# Representation and Recognition: The Perceptions of Finnish and Spanish Viewers of Their Media Ecosystems and Public Service Newscasts

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The media play a strategic role in representing reality in representative liberal democracies, currently considered in crisis, precisely owing to the shortcomings in institutional and media representations. These representations play a particularly important role in building citizenship, an essential aspect of democratic health, and particularly relevant when democracy is challenged. While the representation of minorities in the news has already attracted some academic attention, its broad implications for the public at large require further study. This article delves into the effect of news media representations on the recognition of citizens, the promotion of their voice, and their capacity to consent. This is explored comparatively in two information ecosystems with different structural dimensions, adapting Hallin and Mancini's framework. An analysis of the discourse of Spanish and Finnish citizens with different profiles was performed, particularly as regards the role of the newscasts of their respective public service broadcasters (TVE and YLE). The results show that public service-oriented journalism and media representations contribute to the sustenance of the social identity formation of the citizenry.

Keientwords: representation, recognition, viewers' discourses, news media, public service news, YLE, TVE

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Journalism plays a strategic role in the representation of reality in representative liberal democracies, particularly in the formation of public opinion and during electoral periods (Nino, 1997). It can thus be conceptualized as a mechanism of citizen observation in the public sphere (Thomas, 2010). According to Carey (1999), this mechanism can only be sustained if the public truly believes that news media are capable of representing the world and that they are not in connivance with the state or the most powerful groups.

Since the 1980s, the theory of deliberative democracy (Nino, 1997), in the academic field of law, and the theory of public journalism, in the field of journalism, have been censuring the crisis in representative liberal democracies, due to shortcomings in both institutional and media representations. Both currents, which are inspired by Habermas's (1989/1962) concept of the public sphere (Karppinen, 2013), advocate for a greater degree of institutional and media participation of a deliberative nature, to improve decision-making processes.

These two currents coincide with an increasingly more widespread interdisciplinary interest in participating in the humanities and social sciences, which is referred to as the "participatory turn" (Burger, 2015). In this context and in media studies, the notion of "cultural citizenship" has served to explore the influence of the media representations of social groups in the identity formation of the citizenry, particularly with entertainment formats (Hermes & Stello, 2000, p. 199; Müller & Hermes, 2010). They consider that Habermas's concept of the public sphere plays an important role not only in rational debates but also in identity construction processes, which are regarded as prerequisites for citizen participation.

According to Murdock (1999), four rights are necessary for achieving cultural citizenship: (1) the right to information, as the basis of informed decision-making in the social and political spheres; (2) the right to experience, which reflects the diversity of ways of life and underlies the development of the individual conception of identity; (3) the right to knowledge; and (4) the right to participation, which also includes the citizenry's right to be heard.

In the field of journalism, despite its clear link to the public sphere concept and the existence of participatory journalism as a subdiscipline, few works have explored media representations and participation from the perspective of the citizenry's right to both, as enunciated by Murdock (1999). Instead, most academic debates on journalism have focused on the dilemma of whether to place the accent on professionalism or participation. Scholars have gone to great lengths to define the core components of journalistic professionalism (Deuze, 2005; Nordenstreng, 1997), which is defined in terms of expertise, public orientation, and independence (Singer, 2003) while being considered as hegemonic (Holton, Lewis, & Coddington, 2016; Van der Wurff & Schoenbach, 2014). In fact, the public journalism trend of the 1990s (Glasser, 1999), which could be regarded as the precursor of participatory journalism studies, decried that classic professional values placed limits on the participatory potential of journalism.

Participatory journalism came into its own between 2007 and 2011 (Borger, van Hoof, Costera Meijer, & Sanders, 2013), when the development of the Internet held the promise of a more fluid relationship between audiences and media producers. Journalism studies have a conceptual deficit.

Indeed, even the discipline of participatory journalism itself tends to approach the public as a set of consumers (Borger et al., 2013), rather than as an informed citizenry.

This gap is particularly relevant in the current sociopolitical landscape in which democracy itself is currently being challenged by several interconnected issues: A deterioration of equality and welfare state institutions (Schneider, Kinsella, & Godin, 2016), as well as growing disaffection with such institutions (Piketty, 2020) and the media (Vara, Amoedo, Moreno, Negredo, & Kaufmann, 2022).[2] The above-mentioned authors hold that the politics of austerity, implemented following the 2008 financial crisis, triggered this negative trend. Political disaffection is related to post-truth phenomena and the rise of extreme right-wing parties (Forti, 2022) that actively exacerbate the aforementioned tendencies. On the other hand, the lack of commitment to truth associated with the emerging post-truth regime (McIntyre, 2018) calls for citizens who feel and behave as spectators or content consumers.

In view of the foregoing, the field of journalism needs to focus on the relationship between media representations and citizenship through empirical studies that can further contribute to the development of the discipline's theoretical foundations. In our view, a specific issue that should be explored is the extent to which news media representations of the world and social identities address or recognize viewers as citizens. In this process, it is necessary to observe how the meaning-making dimension of citizens interacts with political, economic, and social structures in which their essential options are developed in conditions of inequality.

In addition to representation, the recognition of citizenship deserves greater attention. In the field of philosophy, Axel Honneth's (2006) theory of recognition considers that conflicts relating to the distribution of material resources can be understood as struggles for recognition, due to an inappropriate interpretation of the principle of success. In other words, it is the feeling of being inadequately recognized that lies at the heart of social conflicts. This theory is enlightening for it has contributed to the development of relevant notions relating to cultural citizenship, which is subject to power relations (Klaus, & Lüneborg, 2012) and in which disadvantaged groups tend to be treated disrespectfully.

