

PRELIMINARY LOOK AT THE MOST RELEVANT CHRONOLOGICAL MILESTONES OF INDEPENDENT PUBLISHING HOUSES IN CHILE

MIRADA PRELIMINAR A LOS HITOS CRONOLÓGICOS MÁS RELEVANTES DE LAS EDITORIALES INDEPENDIENTES EN CHILE

Ana Dyrila PÉREZ SILVA¹
Wendolin SUÁREZ AMAYA²
Francisco GANGA-CONTRERAS³

Received	: 01.04.2024
Approved	: 26.08.2024
Published	: 11.10.2024

ABSTRACT: Chilean independent publishing houses are part of the country's publishing industry, which in turn is a subsystem of the cultural industry. They emerged in the 1990s, in the last years of the dictatorship, and have remained so to date, increasing in number. Each time new publishers are emerging, thus swelling this group, becoming a highly positioned sector. Due to the above, the main objective of this research is to analyze the most significant chronological milestones that have marked its development. For this purpose, a historiographic study was carried out, where historical milestones and the role of the main groups of Chilean independent publishers are analyzed. Among the most relevant results, we can mention the imprint that these publishing houses represent for Chile, with complex installation processes, but with conviction in their motivations. In addition, there is a high motivation and a cultural eagerness that stirs the market, enriches it and configures a reality that is unique to this country.

Keywords: *Organizations, Independent publishers.*

RESUMEN: Las editoriales independientes chilenas, forman parte de la industria editorial de este país, que a su vez es un subsistema de la industria cultural. Surgieron a partir de los años 90', en los últimos años de la dictadura y se han mantenido a la fecha, aumentando en cantidad. Cada vez van surgiendo nuevas editoriales, engrosando así este grupo, transformándose en un sector altamente posicionado. Debido a lo anterior, se realiza esta investigación, que tiene como objetivo central analizar los hitos cronológicos más significativos que han marcado su desarrollo. Para ello, se realizó un estudio historiográfico,

¹ PhD in Management Sciences. Professor Universidad de Santiago de Chile, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-1073-3064> - ana.perez.s@usach.cl

² PhD in Social Sciences. Professor and Researcher Universidad Tecnológica Metropolitana, Chile, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3825-5781> - wsuarez@utem.cl

³ PhD in Strategic Management and International Business. Full Professor Facultad de Educación y Humanidades, Universidad de Tarapacá, Chile (corresponding author), ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9325-6459> - franciscoganga@academicos.uta.cl

donde se analizan hitos históricos y el papel de las principales agrupaciones de editoriales independientes chilenas. Entre los resultados más relevantes se puede mencionar la impronta que estas editoriales representan para Chile, con procesos de instalación complejos, pero con convicción en sus motivaciones. Además, se observa alta motivación y un afán cultural que remueve el mercado, lo enriquecen y configuran una realidad propia de este país.

Palabras clave: *Organizaciones, Editoriales independientes.*

INTRODUCTION

In Chile, there are self-described independent publishers, which are national publishers. Most of these are grouped in the Asociación de Editores Independientes, Universitarios y Autónomos, La Cooperativa de Editores de La Furia, and La Feria del Libro Independiente y Alternativa (FLIA) Chile. This group of publishers represents the new publishing company in Chile, born at the end of the dictatorship, at the end of the nineties, and at the beginning of the two thousand years, consecrating themselves during the first years of democracy.

Publishing houses were practically exterminated during the military regime. Still, at the end of this period and already in democracy, the emergence of new publishing houses is consecrated, in a context different from the sixties or seventies in Chile, transforming their persistence into a real challenge. The self-styled independent publishers are confronted with a concentrated market dominated by international publishers, typical of the inequity and concentration of the market, as Stiglitz (2012) puts it, where enterprises and micro-enterprises die or disappear before two years of life.

