In search of consensus: political, media and public agendas in Santiago de Cuba

En busca del consenso: agendas política, mediática y pública en Santiago de Cuba

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ABSTRACT

This research explains the relationship between political, media and public agendas on experiential topics in Santiago de Cuba during the first quarter of 2014 and 2015. For this, we used theoretical methods, such as analysis-synthesis and inductive-deductive, and techniques such as quantitative content analysis, interviews and discussion groups. The results show a thematic transference relationship between the political and media agendas, and a low one between the latter and the public agenda. This complex phenomenon derives from influences related to the construction of the media and the public agenda.

RESUMEN

Esta investigación explica la relación entre las agendas política, mediática y pública sobre temas experienciales en Santiago de Cuba durante el primer trimestre de los años 2014 y 2015. Para esto, se utilizan métodos teóricos, como el análisis-síntesis y el inductivo-deductivo, y técnicas como el análisis de contenido cuantitativo, las entrevistas y los grupos de discusión. Los resultados muestran una relación de transferencia temática entre las agendas política y mediática, y baja entre esta última y la agenda pública. Este complejo fenómeno se produce a partir de influencias relacionadas con la construcción de la agenda mediática y de la pública.

RESUMO

Esta pesquisa explica a relação entre a política, mídia e agendas públicas sobre temas experimentais em Santiago de Cuba durante o primeiro trimestre de 2014 e 2015. Para este métodos teóricos como a análise-síntese e indutivo-dedutivo usado, e as técnicas como a análise de conteúdo quantitativa, entrevistas e grupos focais. Os resultados mostram que há uma relação de transferência temática entre las agendas políticas e de mídia e baixa entre esta última e a agenda pública. Este complexo fenômeno é produzido a partir da construção da agenda da mídia e pública.

Keywords: agenda-setting; politics; media; public; mediations; construction.

Palabras clave: *agenda-setting; política; medios; públicos; mediaciones; construcción.*

Palavras-chave: agenda-setting; política; mídia; público; mediações; construção.

INTRODUCTION

The communications context in Cuba has experienced diverse transformations that merit a holistic analysis of the relationship between institutions, the media, and the public. At a theoretical level, this relationship has been the object of analysis in multiple studies that examine the phenomenon from sociological, psychological, and communicational perspectives. One of them is that of the agenda-setting, which in the last years points towards a widening and redefinition of the traditional role of agenda-setting of the media to include the influence of external sources, other media, and the audience (McCombs, Shaw, & Weaver, 2014; McCombs & Valenzuela, 2014; Aruguete, 2015). As part of this expansion, such perspective has evolved towards more complex models of information transference, which provide a framework of interpretation that is applicable to the Cuban reality and its own characteristics.

In an interview given by professor Maxwell McCombs, one of the founders of this theory (Muñiz, 2018b), he points out that the exploration of the effects of agenda setting in new scenarios creates opportunities for the theoretical expansion of this perspective.

> As academics apply the current version of the agenda-setting theory to new geographical, social, cultural, and political environments, it is likely that these efforts will generate new theoretical dimensions. Carrying out research in unknown territory requires more insight and creativity (Muñiz, 2018b, p. 8).

It is for this reason that the study of the relationship between agendas in countries like Cuba has required the adaptation of the findings produced in other contexts of scientific production, particularly because the agenda-setting theory was developed in political scenarios of liberal democracy which strongly framed its scope and methodology, making its application to the Cuban reality practically impossible without a prior reinterpretation of its approaches.

In Cuba, the direction of the political system is constitutionally assumed by a single non-electoral party, which separates them from the rest of the political formations of the world, preferably democratic, unlike the PCC, which does not posit candidates for any of its positions (Guanche, 2013; Concepción & Guerrero, 2017). The media system is subordinated to the PCC and other governmental institutions that are in charge of its economic sustenance. This determines that, from an editorial point of view, the country's press covers similar topics and those continue during extended periods of

time due to the high degree of institutionalism of the publications (Lassalle, 2017).

This research focuses on the analysis of the relationship between the political, media, and public agendas in Cuba through a study of cases in the Santiago de Cuba province, where other studies about that interaction have previously taken place (Caballero, 2015; Castillo, 2015; Ramos, 2017).

The research studies about agenda-setting performed in the country (Gallego & Rosabal, 2010; Quiala, 2015; Muñiz & Fonseca, 2017) agree upon the need to analyze the thematic transference of information within a context in which the media essentially responds to the state and is economically and editorially subordinated to one political party. This does not only determine the homogenization of media content, but also the existence of a shared professional culture and production routines that are very similar to each other (Elizalde, 2013). With the longitudinal diagnosis of that relationship the aim is to directly influence the media practices inside the press by understanding and analyzing such interaction.

INTER-AGENDAS RELATIONSHIP: VARIOUS PERSPECTIVES ABOUT A COMPLEX PHENOMENON

The relationship between the media and the public began to be studied in Latin America in the 1970s. In a convulsed political context, the proposal of independent Latin American cultural politics began to emerge; in it, the audience was not seen as isolated receptors, but as critical subjects, forming a complex scenario of mediations that intervened in the process of consumption. (Saintout & Ferrante, 2006). In this sense, Jesús Martín Barbero (1987), Néstor García Canclini (1990), Guillermo Orozco (1996; 2001) and Valerio Fuenzalida and María Elena Hermosilla (1991) produced significant contributions, proposing to rethink the notion of reception from a broader perspective, not solely from the lens of cultural studies but also from anthropology and sociology (Alonso, De Frutos, & Galarza, 2015; Vasallo de Lópes, 1995).

Even though the process of active reception has had wide representation in academic studies, the analysis of the emission has found a home in the sociology of news production. The researcher Cecilia Cervantes (1995) has reflected about the journalistic *habitus* as a scheme of dispositions that transcends the organizational and institutional levels and contributes to the social order,

even when eventually the news media covers events that reflect social tension.

Both perspectives refer to the dialogue of cultural practices that are established not only from the actions of the media and institutions, but that constitutes a complex system which analysis allows for the observation of the public sphere from a multidisciplinary perspective.

From it, the Latin American public sphere is characterized by: the permanent substitution of the people for the state and its protagonist role in civil society and in the regulation of media activity; in the media there is clientelism, the null application of regulation and the inadequate defense of the conditions for the exercise of journalism, which is expressed in the coverage logic from institutional sources rather than from communities and citizens (Martín Barbero, 2001; Guerrero & Ramírez, 2015).

The current Latin American media reality is marked by the political and economic interests of specific groups that, either from the public or private sectors, fight to dominate journalism and the politics of communication (Guerrero & Ramírez, 2015).