To explore the process of representation and participation—in which it is possible to observe the importance of recognition, in addition to that of voice and consent—and to shed light on how different variables interact and generate diverse dynamics, the spotlight is placed here on two countries with different media ecosystems and political structures. To this end, the analysis is based on the structural dimensions regarded as central to Hallin and Mancini's (2004) model: The political dimensions—in representative liberal democracies—of the media system in question, namely, the role of the state in communication policies; the shape of media markets; the degree and forms of political parallelism; and the level of journalistic professionalism. Taking these variables into consideration, Hallin and Mancini (2004) distinguish among the corporate democratic, the polarized pluralist, and the liberal models.

Specifically, an inquiry is conducted into the discursive repertoires of Spanish and Finnish citizens as regards their media ecosystems, which represent the polarized corporate democratic and pluralist

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[2] It is at its lowest level in Spain, where only 32% of citizens trust the news (Vara et al., 2022)

models, respectively, while paying special attention to public service media (PSM) journalism, considered as key to democratic health (Neff & Pickard, 2021), in general, and to the newscasts of the public TV channels, YLE and TVE, in particular. The objectives are the following:

1.  To explore and compare the discourses of Spanish and Finnish viewers on representation, recognition, voice, and consent, with a particular focus on TVE and YLE.
2.  To identify the structural variables of both media systems that best determine the process in which citizens identify themselves as such, which is considered to be a prerequisite for participation.
3.  To contribute to the theoretical debate on the civic role of representation and participation in journalistic discourses, paying special attention to those produced in PSM.

This work involved overcoming the practical difficulties in addressing a multifaceted object of study, for it had to be empirically grounded, include a comparative analysis, and seek to make a theoretical contribution. The following section briefly presents the key theoretical concepts under analysis: Representation, recognition, voice, and consent. A description is then provided of the comparative framework of the characteristics shared by the Finnish media ecosystem with other democratic corporatist systems, and those shared by the Spanish ecosystem with other polarized pluralist systems. After a concise methodological section, the spotlight is placed on the results of the study performed in Finland, which are contrasted with those that were previously obtained in Spain (Lamuedra, Mateos, & Broullón, 2019, 2020). The final section includes a discussion and the conclusions.

**Representation, Recognition, Voice, and Consent**

Habermas provides an appropriate basis for understanding the role that citizen participation, enabled by journalism, plays in democracy. He holds that modern societies are very complex and comprise the state and the economy, which deal with material reproductive functions while the lifeworld, formed by the nuclear family and the public sphere, deals with symbolic ones. Exchanges between these areas occur regularly and, from the lifeworld perspective, are characterized by the interchanging roles of the same subjects as workers and consumers, as well as clients of state bureaucracy and citizens in relation to the public sphere (Fraser, 1989). As regards the latter, according to Habermas, the capacity for consent and expression depends on the ability to participate with others in a horizontal dialogue.

For his part, Honneth (2006), the leading proponent of the third generation of the Frankfurt School, examines the process inherent to this possible participation in a horizontal dialogue. Elaborating on the theory of recognition, which he sees as a development of the Habermasian project, he holds that the inclusion of the members of a society is necessarily achieved with mechanisms of mutual recognition, for that is how individuals learn to assert themselves intersubjectively in specific facets of their personalities. In the modern world there are several systems of recognition in which the subjectivity of individuals is forged. Clearly, each of these systems is shaped by the available catalog of media discourses and representations. This process of recognition is mediated by language, gestures, and the media through which collectives achieve public "visibility" (Honneth, 2006), a prerequisite for recognition.

In the field of journalism, it is relevant to inquire into the extent to which the media representations of the social body favor the recognition of citizens as such, as full-fledged participants in the public sphere. For this purpose, an analytical model applicable to the research objectives is proposed in Figure 1:
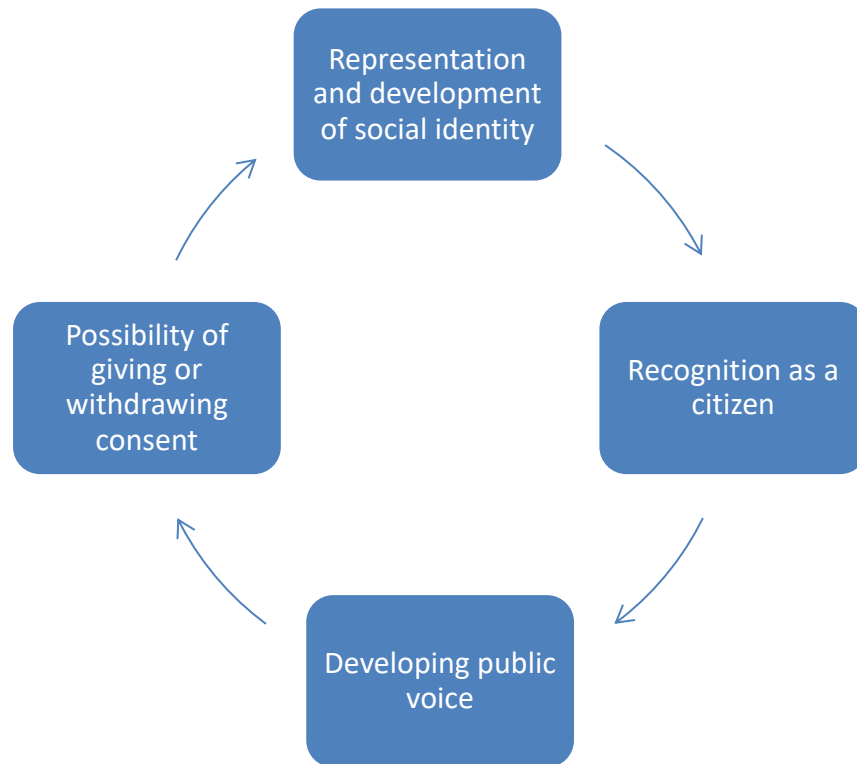


**Figure 1. Analytical model of the research objectives: Representation, recognition, voice, and consent.**

Each one of the four concepts is defined in the following subsections.