Given the above, the main objective of this study is to analyze the most significant chronological milestones that have marked the development of independent publishing houses in Chile. Through a historiographic study of different bibliographies, this research addresses the fundamental role that reading plays in social development, and how it accounts for a publishing group called international publishers, in the themes and the market, but also places emphasis on another emerging publishing group (Hernández, 2019), which makes space, satisfying captive readers, a niche in the first instance, mass later. Thus, glimpsed that the hegemonic is not totalitarian, it is only a dominant symbol, but not necessarily representative as Bourdieu (2005) says.

The importance of this article lies in the visibility of a cultural, social and economic sector; these three edges that seem bifurcated, always have a common genesis: publishing houses arise from an individual or collective desire, but generally with a cultural outlook (Gallego, 2019), then they become a productive organization, to generate their own marketing spaces finally.

This study has implied the search for written antecedents, stories of a past time, which are configuring an event. In this sense, authors such as De Mussy and Valderrama (2010) point out that there is a dominant narrative that is being questioned by post-modern historiography, which is subject to deconstruction because it is not only the historian's narrative, but also the representativeness, given by the significance of language and communication (Habermas, 2010). History is a social construction, it is produced as an event, thus historiography distances itself from traditional conceptions (data, dates, chronologies), according to Rincón (2018). In recent decades the historiography profession has not only become more democratic, and even rejuvenated, but has also experienced the effects of globalization and, more specifically, in the last two decades, of digital humanities. This has created new forms of historiographical socialization as much more numerous, varied, and horizontal associations (Pasamar and Ceamanos, 2020).

Historiography”, as well defined by Aróstegui (2001), quoting García, ‘is the art or way of writing history’, in short, says the author, it is a methodological theoretical reflection on research in history. Thus, the written documentation used for this research has been archival documents, and bibliographic documentation, among others. The reading of a document must be oriented towards the search for concrete situations, before the established project.

The bibliography is the main source of information that is digested on a given phenomenon, as well as newspapers, web pages, and books, are a typified and essential field. Derived from this method, content analysis, and discourse analysis are relevant techniques to carry out any study of this nature (Aróstegui, 2001).

INDEPENDENT PUBLISHER

In attempting to define or identify this type of publishing house, Danieli (2006) states that the independent publisher reflects diversity, and creation in a given society, is generally very passionate, commits his resources, and takes risks to publish an innovative and original work, which may not be recognized at the time of publication, but which turns out to be the beginning of a social challenge. For the sake of simplicity, the following definition will be considered for now: “These are literary or humanist associations in which their editor or editors, advisors, designers, proofreaders, and even salespeople make a commitment of content and form regardless of whether their books are commercial or not” (Fernández, 2013).

This concept gains importance from various analyses that are made with respect to editorial autonomy. Since the 1960s, with the absorption of independent publishers by large communications companies, maintaining independence concerning this phenomenon has been a real achievement (Bethencourt, 2012).

In this sense, Harari (2000) states that independent publishers are those that maintain their autonomy from large publishing houses (conglomerates or groups), most of the time multinationals. These conglomerates or groups, which are not independent publishers, include publishing imprints and generally several areas of the industry (publishing, bookstores, printing, advertising); and/or multimedia (books, press, audiovisual, music, Internet). Thus, Schiffrin (2011) argues the importance of protecting independent publishers from large conglomerates to safeguard the autonomy of publishing, otherwise, these large publishing groups will necessarily alter their editorial line, which is based on the sales of their product.

Their ways of inhabiting the publishing space intertwine varied ways of questioning readers, through their own or cooperative forms of distribution that enable personalized relationships with booksellers, the joint organization of book fairs, the variety of media and formats that facilitate access and activism on the web and digital networks are some of them, which allow them to constantly redefine publishing and dissemination strategies (Coppari and Vigna, 2020).

Regarding the economic aspect, the search for financing alternatives is evident, since they must bet on their sustainability in a fragile economy, which can easily destabilize (Castellanos and Maina, 2019). Some diversify, through business lines such as book sales, courses and workshops, publishing, and printing services, among others. It would seem that the premise is to survive in the market with agility and creativity.