This type of relationship of reciprocal exchange between the media, politicians, and the public has been described by some authors (Gans, 1979) and it constitutes the starting point for diverse theoretical perspectives that allow us to explain in some way the consensual interaction among them. One of them is that of agenda-setting, which arises in the 1970s to explain the thematic transference of informative relevance between the media and the public using images of political candidates broadcasted by the former and their assimilation by the audiences (McCombs, 2006; Aruguete, 2015; Trigueros y Lacasa-Mas, 2018).

Since McCombs and Shaw (1972) carried out their first study about the setting of the agenda in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, United States, during the presidential elections of 1968, the agenda-setting theory has generated a large amount of research that has mostly replicated the correlations between media and public agendas (Ghanem & Wanta, 2001), identified the factors that contribute to the formation of different agendas (Fico & Freedman, 2001), and formally developed and confirmed the theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1993; Scheufele, 2000; Vargo, Guo, & Amazeen, 2018).

The original agenda-setting study examined the elections. However, the theory has been applied not only to that type of context, but also to a variety of other communication situations that go beyond the

original academic domain (McCombs, 2006; Young & McCarthy, 2009; Trigueros & Lacasa-Mas, 2018; Baumann, Zheng, & McCombs, 2018).

The agenda-setting research has been expanded in three main thematic directions: the political, media, and public agendas, which in all three cases make reference to the hierarchization performed by different social agents (Ferreres, 2009; McCombs & Valenzuela, 2014; Trigueros & Lacasa-Mas, 2018): a process of complex nature that is composed of several factors, if all of its contextual elements are taken into consideration.

McCombs, Shaw, and Weaver (2014), three of the most prominent figures in the agenda-setting field, explain that the theory has been expanded around two trends: one centrifuge, that extends to further domains from the original scope towards public issues, and one centripetal, that deepens the understanding of the processes of construction and establishment of the agendas.

This expansion of the agenda-setting contributes to the production of a large number of empirical studies (Cáceres, 2011; Ardèvol-Abreu & España, 2015; Boczkowski & Mitchelstein, 2015; Gallego, 2016), although it pushes the theoretical search towards new disciplinary fields. Despite that, the expansion opens up conduits for the holistic comprehension of this phenomena, in light of other theoretical perspectives that provide richer modes of interpretation. In them, an important place is taken by the research on the relationship between transmitters and receptors in Latin America (Martín Barbero, 2001; Orozco, 2001; Cervantes, 2015), which enables us to resize the public agenda as a component of a system of complex relationships between the media and the political system, taking place in a public sphere with specific contextual characteristics that cannot be ignored in the study of its formation. In it, social agents possess particular modes of consumption and resignification of media messages, strongly influenced by the local (territorial) culture in which they exist.

However, the main contribution that Latin American studies could make to agenda-setting is a holistic view of the relationship between politics, media, and the public from its mediations, as a process and system that influences its behavior, from institutional, situational, cultural, and political contexts with specific characteristics (Martín Barbero, 2002).

The analysis of the mediations could also contribute to the understanding of the factors that impact the construction of the media agenda (*agenda building*), a

perspective that corresponds to the fourth phase of research on agenda-setting and that has delved into the thematic transference between political sources and the media.

The construction of the media agenda derives from the question of "who establishes the media agenda" (McCombs, 2006, p. 98; Vonbun-Feldbauer & Matthes, 2017). In the area of politics, Cobb and Elder (1971) examined how public policy originates and who participates in the formation of the media agenda. From this perspective, the agenda topics at the national level are constructed from concerns that go from individual to collective agendas. Additionally, Cobb and Elder suggested that the political parties and the media played an important role as "triggers" to promote people's interests in the topics of institutional agendas.

The explanation of elements such as the professional culture, the use of news values and newsworthiness criteria, work routines and the organizational structure of media outlets (Oller, 2016; Gallego, 2018) constitute a starting point to analyzing this complex relationship, taking into account its developmental context. The studies conducted by Martín Oller (2016) about journalistic cultures in Latin America could constitute a geographical referent to establish a dialogue between agenda-setting and other disciplines and to think about the relationship between agendas as a system that interacts dynamically with the surrounding environment.

FACTORS THAT IMPACT THE INTER-AGENDAS RELATIONSHIP

The study of the relationship between the agendas that interact in the public sphere should not be conceived solely based on the statistical correlations among them since, while they allow us to measure the effect of one agenda over another, it does not holistically explain the process through which they achieve direct influence. Because of that in this study we analyze the social interaction between the political, media, and public agendas from two sets of factors: those related to the characteristics of the media outlet, which derive from the model of hierarchical influences of Shoemaker and Reese (2016), and those that allow us to explain the formation of the public agenda from contingent conditions (Casermeiro, 2004). Figure 1 shows a summary of the elements that will be observed as part of the results of this investigation.

In the case of the influences over the media content, elements considered included the regulatory activity

of the Communist Party of Cuba over the media and the autoregulatory activities performed by them (García, 2013). Both constitute an essential part of the understanding of the Cuban media system, which characteristics will be explained in the following section.

ABOUT THE CUBAN CONTEXT. HOW DO THE NATIONAL AGENDAS RELATE TO EACH OTHER?

The political order established in Cuba after Fidel Castro's ascent to power in 1959 was defined as a system in transition to socialism. Therefore, it had to overcome the previously established political orders –liberal democracy and dictatorship–, to ensure the formation of a popular power that took into account a sharp internal struggle of classes and the actions of the United States to destabilize it (Valdés, 1997).

The political system in the country has undergone several stages: the first one, which happened from 1959 to 1961, witnessed the transition from the democratic-popular revolution to socialism, new political institutions emerged and several already existent mass organizations were reestablished; the second stage, which happened from 1961 until the mid-1970s, was characterized by the lack of elected entities of power in the first years of construction. The third stage occurred from 1976 until the beginning of the 1990s, in which a process of rectification of errors was developed (decade of 1980), some of which were inherent to the internal mechanisms of governing and others that derived from copying distorted elements from the Euro-Soviet model. The fourth stage started in the 1990s, with the Special Period in Times of Peace: a stage of pronounced economic crisis produced by the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union and by the increased commercial blocking by the United States.

The economic decline and the disappearance of the external environment in which the country had inserted itself was the perfect combination for the hatching of the crisis and an incentive for the adoption, especially since the 1993-1994 period, of measures that tried to make flexible the functioning of the national economy and that allowed for the survival of the country (Triana, 2016).

