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Media Policy Network in Portugal. A Case Study Approach *

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Abstract

In the media policy arena, there are multiple (often conflicting) perspectives and political outcome reflects different pressures and opinions. Contending groups develop strategies and bargain to see their interests served. Notwithstanding the diversity and complexity of the policy-making literature, we will try to assess the utility of the policy network concept in an attempt to shed some light into the conception/implementation of media policy in Portugal. Whist analysing the eventual relevance of the policy network approach, we will consider two distinct political periods: the social democrats majority rule, from 1987 to 1995, and the socialist mandates, from 1995 to 2002.

Key words

Media policy, Policy Networks, Power, Media Groups, State, Portugal

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In the media policy arena, there are multiple (often conflicting) perspectives and political outcome reflects different pressures and opinions. Contending groups develop strategies and bargain to see their interests served. Notwithstanding the diversity and complexity of the policy-making literature, we will try to assess the utility of the policy network concept in an attempt to shed some light into the conception/implementation of media policy in Portugal. Whist analysing the eventual relevance of the policy network approach, we will consider two distinct political periods: the social democrats majority rule, from 1987 to 1995, and the socialist mandates, from 1995 to 2002.

Our working hypothesis is that to begin to understand the definition and application of media policies, observation of the structural dimensions and micro-analysis are not

sufficient. A meso-level conceptual framework such as 'policy network' might contribute to the difficult task of explaining the decision-making process. We will use the case study approach looking at networks within the media policy sector. This article is to been seen as an working hypothesis as it is the first step of a two-year research project.

Policy network as a meso-level concept

To explain how national political systems make choices on behalf of the electorate it is necessary to specify the interests, the resources, constraints, and norms. Institutional and network perspectives, rational choice theory, socio-economic and ideological approaches have all been crucial in the difficult task of explaining how policy is made and implemented. Despite the critical analysis of the policy network literature[1] and its (apparent) separation from other public policy perspectives, it is our view that policy network understood as a meso-level concept can be relevant.

Hanf (1978) argues that the term network merely denotes, in a suggestive manner, the fact that policy making includes a large number of public and private actors from different levels and functional areas of government and society. This idea clearly plays down the relevance of institutional and formal differences between state and societal actors. 'Policy making usually involves interaction and indeed there is not uncommonly a situation whereby the relevant part of the bureaucracy shows more sympathy to its societal clients than to some overall state goals' (Jordan & Schubert, 1992).

The proliferation of authors using some kind of network metaphor at the end of the 1970's was not a coincidence but reflected political landscape transformations. Jordan & Schubert recognise that the network idea was the inevitable response to a number of developing characteristics of the contemporary public process (1992: 11):

- The emergence of the organised society, or a society based on organised collectivities;

- A trend in most reasonably sophisticated political systems of sectorisation on policy making;

- The increasing mobilisation of competing interests which leads to overcrowded policy making;

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[1] For a review of the North-American, British and German-inspired policy network literature, see John, 1998; Borzel, 1997; Marsh, 1998, Marsh and Rhodes, 1992.

- Increased scope of state policy making – perhaps as a result of the electoral 'auction' which forces political parties to appear to offer solutions;

- Decentralisation or the fragmentation of the state. There are few state goals but an aggregate of departmental interests;

- Blurring of boundaries between the public and private. Policy making tends to be made between fractions of the state and clientelist interest groups.

Its actors, their linkages and its boundary can therefore describe a policy network. It includes a relatively stable set of mainly public and private corporate actors. The linkages between the actors serve as channels for communications and for the exchange of information, expertise, trust or other policy resources. The boundary of a given policy network is not in the first place determined by formal institutions but results from a process of mutual recognition dependent of structural relevance and structural embeddedness (Kenis & Schneider, 1989:14).

Despite the policy network's appeal as a description of some important realities in contemporary political systems, many questions have been raised about the concept (and its numerous variations) and about its capacity to provide dynamic explanations of policy choices in either sectors or sub-sectors. Dowding (1995: 136-7), for example, points out that networks at present appear more useful at the metaphorical level than at the level of models capable of explaining outcomes in a systematic manner. In his perspective, the policy network approach fails as a model because the driving force of the explanation, the independent variables, are not network characteristics *per se* but rather characteristics of the components within networks. These components explain both the nature of the network *and* the nature of the policy process (1995: 137). Dowding's argument implies that networks themselves have no influence on policy outcome. Instead, networks reflect patterns of interaction and resource exchange between agents, and those in turn determine outcomes: 'the explanation lies in the characteristics of the actors' (1995: 142).