### Representation

Public discourses are linked to a repertoire of more profound normative principles that determine the linguistic horizon of the sociomoral thoughts and feelings of a particular society (Honneth, 2006). Language, culture, and the media play a central role in building identities on the discourses available (Hole, 2007) in the public sphere.

### *Recognition*

When different social identities are recognized as being valid (Fraser & Honneth 2006; Vázquez Medel, 2003), they develop their own intersubjectivity and are considered to be suitable for participating in public debates. For Honneth (2006), recognition is so crucial that the purpose of social equality is precisely that of enabling the development and recognition of the social identity of all the members of a society, so that they may participate on an equal footing.

### *Voice*

Recognition is fundamental for citizens to enable them to feel committed to their society and to develop a public voice and a participatory attitude. Democracies should be designed to encourage and develop citizens' voices, thus providing them with the necessary resources in this respect, such as access to the media, education, information, and time, all of which would enhance their capacity for self-reflection (Couldry, 2010).

### *Consent*

Different studies consider that when individuals or collectives do not have access to the aforementioned processes, it is more difficult for them to give or withdraw their consent as regards certain political issues, in the broadest sense of the word. Although this has been essentially studied in relation to women and minorities (Ehrlich, 2001; Lakoff, 1975), it can also be applied to social majorities in those democracies currently governed by a neoliberal logic (Couldry, 2010).

In the field of journalism, several studies have assessed whether individuals and collectives (often marginalized) are granted the status of political subjects and, therefore, citizens in a democracy, through the recognition of their voice in the news (Eide, 2011; Haas & Steiner, 2001; Prentoulis, 2012). This article does not focus on minorities but explores the dynamics in which the news media discourse enables the general public to have access to processes of citizen recognition, thus fostering the development of a public voice and facilitating the capacity of consent in representative liberal democracies. It does so in two different media ecosystems (democratic corporatist and polarized pluralist), which will be addressed below.

### **Comparative Context: The Finnish and Spanish Media Systems**

What follows is a summary of the comparative framework developed for this study, a full version of which can be consulted here: https://uses0-my.sharepoint.com/:w:/g/personal/mlamuedra_us_es/ETiyB-82L5JNrjuhItPV_FoB-tV55hARPx0LGCWRu4wrZg?rtime=3Voq_TqS2kg.

Finland and Spain differ in terms of their population (Spain 47.1 million vs. Finland 5.4 million), democratic tradition (recent in Spain vs. long and well established in Finland), cultural trends (toward binary polarization in Spain vs. toward consensus in Finland), and social inequality (high in Spain vs. low in Finland).

Additionally, there are differences in their media ecosystems that have already been extensively explored in Hallin and Mancini's (2004) model (see Table 1).

*Table 1. Comparison Between Finland and Spain: Political, Social, and Media Dimensions.*

| Spain | Finland |
|---|---|
| Highest social inequality in Europe | Low social inequality |
| Democracy still recent (1976) | Long-established democracy (1919) |
| Tendency to binary polarization | Consensus culture |
| Elite press and commercial broadcasting | High circulation of the press and public service media |
| Weak public service media | Strong public service media |
| Political parallelism in media | Political independence in media |
| Weak journalistic profession | Strong journalistic profession |
| Low citizen trust in media | High citizen trust in media |

Spain has a polarized pluralist media ecosystem (Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom, 2022; Hallin & Mancini, 2004), in which a two-party system has recently given way to a multiparty one, albeit grouped in left- and right-wing blocs. The country's media ecosystem is characterized by a relatively high level of political parallelism and government intervention, a low circulation of newspapers, and the predominance of television, all of which constitute an almost-perfect duopoly (Bustamante & Corredor, 2012). PSM are regarded as weak due to their alleged dependence on the incumbent government and their low ratings. The journalistic profession also has its drawbacks due to its unstable working conditions and pressures.

For its part, Finland is considered to have a multiparty political system, a "democratic corporatist" media ecosystem, and a consensus culture, all of which have proven to be resilient (Karppinen & Ala Fossi, 2017 to the recent deterioration of the welfare state and other problems. In Finland, PSM continue to be in excellent health while commercial media outlets are politically independent despite recent controversies. Journalists have maintained a high level of editorial autonomy and decent wages; moreover, the framework for regulating and supporting the media industry is judged to be mostly fair and transparent. As a result, the Finns' trust in the media is among the highest in Europe.

**Methodology**

This article has been written in the framework of a larger R+D project funded by the Spanish Ministry of Education. One of the project's objectives is to develop methodological and conceptual models that facilitate comparative research addressing the relationship between the structural dimensions of communication policies and the meanings constructed by citizens in news production and reception processes, as formulated by Livingstone (1998). Further information about the project can be found here: https://uses0-my.sharepoint.com/:w:/g/personal/mlamuedra_us_es/ETiyB-82L5JNrjuhItPV_FoB-tV55hARPx0LGCWRu4wrZg?rtime=3Voq_TqS2kg

A qualitative methodology (discussion groups and interviews) was chosen because, as held by Callejo (2000), "the forms of social circulation of discourses are hardly observed in any other way than being in specific circulation" (p. 18).