From 2000 until mid-2007 there was a stage that could be defined as of growth and recentralization, marked by a strong politization due to the events surrounding the dispute for Elián González. In 2008, the country's situation was critical, giving way to the
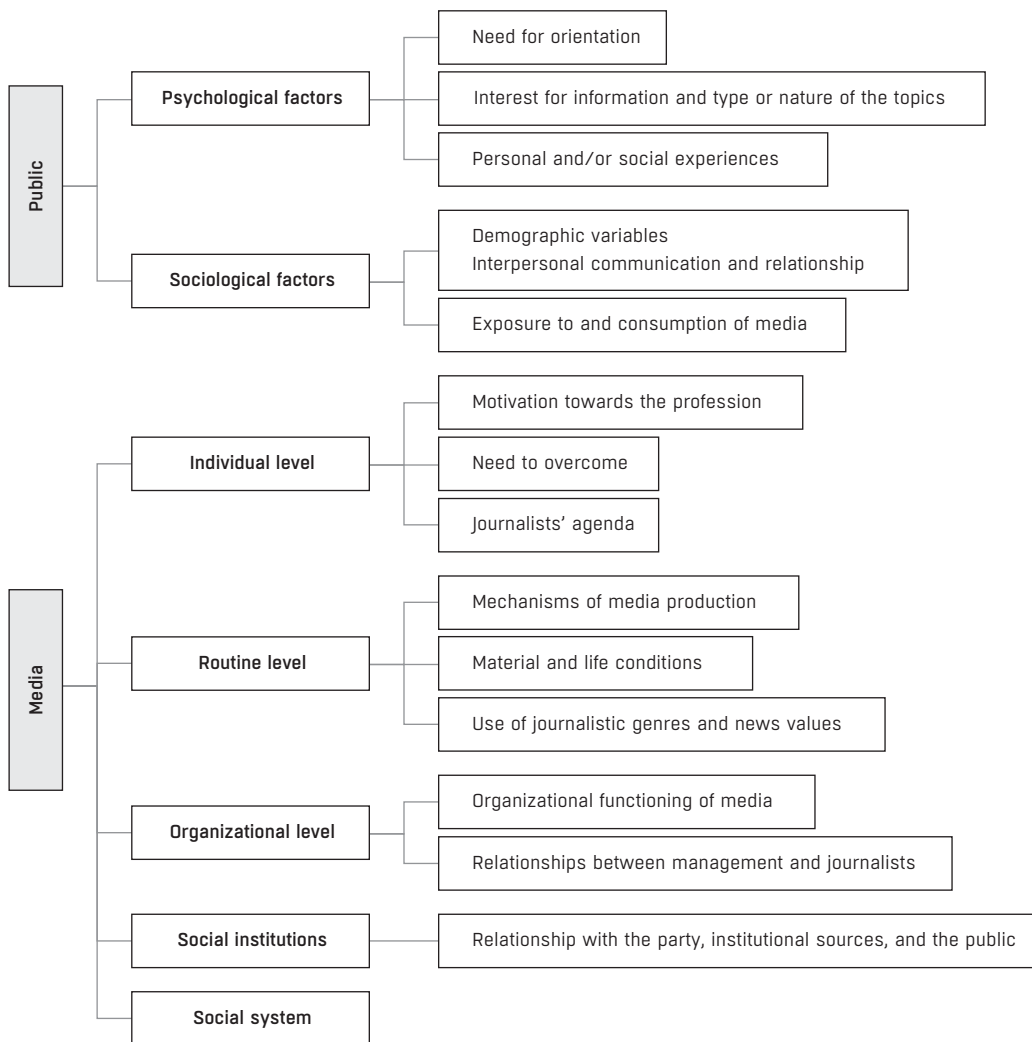
Figure 1. Factors that impact the inter-agendas relationship

Source: Own elaboration.

beginning of a process of update of the economic and social models.

Between that year and 2010, measures were launched to eliminate bans implemented during the period of Soviet socialism in Cuba, such as the prohibitions for Cubans to enter international tourist hotels or to buy and use mobile phones (Triana, 2016). In the last trimester of 2010 and until 2012 the government approved the Guidelines for Economic and Social Policy of the Party and the Revolution in the VI Congress of the PCC, and in the National Assembly the Commission of Implementation and Development of Guidelines was

created, becoming the brain and arms of the reform (Rodríguez, 2016).

In the last trimester of 2012 until 2014 a group of measures were announced that were meant to have a strong structural impact, among them the approval of a new policy for direct foreign investment, the announcement of the beginning of the monetary and exchange rate unification, and the transformation of the socialist state enterprise (Triana, 2016).

Although some authors (Marshall, n.d.) pose the existence of an autocratic regimen in the country, other researchers have indicated that the Cuban political

system works under the principles of democratic centralism (Valdés, 1997; Guanche, 2013), which is manifested through the predominance of the central institutions of the state over the set of social activities and of the superior instances over the rest of the subordinated instances; and in the formation of verticalized structures and the installation of a ranked bureaucracy with discretionary powers (Guanche, 2013).

In a systematization performed by the researcher Julio César Guanche (2017) of the studies developed in the United States about the Cuban political system, the author analyzes the scarce existence of research about it, due mainly to the lack of access to sources. The Cuban political scientists Jorge Domínguez (2009) defines it as advisory oligarchy with an undisputed leader by pointing out that since the triumph of the Revolution an elite was established related to the Party, the State, and the governmental institutions, creating the permanence of a group of advisors around the figure of Fidel Castro. This definition has as a limitation the making of forms of participation in Cuban society invisible –from the institutional and extra institutional perspectives– and mainly analyzes the power elite (Guanche, 2013).

In the PCC Congress that took place in 2012, the then Cuban president Raúl Castro, who had officially taken over the presidency in 2008, expressed that "the Cuban press is called to play a decisive role in the clarification and objective, constant, and critical diffusion of the progress towards the updating of the Economic Model, in a language that is accessible for everyone". This idea was later endorsed during the First National Convention of the PCC in 2012. Thus, Castro recognized the importance of Cuban media in the construction of society as an active entity and not simply as a mere disseminator of institutional information.

The regulation of journalism in Cuba in the last sixty years has been more centered on the political regulation accompanied by professional autoregulation, than on the legal regulation. The establishment of a regulatory framework –political and professional– for the national press was marked by the UPEC Congresses (1974, 1980, 1986, 1993, 1999, 2008, 2013, 2018) and the Party Congresses (1975, 2012, 2016).

During these years, the media's regulatory framework was closely linked to the fulfillment of an Informative Policy, which is not contained in a single document that summarizes its degree of reach, but it is the product of general guidelines –which bases were established since the first PCC Congress–, and serve as guidelines

for the work of the press, although the way they are applied and the tools used for their application may change (García, 2018).

The press model based on regulation –more than on autoregulation– of the media institutions determines the concepts of news and public service to be subordinated to the propaganda of acts, superstructure and daily activities, and that the directives of production and social management rise as administrators of what is disclosed, decreasing the role of journalists and the press staff (Garcés, 2014; Olivera, 2017).

The peculiarities of the Cuban public sphere show a dysfunctional relationship between the political system, the media, and society, which can be expressed through the poor participation of the public in the setting of media agendas (Martínez & Dueñas, 2015) and the verticalization of the processes of management, production, and socialization of informative material, which occurs due to the excessive orientation towards institutional sources regarding media content (García, 2014; Garcés & Senén, 2017).