GENERAL BACKGROUND OF INDEPENDENT PUBLISHERS IN CHILE

According to Symmes (2013) the social conditions of publishing production draw a specific picture in each country, highlighting the case of Chile, the situation of post-dictatorship society, which will define the margins where its cultural work moves, which represents only the first aspect, followed by a series of events and changes that have been shaping this business sector.

“Throughout the last twenty years, the world of independent publishing has become an organized pole that has contributed to significantly transforming the national publishing space” (Symmes, 2013, p. 132). They have a power, which is the conviction about the social necessity of books, which determines the thinking and any kind of power required to promote itself, for its validation.

Independent publishers emerge to counteract a dominant power, basically exercised by the mass media. Bustamante and Symmes (2013) state that these publishers -strengthening their work in networks- have a sort of cultural militancy that has endowed them with an important symbolic capital, additionally they point out: “Chilean independent publishers position themselves locally by claiming, before those responsible for the institutions in charge of the cultural sector in their country, the need for public policies that safeguard national cultural production” (p. 92).

This representative and identity symbolic capital, attributable to cultural diversity, says Symmes (2013), is nothing more than the defense of the cultural autonomy of countries, as opposed to cultural transversalization. It is writing about those social phenomena that burst

into a given space and time, which seem to be neither observed nor represented by the big publishing houses.

In this context, Indri (2024) analyzes literary publications of independent publishers, highlighting narratives of memory that recover the intervention of women in historical and political events in the region during the independence process, that is, that burst with the representation of non-hegemonic phenomena. The large publishing houses, says the author, generally seek to homogenize voices.

Independent or self-managed publishing houses began to be very prominent in the last decade of the last century, as a result of the globalization and economic concentration of cultural enterprises in Latin America, and multiplied considerably in the early 2000s, in conditions that favored forms of activism in the face of the globalized market of symbolic goods. At present, despite the new crisis affecting the publishing sector, due to the increase in production costs and the drop in sales, the heterogeneity of publishing projects is increasing and is perceived as a sign of freedom and development to produce outside the literary mainstream, say Coppari and Vigna (2020).

An interesting phenomenon, derived from the management of these publishers, are the fairs that they organize in different spaces and localities, where they share sales spaces, causing inalienable associativity and cooperation (Coppari 2024).

The independent publishing houses became the sector of the cultural industry in Chile or what today is called creative industries, which increased with Law No. 19,227 of 1990 on Book and Reading Promotion.

Although independent publishers seem to have many complications in selling their books, the paradox is that they are the sector within the creative industries with the greatest industrial prospects (Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes - CNCA, 2014).

Fuentes et al. (2015), confirm that the phenomenon of small and micro-publishing in Chile emerged in the 21st century, particularly in 2008; 2% were founded between 1983 and 1989, 4% between 1990 and 1999, 10% between 2000 and 2007 and 83% between 2008 and 2014. 2012 was the year in which the most publishers (28) were founded. There is a strong

concentration in the Metropolitan Region, which reaches 76%. The Valparaíso Region (13%) and the Biobío Region (4%) are followed by the Valparaíso Region (13%) and the Biobío Region (4%). At the community level, there are small publishing houses in 38 communities, 11% of which exist in Chile. Looking specifically at the communes of the Metropolitan Region, there is again a phenomenon of concentration, mainly in Santiago (25%), Providencia (22%) and Ñuñoa (18%).