Both the focus groups (moderated by one researcher and, whenever possible, with the participation of one or two more) and the interviews were semi-structured, face-to-face sessions aimed at exploring the interviewees' views on the topics listed below, which ultimately gave rise to the following analogous codes:

- News consumption and habits (focusing on TVE and YLE).
- Journalistic standards and values and their role in democracy.
- Public service journalism and how it differs from the commercial kind.
- Trends observed in TVE/YLE newscasts.
- Relationship between the media and audiences: Representation, recognition, and voice.

When the focus groups and interviews were being conducted, the climate of criticism in both Spain (with the "Indignados movement") and Finland (with a center to right-wing coalition government) was conducive to exploring perceptions and demands for representation and participation. During this period, as well, a scandal affected the Finnish prime minister, Juha Sipilä, who had allegedly put pressure on two journalists working for YLE, to dissuade them from investigating an issue involving a conflict of interests.

Eligible respondents were approached using the researchers' extended network of contacts. Snowball techniques proved to be very useful, particularly in Finland. The sample was chosen based on "theoretical sampling," which dispenses with "concerns about representation" (Deacon, Golding, & Pickering, 1999, p. 52). Instead of looking for "typical" cases, researchers deliberately looked for respondents who were more likely to contribute to theoretical development. Inquiries continued until respondents started to repeat issues that had already been covered, a stage known as the saturation point (idem).

In Spain, the principal objects of study were members of those sections of society whose awareness of the problems facing journalism was more likely to have been raised by the aforementioned context. These were (1) "indignados" or activists (coded as A); (2) Internet users or technophiles (coded as T)—mostly under the age of 30—for their particular way of interacting with television and the media; (3) public service employees (excluding public television; coded as PS), as they were among the first to feel the brunt of the government's austerity policies; (4) conservative viewers (ideologically speaking; coded as C), who were recruited to counterbalance any possible overrepresentation of left-wing positions; and (5) a group of people without higher education (coded as NHE), which was included to avoid any bias toward profiles with university degrees.

The Spanish sample was formed by a total of 29 subjects. The discussion groups held in different Spanish cities—Madrid (1), Seville (3), and La Laguna (1)—with the participation of 25 subjects (15 men and 10 women) are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2. Discussion Groups of Spanish Viewers 2014–2017.**

|  | Activists | Technophiles | Public Sector Employees | Conservatives | No Higher Education |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| City | Seville | La Laguna | Madrid | Seville | Seville |
| Date | 03/06/2015 | 03/17/2015 | 27/04/2015 | 05/29/2015 | 07/ 14/2016 |
| Code | A | T | PS | C | NHE |

The sample was completed with four in-depth interviews with subjects living in small towns.

In Finland, 17 men (coded as M, male) and 13 women (coded as F, female) were interviewed in Helsinki, Tampere, or Seville (see Table 3). After gender, the code identifies the subjects' age. There were 23 individual interviews and three group interviews (friends, families, etc.) in which seven subjects took part. English was used in most of the interviews, except in five conducted in Finnish and then translated into English, and one in Spanish (a Finn of Argentine origin).

Due to country-profile differences, the classification of the Finnish subjects differed slightly from that of their Spanish counterparts. Most Finns are technologically literate (even the elderly), so it did not seem necessary to identify technophiles. As in Spain, the interviewees were classified as public service workers (PS) and without higher education (NHE), as well as conservatives (C) and activists (A) whenever the interviewees openly identified themselves as such.

**Table 3. Interviews With Finnish Viewers 2015–2017.**

| Code | Place | Date | Interview Language |
|---|---|---|---|
| F19 | Seville | June 2015 | English |
| M20 | Seville | June 2015 | English |
| F20 | Seville | December 2016 | English |
| M25S | Seville | November 2016 | English |
| M68-C | Helsinki | January 2017 | English |
| M49-C | Helsinki | January 2017 | English |
| M47 | Helsinki | January 2017 | English |
| F62-PS | Helsinki | January 2017 | English |
| M63 | Helsinki | January 2017 | English |
| M56-A | Helsinki | January 2017 | English |
| M52-PS | Helsinki | January 2017 | English |
| F48-PS | Helsinki | January 2017 | English |
| F28 | Helsinki | January 2017 | English |
| M25 | Tampere | January 2017 | English |
| F34-PS | Tampere | January 2017 | English |
| M52-Russian-PS | Tampere | January 2017 | English |
| M37-A | Tampere | January 2017 | English |
| F27-PS | Tampere | January 2017 | English |

| M67-C | Helsinki | January 2017 | English |
| M64-C | Helsinki | January 2017 | English |
| M31-A | Helsinki | January 2017 | English |
| F69-A | Helsinki | January 2017 | English |
| F56-A | Helsinki | January 2017 | English |
| F45-PS | Helsinki | January 2017 | English |
| Fi-M74-NHE | Tampere | November 2015 | Finnish |
| Fi-F57 | Tampere | November 2015 | Finnish |
| Fi-F22-NHE | Tampere | November 2015 | Finnish |
| Fi-F38-NHE | Tampere | October 2015 | Finnish |
| Fi-M48 | Tampere | November 2015 | Finnish |
| Sp-Argentinian-M26-A | Tampere | August 2015 | Spanish |

Once transcribed, the content was manually coded by one researcher from a team of five. Cross-coding verification was conducted in all cases.

The results below were obtained from a theme analysis inspired by the interpretative repertoire concept, defined as "a culturally familiar and habitual line of argument comprised from recognisable themes, common places and tropes" (Wetherell, 1998, p. 409).