If interaction and resource exchange between agents and bargaining between actors are presented as the factors that count, the network approach has in fact little (if any) theoretical relevance. However, we would venture the notion that this perspective can be useful in our attempt to understand change and continuity in the Portuguese media policy, insofar as we perceive policy network as no more than a meso level concept in interconnection with the micro and macro level analysis (Marsh and Rhodes, 1992; Marsh, 1998; Daugbjerg and Marsh, 1998).

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The macro-level analysis deals with two broad sets of questions: the larger structures and processes of government within which any network operates, and the relationship between the state and civil society. Policy networks occur at the sectorial and sub-sectorial level. However, these networks operate within the context of the broader political system, which has particular features. In these circumstances, state theory can offer an explanation on the pattern of inclusion and exclusion of the network and might also support an hypothesis on whose interests are served by the outputs of a network. The meso-levels deals with the pattern of interest group intermediation; it concentrates on questions related to the structure of the networks and the patterns of interaction within them. The micro-level analysis deals with the individual actions and decisions of actors within the networks and must be underpinned by a theory of human behaviour, whether it be rational choice theory or some other (Marsh, 1998). Considering this framework relevant for our case study, we will concentrate on networks as political structures, which constrain and facilitate actors within the network. These structures are naturally context dependent.

Change and continuity in media policy

The most comprehensive changes in the Portuguese media, since the 1974-75 revolutionary period, were undertaken by the social democrats during Cavaco Silva's absolute majority rule from 1987 up to 1995. The socialists, led by António Guterres from 1995 to 2002, have inherited a highly reformed but poorly regulated media environment. Perceiving the reforms as irreversible, Guterres' governments have merely attempted to strengthen regulatory bodies, to improve a number of legal instruments, and have certainly contributed to the expansion of the media policy network.

The first set of measures directly related to the structure of the media concerned the re-organisation of the radio broadcasting sector. By the mid-1980's there were so many illegal radio stations operating that the government could no longer ignore that reality. Nevertheless, only by 1989 had 310 new local frequencies been allocated. In the following year, two regional frequencies were attributed: one went to *Rádio Press*, part of the *Lusomundo* group and the other to *Correio da Manhã Rádio* which belonged to the *Carlos Barbosa* group.

The two most important state owned and controlled newspapers, *Jornal de Notícias* and *Diário de Notícias*, were privatised in 1989 and 1991, respectively. The government had been following a wide privatisation programme and there were no grounds to justify the maintenance of *Jornal de Notícias* and *Diário de Notícias* under state control. Torn between the perceived need to control those newspapers and the ideological and political belief in privatisation the government was clearly in a dilemma. In a controversial process, both were bought by *Lusomundo*, one of the most important multi-media groups in Portugal, perceived - at the time - as having close links with the government.

The opening up of TV channels to private ownership was by far the most relevant aspect of the social democrat's media policy. Indeed, there had been considerable debate about private television, in particular, since the early 1980's. The 1976 Constitution stated that no TV channel could be privately owned and the 1982 review did not contemplate any changes in this area (only in 1989). What appeared to be an undisputed policy in 1976 had however been seen as an extremely retrograde decision by 1982. In the ensuing controversy, the Catholic Church was one of the first actors to openly express its desire to own and run a generalist TV channel (not a religious channel).

From 1987 onwards, due to the economic growth and political stability, the *Balsemão*, *Sonae* and *Presslivre* groups started to seriously evaluate their possibilities in the new context. This process, however, was delayed until the early 1990's because the government strategically decided to concentrate its efforts on the re-organisation of the radio sector whose expansion had become unstoppable since the mid-1980's. When local and regional radio frequencies were attributed, political interest moved again to private television. Amongst three candidacies (*Sonae* had given up), the government decided in 1992 to attribute the third national channel to *Sociedade Independente de Comunicação* (SIC) and the fourth was allocated to *Televisão Independente* (TVI), a channel identified with the Catholic Church.