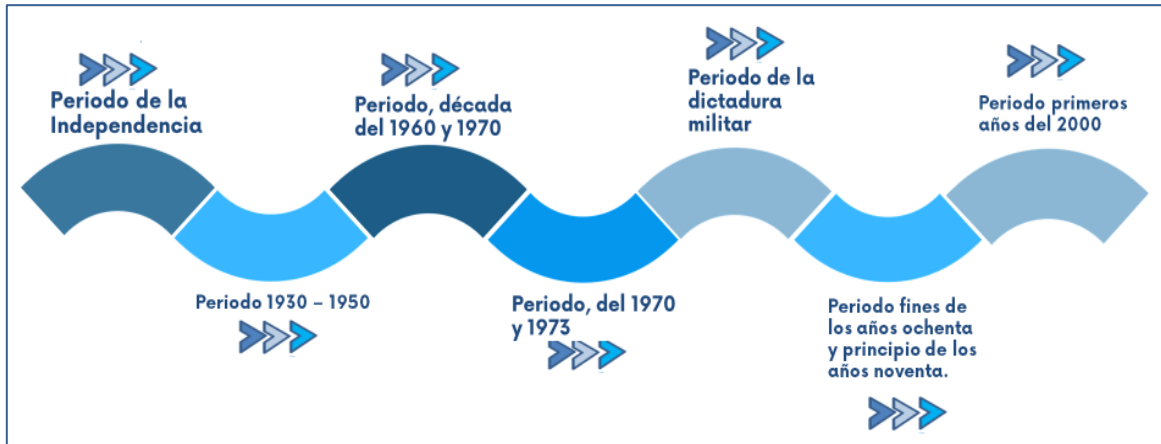
For the period after the pandemic, the Association of Independent, University, and Autonomous Publishers of Chile surveyed its members to see the impact of the pandemic on its publishers (Unesco, 2023). It was answered by 35% of its members, the main results were: that 93% of those who responded to the survey stated that they were micro, small, or medium-sized enterprises and that, although there are large publishers, in general, most of them are MSMEs. On the other hand, only 26.7% stated that they live exclusively from the income of the publishing house, the rest partially. Regarding book sales, a 7% decrease was observed in 2020 concerning the previous year. A great majority of the publishers (80%) said that they had to make some kind of decrease, such as ceasing to publish books, terminating or modifying collaborators' contracts, taking advantage of the labor protection law, or having to leave the physical space of the office as a recurrent expense. A very interesting fact is that in 2019 43.3% had books in digital format and in 2020 it increased to 77% (Unesco, 2023).

CHRONOLOGY OF INDEPENDENT PUBLISHERS IN CHILE

As can be seen in Figure 1, in the historical development of independent publishers, seven periods can be highlighted, from independence to the first decade of the 2000s approximately.

Figure 1

Important milestones in the history of independent publishing in Chile



Source: own elaboration.

PERIOD: OF INDEPENDENCE

Towards the end of the 18th century, already influenced by the Enlightenment, the book was the reflection of new ideas and was acquiring an increasing importance in Chilean cultural life. The possession of books functioned as a unifying element for an elite made up of lawyers, bishops, and professors of the University of San Felipe who, slowly, through the acquisition of books, embraced the new spirit of the Enlightenment (Memoria Chilena, n.d.).

The first printing press arrived in Chile, by official order of the government headed by José Miguel Carrera, from the United States (Bragassi, 2010) and it was established in a place in Santiago of the Real Universidad de San Felipe, having as its first product, the publication of the first national newspaper “La Aurora de Chile”. This period was strongly influenced by the intellectual development of the time; in this regard, Bello (1843) expressed: “I am certainly one of those who see general instruction, the education of the people, as one of the most important and privileged objects to which the government can direct its attention” (p. 1). This excerpt from Bello's inaugural speech, delivered at the University of Chile, shows an intellectual action, which is the driving force of all reading and publishing development.

PERIOD: 1930 – 1950

Subercaseaux (2010) states that there was a publishing expansion that has been considered - taking into account the subsequent atrophy - as the golden age of the publishing and book industry in Chile. The publishing activity was already fully constituted in its modern sense. There were several publishing houses, such as Zig-Zag and Ercilla, with projections in the Hispanic-American market, and other medium-sized, family-run companies, such as Nascimento and Letras.

The golden age of the book in Chile was between 1935 and 1950 when Spain and Europe were going through great difficulties and Argentina and Mexico did not yet have a book protection policy. Chilean publishing houses such as Ercilla and Nascimento, came to have branches in several Latin American countries (Subercaseaux, 2010).