**Analysis**

After a brief introduction to the discursive repertoires of the Finnish and Spanish interviewees, there follows a detailed analysis based on the four concepts addressed in the theoretical section of this article—representation, recognition, voice, and consent.

The discursive repertoires of the Finnish interviewees elaborated on shared elements, such as their country's relatively small population, deep-rooted Nordic consensus culture, long tradition of democracy, freedom of the press, and welfare state, which showed recent signs of deterioration and was affecting the country's media ecosystem. Nonetheless, their perceptions of journalists were generally positive, linked to the Finnish media's neutrality, in general, and that of YLE's newscasts, in particular, thus substantiating the fundamental claims of previous research.

In contrast, among their Spanish counterparts it was possible to detect a certain degree of criticism of the country's fledgling democratic system and of the media's lack of neutrality and partisan polarization. They also drew a distinction between journalists in positions of power (who were accused of compliance with the powers that be) and their rank-and-file colleagues (who were influenced by them). This perception was apparently linked to a conception that assumes that such a system (1) has a group of owners, namely, one that is dominated and controlled by a super-subject, (2) represents a power that has influence and control over reality, and (3) is a tool at the service of those who already wield institutional power and who strive to maintain the status quo (Lamuedra et al. 2019). It was that super-subject that

pulled the strings of both the democracy and the media, to whom the interviewees referred as "they," as opposed to "us."

### *Overwhelming Trust in Media Representations as a Whole*

The empirical evidence as regards media trust was consistent with the findings of previous research. In the main, the interviewees considered that the Finnish media ecosystem accurately represented the world: "Media are talking about the right things . . . I believe in the freedom of the Finnish media" (M67-C). Traditionally, only the leftist activists of the 1960s and extreme right-wing parties, such as the True Finns, have challenged media representations in Finland. In this respect, the statement of one of the interviewees—a Russian expatriate—who had a more detached view of the Finnish media ecosystem is particularly enlightening: "Finns have an almost blind trust."

The Finnish public service broadcaster (PSB) was highly trusted. Firstly, it was deeply rooted in family traditions. Some interviewees emotionally recounted how families used to sit down together in front of the television to watch the YLE evening news and resorted to YLE Areena or the YLE website when traveling abroad. Secondly, that high level of trust was related to the fact that YLE was the "official" channel, by virtue of a social contract according to which it received public funding in exchange for complying with its obligation to keep the citizenry well informed. This reliability was seen as an asset when dealing with the perceived threat posed by social media: "Thanks to social media and other stuff, it's easier to receive wrong information . . . but when you watch the news, you receive official information" (M25S).

It was also possible to detect a high degree of satisfaction with the press, particularly the *Helsingin Sanomat*, which was seen as being equivalent to YLE's newscasts in terms of trustworthiness. For its part, the commercial channel MTV3 was regarded as a privately owned commercial channel with limited resources, for which reason the interviewees had low expectations from it. On the other hand, new digital media were treated as a supplementary information source, but which ultimately had more disadvantages than advantages. Notwithstanding this, the interviewees admitted that they were not as interested in discussing the news with family or friends as they used to be.

This study also substantiates the current literature on the Spanish media ecosystem, in which there is little trust and in which television is central to the market although the interviewees, especially those with higher education, also mentioned that they customarily read newspapers. There was an unmet demand till date for decent PSB newscasts, which also pointed to a certain deterioration with respect to the period from 2006 to 2011, during which TVE's newscasts had the largest audience share and the greatest degree of internal pluralism on Spanish television (Humanes & Fernández Alonso, 2015).

A relevant factor explaining this involution is that the top management was considered as being particularly partisan during the period from 2011 to 2018 (Madariaga, Lamuedra, & Toledano, forthcoming). Consequently, public television was regarded as the official voice of the government and part of the super-subject. It was also held that digital media offered an opportunity to obtain information

without the mediation of the system's agents although, at the same time, it was considered to be "too abundant."

### *Representation Issues*

In view of the perceived decline of the welfare state, the Finnish interviewees (particularly the elderly and the activists) felt that YLE had deteriorated in terms of neutrality and plurality over the past 20 to 30 years, in sharp contrast to the quality of the channel in the 1970s and 1980s. As expressed by one subject: "They're doing a good job in many ways, even though the quality's declined slightly, unfortunately . . . I've been watching YLE for 20 years . . . now certain discussions have disappeared" (M37-A).

Their discourses included a number of critical reflections on representative failings, listed below in increasing order (from the least to the most repeated arguments):

1. The role of experts. Whereas there were doubts about the excessive presence of purported experts on newscasts and in debates, some interviewees appreciated their involvement.
2. Lack of in-depth news. For instance, one interviewee (M31-A) felt relatively satisfied with YLE's newscasts, but described their reporting as "very soft, just telling you the facts, they don't deliberate, speculate, or delve deeper into the issue," contending that hard investigative journalism could be found only in the press.
3. As regards journalists, the following issues were raised in the sessions: Their limited knowledge of certain topics (particularly when viewers themselves were experts); their lack of objectivity; insufficient time to investigate; a certain degree of dependency on the channel's guidelines; and their influential role in deciding what news should be covered and how.
4. Despite the general consensus on YLE's mainstream position, its power to shape public opinion was a cause for concern.
5. Political bias. This referred to both the prime minister crisis and to the increasingly more frequent attempts by politicians to control the media or journalists. In contrast, one interviewee thought that YLE mostly took a left-wing stance, due to its journalists training at "red universities": "If they interview you on a program . . . and you have a right-wing opinion, then they start being sarcastic with you" (F56-A).
6. Misrepresentation of topics (more on this below).