The radio and television markets were indeed opened up and the most important newspapers (nationalised during the revolutionary period) were sold out to private capital. These profound reforms – though highly controversial – were perceived by the following socialist governments – led by António Guterres - as irreversible, and attention was instead focused on the tuning up of the new media landscape.

In the broadcasting arena, a new television Act was passed (Law 31-A/98 of 14th of July). This television Act introduced changes in both the access to and exercise of the

television activity. The law consecrated the possibility of creating local, regional and thematic channels, though the lack of ulterior regulation effectively meant that no local or regional channels were implemented. Up until the passing of Law 31-A/98 the Portuguese television broadcasting system already included a number of channels: two public national channels (RTP1 and RTP2), two private national channels (SIC and TVI), two public regional channels (RTP-*Açores* and RTP-*Madeira*), and two public international channels (RTP *África* and RTP *Internacional*). Cable television and satellite television reception were also well-established realities but companies were not allowed to produce their own programmes. Only third party transmissions were legally possible.

The development of cable television channels did not mean that the financial situation of broadcasting companies improved during the Guterres' mandates. In fact, all terrestrial TV stations registered important financial losses. The advertising market was small and, apart from SIC, terrestrial broadcasting companies had highly unstable management mainly due to debt accumulation. When the broadcasting market was opened up to private initiative in 1992 the Cavaco Silva government abolished the television license-fee and sold RTP's transmission network to Portugal Telecom. These political decisions, which were not reversed by the socialists, put RTP in a difficult economic situation and transformed the so-called Public Service Broadcaster into a standard commercial television; RTP had to fight for audiences in trying to conquer a meaningful slice of the adverting cake. In this context, RTP was neither performing its duties as a public service nor being successful as a commercial company.

Digital terrestrial television was also in the socialists' agenda. In August 2001, following a consultation period, the government attributed to the PTDP consortium (*Plataforma de Televisão Digital Terrestre*) a licence to establish and explore a digital terrestrial television platform. The winning consortium integrated both the Public Service channel, RTP, and the private channel SIC.

Not unlike its social democrat predecessors the socialist government also considered international broadcasts of great importance to its foreign policy. Under the social democrats tutelage, RTP's International channel (*RTP Internacional*) and RDP's international channel (*RDP Internacional*) were launched. Recognising the relevance of these instrument, António Guterres supported their expansion and consolidation. Most Portuguese communities abroad and Portuguese speaking nations can effectively watch and listen to these international television and radio channels. In addition, the socialists decided, along with RTP and RDP, to set up channels (*RTP África* and *RDP*

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África) specifically designed for Portuguese speaking African countries (Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde and S. Tomé and Príncipe).

In the radio broadcasting sub-sector, the socialists made it compulsory for local radios to produce their own content (most were simply re-broadcasting national radio stations feed) and created financial management incentives, namely by subsidising technological modernisation, by providing institutional advertising, and by reducing telecommunications costs (due to an agreement with Portugal Telecom).

As stated in the government programme (Assembleia da República: 1995), independence in the media public sector and journalists' rights were also high on the agenda. Therefore, both the Press Law and the Journalists' Statute were altered. These revised tools intended to further pluralism and independence guarantees within media companies and to reinforce journalist's rights. Changes were also introduced in the Media regulatory body, High Authority for the Media.

Policy networks under Cavaco and Guterres Governments

Having put forward the structural changes which took place during the Cavaco Silva's majority governments and the regulatory/legal adjustments implemented by the socialists, we now intend to discuss the policy networks which might have contributed to both change and continuity during these two periods. But we can't discuss power relations and the hypothetical relevance of networks to the political output without identifying networks. Therefore, the boundary problem is unavoidable. Where does a network begin and end? Provisionally we solved this problem by looking back to the literature on communications policy in Portugal. Sousa (1996) has described in detail the Portuguese communications policy from the mid-1980's up until the mid-1990's. Although this study did not explicitly clarify the network structure, it has identified the actors which have played an observable role in terms of media policy outcome.

