

## **Information Law: Transdisciplinarity of its study**

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In general, México has had a positive institutional environment that allows the effective follow of our young Information Law (IL), through the commitment of different actors that reinforce it.

Since 1994, a network of citizens and nongovernmental organizations (NGO's) composed by, communication experts, academics and opinion leaders, promoted the development and creation of the Federal Law of Transparency and Access to Government Public Information in Mexico (Gómez Hermosillo & Herrera, 2008).

In the international economic context prior to this law, we find that in 1999 the International Monetary Fund (IMF) publishes the Code of Good Practice and Transparency of Monetary and Financial Policies.

Among other international recommendations, in late 2000, the World Bank presented a development agenda for Mexico, with proposals for economic and social reforms, standards of public accountability of government and much higher citizen participation (Guigale, Lafourcade & Nguyen, 2001).

In Mexico, the IL emanates from the sixth article of the Constitution, it was established since 1977 and it is guaranteed by the state. In 2000, the political change takes place after 70 years of paternalistic government and opacity to promote the availability of access to information, however, as part of the democratic transition, in 2002 was approved the Federal Law of Transparency and Access to Public Information, which specified the guidelines for its exercise and created the Federal Institute for Access to Information (IFAI), the agency in charge of this right.

By the year 2007, the 32 states of the country and the Federation had their own IL, but with marked differences in content from one state to other and in consequence, with repercussions for the exercise of this right.

As result of the sustained effort and commitment to protect IL and accountability in México, researchers from different academic institutions conducted a complete analysis of the system of transparency in the country; it is, of the infrastructure that guarantees this right (CIDE-COMAIP, 2010).

The results indicate that main challenges for coming years are: a) To avoid differences in content of the laws, b) improve the quality of information and c) promote stronger diffusion campaigns.

However, today Mexico (Ackerman & Sandoval, 2007) is among the 12 of the 62 countries with IL that counts with independent commissions along the national territory. The regulations of access to information contain numerous guarantees as procedures and periodical publications of a large amount of information by the obligated agencies. The

prices for prints are accessible and especially, all aspects to prevent human rights violation are constantly supervised.

With the above, we can see that there is a continuous development to protect the IL, however, citizens are the actors who motivate the creation of this fundamental right; they are also the subject of this study and the ones that lead to the following questions: Is IL effective for the citizens? How can be measure the impact of this law in citizenship?

In order to know some answers, it was performed a detailed statistical analysis based on Telephone Survey conducted in Mexico City from July 2007 to November 2011 by the Institute of Access to Public Information and Personal Data Protection of Mexico City (Inodf, 2012).

Databases obtained in those periods, were integrated, completing a total of 10.888 sample surveys, these, were directed to general public, regarding the IL as well as the services provided by the agency.

According to *Transparency Metrics* (CIDE-COMAIP) study, in 2010 and 2011, Mexico City was recognized with the first place in transparency and access to public information, that is why, for this research are taken into account the actions applied by the Infodf. Also, evidence from the number of citizens requests to the agency compared with the budget spent in diffusion, make possible consider that the institution have generated confidence over the past six years, even when the investment budget have not been on the rise (Table 1), demonstrating the optimization of financial, technological and human resources.

Table 1. Media spending and number of applications received in the Infodf (2007-2012)

Year	Share of Spending on Social Communication in the total budget	Requests for Access to Public Information and Personal Data
2007	21.0 %	19,044
2008	14.8 %	41,164
2009	9.2 %	94,163
2010	8.9 %	89,377
2011	8.6 %	93,898
2012	7.2 %	35,994

The main objective of this analysis was to explore the knowledge and use that people have of IL as well as the knowledge of the institutions related to it and obtain some of the possible reasons of which depends that citizens make use or not of the IL in Mexico City.

The results indicate that: Nearly 10% of the sample requested information, but it's unclear whether it was to the Infodf or the Federal Institute for Access to Public Information (IFAI), there is confusion. In general, users have schooling higher levels, 54% are men and 46% women; primary reasons for consultation are related to research, public spending, public works, safety and education. The majority of users reported that was from radio or TV how they knew the institutions. The 90% of this sample, non-users, few know of the IL, institutions and its benefits, therefore massive diffusion is required with a clear and familiar language to the public.