While the Finnish interviewees described YLE's superficial news coverage as simply annoying, their Spanish counterparts expressed frustration with what they considered as TVE's misleading coverage, and blamed the super-subject for the media ecosystem's lack of neutrality and plurality. However, the Spanish interviewees deemed that all news media offered biased coverage, and that TVE was a sort of refuge.

### Misrepresentation of Topics and the Shift in Consensus Culture

As to the Finnish interviewees, their discursive repertoires with respect to the notions of democracy, welfare, equality, freedom of speech, and lack of corruption were apparently interrelated and believed to characterize Finnish society: "Equality's good in general" (F19); "And there aren't any wage inequalities. The middle class is huge . . . It doesn't matter so much in Finland into which family you're born because you get free education" (M20). Most of the concerns voiced by the interviewees—about misrepresentation in the news—had to do with different aspects of what was understood as a paradigm shift in Finland away from shared core notions. In this context, the representation of immigration and extreme right movements was the most debated and controversial.

For instance, two interviewees (M31-A and M37-A) were concerned about the lack of news coverage "of the greater segregation promoted by the government," seen as undermining one of the pillars of Finnish citizenry: "I feel our nation's breaking apart because we're famous for being a sort of united, uniform, and even homogenous people in Finland" (M37-A). Another interviewee claimed that something had changed in the essence of the nation: "There're more differences of opinions . . . and there's no sole uniform view of the official truth . . . The welfare state's deteriorating" (F48-PS).

Nevertheless, it should be noted that this consensus culture was not perceived as positive by all. One interviewee declared that, in practical terms, it meant that those who did not toe the official line were rejected by the system: "Finnish culture's very much like this: If you have a wrong opinion, we don't play with you anymore. It's consensus culture" (F56-A).

The impact of extreme right-wing movements and their media coverage was also described as disturbing and related to the rejection of immigrants. This was the view of an interviewee who worked at a state employment office (F34-PS). Another interviewee expressed his concern about the impact on society of the racist speeches of right-wing politicians who were given news coverage: "They're talking about opinions as facts, so I think it's dangerous in a way. For example, how should these racist politicians be covered? Should they be given airtime or not?" (M56-A).

Migration was seen as an important challenge to Finnish society (M47, F45-PS, M31-A, F69-A, M37-A, and M52-PS), which "ends up tearing Finnish society apart" (F69-A), for which reason its coverage was controversial.

The way in which YLE represented this issue also gave rise to disagreements. One of the interviewees (F45-PS) considered that YLE had shown how plural it was by covering news about migrants and refugees from different angles, while others (M31-A and F69-A) thought that national TV channels were indeed attempting to counter the very negative picture of Muslims painted on social media.

On the other hand, two of the interviewees (M56-A and M37-A), both experts in international affairs and in North Africa, considered that media representations of migrants and refugees were often mainstream, politically biased, and Western-centric. One of them (M37-A) held that the media did not reflect the complexities of such a topic and that there was a certain degree of censorship. He was

seconded by two other interviewees (M52-PS and F48-PS), who claimed that a riot at a refugee center was not mentioned in the news and that YLE had stopped covering refugees because it was still following the political agenda of the former (left-wing) pro-refugee government, while on other occasions the hardships and vulnerable situation of immigrants were simply ignored.

The notion that the country's TV channels (particularly YLE) did not portray reality but a utopia appeared in some of the discourses (M31-A, F56-A, M52-PS, F48-PS, M68-C, M56-A, M37-A, M63, and F69-A). Certain national goals or challenges, such as migration (M31-A, F69-A, and M52-PS) and the European Union agenda and Russia (M56-A, M52-PS, and F56-A), were perceived as being positively represented on mainstream TV channels, to convince the citizenry how things should be (a utopian mainstream view), rather than how things actually were (a realistic view). The following ironic remark illustrates this idea very neatly: "Oh, this is Finland; it's so good to be here!" (F69-A).

It should be noted that the interviewees contextualized their views on the failures of representation during a certain period, marked by the gradual deterioration of the welfare state and the attempts by the government and politicians to manipulate the media, a trend that they tended to view as circumstantial:

> It [the crisis between the prime minister and YLE] concerns me, but not greatly. Because they've been so clumsy about it that it hasn't yet led to any far-reaching changes in YLE. The government's term of office will end in two or three years, so it's not going to be long term. (M31-A)

In sum, the issues that raised the most concern were as follows: Firstly, migrants, refugees, and Russia; and secondly, women, pensioners, and the poor, together with the Western approach to international affairs, the complacent treatment of the powers that be, and the generally optimistic tone of the coverage.

Although the interviews did not include any questions about Russia, the country was mentioned in most of them. Russia's alleged attempts to invade or control Finland was a controversial matter that led to the frequent appearance of a highly articulate discourse (M25 in Helsinki, F56-A, F19, F56-A, F27-PS, M68-C, M64-C, F69-A, F56-A, M67-C, and F34-PS). The interviewees also expressed positive views (Sp-Argentinian-M26-A, M56-A, M52-PS, M37-A, and, of course, M52-Russian-PS) and neutral (M37-A) ones of their Russian neighbors. Therefore, it could be contended that whereas the super-subject in Spain took the shape of an economic and political power, in Finland the threatening super-subject could be embodied by Russia.