The state/government was perceived as the main actor in the media arena, not only regulating but also owning and controlling the political content of public media. During Cavaco Silva's mandates, the media were under the tutelage of the *Secretaria de Estado da Presidência do Conselho de Ministros*. Although Marques Mendes chaired this *Secretaria*, the prime minister personally handled the most important portfolios, such as the opening up of television to private operators. Marques Mendes dealt with 'politically safe' issues such as violence on television and RTP's broadcasts to the

Portuguese emigrant communities and to the Portuguese speaking African nations. Though the socialists contributed to the development of a more open policy network, the state (government and regulatory bodies) has not lost its centrality in the policy-making arena. Private actors in the electronic media largely depended on the state to keep their licences and to expand their interests.

Political parties in general and the opposition in particular (inside and outside the Parliament context) as well as the President of the Republic tended to pay particular attention to the government intervention in the media. This does not necessarily mean that these actors did determine major decisions, but they created an awareness and visibility of media issues, which had no parallel in other policy sectors. The opposition and the President of the Republic, Mário Soares, frequently put forward their views on media policy and media (essentially public) performance. During Guterres' governments, the President, Jorge Sampaio, and the (fragmented) opposition had a more discrete intervention in the sector.

Within the institutional framework, the *Alta Autoridade para a Comunicação Social* (AACS) was another relevant actor – at least in legal terms. AACS was contemplated for the first time in the 1989 version of the Portuguese Constitution and its objectives were (and still are), inter alia, to guarantee the freedom of the press, to have a say in the attribution of TV channels to private initiative[2] and in the selection of public media editors. Despite its constitutional status, the high authority was perceived as being dominated by the government of the day and as a weak regulatory body. From its 12 members, one was a magistrate, five were members of Parliament, the government itself designated three members and the other elements were so-called representatives of the public opinion. The composition of AACS alone would prevent it from operating as an independent entity. During the first Guterres mandate, changes were introduced in the AACS composition in order to guarantee that it would operate more independently from the government of the day.

Apart from the state actors, Sousa (1996) highlights the role of two non-state actors: the Catholic Church, and the Balsemão media group. The opening up of the Television broadcasting sub-sector to private operators was the most relevant media decision during Cavaco Silva's mandates, and these two actors successfully lobbied to determine the outcome that best suited their interests. The Catholic Church and the

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[2] The AACS was not able to put forward its view on the attribution of TV channels to private operators. But, as its opinion was required by the Constitution, the High Authority decided for 'technical equality' and no candidacy was excluded.

Balsemão group were granted the two available national TV licenses in what turned out to be an extremely controversial process.

The Catholic Church is a powerful actor in a number of policy areas and it has a long history of involvement in the media (owning hundreds of local/regional papers and dozens of radio station, including the highly successful national network *Rádio Renascença*). The acquisition of a TV channel had been a long-standing whish. Recognising that other media groups were gaining social influence and considering a national TV channel strategic for the expansion of Christian values, the Church developed its arguments and it positioned itself as a 'natural' holder of a TV license. However, being more concerned with its influence in the Portuguese society than with the economic aspect of such a venture, the Catholic Church soon realised that it had no financial means to keep the channel (TVI). TVI is now in the hands of the *Media Capital* group.

The *Controjornal* group, whose figurehead was (and still is) the former prime minister Pinto Balsemão, had started with the successful weekly *Expresso* and had been consolidating its position in the media market. In addition to *Expresso*, it owned at the time a daily newspaper (*Capital*), several specialised magazines, and it also had a solid position in the printing industry. The creation of a national TV channel (SIC) was the most important development in Balsemão's media plans.

Though Lusomundo media group did not perceive itself as a potential candidate in the run for television channels, it certainly was another powerful actor in the media arena under the social-democrats' governments. *Lusomundo* started with film distribution and later expanded into exhibition and real estate. It had a dominant position in cinema distribution and exhibition sub-sectors in Portugal. During the allocation of regional radio stations, in the late 1980's, *Lusomundo* successfully bided for the Northern Portugal frequency (now absorbed by *TSF Rádio Jornal*, where *Lusomundo* got a solid position from March 1993 onwards). The privatisation of the two most important daily newspapers, *Jornal de Notícias* e *Diário de Notícias*, took place in favourable circumstances to Lusomundo who seized the opportunity to buy them both.

