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CISAN Research on North American Cultural and Creative Industries

The creative and cultural industries are defined as all those whose product or service has a high symbolic and aesthetic content and whose meaning is more important than their utilitarian function.¹ Among the most important sectors are all branches of formal artistic endeavors: audiovisual activities such as cinema and television; the publishing industry in all its formats; publicity, which uses different media and lan-

guages; the new technological sectors like videogames and other digital narrative forms; and all fields of design and architecture.

David Hesmondhalgh points out three reasons why the cultural and creative industries are important for contemporary societies: first, their capacity to produce narratives that influence our knowledge and understanding of the world and how we experience it; secondly, because they play the role of systems of organization of creativity and knowledge in contemporary societies; and third-

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ly, because their actions generate transformations and economic, social, and cultural effects.² They are not only important because they cover a series of economic activities with common traits like symbolic and aesthetic content, but also because, to a greater or lesser extent, these characteristics have permeated most economic and service activities to the degree that, according to Allen Scott, the era we live in can be defined as cognitive-cultural capitalism.³

For Mexico it is very important to study North America's creative and cultural industries. For decades, the United States has been the world's main producer and distributor of cultural content; it has dominated, above all, in the production of films, television programs, and the music industry. In Mexico, the consumption of these U.S. cultural products has been intense and, therefore, it has affected the vision we have of the United States. Of

course, U.S. cultural products' content are not unidirectional nor do they have a coherent, invariable intentionality. While narrative patterns exist through which U.S. society represents itself, we can say that the diversity of cultural products and the fragmentation of U.S. industries' creative sources have generated a broad, contradictory universe of narratives. Understanding and monitoring the changes and continuities of these products is central for understanding the United States and our vision of it.

Another aspect that makes the study of these industries in North America from the Mexican viewpoint important is their economic effects. The immense production of U.S. audiovisual and musical content and their domination of the Mexican market has affected our own creative and cultural industries, particularly the film industry. The negative effect of Hollywood domination can be seen

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around the world, even in countries with important film traditions and considerable governmental support, such as Canada and France. On the other hand, the large migrant and Mexican- and Latin American-origin population in the United States has created a very important demand for Spanish-language and Mexican cultural content. This has undoubtedly been key for the development of television and other sectors such as music, publishing, and radio broadcasting. These economic effects require continual research efforts to monitor and explain the transformations in audience dynamics, the penetration of Spanish-language media and content, and the discourses and representations in their content and in the organization of companies.

The creative and cultural industries have been tremendously affected by the swift evolution of information and communications technologies. On the one hand, both independent and commercial content production has expanded exponentially. On the other hand, the digital distribution of cultural content, above all music, film, and literature, has put within the reach of individual consumers an extremely broad supply of products that is hardly conditioned at all by their place of residence. Cultural consumption in the new streaming platforms for music and audiovisual products has increased access to U.S. products, but it has also opened up spaces for Mexican and Canadian production. One aspect to be researched is the extent to which these new distribution channels have benefitted or complicated production for Mexico.

The social and technological dynamic between Mexico and the United States has brought with it the emergence of collaborative networks for creative and cultural production. These transformations have had an impact on production relationships in North America. More and more co-productions by Canada, the United States, and Mexico are in the offing, and their artistic and creative communities are participating in tight-knit networks for work and temporary collaboration. Mexican talent has always migrated to the centers of U.S. cultural production, but in this century, this has accelerated and become more

noticeable. Studying the effects of technological change in cultural consumption and production must be a priority for understanding the evolution of North American creative and cultural industries and the role Mexico plays and will continue to play in the region.

Canada fields a large number of strategies and public policies to encourage its creative industries, and Mexico can learn a great deal from them. Given the cultural proximity of Canada and the United States, the pressure on Canadian cultural markets is much greater than in Mexico. The Canadian government has made different sustained efforts for the production and distribution of Canadian content. The support goes not only to the fine arts, but support for folk culture is also broad and innovative. Popular music and audiovisual film and television production are successful examples of these policies. Mexico has a lot to learn from the Canadian experience and the regional and national dynamics of its cultural and creative industries. To do that, we study these processes from the CISAN.

Since its beginnings, the CISAN has produced important multidisciplinary research about North America's cultural and creative industries. The lines of research have produced important teaching and research materials in the areas of cultural, literary, and film studies. Research into the cultural industries in the trade agreements has recently been incorporated, including their socioeconomic functioning in each country and the organizational and creative links that tie the cultural producing and consuming communities together in North America. ■■■

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1 Dominic Power and Allen J. Scott, "A Prelude to Cultural Industries and the Production of Culture," in Dominic Power and Allen J. Scott, eds., *Cultural Industries and the Production of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 3-16.

2 David Hesmondhalgh, *The Cultural Industries* (Los Angeles and London: Sage, 2012).

3 Allen J. Scott, "Beyond the Creative City: Cognitive-Cultural Capitalism and the New Urbanism," *Regional Studies* 48, no. 4 (2014), pp. 565-578.