The Spanish interviewees' discourses also highlighted different sorts of misrepresentations, examples of this in four of the five discussion groups. For instance, in the group of people without higher education, two women who were mothers of teenagers complained about the negative media representations of young people while in the group of technophiles, there was a consensus that the media "tried to convince us that the 'Indignados' was a neo-hippie movement, when it was actually made up of middle-class people of all ages." It was also observed that these misrepresentations often resulted from

news superficiality while concern was expressed about the often-inadequate scope of the news, which ignored important issues such as the state of the oceans (Lamuedra et al., 2019). These issues were expressed with anger and frustration, as they were generally believed to form part of a state of affairs in which the powerful pulled the strings.

### *Recognition and Voice*

The Finnish interviewees pointed to the existence of a social contract by virtue of which YLE was funded by the taxpayer and its independence was guaranteed; in return, YLE had the duty to inform and educate the citizenry. This was viewed as key to Finnish identity formation: "Because what they broadcast on TV news or publish in the press is watched or read by us, and if we're given stupid stories, then we ourselves become stupid" (F34-PS).

This social contract appeared to be key to their recognition as citizens. In fact, for the Finns, information was a very serious civic duty; they accessed information on a daily basis, had a critical approach to the news, and felt entitled to suggest improvements. Consequently, the same contractual logic was also present in some concerns and expressions of discontent. For instance, one of the interviewees (M31-A) was worried that the recent changes in YLE's funding (the TV tax had fallen under the control of the government, instead of that of Parliament) would make it more vulnerable to government pressure.

Many interviewees claimed that watching the news moved them to action, which can also be related to the idea of citizenship: Sponsoring UNICEF (F56-A), looking for further information on issues considered as relevant (Fi-F38-NHE), remembering to vote (Fi-F57), wearing antireflective clothing (Fi-F22-NHE and Fi-F57), introducing a home recycling system, and helping those in need (M31-A and F45-PS).

It seems that the recognition process had to be mutual for it to work. The media ecosystem, specifically YLE, was reliable and protective, recognizing citizens as such, and the interviewees acknowledged these roles and acted in accordance with their expectations:

> In a society and country like Finland, I feel it's a sort of public right to be informed, and to have access to news . . . So, I really feel it's our right and, at the same time, also think it's our responsibility to use that information wisely and to make sure it's correct . . . I trust Finnish news, especially YLE, because I assume it's government funded. I just feel that they've a sort of responsibility to be politically correct and as honest as possible. (F20)

Global recognition was broad enough to favor the generation of a public voice and a level of discursive sophistication that made the interviewees—even those (the elderly and the activists) who did not consider themselves to be fully represented or addressed in the media ecosystem—feel included, at least to some extent. The Finns did not seem to show the same kind of anger as their Spanish counterparts, perceiving themselves as super-users who could typically appear at the apex of the media ecosystem (see Figure 2).
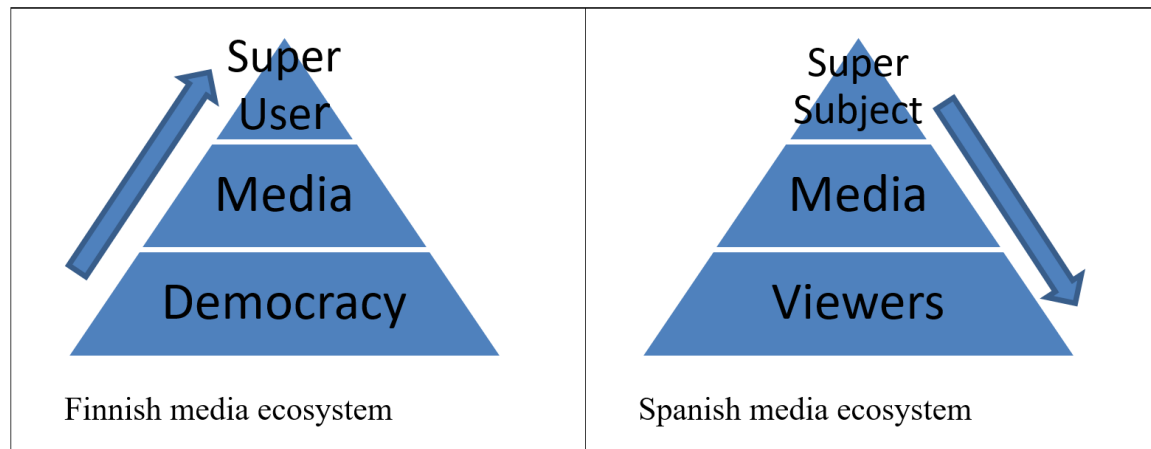
**Figure 2. The super-subject model (Spain) vs. the super-user model (Finland).**

Although there was also a certain degree of consensus on TVE's (unmet) contractual obligation to address audiences as citizens and on its educational role, the Spanish interviewees perceived it as part of the super-subject that manipulated the system and tried to dominate viewers, which was apparently upsetting for them.

Finally, the activists' discourses were particularly sophisticated in both countries. To keep abreast of the news, they also resorted to blogs and information provided by nongovernmental organizations, which might have fallen outside mainstream news perspectives. In Finland, activists were aware of the complexity of truth and more critical toward the media ecosystem. In Spain, the members of the activist group stood out for the level of sophistication of their proposed measures for improving the system, placing greater emphasis on participation that enabled the recognition of citizens as such (Lamuedra et al., 2019, 2020).

### Consent

As already noted, the Finnish viewers felt that the media system was at their service. Although the possibility of manipulation was acknowledged, they believed that the media counteracted it. This was evidenced by subsequent developments in Finland, after data collection, when the prime minister crisis led to the resignation/dismissal of the director of YLE while the prime minister lost the following elections, as M31-A had predicted, reflecting his confidence in the Finnish media ecosystem.