In her analysis of the Portuguese communications policy, Sousa (1996) does not give particular attention to professional organisations, consumer groups and trade unions. This does not necessarily mean that these actors shouldn't be considered as part of an open issue network but they were generally perceived as lacking human, technical and financial resources to have any significant impact in the determination of political output.

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Up to date, media policy under Guterres mandates (1995-2002) has not been systematically studied. However, departing from the analysis of two articles (Sousa, 1999; Sousa, 2000) and the examination of a media chronology from 1995 to 1999 (Pinto et al., 2000) we can put forward the idea that the media policy network has clearly expanded. Still, previously mentioned actors remained active (though significant internal changes did occur), and the government did not loose its central position. The prime minister's cabinet and the *Secretário de Estado* for the media (Arons de Carvalho) continued to be nuclear figures in both decision-making and non-decision-making. Contrary to what has happen during the Cavaco Silva's period, highly sensitive dossiers such as the Public Service Television Broadcasting were not dealt with.

Willing to demarcate itself from Cavaco Silva's centralist rule, Guterres governments set up or promoted the development of entities whose main task was to assist the policy-making and/or to study the media sector so politicians could decide with a better understanding of alternative choices. Amongst other examples, we would mention the *Comissão de Reflexão para o Estudo da Televisão* (Comission to Study the Future of Television), the *Comissão Inter-ministerial para propor acções nos sectores do cinema, audiovisual e telecomunicações* (Inter-ministerial Commission to propose measures in the cinema, audiovisual and telecommunications sectors), the *Instituto da Comunicação Social* (Media Institute), the *Conselho de Opinião da RTP* (Advisory Council of the Public Service Broadcaster, RTP*),* the *Instituto do Cinema, Audiovisual e Multimedia* (Audiovisual and Multimedia Institute), and the *Observatório da Comunicação* (Communications Observatory).

The *Instituto da Comunicação de Portugal* (ICP), the telecommunications regulator, started operating in 1989 but due to the technological convergence it has assumed a new role during Guterres' mandates. The *Instituto da Comunicação Social* and the *Instituto da Comunicação de Portugal* (ICP), recently renamed ANACOM (Communications Authority), were put to work together in order to develop common strategies for the converging telecommunications and audiovisual sectors.

The emerging regulatory/advisory entities contributed to the public's perception that policy-making was more open to consultation and debate. However it should not be assumed that these new media policy actors had a significant impact in the development and implementation of policies. Indeed it might eventually be argued that the increasing number of policy actors and their competing views might have contributed to non-decision-making due to what can be called a zero-sum game. In any case, non-decision-making is in itself a political outcome.

The previously mentioned multi-media groups have not disappeared but there were changes in their power structure. It could be argued that during the Socialists' rule, the Catholic Church lost some ground. Its most important recent acquisition, TVI, went into debt due to the lack of advertising revenues and in 1997 SOCI media group and the Scandinavian Broadcasting System bought it. In November 1998, the Media Capital group bought the company, being its current owner. Apart from loosing TVI, its most important asset, the Catholic Church also saw state subsidies to its numerous (but economically fragile) local newspapers reduced.

Though all television companies went through serious financial difficulties, the Balsemão group managed to expand its business. The Impresa holding managed to cement its position in the television market with a generalist terrestrial channel (SIC) and three cable thematic channels (SIC Notícias, SIC Gold and SIC Radical). In the press, it has acquired the news magazine *Visão* and it has reinforced its magazines offer in segments such as economy, society and tourism.

Apart from the traditional media groups, newcomers have joined the policy network. The biggest telecommunications operator, Portugal Telecom, has entered the television distribution business, with TV Cabo, but it also became a multi-media group in 2000, when it bought the Lusomundo group. The group does not have a terrestrial generalist channel but it is very strong in cinema distribution, press, and owns the highly influential radio network, TSF.

In addition, two other multi-media groups (Media Capital and Cofina) gained relevance in the media sphere. Media Capital made important investments in the radio sector and controlled the national television channel TVI. Recently this group has expanded into on-line services, cable TV and television production. Cofina is an extremely recent group with a strong position in the newspapers and magazines markets.

