



# Comparing Journalism Cultures in Latin America: The Case of Chile, Brazil and Mexico

Claudia Mellado, University of Concepcion, Chile

[claudiamellado@udec.cl](mailto:claudiamellado@udec.cl)

Claudia Lagos, University of Chile, Chile

Sonia Moreira, Universidad Estadual do Rio de Janeiro

María Elena Hernández, University of Guadalajara, México

**IAMCR 2010, 18-22 July, Braga (Portugal)**



## Comparative studies in journalism

- Comparative strategy in journalism studies worldwide
- Variation in journalism professional orientations around the globe
- Nation-state as an object, context, unit of analysis or locus for a transnational trend (Kohn, 1989)
- Journalism culture as a key strategy to frame and evaluate the changes in journalism practices and attitudes



## Previous Studies

- Most of the studies: based on second-hand analysis of data coming from national realities (Weaver, 1998; Zhu et al, 1997; Wu et al, 1996)
- Excessive westernization of journalism research (Curran and Park 2000; Josephi, 2005)
- Many ways of confronting the study of journalism culture as types of journalism and existing cultures have been developed, inviting misunderstanding and theoretical ambiguity (Hanitzsch, 2006)



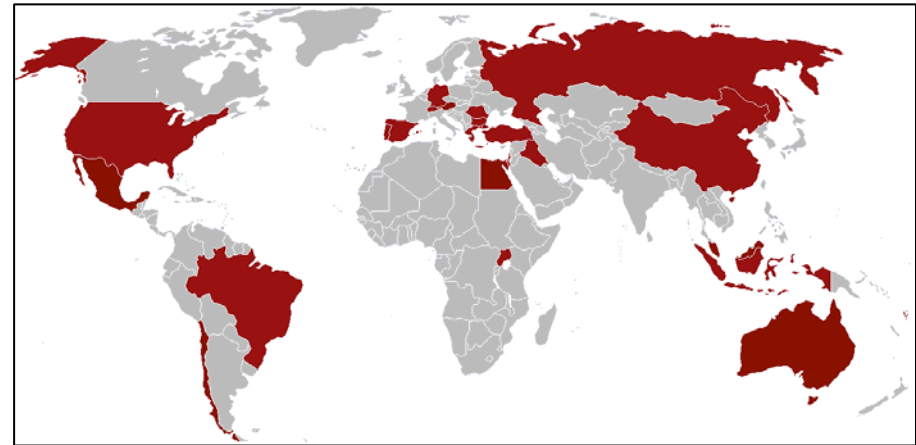
## Previous Studies

- In Latin America, the quantitative study of journalists' professional roles, orientations and attitudes has been very sporadic
- Chile, Mexico and Brazil have no strong tradition in this type of research, nor have their journalism cultures ever been simultaneously compared