PERIOD: DECADE OF THE 1960'S AND THE 1970'S

During this time, the impulse of publishing houses was largely a consequence of the so-called Latin American boom, marked by a strong emergence of a circle of renowned intellectuals such as Alejo Carpentier and Gabriel García Márquez, among others (Guillén, 2021). The decade in which the Cuban revolution took place, around which the Latin American intellectuality of the time was polarized (Pedemonte, 2017). Havana became the cultural and political capital of the writers of the period. At the beginning of the 1960s, the support given to the Revolution by Latin American writers (especially non-Cuban writers) was enormous, and, in the face of this political process, a series of writers and intellectuals of the time were exalted (Salvador, 2017).

PERIOD: ONE THOUSAND NINE HUNDRED AND SEVENTY TO ONE THOUSAND NINE HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-THREE

In 1970, Zig-Zag workers were on strike, according to Campillo (cited by Lawner et al., 2008), in the context of a terminal crisis, which would lead to bankruptcy. Faced with this situation, President Salvador Allende decided to buy the publishing house and formed Empresa Editora Nacional Quimantú Ltda., which published a series of classic and contemporary works of literature and history, scientific texts, art books, magazines for young people, women, and children, in print runs of tens of thousands of copies at low cost and easy access, distributed in bookstores and kiosks (Montesinos, 2020). According to Bravo (2013), President Allende intended Editorial Quimantú to contribute to broadening the intellectual and cultural horizons of the nation.

PERIOD: FROM THE MILITARY DICTATORSHIP

The main publishing houses disappeared, leaving in circulation those that produced school textbooks. The military dictatorship in Chile generated a breakdown not only in the institutional framework but also in the cultural field, generating a disarticulation of the sector, which Subercaseaux (2010) calls denial. The Quimantú publishing house changed its name to Gabriela Mistral, and in 1976, the Corporación de Fomento de la Producción (CORFO) auctioned this publishing house, which was acquired by imprenta y litografía Fernández, which, as Subercaseux (2010) points out, lacked experience and working capital. As a consequence, massive layoffs took place. That same year, the book tax (VAT) began to be applied.

In 1981, Arrayan Editores was created to publish research books. At the beginning of the eighties, hand in hand with the social mobilizations, a series of publications began to emerge under the auspices of non-governmental organizations, most of which were censored by the dictatorship, but which undoubtedly formed the basis of a series of publishing houses that emerged in those times and were strengthened during the nineties.

After the cultural impacts that occurred during this period, the recomposition of the industry is complex. Aldea (cited by Subercaseaux, 1993) is the most eloquent way to understand this:

They were previously subjected to rigorous market analysis and the results obtained determined the final titles, format, cover designs, and print run. Research began in September last year with surveys in schools, neighborhoods, and among customers attending the Chilean Book Fair (p. 20).

Here we present the launch of new titles from Editorial Renacimiento, where a clear market focus is adopted.

PERIOD: LATE 1980s AND EARLY 1990s

At this time, the expectations of democracy, the gradual return of exiles, the demand for freedom of expression, and therefore of publication, provoked the emergence of a series of independent publishing houses. According to Pinto and Undurraga (n.d.), in this period the nuances of the free market were accentuated in the publishing field, consolidating the large transnational groups. In parallel and on the margins of the economic groups, numerous independent publishing houses emerged, made with more effort than lucrative ambitions. These publishing houses are: Altazor, Bravo y Allende Editores, Contrabando del Bando en Contra, Forja y Frasis, Dolmen, Cuarto Propio, Carlos Porter, Animita Cartonera, Forja y Frasis, and Barba de Palo. What is interesting in the process is how some are driving others as they are formed, they are not isolated processes, as shown in Figure 2. Perhaps precariousness tends to unite them, as happens with any organizational process as defined by Simon (1998).

Figure 2*First Editorials*

Source: Own elaboration.