Is possible observe that the infrastructure around the protection and enforcement of the IL has been carefully followed, but there is still work to be done to carry this law to citizens and be able to recognize it as their right and what it means.

From the results, were generated a hermeneutic and methodological proposals for the Federal IL Agency and the Mexican Conference on Access to Public Information (COMAIP). The main objective is to study some of the dynamics of social aspects related to the IL with a transdisciplinary perspective and the adaptation of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model (1994).

The model integrates different strata or systems related to each other that include some of the actors related to IL and their dynamics, in order to obtain a panoramic reference from the individual (microsystem), the immediate environment (mesosystem), society (exosystem) and, up to the one that includes ideology, laws, customs and culture (macrosystem) (Figure 1).

For this work, the strata or levels include some of the issues related to IL to improve:

Microsystem: Person, citizens = Lack of IL diffusion and citizens recognition

Mesosystem: Institutions Guaranteeing, government = Budgets optimization, diffusion and all states to count with the same regulations.

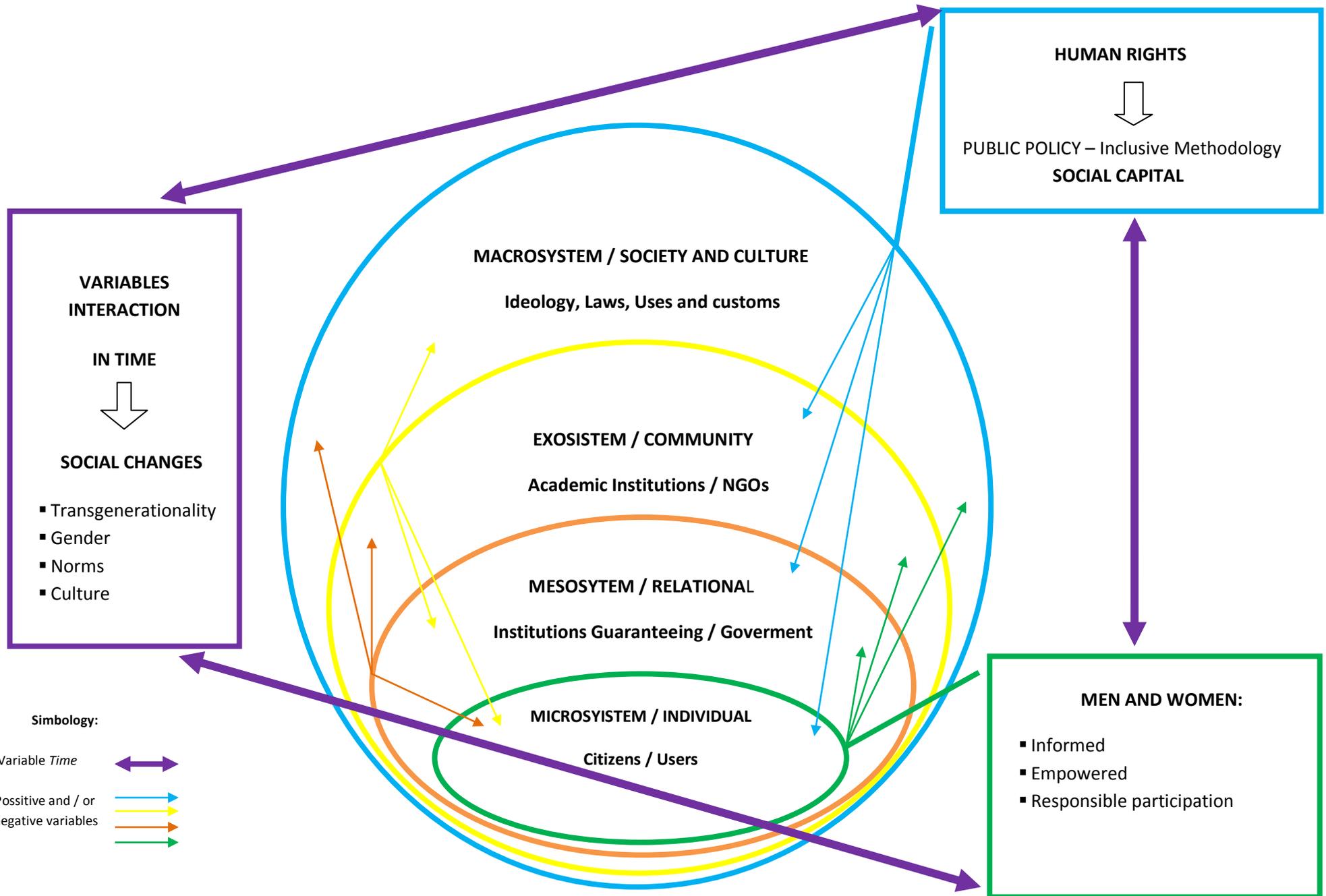
Exosystem: Academic institutions and NGO's = Needs detection, development of methodologies and indicators, study and promote the same regulations, projects tracking and costs.