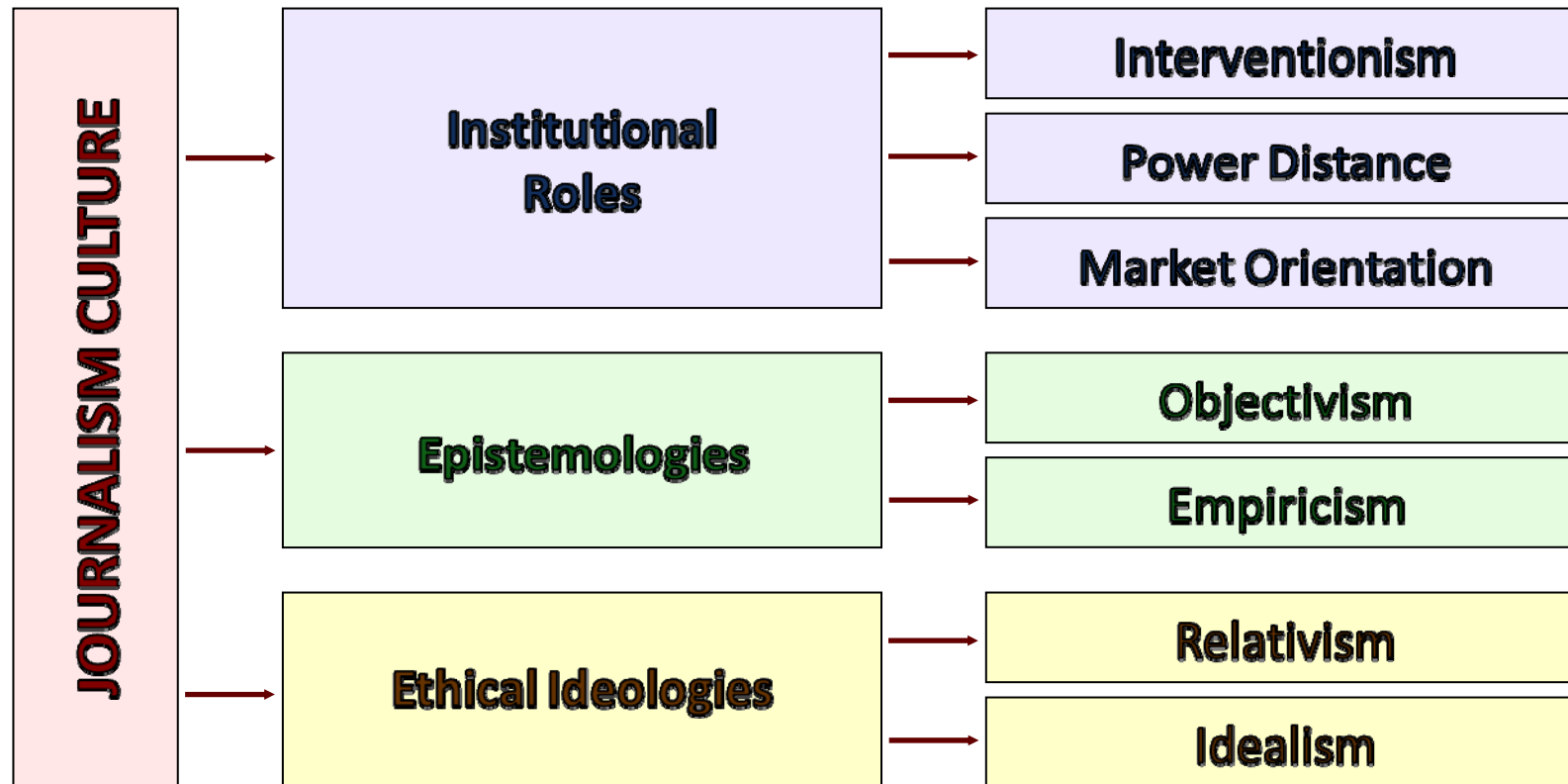
## Objective of the study

- To identify the variation in journalism culture across Chile, Mexico and Brazil, based on the nature of the observed societal differences





## Mapping Journalism Culture





## National Journalism Systems in a Comparative Perspective: Chile, Mexico and Brazil

- All democratic countries
- Recovery from severe economic crises and big political traumas in their past.
- Relatively strong levels of freedom of speech,
- The most important, competitive and stable economies in Latin America
- Relatively high levels of press credibility



## National Journalism Systems in a Comparative Perspective: Chile, Mexico and Brazil

- Two competing conceptual expectations are tested.
  1. Journalists from Mexico and Chile share a similar professional culture, differing from Brazil, due to the *parochial* political culture and higher levels of political parallelism that exist in both countries.
  2. The political structure, the size and concentration of media ownership, as well as the social context existing in Brazil and Mexico, distances their journalists from Chilean news media workers



## Research Questions

- *RQ1: How do Chilean, Brazilian and Mexican news media workers evaluate journalism's institutional roles, epistemological orientations and ethical ideologies?*
- *RQ2: Which aspects of journalism culture are perceived most differently and most similar among journalists from Chile, Brazil and Mexico?*
- *RQ3: What particular societal factors seem to explain the journalism culture among those countries?*



## Design and Population

- Data reported in this paper come from a survey of role perceptions, epistemological orientations and ethical views of Chilean, Mexican and Brazilian news media journalists.