PERIOD: EARLY 2000s

The first concrete initiatives regarding books came from private institutions, such as the one carried out by Fundación Chile 21, which in 2001 brought together different actors in the publishing world to reflect on the situation of books and reading, which resulted in a publication:

For a year, the Book Roundtable operated under the responsibility and coordination of Chile 21, with representatives of national and foreign publishers based in Chile, distributors, bookstores, and authors, with the participation of the Association of Independent, University, and Autonomous Publishers, today Editores de Chile, the Chilean Book Chamber and the National Book Council, as well as some guests from the public sector as interlocutors, for aspects related to the industrial and commercial characteristics of books: financing, legal norms, distribution, transport and export promotion. (Fundación Chile Veintiuno y la Asociación de Editores de Chile, 2005, p. 11)

This illustrates three key periods in Chilean publishing in recent times, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Key stages of the Chilean edition



Source: own elaboration.

SITUATION OF INDEPENDENT PUBLISHERS IN CHILE, DURING THE FIRST DECADE OF THE 2000s

According to the reality studied, there are currently three groups of independent publishers, which will be detailed below:

Association of Independent, University, and Freelance Publishers

At the end of the dictatorship and during the 1990s, a series of publishing houses emerged, which came to rescue what Subercaseaux (2010) called the illustration of the book and which later called themselves independent publishers. Most of them are small publishing houses with a clear editorial line, with a different position concerning the market, and with a rather critical sense that seek a way to survive and are the Asociación de Editores Independientes, Universitarios y Autónomo Asociación de Editores Independientes, Universitarios y Autónomos, constituted on October 3, 2001.

The main objectives of Editores de Chile are to promote the development of the national and Latin American publishing industry, strengthening the ties of collaboration and exchange; to promote cultural diversity from a humanist, democratic, pluralistic, and Latin American perspective; to promote the role of books and reading as a means of integral development of human beings and support of a citizen society; to promote and carry out activities that encourage the consolidation and opening of markets for books, which includes the edition and distribution of books, production of forums, seminars and presentations; also to promote and protect the rights of authors and publishers, particularly in the face of piracy. (Alianza internacional de editores independientes, n.d.)

Today they are widely recognized, with characteristics of medium and small companies, motivated as they express on their website; “by the commitment to readers and their relationship with the book, as a source and cultural and educational vehicle, builder of identities, support of plurality and disseminator of diversity. Since then, its work has been that of cultural builders, who through the written word extend bridges of communication and reflection, suggesting themes, inciting debate, seeking ideas and talents that permanently recreate the individual and collective humanity of Chile”. This association has a board of directors, composed of 7 people, led by a president, in addition to having a representative in the National Book and Reading Council of the Ministry of Culture of Chile.

Subsequently, for Editores de Chile, the need arose to incorporate a Professionalization Area into the work carried out. Its objective was to support better integration and participation of all its associates in areas that would directly facilitate editorial management and the development of a business platform. They understand business platforms as the generation of a series of initiatives that will help them distribute their books. In practical terms, this has translated into a series of applications for various projects to government agencies (CNLL, Prochile, among others), which has allowed them to participate in various international book fairs.

Among the most outstanding activities they have carried out are:

Encuentros con el Libro Chileno, in the north and south of the country, financed by the Book Fund 2009 and 2010. Its objective was to implement systems of traveling fairs in various cities and to execute an interesting cultural program, accompanied by a complete sample of books from the Association's publishers.

The year 2010 began with an important challenge, the implementation of LEA +. Librería de los Editores Asociados at the Centro Cultural Gabriela Mistral. This initiative allowed an important commercial positioning and became a unique space for cultural dissemination for independent publishers in Chile.

They have always carried out intense work to promote discussions related to the area of public policy, resuming the work about the reduction of the book tax, raising positions on legislation related to books and reading, and by the year 2021 there were more than 100 members (Unesco, 2023).