The boundaries of the policy network could be stretched to include a number of peripheral actors such as trade unions (eg: Press Union), sub-sectors associations (eg: *Associação de Imprensa Diária; Associação Portuguesa de Imprensa; Associação Portuguesa de Radiodifusão; Associação de Rádios de Inspiração Cristã; Associação de Imprensa Cristã*), consumer groups (eg: *Instituto do Consumidor; Associação Portuguesa para a Defesa dos Consumidores; Instituto Nacional de Defesa do Consumidor; Associação Portuguesa de Telespectadores; Associação Portuguesa de Espectadores de Televisão)*, research centres, etc. However, without further empirical research, we cannot demonstrate the relevance of any of these actors in terms of policy outputs. These actors frequently put forward their views on issues but there is no

clear connection between their expressed interests and major political decisions. Still, it is probably that a more detailed analysis of specific sub-sector (e.g. local radios or regional press) will prove that specific interests of a given association or trade union were served.

Obviously the policy networks don't stop at the national frontiers, as regional and global actors are increasingly important to the domestic level of policy-making. In any case, we have focused our provisional study on nationally based actors, being aware of the fact that they permanently interact with external entities which are in turn actors of other policy networks. Still, the nationally based policy network cannot be understood without the analysis of the network's inter-action with other networks.

The hypothetical relevance of policy networks

Considering what was said so far, the media policy outcomes were considerably different during the Cavaco Silva's and Guterres' mandates, and it is clear that policy networks existed in both periods, having expanded during the socialist rule. Now we will attempt to explain change and continuity and will try to examine if these changes were endogenous or exogenous to policy networks.

Major changes undertaken by the social democrats might be perceived as a result of regional developments (Portugal has joined the European Community in 1986). Indeed, the European Community was developing policies in this area; conservative governments in the UK, Germany and France persuasively argued for the liberalisation of markets and privatisation of state property. Important technological advances - mainly the development of satellite and optic fibre and the subsequent convergence of distribution technologies – were occurring.

At a national level, significant changes were also taking place: the economy was booming and, for the first time since the 1974 revolution, Portugal had a majority rule government, which brought political stability to the country. Furthermore, for ideological reasons, the pro-business social democrat governments favoured the privatisation of state media and the opening up of the radio and television terrestrial sub-sectors to commercial interests. Indeed, when António Guterres came to power in 1995, it had reduced room for manoeuvre: major changes had already been introduced and were seen as irreversible.

Apart from the regional and national structural factors, one can also attempt to understand change and continuity according to what we might call 'style of governance'. During Cavaco Silva mandates, relevant policies were taken by a few senior politicians (generally the prime minister and a few close governmental figures) with very limited - if any - public debate. Although a number of actors were supposed to have a say in the sector's political outcome, only a handful of them managed to have some influence. Most decisions were taken behind closed doors with no justification being provided by governments. Secrecy protected governments' interests from criticisms during what otherwise would have been consultation periods. The Cavaco Silva's governments were ill prepared to deal with the specificities of the media sector and have acted without public consultation or expert advice.

Since early days Guterres tried to demarcate itself from this style of governance (which it had severely criticised whilst in opposition) and tried to involve social actors in the decision-making process. «Dialogue» was by then the operative key word and efforts were developed in order to implement a more open decision-making process, promoting public consultations and publicising the distinct stages of the political process. The proliferation of advisory committees and regulatory bodies that were supposed to study and advise government in terms of formulation and implementation of policies was certainly related to an attempt to promote a different policy-making model.

When trying to understand media policy making in two different periods, these exogenous macro factors are certainly part of the explanation. National and international economic, political and social dimensions cannot be ignored. Micro factors, namely the individual actors behaviour, are another crucial aspect. But, although individual actors act *per se*, their actions are dependent from their evaluation of the macro and meso level scenarios. Individual actors assess the broad political and economic environment and their relative power and resources regarding other network members. In this perspective, it can be argued that policy networks do affect policy outcome. Individual behaviour cannot be disassociated from the sectorial and sub-sectorial context they operate in. Only individual members of the network act by themselves but the networks are conditioning structures and as such they are a factor to be considered when attempting to explain policy outcomes.