## Data collection

- **individual level:**  
fully standardized telephone/face to face interviews with a quota sample of 100 working journalists for each country
- **organizational level:**  
documentary research about the 20 newsrooms and media organizations per country for which the interviewed journalists work
- **societal level:**  
3 countries: Brazil, Chile and Mexico
- **Field research was carried out between October 2007 and June 2009.**



## Measurement

- 12 items measure the journalists' self-perceptions regarding the importance of different institutional roles. (5-point scale where one corresponded to "not important at all", and five corresponded to "extremely important.")
- 14 items measure the journalists' level of agreement or disagreement with certain important epistemological beliefs and ethical ideologies. (5-point scale, where one corresponded to "strongly disagree" and five corresponded to "strongly agree.")



## Findings

- The professional values of detachment and non-involvement, being a watchdog of the government and business elite, and both the citizen-oriented as well as the consumer-oriented approach, are considered the most important institutional roles among Mexican, Chilean and Brazilian journalists.
- In terms of the levels of importance given to each dimension, however, significant differences were observed.



## Findings: Intervencionism dimension

	Chile		Brazil		Mexico		Differences among countries <sup>b</sup>
	Mean <sup>a</sup>	% Saying "extremely important"	Mean <sup>a</sup>	% Saying "extremely important"	Mean <sup>a</sup>	% Saying "extremely important"	Significance
To be an absolutely detached observer	4.24	46	4.42	58.6	4.48	59	.08
To set the political agenda	3.30	17.3	2.65	3	3.20	9	.00**
To influence public opinion	3.93	36.4	2.59	8	3.55	24	.00*
To advocate for social change	3.25	12.1	3.49	23.2	3.89	38	.00**

\*\* p .001

a Scale ranges from 1 =not important at all to 5 = extremely important

b. Calculated by oneway independent ANOVA



## Findings: power distance

	Chile		Brazil		Mexico		Differences among countries <sup>b</sup>
	Mean <sup>a</sup>	% Saying "extremely important"	Mean <sup>a</sup>	% Saying "extremely important"	Mean <sup>a</sup>	% Saying "extremely important"	Significance
To act as watchdog of the government	3.80	30	4.45	58	3.90	41	.00**
To convey a positive image of political and business leadership	2.01	3	1.43	1	1.70	3	.00**
To support official policies to bring about prosperity and development	3.23	14.1	3.17	16.2	3.11	19	.78
To act as watchdog of business elites	3.52	20.4	3.28	25	3.49	24	.37

\*\* p<.001

a Scale ranges from 1 =not important at all to 5 = extremely important

b. Calculated by one-way independent ANOVA



## Findings: market orientation

	Chile		Brazil		Mexico		Differences among countries <sup>b</sup>
	Mean <sup>a</sup>	% Saying "extremely important"	Mean <sup>a</sup>	% Saying "extremely important"	Mean <sup>a</sup>	% Saying "extremely important"	Significance
To provide citizens with the information they need to make political decisions	3.98	32.3	4.81	83	4.49	62	.00**
To concentrate mainly on news that will attract the widest possible audience	3.44	12.2	2.74	3	3.39	17	.00**
To provide the audience with the information that is most interesting	3.89	31.3	3.85	26	4.15	47	.00**
To motivate people to participate in civic activity and political discussion	3.51	16	3.74	28	4.16	51	.00**

\*\* p < .001

a Scale ranges from 1 =not important at all to 5 = extremely important

b. Calculated by one-way independent ANOVA



# Worlds of Journalism

## Findings: Objectivism

	Chile		Brazil		Mexico		Differences among countries <sup>b</sup>
	Mean <sup>a</sup>	% Saying "strongly agree"	Mean <sup>a</sup>	% Saying "strongly agree"	Mean <sup>a</sup>	% Saying "strongly agree"	Significance
I do not allow my own beliefs and convictions to influence my reporting	4.29	54.5	4.29	52.5	4.28	55	.99
I remain strictly impartial in my work	4.24	49.5	3.98	32.3	4.34	54	.02*
I think that journalists can depict reality as it is	3.62	16.2	4.05	40.8	3.82	34	.01**
I always make clear which side in a dispute has the better position	3.00	9	2.26	3	2.78	5	.00**