La Furia Editors Cooperative

There is another group of publishing houses, generally of a micro-publishing nature, grouped in the cooperative La Furia de Libro, which has a more relevant character and visualizes the book as a channel of message not only from writing but also as an instrument of creativity in itself. This arises from a book fair held in 2008 in the Lastarria neighborhood, which received 900 people in three days, which was a success for the time. According to Galo Ghigliotto, one of the organizers, the name Furia del Libro responds to the tragic situation of the book, he mentions “It makes us angry to live in a country that thinks it is developed, but has a 19% book tax”, adds Ghigliotto, who is also editor of the independent label Cuneta, along with his partner Arturo Aguilera” (La Tercera, 2011, para. 3). These publishing houses emerged around 2005 and call themselves independent, with clearly critical editorial lines, and obviously with many difficulties to survive in the market. They put on the market a book object, not traditional, but aesthetically different, where design was a fundamental contribution. All of them were grouped around the Book Fair, which they called the Book Rage.

Independent and Alternative Book Fair (IABF) Chile

According to Template (2012), they are a group of friendly publishers who have come together in Chile to raise IABF. In Chile, he argues that the number of independent publications has grown considerably in recent years, but there are still huge problems of dissemination and the few spaces that have managed to open do not have sufficient periodicity to massively show the work, or else they are inserted in the circuit of book fairs with costs impossible to recover for micro-publishers and logics that do not represent them. They also face the problem of the loss of public spaces, where it is almost impossible to set up a street fair. For this reason and because they share the spirit of IABF, they are trying to open this permanent and public space based on self-management.

This is an organization, perhaps not formal, but representative of certain sectors as Drucker (1992) says, its existence was felt in the media and in reduced and directed sales spaces.

In short, there are two recognized and formalized consolidated groups and one with degrees of recognition, but not formalized. When Aguilera (2013) analyzes the existence of these publishing houses, focusing on their emergence between the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s, he limits himself to a cultural and public policy analysis, which is an authoritative one. However, this sector has become a social phenomenon, typical of the times we live in, where public opinion is not one, it is diverse and vertiginous, marked by a recent pandemic, as well expressed by Palomino and Ruiz (2022). The authors denote a form of recognition of discourses, grouping them into three major sources: academia, the press and social networks. These editorials may not be a dominant theme in these discourses, but they are a recurrent part.

Although at the beginning independent imprints were a minority, today they represent a heterogeneous territory, perhaps a majority in several organizations, which substantially differentiates them from the large conglomerates. Lacroix (2021) says that it is essential to study this phenomenon when observing the systematic and procedural changes of the book industry in Chile during the 21st century.

CONCLUSIONS

The independent character of the new publishers will be understood then, from their opposition to the large transnational publishing conglomerates, thus expressed as a sector of society that represents an important area of development, it would seem at first that they lack the initiative to strengthen them and give them a leading role as spearhead in the production and distribution of books in Chile, however, they came to stay and have become a determining group in the national culture. Although the road they have traveled has not been easy, they have managed to make a qualitative leap, to tend to professionalism in the distribution of the book object.

This work does not delve into cultural processes or cultural analysis; it only uses them to give an account of an emerging publishing phenomenon at the end of the dictatorship and its explosion during democracy. Its focus, therefore, is on the publishers and editors who made space for themselves in the market. Thus projected, the next challenge is to denote the role of these publishers as companies that make up an industry.

Among the most significant results of this research, we can highlight the decisive editorial trajectory that Chile had before the dictatorship, and how a series of publishing houses emerged despite it, which also increased exponentially during democracy.

It can also be affirmed that the diversification of thought and knowledge undoubtedly provokes the edition and publication of books. Furthermore, this study is relevant because it connotes a sector that makes up the cultural industry or the creative industries in Chile, considering its role as a micro, small, and medium-sized economic and cultural enterprise. Todo lo estudiado indica, entre otros aspectos fundamentales: elementos organizaciones y de gobernanza interna y externa muy acentuados -quizás propios o peculiares- resultan interesantes de abordar en futuros estudios.

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