Macrosystem: Ideology, Law, uses and customs = IL Culture, citizen participation and extension of regulations.

The arrows represent the positive or negative impact of the variables from one strata or level to another.

The arrow surrounding the ovals represents the *Time variable*, and includes the evolution of all variables through time, and can be related to monitoring the development or evolution of each of the projects, programs established by actors, the impact in each strata as well as social matters.

**Figure 1. ECOLOGYC-DYNAMIC MODEL: INFORMATION LAW AND CITIZENS**



Source: Author's elaboration based on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model (1994).



The benefits of the ecological model basically are:

It can explain social phenomena in a dynamic and integral form by a quantitative and / or qualitative method depending on the objectives of the study and variables definition. This integral approach leads to better diagnosis and therefore, the formulation of better proposals. Also, promotes common language between disciplines and actors.

The Institute of Mathematics of the National University of Mexico (IIMAS) is also collaborating to adapt the Ecological Model to a mathematical structural model, which apparently, can be very precise to evaluate costs and benefits of social programs.

To improve the correlation between IL and citizens it is also proposed the transdisciplinary approximation since into this law dynamic, there are involved diverse disciplines: Law, Sociology, Social Psychology, Statistics, but also institutions, NGO's, government, users and general citizens. These actors deal with different issues as diffusion strategies, regulations, coordination and follow of programs, projects, economical and in kind costs, needs detection and more.

Conceptually, transdisciplinarity is concerned as indicated by the prefix "trans", which is at once between disciplines, across different disciplines and beyond all discipline, promoting too, a common language for all. Its purpose is to understand the present world and one of the imperatives is the unity of knowledge. The transdisciplinarity involves a process of communication, interaction with other groups, which are not necessarily professional and/or specialists in the field. Engage more actively in this process between all interested ones: professionals, authorities and others (Rist, 2005).

In this context, for the transdisciplinary study of IL, it is proposed a team of researchers from various disciplines and people from NGO's to represent each stratum of the ecological model, all in turn, would act as *mediators* between the IL and citizens to make an exercise of *interpretation* by defining and analyzing indicators and variables included in the model.

The purpose is to obtain holistic vision, which therefore, could produce better sustained proposals directed to provide a systematic monitoring of results and contributions of each actor, which together, can optimize efforts and resources towards active citizens' participation.

Transparency through accountability and IL, means revealing data as well as spread this law, in order that citizens appreciate it clearly, without fractions, as a whole and by all. The spread of IL transcends to other areas such as Human Rights; builds confidence that even impacts international matters and economics. The fact that individuals know the IL, encourages citizen participation and also important, it could be printed on the social representations, as an intervener in civic pride.

Citizen recognition, giving social reward and empowerment with information, promotes the corresponsibility in a democratic and modern society, being this, an advanced attitude. The diffusion of rights have a determinant role in shaping our social capital, since ideally, should motivate citizens, to take part in the construction of a democratic country, aware that

it begins with the actions of each citizen; conscious that for the exercise of democracy as for freedom, our rights open the doors, but it is our participation that sets us free.

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