\* p < .05; \*\* p < .001

a Scale ranges from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree"

b. Calculated by oneway independent ANOVA



## Findings: Empiricism

	Chile		Brazil		Mexico		Differences among countries <sup>b</sup>
	Mean <sup>a</sup>	% Saying "strongly agree"	Mean <sup>a</sup>	% Saying "strongly agree"	Mean <sup>a</sup>	% Saying "strongly agree"	Significance
I provide analysis of events and issues in my work	3.99	38	3.97	39	4.55	62	.00**
I think that facts speak for themselves	3.75	18	3.76	26.3	4.16	48	.00**
I make claims only if they are substantiated by hard evidence and reliable sources	4.36	46	4.71	74.7	4.60	65	.00**
I always stay away from information that cannot be verified	3.55	22	3.46	38.4	3.66	35	.57

\* p<.05; \*\* p<.001

a Scale ranges from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree"

b. Calculated by one -way independent ANOVA



# Worlds of Journalism

## Findings: Relativism

	Chile		Brazil		Mexico		Differences among countries <sup>b</sup>
	Mean <sup>a</sup>	% Saying "strongly agree"	Mean <sup>a</sup>	% Saying "strongly agree"	Mean <sup>a</sup>	% Saying "strongly agree"	Significance
There are ethical principles which are so important that they should be followed by all journalists, regardless of situation and context	4.02	38	4.82	87	4.57	73	.00**
Ethical dilemmas in news coverage are often so complex that journalists should be allowed to formulate their own individual codes of conduct	3.57	27	2.08	4	2.78	7	.00**
What is ethical in journalism varies from one situation to another	3.27	19	2.15	8	3.14	19	.00**

\* p < .05; \*\* p < .001

a Scale ranges from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree"

b. Calculated by one-way independent ANOVA



## Findings: Idealism

	Chile		Brazil		Mexico		Differences among countries <sup>b</sup>
	Mean <sup>a</sup>	% Saying "strongly agree"	Mean <sup>a</sup>	% Saying "strongly agree"	Mean <sup>a</sup>	% Saying "strongly agree"	Significance
Journalists should avoid questionable methods of reporting in any case, even if this means not getting the story	3.83	33.7	4.02	38.4	3.95	41	.43
Reporting and publishing a story that can potentially harm others is always wrong, irrespective of the benefits to be gained	3.44	26.3	2.16	12.1	2.96	18.2	.00**
There are situations in which harm is justifiable if it results in a story that produces a greater good	3.48	19.4	3.31	26.3	3.05	11.1	.05*

\* p<.05; \*\* p< .001

a Scale ranges from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree"

b. Calculated by one-way independent ANOVA



## Conclusion

- The findings related to the domain of institutional roles turned out to be consistent with our previous conceptual expectations.
- The epistemological and ethical values embraced by the journalists seem to be trapped in struggling areas of ambiguity and duplicity, where organizational and individual factors could play a more important role than social differences.



## Limitations

- The individual country samples are rather small, and may not warrant a perfect representation of the various national populations of journalists.
- Study based on the journalists' professional self-perception, which may not fully correspond with their actions, as many authors have suggested (Vos, 2002; Hallin and Mancini, 2004).
- The way the items were measured - on the basis of positive and negative statements within each dimension – results in factorial analysis tending to treat both poles on the continuum as different factors, without the possibility of reliably testing the statistical validity of the model.



**Thanks**

**[claudiamellado@udec.cl](mailto:claudiamellado@udec.cl)**

**[www.worldsofjournalism.org](http://www.worldsofjournalism.org)**



## Data collection

Type of medium	Sublevel	National	Local	Total
Daily newspaper	quality: citizen-oriented	2 (10)	3 (15)	5 (25)
	popular: consumer-oriented	1 (5)	1 (5)	2 (10)
General interest weekly (magazine/newspaper)	quality: citizen-oriented	1 (5)	–	1 (5)
	popular: consumer-oriented	1 (5)	–	1 (5)
News agency		1 (5)	–	1 (5)
Television	state-owned/public	1 (5)	1 (5)	2 (10)
	private	3 (15)	1 (5)	4 (20)
Radio	state-owned/public	1 (5)	1 (5)	2 (10)
	private	1 (5)	1 (5)	2 (10)
Total		12 (60)	8 (40)	20 (100)

Numbers in parentheses represent the total sub sample of journalists in the respective media category