This has been endorsed by previous studies about agenda-setting in the country (Gallego & Rosabal, 2010; Colunga, 2011; Muñiz & Fonseca, 2017; Castillo, 2017) which have systematized the following results:

- There is a correlated separation between the different levels (objects and attributes) of the public and media agendas in Cuba, determined by the nature of the topics in the former: experiential and chronic (Gallego & Rosabal, 2010; Colunga, 2011; Valido, 2012; Gallego, 2016).

- There is a high correlation between the agendas of the different media outlets in the country, due in a large extent to the existence of a centralized Informative Policy (García, 2013; Lasalle, 2017).

- The public possesses characteristics that condition its low consumption of media and communication: high educational level, high interpersonal communication, and visualization of previously silenced social groups (Anazco, 2014; Gallego, 2016).

- The process of construction of the media agendas possesses stable vertical structures, ruled by the Communist Party of Cuba in different instances, which provides objects and attributes in its dimensions (Muñiz, 2018a).

For Cuban researchers (Olivera, 2017) the fragmentation of policies, the absence of specific structures dedicated to its management, the conditions of material precariousness of the labor market in specific sectors –specially the journalistic–, the faint management of the scenario of convergence and the change of socio-technological paradigm, along with the insufficient and fragmented legal regulations, are among the most significant obstacles for the necessary (re)structuring of the communications system in Cuban society.

Therefore, how to develop an agenda-setting study in a context such as the one previously presented? Despite the fact that the theory is not applicable in its original formulation, since it has been empirically demonstrated that the state media outlets do not establish the public agenda and that it is built from different sources related to the personal experience of individuals, most of the research developed in the last five years (Gallego & Rosabal, 2010; Quiala, 2015; Caballero, 2015; Lasalle, 2017) attempts to explain this phenomenon that is of interest to the national and international academic communities.

While these and other agenda-setting elements possess specific characteristics, in Cuba there has been a line of study at the national level since 2010 which has been consolidated in the analysis of the construction of media agendas and the potential transformation of the relationships between these and the audiences.

The province of Santiago de Cuba has an ample system of media and communication outlets to respond to the needs and information interests of the people regarding provincial topics: the Sierra Maestra newspaper, the Tele Turquino television center (with a correspondent in the Palma Soriano municipality), the CMKC Revolution Radio, with provincial reach, and 10 municipal stations.

The media outlets analyzed in this study share some peculiarities among them: they are press agents of provincial reach, which is why their main duty is to publish mostly about the reality of Santiago de Cuba; they are located in the head municipality of the territory, which gives them a similar framework of geographical access to information; while they use different formats of transmission, their news production processes share common ground, related to the institutional subordination that in the case of the radio and television stations occurs also towards their governing body (the Cuban Institute of Radio and Television).

The objective of this study is to explain the relationship between the political, media, and public agendas regarding experiential topics in Santiago de Cuba during the first quarter of the years 2014 and 2015. The following specific objectives were defined:

- To systematize the theoretical-methodological assumptions of the agenda-setting and the inter-agendas relationship within the public sphere.

- To characterize the composition of objects and attributes of the political, media, and public agendas of the provincial press agents of Santiago de Cuba and their statistical correlation.

- To analyze the factors that impact the relationship between the agendas, starting with the mediations about the construction of the media agendas and its contingent conditions.

METHODOLOGY

We used as a theoretical model the one of analysis-synthesis, which allowed us to establish a systematization of the main results of the agenda-setting theory and the studies about reception in Latin America that enabled the comprehension of the characteristics of the public sphere in the region. Additionally, we employed the method of induction-deduction, which allowed us to adapt the general postulates of the theory produced in other contexts to the Cuban media scenario, which peculiarities turn them into a one of a kind in the world.

To perform this study we used a mixed-methods research design, based on the collection of quantitative and qualitative data and its subsequent joint analysis, which enables us to reach more comprehensive conclusions about the process of agenda construction. In that sense, we used the following techniques:

a. Analysis of quantitative content, for the measurement of the political, media, and public agendas. We analyzed 27 objects (themes) and 149 attributes in the substantive dimension of each agenda. The categories used to elaborate the instrument for analysis were obtained from the review of previous research (Gallego & Rosabal, 2010; Colunga, 2011; Muñiz, 2013) performed in the country. To determine the political agenda we performed quantitative analysis in all of the thematic plans that the Party sends to the provincial media outlets, the meetings with the

Press agent	Selected spaces	Frequency of emission	Number of works analyzed	
			Year 2014	Year 2015
Sierra Maestra	The whole newspaper*	Weekly	118	170
Tele Turquino	Santiago Magazine (30 min.)	Daily	852	670
	Telenoticias news (15 min.)			
	Última hora news (15 min.)	Weekly		
	Information panel (1 h.)	Alternate Weekly		
	En línea contigo (1 h y 30 min.)			
Radio station CMKC	Reportes news (30 min.)	Daily	165	237
	Con el sol informative magazine (1 h.)			
Encoders of the Provincial Assembly of the Popular Power (public agenda)		April-May		
		November-December		
Press notes about the sources of information		Weekly		
Thematic plans of the PCC (political agenda)		Monthly		

Table 1. Quantity of journalistic works analyzed in the study

Source: Own elaboration.

managers of the outlets, and other materials that serve as sources of information for journalists.

The media agenda was measured in the three outlets of provincial press in Santiago de Cuba: the radio station CMKC, the newspaper Sierra Maestra, and the television center Tele Turquino, for which we took a stratified sample guided by the purpose of the study, excluding the sections on culture and sports. In the case of the public agenda, we analyzed the encoders issued by the Provincial Assembly of the Popular Power as a result of the processes of accountability.

Table 1 shows the quantity of journalistic works analyzed for each type of media and the frequency with which the documents in the political and public agendas were issued.

b. Semi-structured interviews, which were conducted with 38 journalists from the media outlets of the province of Santiago de Cuba to determine their perception regarding the factors that impact the construction of the media agenda. We used an 8-question survey with the purpose of deepening

the understanding of the characteristics of the media agendas, the participation of journalists in their development, their daily routines to establish their own agendas, etc. Such survey was elaborated from previous research conducted in the country (Gallego & Rosabal, 2010) and for its application we requested the consent of all of the interviewees for the publication of the research findings. The study was approved by the Scientific Council of the author's university, which watches over for the ethical behavior of the participants. It was not necessary for the study to seek the approval of an ethics committee, due to the fact that this entity only exists for research on public health (clinical trials).

c. Discussion groups, performed with journalists who work in the provincial media to deepen the understanding of the mediations that impact the construction of the agendas within the press agents (7 groups), and with people from the public to analyze the contingent conditions that influence the formation of the public agenda (9 groups) in several areas of the province (see table 2).

