possibilities of the program are reduced" (Institutional, resp. 10). This was repeatedly mentioned as the main problem that constrains Ibermedia's development (Institutional, resp. 1, 10, 16; Producer, resp. 8, 13), because "with the same mentality and more budget, it could do much more" (Institutional, resp. 10). Some producers explained that the limited budget had an impact on their engagement to Ibermedia, because the level of financial support it gives is not really significant in the total production budget, and sometimes the level bureaucracy involved means that it is not worth making the effort (Institutional, resp. 1, 16; Producer, resp. 2, 4, 6). Even so, everyone argues in favor of more budget.

#### **6.4. The human factor**

Some of our findings go beyond the framework used, because they focus more specifically on stakeholder relationships. A vital point mentioned by several respondents is the familiarity of the persons who are in charge of the Technical Unit, and who are seen as a reference point in the sector (Institutional, resp. 1, 10, 11, 16, 19; Producer, resp. 7, 8, 12): "They are the same people. Some of them I met at festivals, others not. But you already feel that they know you and that makes it more comfortable" (Producer, resp. 7). Although the application procedure is perceived as bureaucratic, technical support was always described as fast, accessible and efficient. When Ibermedia demonstrates a "particular interest in the projects" (Producer, resp. 4), they have a "good understanding of cinema production" (Producer, resp. 14) and are "generous" (Producer, resp. 12). This mutual affection creates an environment in which the stakeholder feels that Ibermedia is "sensitive to the needs of producers" (Producer, resp. 8).

The continuity of the same staff is consistently reported as an important point to "make things seem alive" (Institutional, resp. 16). This applies equally to the Technical and Executive Secretariat, under the leadership of Elena Vilardell, who has a crucial role in maintaining the stability of the Ibermedia program:

I, as an institutional representative, will eventually move on, but Elena does not move on. She was there before I came and she will be there when I leave [...]. Elena is neutral, knows everybody, has a lot of technical knowledge, is not subject to political change and it is not a political authority. She has freedom and therefore more influence (Institutional, resp. 21).

Elena was mentioned in all interviews and is recognized as the personification of the program, which helps to establish an affectionate and informal relations with Ibermedia. As such, she builds an atmosphere of openness with the stakeholders, who feel that they can present a claim when they need to.

## 6.5. Positivity

Together with a general sense of liking for Ibermedia, a general feeling of positivity was also perceived. Those interviewed have a very positive vision of the institution, but also a comprehensive view of its limitations and are unanimously in agreement that it should continue to exist and develop. The stakeholders reported no tensions between Latin American and European countries.

Ibermedia's role "is not just about funding, but also about discourse, its participation in events, and the attention that it can devote to a topic. It is a reference for all professionals" (Producer, resp. 12). Ibermedia is "a space for encounter" (Producer, resp. 3). The co-productions involve an "exchange of experience among producers and establish relationships that continue on to other projects" (Producer, resp. 3). It is not just an economic relationship (Producer, resp. 8); the ties it establishes are lasting (Producer, resp. 12), it promoted coproduction, even though Ibermedia might not select some projects, they continue being developed (Producer, resp. 14). In other words, the creation of networking and exchanges within the sector are reported by many as one of Ibermedia's main contributions (Producer, resp. 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17), as well as its impact on the institutionalization of Ibero-American audiovisual projects through its encouragement of producer engagement (Institutional, resp. 16; Producer, resp. 2, 3, 7, 9, 12). The positive evaluation of Ibermedia reduces the stakeholder's claims who perceive that the program is already good. As one respondent put it: "I never made a direct claim, but I feel that they are open. For me, the program works" (Producer, resp. 6).

## 7. People shaping policies

Ibermedia maintains its initial intention of being a bottom-up, stakeholder-based institution. The stakeholders confirmed its openness, and it is not simply the institutions formally linked to Ibermedia that are being listened to; many different associations representing many different stakeholders are also invited to the table. This is remarkable, since most research into multi-stakeholderism indicates a lack of equitable inclusion (Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2006; Donders *et al.*, 2019).

Stakeholder engagement mainly takes place in informal contexts (McCann & Ward, 2012), such as movie festivals, where the connections made by people and through people shape policy-making (Béland, 2009; Stone, 2012). FIPCA is a vital partner that helps to strengthen this connection with the stakeholders, because it readily listens to and reports on the producers' claims. Its members are also advocates for Ibermedia at the national level, pressuring national authorities to become part of the organization and support it financially. This confirms the importance of engaging with stakeholders to achieve better policy results (Cashore *et al.*, 2019; Pedrini & Ferri, 2019). The Ibermedia staff also play a role in connecting to the sector through their cordial and understanding approach, whilst also serving as a sectoral reference point. This demonstrates the impact that civil servants can have.