The "this never happens in Finland" discourse that appeared in most of the conversations was related to their high level of trust in the country's media representations, their self-recognition as citizens, and their unwavering support of the system. There were indeed concerns about commercial broadcasters (M20, F56-A, Fi-F57, and M25 in Helsinki) because of their relationship with the business world, but this was precisely the argument deployed to justify the existence of YLE.

In Spain, the interviewees' discursive repertoires provided a glimpse of how things should be (public media ought to represent reality, recognize citizens as such, and facilitate their democratic participation). Nevertheless, not only did their demands appear to be unmet but it was also a challenge merely to imagine how that could possibly be (with the exception of the activists). Therefore, a feeling of being manipulated and fairly powerless permeated the conversations.

In contrast, the Finnish interviewees did not apparently feel that their ability to consent to certain social or political issues was being manipulated in the media game. They made no structured demands for designing an alternative media system despite the high level of sophistication of their discourses.

With regard to the Finnish media, the discordant note was struck to a certain extent by the elderly and the activists. One of them (Sp-Argentinian-M26-A) offered the most extreme view among the members of his group, when claiming that the Finns were disillusioned and told "what they should believe." In this case, the idea of a super-subject, which identified with the globalized elites or owners of major corporations, did indeed appear.

### Conclusions

The analysis of the discursive repertoires of both the Finnish and Spanish interviewees suggests that media representations and citizen recognition are two dimensions of the same citizen participation process in liberal democracies, enabled by the public sphere. Representation and recognition can be considered as prerequisites for the effective construction of a citizenry that has a role in decision-making, namely, that has the ability to consent.

The results highlight several thought-provoking differences between the two countries regarding representation, recognition, the promotion of voice, and consent. It should be noted, however, that the processes of consent—perhaps because they are insufficiently developed in current societies—were less clearly expressed in the discursive repertoires of both the Finnish and Spanish interviewees.

In Finland, the interviewees' discursive repertoires reflected a general acceptance of the representation of current affairs in YLE's newscasts albeit with some nuances. This idea appears to be associated with the fact that they could exercise their right to information as citizens. Therefore, they felt recognized and encouraged to act as such and to value the established political system, believing that any power abuse in public opinion formation—such as the prime minister crisis—would be corrected by the system itself.

In Spain, the interviewees' discourses revealed a high level of dissatisfaction with the representation of current affairs. They stated that TVE's newscasts targeted them as consumers, thus trying to influence their purchasing decisions or their vote. This suggests that they felt unrecognized as citizens even when they were addressed as voters. Such a state of affairs gave rise to frustration and, in the case of TVE, anger. Spanish interviewees claimed that they were not taken into account in the media ecosystem or in the political system, both of which controlled by the super-subject. Rather

than accepting this situation, they were resigned to it. In other words, they did not feel that the system required their consent for decision-making.

Citizen recognition plays a fundamental role in this process. In a healthier public sphere, for citizens, the representation of reality is more adequate which, in turn, makes them feel recognized as such. In a more deficient public sphere, this process is left unfinished and, therefore, the quality of democracy is undermined. The integration of the concepts of representation, recognition, voice, and consent frames citizens in an intersubjective and iterative participatory process.

The results show that a representation of current affairs considered adequate by viewers is key to the representation-recognition-participation process. However, they raise a number of relevant and pressing issues in the international academic debate in times of political disaffection and post-truth. Firstly, the question of whether liberal representative democracies are worthy of the name if their media ecosystems do not perform properly. Democracies should provide resources for the exercise of cultural rights and engagement in some sort of horizontal dialogue in the public sphere with a decision-making orientation. The representation of current affairs particularly in PSM newscasts has proven to be a key tool in this regard.

Secondly, it is necessary to explore the little-studied role of media representations in identity formation. In this article, we have tried to build a comparative framework incorporating the relationships of media ecosystems within institutional legitimacy (based on Hallin and Mancini's model, 2004), media market plurality, and the political (in)dependence of the media, as well as social, economic, and political variables. The comparison of the patterns of the dynamic relationships among structural variables, processes of representation and recognition, and their effects on citizenship is a new avenue of research in which the analysis of discursive repertoires can be a useful tool. In our comparative study, the academic literature and international reports clearly show that structural variables of Finland and Spain mostly differ.

As a result of Finland's traits as a country, the discourses of the Finnish viewers elaborated on a number of elements central to both Finnish identity and the quality of democracy: Egalitarianism, the welfare state, their PSB (YLE), and a culture of consensus (a deliberative practice for decision-making). The growing presence of discourses on immigration, racism, and the deterioration of the welfare state in the media was understood as a threat to this set of key notions.

For their part, Spanish interviewees referred to certain issues hindering Spain's democratic development: The "they" (super-subject or dominant power of a political or economic nature); the media as a tool of that power; journalists as hostages of the system itself; the collusion between political parties and the media; and public media as a sphere that should connect them with their citizen and information rights. Their discursive repertoires included a cocktail of measures—particularly sophisticated in the case of activists—for upending a system that they did not accept. So, there were certain similarities between the key elements of their discourses on the journalistic ecosystem, and the structural variables indicated in studies such as that of Hallin and Mancini (2004), which suggest that the meaning-making dimension of citizens interacts with political, economic, and social structures, an area that requires further research.

Finally, our results suggest that issues that are usually studied separately, such as equality, the welfare state, the quality of media representations, and citizen identity, should be addressed jointly to meet the current challenges of democracy, such as the gradual spread of extreme right-wing democracy eroding ideas in the post-truth era.

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