Discussion groups with journalists		
Place	**Date**	**Quantity of participants**
Baraguá Radio Station	April 28 of 2015	6
CMKC Radio Station	April 12 of 2015	5
CMKC Radio Station	February 25 of 2015	7
Mambí Radio Station	March 17 of 2015	8
Sierra Maestra Newspaper	March 6 of 2015	6
Tele Turquino Television Center	March 10 of 2015	7
Tele Turquino Television Center	April 15 of 2015	6
Discussion groups with the public		
Place	**Date**	**Quantity of participants**
Santa Bárbara popular council	March 2 of 2015	9
Quintero popular council	March 6 of 2015	8
El Caney popular council	March 9 of 2015	9
Sueño popular council	March 10 of 2015	6
Sueño popular council	March 10 of 2015	7
Quintero popular council	March 12 of 2015	8
30 de noviembre popular council	March 18 of 2015	7
30 de noviembre popular council	March 19 of 2015	7
Quintero popular council	March 20 of 2015	6

Table 2. Data from the discussion groups performed with journalists and the public

Source: Own elaboration.

d. Participant observation, applied to the dynamics of construction of the media agenda, routines, expressions of the relationship between sources and journalists, and of the habits and public behavior regarding their thematic priorities and their relationship with the media outlets of the province. Table 3 shows the elements observed in each case.

For the processing of quantitative data we used the Spearman coefficient of correlation, calculated with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

FINDINGS

CHARACTERIZATION OF THE AGENDAS AT THE QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE LEVELS

The process of construction of the media agenda (which in turn includes some elements of influence from the institutional sources and the public) has three fundamental levels: the first one is the general regulatory frameworks of the Cuban press (the Informative Policy, the Orientations of the Political Bureau, etc.) that enable institutions to exercise their function; the second level is precisely institutional: how those organizations (the Party, the Cuban Institute of Radio and Television)

Elements of the public	Elements of the media
1. Psycho-social characteristics of the contexts in which the public agenda is developed: systems of relationships in the communities, modes of behavior and social coexistence, common spaces and styles of socialization, real living conditions (quality of the housing fund, economic development), problems that are of concern for the community.	1. Productive process in the media outlet: • Motivation of journalists towards the profession. • Thematic proposals and their organization. • Relationship with media management. • Organization of the selection and editing processes of the journalistic material. • Newsworthiness criteria used by the media. • Similarities with those found in other media outlets.
2. Sources utilized to obtain information about the topics that are considered important in the province.	2. Relationship with sources of information: • Intervention of sources in the production process. • Role of the sources in the construction of the thematic priorities. • Press notes sent to media outlets and coverage given to those topics.
3. Most consumed media outlet. Attitude and behavior regarding its content. Routines of media consumption.	• Participation of the public in the development of the agenda. • Feedback mechanisms with the audience of the information programs, especially from the journalists.

Table 3. Elements observed in the media and the public during the study

Source: Own Elaboration.

specify the orientations that appear on the first level, and a third level in which we find the media activity itself, its production routines, that enable the enactment of the previous levels.

To offer a holistic view of those levels and to add the explicit influence of other institutions that in the previous construction processes were a bit overlapped, this study proposes the following model of construction of the media agenda, which its broader categories allow for the analysis of the relationship between sources (political, institutional) and the media, and illustrates the thematic break that occurs in the case of the public.

Figure 2 allows for the observation of the structuring of the political agenda in two dimensions: one morpho-conceptual and the other one applied. The first one integrates those elements that rule the Cuban media system at a macro level and that constitute general policies to be applied in specific structures. The second one is composed of those structures in charge of putting into practice the elements previously established at the conceptual level that function both at the national and at the provincial levels.

The applied dimension contains three components that allow for the concretion of the morpho-conceptual dimension: two of them (Provincial and Municipal Administration Council, and the Mass Organizations and Political Institutions) have an immediate outlet to a third one (Provincial Committee of the Party), which ultimately directly provides the objects and attributes for the media agendas. That does not mean that the institutional sources present in the first two structures do not deliver topics for coverage directly to the journalists or their superiors.

Between both dimensions there are unidirectional relationships of influence: the morpho-conceptual dimension determines the application of the policies established for the regulation of the press, directly impacting the external levels of the process of construction of the media agenda from the interpretative frameworks to perform journalistic work, that is, in the state institutions that serve as sources of information for the work of the press. Additionally, the applied dimension determines the specific contents to be published by each media outlet according to their format and to the policies previously established.

Therefore, the influence of the political agenda takes place in the mechanisms of media production, which in turn generate an appropriate space for the participation
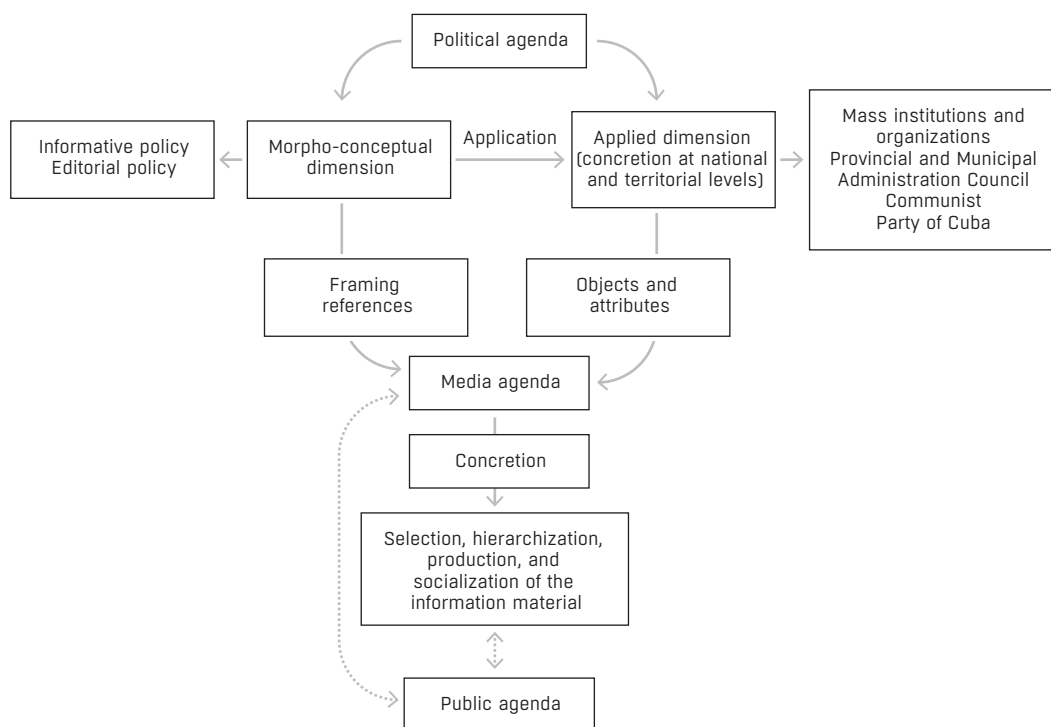
Figure 2. Process of construction of the media agenda in the media outlets analyzed and relationship with the public agenda

Source: Own elaboration.

of the public in the formation of its content. In that sense, the relationship between the media and the public agendas is shown in the model with dotted lines to demonstrate that there is no thematic transference between both listings.