The stakeholders are generally very positive about their engagement towards Ibermedia and feel that they can impact decision-making. Again, this is striking, because stakeholders often do not have enough salience to impact actual outcomes and are reduced to the role of observers (Hintz & Milan, 2009). They are also very positive about Ibermedia's work and its results in the Ibero-American audiovisual sector. Other supranational audiovisual institutions are seldom assessed with the same positivity. EU audiovisual policy faces frequent criticism from its stakeholders (Vlassis, 2017). In Mercosur<sup>1</sup>, the advisory body in charge of audiovisual development, RECAM<sup>2</sup>, was not able to rely on stakeholder engagement to overcome its challenges (Fernandes, Loisen, & Donders, 2021).

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<sup>1</sup> Mercosur was created in 1991 by the Treaty of Asuncion as a free-trade region including Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay.

<sup>2</sup> Specialized Meeting of Audiovisual and Cinematographic Authorities of Mercosur and Associated States.

This same positivity was also found in the relationship among the member countries. The previously reported tensions reported between Spain and the Latin American countries, which initially questioned Ibermedia's role as a tool to benefit Spanish public relations and give access to cheaper productions (Falicov, 2007; Villazana, 2009), were not evidenced in this research. The decrease of Spanish leadership (Zamorano & Bonet, 2018) together with decrease of investment and the establishment of rules to allocate the available funding equitably among the member countries appears to have eliminated these neo-colonial tensions. Spain's assumed dominance within the organization was not experienced by the stakeholders. Ibermedia listens to and responds to claims regarding technical rules that could disfavor Latin American countries and has evolved with the sector in helping to build a collaborative program. As a result, the Latino-Americanization of Ibermedia co-productions (González, 2020; Moguillansky, 2019) is now also evident in policy-making.

Although Ibermedia is positively evaluated by its stakeholders, it also faces challenges. Previous research criticized the lack of reflection led by Ibermedia (Falicov, 2013), which was confirmed by the organization's absence of leadership in response to the distribution challenge (González, 2020). This is an area where the stakeholders and academia would like to be more participative. The deficit in promoting broader debates and conducting more studies impacts on the productive power and can still be pointed to as a weakness.

Another serious problem is the small budget. Ibermedia depends on national financial contributions and is therefore affected by politics. This limitation influences the number of claims that can be listened to. The claims that can be accommodated within existing or available policies without additional investment have a greater chance of being accepted (Eesley & Lenox, 2006). Consequently, the urgency attribute is crucial to the salience framework (Wood *et al.*, 2021), in contrast to the position taken by Neville *et al.* (2011). The small budget is also the main complaint made by the stakeholders, and this may have an impact on their engagement, if it causes them to lose interest in the program. Limited resources can also impose constraints on institutional dialogue (Sanderink & Nasiritousi, 2020) between Ibermedia and other Ibero-American institutions, threatening one of its main strengths: its connections.

## **8. Conclusion**

This article set out to investigate as its main research question whether or not Ibermedia still maintains its bottom-up, cooperative nature, which was proclaimed at the time of its creation. Our analysis shows that Ibermedia does indeed still engage with different stakeholders, who feel they have an impact on decision-making. It can therefore still be considered as a collaborative space.

The framework used in this paper provided evidence for the salience of institutions, the relevance of the urgency attribute, and an openness for informal behavior. Informal connections are essential to the Ibermedia decision-making process. The inclusion of two extra attributes that focus on stakeholder relationships provides a deeper salience analysis and is recommended for research dealing with informal contexts.

Stakeholder involvement, the affection generated by informal connections and the general positivity towards Ibermedia are particularities that differentiate Ibermedia from other supranational audiovisual institutions. The role of the Technical Unit is broader than the straightforward implementation of policies and the role of Ibermedia is more than the supporting of co-productions. As a result, it cannot be evaluated solely with reference to the performance of its support programs. Ibermedia's impact also relates to its capacity to stimulate connections among people, where its productive power can be better used.

The paper demonstrates the importance of people to Ibermedia's success and the impact of informal networks in policy-making. In particular, it is necessary to highlight the influence of the staff in building up these connections and promoting greater awareness of the need to

consider them in the policy process. Consequently, further research should focus on the informal networks (Freedman, 2008) that are not being translated into official channels, but are the core of Ibero-American audiovisual policy.

Ibermedia is proving itself to be essential to the development of an Ibero-American audiovisual space. The program benefits from good connections and specialized knowledge, so that there is a strong case that greater recognition and financial support should be given by national authorities.

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