When individual actors develop their strategies in order to see their interests served they are well aware of the network of interests in a given sector and their perception of the relative power of the network members is crucial to the type of arguments they will use and the timing to put them forward. The structure of the policy network affects

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policy outcome because actors know that their negotiating position cannot ignore the other network members' interests.

During Cavaco Silva's rule, the government and the emerging media groups, namely the Catholic Church, the Balsemão group and Lusomundo, were certainly the most powerful network members. The media regulatory bodies were incipient and they had no human and financial resources to seriously influence political outcome. Despite its Constitutional status, the High Authority for the Media, for example, had serious difficulties in assuming an effective regulatory role. Media operators perceived the High Authority as a weak (government controlled) body and as such they frequently ignored the law it was supposed to implement.

The government, the Church and the economic interests were central during the social democrats rule. However, strong economic groups such as Sonae (although with interest in the media) did not apply for a TV channel. This group did not have a close relationship with the government and therefore a TV channel would not be attributed to Sonae. Sonae clearly understood that one channel would have to go to the Church and the other one to the former social democrat prime minister, Pinto Balsemão. Basically the same did happen in the radio and newspaper sub-sectors. The social democrat governments handed out the most important daily newspapers and the most important radio frequencies to Lusomundo, an emerging media group led and supported by social democrats. Indeed, individual actors decisions and macro level analysis are not sufficient to explain these aspects. Individual actors carefully evaluate their relative power in the network structure they share with other actors.

António Guterres wanted to demonstrate that policy-making could be an all together different exercise and he was very keen on a more open and participated/inclusive mode of governance. In reality the policy network has expanded and there was a proliferation of voices in the media arena. The proliferation of contradictory voices (both internal and external to government) somehow paralysed the decision-making process. The terrestrial television dossier (with all channels in the red), for example, should have been dealt with but conflicting interests led the government to postpone fundamental decisions. The Public Service Broadcaster, RTP, was (and still is) financially bankrupt but the socialists did not alter the status quo.

As the government did not have clear ideas on what would be the best solution for RTP, commercial television operators persuasively convinced the government that their survival depended on a public service television with different characteristics: that is, with no advertising or with limited advertising. Without making provisions for any

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alternative financing, the government heeded to SIC and TVI by defining a 7,5 minutes / per hour advertising limit on RTP 1, and by excluding advertising from RTP 2. Once again, to understand this decision the macro and micro level of analysis are not sufficient. Obviously broad political and economic reasons partly explain the financial difficulties of television operators. Micro choice theory also help us to understand the particular behaviour of both SIC and TVI. However, without considering the relative power of actors in the policy network context, one cannot fully understand the policy outcome. Apart from its financial difficulties, RTP never developed as an autonomous public service broadcaster. It is a fragile company lacking in vision and leadership. The perception that this decision would not cause a major political problem for the government (given that RTP had no conditions to strongly react to this measure – both internally and in terms of public support mobilisation) made it possible for private operators to pursue a winning strategy.

Concluding Remarks

The analysis of the Portuguese media policy in recent times demonstrates that policy networks exist and are relevant for policy process and policy outcome. Networks affect outcome which in turn affects the network. There is a continuing inter-action, with policies being positive or negative to individual actors but also with actors developing continuous strategies to influence the outcome. The Portuguese case shows that networks are sites of strategic action. Network outcomes reflect bargaining among network members and therefore policy networks can *partially* explain why decision-making takes a particular course at a particular time.

In spite of the expansion of the media policy network in recent years, it is observable in both periods that the state is the principal actor because it is up to the government to define the timing and the conditions of access to the television and radio markets. In the press, the market is open (though vague legislation on concentration does exist) but the state still plays an important role in terms of direct and indirect subsidies.

Considering that this article is merely the initial step of a two-years research project on media policy networks, we would like to put forward the possibility of disaggregating media policy network in sub-sectorial analysis, namely press policy network, radio policy network, terrestrial television policy network, digital television policy network. Obviously we will maintain our interest on the sectorial level but it is likely that the incorporation of sub-sectorial dimensions might take us further.

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