At a quantitative level, table 4 shows the objects ranked in the first places of each agenda. In each case we distinguish the data corresponding to each year of analysis, which allows us to evaluate their behavior over time.

In the media agenda we observe how the first three objects are maintained during the two consecutive years, and in the case of the political agenda something similar happens with the first two topics. Both listings notoriously differ from the public agenda; while this one prioritizes the same objects, they do not appear in equal ranges between the analyzed years. Similarly, the leading topics in the media and political and institutional sources listings differ from the leading topics in the public agenda, which tends to focus its attention on state services, nutrition, transportation, and not necessarily on events, historical commemorations, etc.

The main differences between the three agendas lies in that the public establishes its priorities according to the immediate material repercussion of the topics in their daily lives, which additionally constitute unresolved issues. At the same time, the media are guided by different newsworthiness criteria, marked by institutional priorities that, while they are also part of that public, do not entirely respond to their information needs.

STATISTICAL CORRELATIONS BETWEEN THE ANALYZED AGENDAS

Table 5 shows the values obtained for the correlations of the media agendas analyzed during the years 2014 and 2015. The data shows that the thematic priorities of such media behaved similarly during the first quarter of both years, which reveals the cyclical nature of the media agendas, both within the individual press agents as well as in the general media agenda. The highest correlations occurred at the object level in almost all cases, with the exception of the Sierra Maestra newspaper, in which a higher correlation was obtained at the level of the substantive attributes.

Objects	Political agenda		Media agenda		Public agenda	
	2014	2015	2014	2015	2014	2015
Political, institutional, and social activities	44.05	46.97	15.15	20.33	0	0
Aqueduct	0	1.01	1.59	3.06	8.54	1.43
Agriculture	5.95	2.02	6.61	3.34	1.23	1.84
Science and technology	0	2.02	2.38	1.49	0	0.03
Domestic trade	2.38	0.51	1.76	1.49	11.72	16.38
Communications	2.38	3.54	5.29	6.31	0.19	0.16
Civil defense	1.19	1.52	0.97	0.37	0	0
Economy	1.19	0	1.32	0.56	0.61	0
Education	0	1.52	1.41	4.09	1.22	2.37
Energy	1.19	0	0.79	0.37	1.65	3.16
FAR-MININT	2.38	1.52	2.47	0.37	1.56	0.34
Gastronomy	0	0	1.06	1.21	4.33	4.89
Government	0	5.56	1.41	3.53	0.25	0.16
Communal hygiene	5.95	0.51	1.59	1.21	9.9	19.2
History	10.71	17.17	10.57	9.94	0	0
Hotels and recreation	0	0.51	1.06	1.11	0.08	0
Industry	7.14	3.54	5.2	5.94	0.22	0.26
Justice	0	0	0	0.09	0.03	0.18
Environment	1.19	1.01	0.53	0.65	0.17	0.19
Political and mass organizations	1.19	0.51	2.38	4.55	0.22	0.19
Politics	4.76	2.02	4.67	3.62	0	0
Social problems	1.19	0.51	5.02	1.21	2.87	5.95
Public health	1.19	2.53	10.75	11.14	6.16	7.2
State services and institutions	1.19	1.52	5.99	3.81	28.86	21.14
Labor and social security	1.19	0.51	2.91	2.97	0.28	0.4
Transportation	0	1.52	2.82	2.69	8.23	8.25
Housing, construction, and heritage	3.57	2.02	4.32	4.55	11.68	6.3

Table 4. Percentage of mentions of the topics evaluated in this study

Source: Own elaboration.

Years 2014/2015	Sierra Maestra	Interpret.	CMKC	Interpret.	Tele Turquino	Interpret.	General	Interpret.
Objects	0.420*	Moderate	0.736**	High	0.635**	High	0.755**	High
Substantive atributes	0.551**	Moderate	0.580**	Moderate	0.523*	Moderate	0.637**	High
Positive atributes	0.517*	Moderate	0.758**	High	0.796**	High	0.780**	High
Neutral attributes	0.308	Low	0.572**	Moderate	-0.121	Null	0.729**	High
Negative attributes	Not measurable		0.227	Low	Not measurable		0.584**	Moderate

Table 5. Correlations between the media agendas during the two periods measured

Source: Own elaboration.

(Interpret. = Interpretation)

*The correlations are significant at a bilateral level of 0.05
**The correlations are significant at a bilateral level of 0.01

The evaluation of the correlations shows the existence of a "routinization of the agenda", which is in part guaranteed by the stability of the media in regards to key aspects of the territory. However, this becomes detrimental when it comes to the inclusion of new discussion issues that have political and public influence.

Moreover, table 6 shows the statistical correlations between the three analyzed agendas and the following findings can be observed:

• There is a moderate correlation between the political and media agendas, and low correlation between the media and public agendas. Among the first two, the correlations between objects ranged from moderate to high. Meanwhile, the correlations among objects between the media and public agendas maintained very low levels, below the minimum acceptable to be considered significant.

• In the case of substantive attributes, the values decreased compared to the correlation of objects, maintaining a very low relationship between the media and public agendas and a moderate relationship among the former and the political agenda during alternate periods.

• The correlations of affective attributes allowed for the establishment of a pattern of behavior: between

the media agenda and the political agenda, the values were significant for the positive mentions, which could indicate that both highlight the same topics in a similar way. However, due to the low quantity of positive mentions in the public agenda, it was not possible to measure the correlation. It is important to note that in the media agenda the majority of the mentions were positive.

• The political agenda did not have negative mentions, which is why the correlation could not be measured, while in the media and public agendas it was possible to measure it, but it produced values that were not statistically significant.

• In terms of the neutral mentions, the three agendas maintained a fluctuation in terms of the numerical data found, which is why in this case it could be said that the media, politicians, and the public approach from a neutral perspective many topics that may or may not align among the agendas examined.

The correlations allowed us to note the media reality in Santiago de Cuba: the institutions provide the majority of the topics to the media agenda, which has low representation in its ranking of those which are of interest to the public. Next, we will explain other elements that contribute to the understanding of this phenomenon in the territory studied.

Periods of time/ agendas		Objects		Substantive atributes		Positive atributes		Neutral attributes		Negative attributes	
		Media agenda	Interpretation	Media agenda	Interpretation	Media agenda	Interpretation	Media agenda	Interpretation	Media agenda	Interpretation
2014	Political agenda	0.394	Low	0.353	Low	0.67	High	0.496*	Moderate	Not measurable	
	Public agenda	0.258	Low	0.151	Very low	Not measurable		0.263	Low	0.15	Very low
2015	Political agenda	0.655**	High	0.428**	Moderate	0.948*	Very high	0.372	Low	Not measurable	
	Public agenda	0.008	Null	0.179	Very low	Not measurable		0.084	Very low	0.037	Very low

Table 6. Correlations between the political, media, and public agendas in the years 2014 and 2015

Source: Own elaboration.

*The correlations are significant at a bilateral level of 0.05

**The correlations are significant at a bilateral level of 0.01

FACTORS THAT MEDIATE IN THE RELATIONSHIP
Factors related to the media

Through the interviews made we determined two elements that are important in the vision that journalists have of the profession as it is practiced in Cuba and specifically in the province: the attribution of an educational function that is orientating, informative, and evaluative of reality; and the existence of a more decisive tendency, that the press has to actively intervene in the problems rather than just denounce them. These elements have led to an exaggeration of the social role of the press, which later influences the credibility of the media and their capacity to satisfy the information needs of the people.

The analysis of the categories that make up the professional culture of journalists reveals that there is a base of values such as ethics, humanism, and the sense of belonging towards the media work being done, despite the existence of some material limitations that tend to constrain the exercise of journalism. This is linked to elements that are part of the routine modes of exercising journalism and established mechanism through which the media product is generated. The analysis is then expanded towards two concepts that govern the work of journalists in this country: the Informative Policy and the Editorial Policy. Both categories are of vital importance to characterize the internal work of the media; however, despite the fact that the First term refers to the general guidelines and the second refers to the implementation of these in the media, the journalists usually conceive them indistinctly such as:

> A document that has already been established (…) We make some contributions, introducing novelty topics according to the thematic lines (MeyLing Chang, journalist of CMKC, personal communication, October of 2015).

> The Informative Policy is the set of norms that stipulates the commitment to the profession, the duties of journalists. The Editorial Policy, is one of the issues faced by every media outlet, because we cannot participate in it (Jorge Matos, journalist of the Sierra Maestra newspaper, personal communication, April of 2015).

These criteria show that journalists conceive the Informative Policy and the Editorial Policy as vertical guidelines, alien to the daily exercise of the thematic planning that should occur in the media outlets, element that can contribute to its correct execution.

This shows that in the media two causes underlie that prevent the participation of journalists in the development of the Editorial Policy and of the agenda: one is the overflow of the regulatory role of management, who ultimately act as *gatekeepers* deciding what to publish, but in their role limit the topic proposals;

another elements is the own conception that the journalist has regarding what he/she should or not do or say (self-censorship). Both factors impact the later exercise of being critical about topics and not just the submission of thematic proposals.

The analysis of these elements confirms the existing limitation in the self-regulatory mechanisms of the media, due to the low participation of journalists in the development of their agendas and in the decision making processes with respect to the treatment of social issues and the exercise of being critical. However, the most concerning aspect about this phenomenon is the high degree of assimilation of these elements as part of the dynamics of daily media production, up to the point that they are noted as deficiencies, but accepted with a kind of mutual consent.

Otherwise, the relationship between the media and the Party in the province is conceived as positive, although it notes the exaggerated orientating role that the latter plays in the establishment of the ranking of topics. The interviews show that journalists tend to confer a command function to the Party, more than of orientation; decisive, rather than supportive. This is complemented by the fact that they think that the topics (or the majority of them) that are published in the media come from a direct mandate from the Party, when those oriented by institutional sources are more influential. In the discussion groups we analyzed some negative elements that ballast the relationship between journalists and sources:

- The secrecy: "Management has a mentality that they handle classified, confidential information. It seems as if they are always protecting something" (Camilo González, journalist of CMKC, personal communication, April of 2015).

- Enthronement in the phases of selection and ranking of the material in the media: "(…) Due to this, they give you the data that they consider pertinent to publish, and they may even require the revision of your work prior to publication" (Ángela Santiesteban, journalist of the Sierra Maestra newspaper, personal communication, April of 2015).

These criteria reveal the existing imbalance between the participation of institutional sources and the role of citizens in the formation of the media agendas. This leads to a low level of representation from the public. The contradiction

in this case is given by the fact that the people consume media with variable objectives of becoming informed, even though their presence is very low in the formation and ranking of the topics in the agenda.

The weak relationship between both is –from a social point of view– a complex process intervened by the characteristics of the media and its regulation and self-regulation, and the peculiarities of a public that possesses a high educational level, higher access to other agendas and, above all, the ability to socialize their issues in other spaces from which they create networks of exchange (at the community level).

Factors related to the public

In addition to the elements previously discussed, the relationship between the media and public agendas in the province is characterized by the attention towards experiential topics that constitute unresolved material problems and the insufficient reflection of the socialization about these issues in the media outlets.

In the discussion groups, it was recognized that the higher the need to be informed, the higher the social relevance and visibility of the problem. But the opposite also occurs, since the topics that the people considered as the most important in the province match those topics for which more information is demanded: "In the country a gerund journalism is done: we are working, we are resolving. But in reality neither the press nor the public officials offer a conclusive answer, a solution to the problems" (Self-employed, Quintero Cast, discussion group, March of 2015).

The need for orientation is projected primarily when the issues have direct repercussions in the lives of people and their impact occurs at the material and psychological levels. These circumstantial elements are a motive for certain provincial topics (such as wages, transportation, the hydraulic situation) to be configured as objects of common interest from the interpersonal agenda to the public one. In that case, the need for orientation can be increased for the following reasons:

- The people demand information that is instant, accurate, and correct. This factor influences that in the attention cycles the topics in the public agenda remain during a longer period of time.

- A deficient functioning of the spaces established to respond to the concerns of the population, and an ignorance about the platforms at the social level with which they are able to demand answers.

- As a result of this situation, information gaps emerge that provoke a difficult environment in the sense that people are not able to find answers to their concerns, because they do not even have access to all of the arguments due to that lack of information or the bad management of it at different levels.

- When the attributes that people have assimilated directly from their environment due to experience do not correspond to those that they receive from other sources, they become disinterested in the topic due to the contradictory content, and it increases the need to know more about it.

According to the discussion groups, the most used source of information was the family, selected because of what it represents to the system of experiences, habits, customs, life conditions, or the affective-emotional relationship of individuals. The second source of information were the media outlets, due to their credibility as institutions, the responsibility, characteristics, and social function they must fulfill, more than as really effective ways of obtaining the information. Lastly, the third source was the educational or work environment, which allows for the socialization of the most important issues through the interaction with people who hold common interests.

However, even when the problem is not directly experienced, the individuals are motivated to learn about it because they are not strangers to the reality in which they live and it is inevitable to participate in the dynamics of social debate. This shows that the levels of affective-emotional or geographic proximity with respect to the topics of the province condition the magnitude and the projection of interest, which also depend on what each individual needs from the point of view of the personal, ideological, political, cultural, and professional.

Similarly, the public agenda is the result of the influence of several agendas, not only the topics that come from media outlets, as it has been demonstrated in the agenda-setting studies developed since 2006. Thus, the analysis of the sources used by the people to obtain information points to how the subjects configure their agenda from the social influence of the groups to which they belong. The media outlets have lost ground as spaces for debating social problems and, the same way that they have developed their work inside their agendas and the one established by institutional sources, the public has found alternative ways to engage in dialogue about the topics that concern them.

Since the public agenda about experiential topics is composed by affairs that have material impact on the lives of people and the media outlets do not constitute the main source of information about the reality of the province, it is important to analyze how the social spaces at the community level influence the ranking of topics.

In a discussion group the following comments were highlighted, which show the reasons why the phenomenon occurs:

> The media outlets of Santiago de Cuba are not the only source that one can use to obtain information. I rather find out on the street, it is quicker and even if it is not as reliable, I can access several versions of the same problem (State worker, Sueño Cast, discussion group, March of 2015).

> It is easier to be informed by the rumors than by what the media says. Rumors are much more broad than the information in the media: less political, triumphalist or conformist (University student, Sueño Cast, discussion group, March of 2015).

This is due to the attitude of people who try to directly manage access to the information that they need, without institutional mediators that slow down the process. To achieve that, they also form their own opinion circles within the community, like guilds, based on trust or close personal ties.

The public debate among the population is systematic, inclusive, multi-thematic, and can vary depending on the context of the community being studied. In the province, there are instances in which the frequency of exchange about experiential topics is lower than in others in which the conversation happens more spontaneously.

DISCUSSION

This study analyzes the relationship between the political, media, and public agendas in Cuba from a study of cases in the province of Santiago de Cuba. The study is a novelty, because it focuses on the process of thematic transference in a country where the political and media contexts are different from those in which this type of research has been done before.

In that sense, we found some elements that have been previously described in the context of Santiago de Cuba (Quiala, 2015; Castillo, 2017; Ramos, 2017):

- In the province there are high relationships between the media outlets from the point of view of topics as well as the internal processes of news production.

- The above is linked to the establishment of common newsworthiness criteria, which come from a vertical process of construction of the media agenda, which topics are guided basically by institutional sources or by the Provincial Committee of the Party.

- The media agendas in the province are cyclical (the topics reiterate from one year to the other), and are headed by institutional topics.

- The public agenda prioritizes issues of chronic permanence, related to topics of immediate material repercussion.

- These elements influence that there are low statistical correlations between media outlets and the public in the province, which leads to the incapacity of the media to generate a social debate that is adequate to the needs of the socioeconomic and cultural contexts of the audience.

These results are a contribution to the agenda-setting line of research in Cuba, because they allow to corroborate the characteristics of the media system and its still insufficient relationship with the audience, to establish work guidelines in the short and medium terms. Previous research (Gallego & Rosabal, 2010; Anazco, 2014; Quiala, 2015; Lasalle, 2017; Ramos, 2017; Muñiz, 2018a) puts in evidence the need to articulate the topics that come from the public agenda with those topics that are of interest to the media, taking into account the role that audiences play in controlling the process of thematic transference.

Recent studies at the international level explain one of the causes of the information gap between media outlets and the public in Cuba (Muñiz & Castillo, 2017): "If (the public) does not find a relevant element in the media, it is likely that it will not have much effect in the configuration of the agenda. Additionally, this is what (David) Zucker calls an annoying problem, since when people have personal experience, media coverage does not have much of an effect" (Trigueros & Lacasa-Mas, 2018, p. 62).

The fact that the topics analyzed are experiential determines to a large extent the media consumption with informative purposes, because people, by having a direct perception about reality, do not take the media coverage as a main source of information –generally, limited to a specific area. People are not only a blank board that media outlets should complete (…) and they turn to the media when they want information about something that cannot be obtained through personal experience (Trigueros & Lacasa-Mas, 2018, p. 62).

For Muñiz and Castillo (2017), the information gap between the media and the public in the country is determined by elements such as the vertical construction of the media agenda, the existence of a public agenda with themes that are recurrent and permanent in time, and the relationship between both in a context mediated by the direct experience about the social reality. To this list we should add the ability and probability of access to other media agendas that, both inside and out of the national public space, offer their own version of social reality.

With the technological expansion experienced by the country, national media outlets face competition from other internal and foreign agendas to fill in the information gap produced by the high level of institutionalism of the current media coverage (Muñiz & Castillo, 2017), which conditions the process of news production, the selection of sources for journalistic work, the newsworthiness and news value criteria used, the "routinized" mechanisms (non-routine) that enable the temporary reproduction of the agenda, and the socialization of the journalistic material itself.

CONCLUSIONS

The study of the social interaction between the sources of information and the politics, media, and audiences, that are produced in the public sphere allows us to explore relational dimensions among them through a contextualized gaze. It is precisely in that public sphere where the political, media, and public agendas converge, and which analysis based on the agenda-setting theory has mainly focused on the study of statistical correlations and factors that impact its behavior from the characteristics of the public and the formation of their agenda (contingent conditions) and the construction of the media agenda (mediations about the content of the press).

This study is part of an agenda-setting research line in the Cuban context, which political and media

peculiarities have led to the modification of the way in which the theory is applied, mainly because the informative thematic transference does not occur in the way that is described by the studies at the international level. The fact that there is only one party and that the media outlets are state institutions influences the way in which the analyzed agendas are formed.

The relationship of media outlets with the political system, the State institutions and the administration, and at least part of Cuban society, reveal an asymmetry that translates into an unbalanced external regulation in detriment of the processes of autoregulation of the press. These elements lead to a poor participation of the public in the development of media content, and the search for alternative sources of information about the national reality: other media-like channels of communication, ways of spontaneous socialization (interpersonal communication), etc.

As part of this study we found a homogeneous distribution of topics addressed by the media related to meetings, events and daily occurrences, while the public prioritized topics such as transportation, the service of state institutions, and nutrition. This topic divergence was expressed in quantitative terms (through the low statistical correlations between the media and public agendas, and the high correlations between the political and media agendas) and in qualitative terms (through the mediations related to the construction of the agenda and the contingent conditions that impact the formation of the public agenda).

The analysis of such factors regarding the correlation between agendas allowed us to show that the media agenda is characterized by a routinized process of construction of the news, which reveals the treatment of the same topics during consecutive years and even its reiteration during the same year studied. This is opposed to the characteristics of the public agenda, which demands an accurate, critical analysis of the social problems by the media, which still lacks the ability to generate a discussion space about those issues of social interest.

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