

## **Rurbanity and Mediatization: A case study of TV consumption on an Argentine agro-town<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract:** This text connects the hegemonic urbanization and mediatization processes to demonstrate how television consumption, an experience in contemporary life, also permeates, in a particular way, a specific Latin-American territory made up of the interpenetration of urban and rural features. If in the modern 21<sup>st</sup>-century city one of the main practices consists on watching and being watched, it is worth identifying the ubiquitous cases of TV consumption inside and outside home in the various urban agglomerations, and particularly the agro-town of the Argentine Pampas, as a basic experience in the peripheral advanced modernity. Advanced modernity includes simultaneous globalization, urbanization, individualization, and mediatization processes, among other dynamics. Due to mediatization, the core processes of sociocultural activities such as politics, religion and education, are, as a result, influenced by and dependent from the media. The importance of television and other devices refers to their presence within society as a semi-autonomous institution and, at the same time, integrated within other social institutions. Thus, urban residents live as in a television condition. As a consequence, a socio-communicational analysis should be conducted of the towns in the Argentine Pampas Region and of the media consumption of the urban population, which does not recreate a one-dimensional and dichotomous tendency of the social theory. A study with these objectives includes three operations integrated into a methodological convergence or triangulation strategy: a) the discussion of the history, relevance and significance of the “agro-town” notion within the frame of the sociocultural theory in order to understand its implications on the studies about the relationships among communication, media, and urban territories; b) the analysis of the quantitative secondary data on TV consumption in the residences of a particular urban configuration, such as Río Cuarto town (Córdoba, Argentina); and c) an ethnographic exploration of other places within this medium-sized urban area that describes certain ways of exposure to television also given on a daily basis and outside home.

### **Key words:**

Argentina, television consumption, rurbanity, mediatization process

### **1. Urbanization and Mediatization in the Peripheral Advanced Modernity**

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“A city is a society that is  
nostalgic for a community.”  
Renato Ortiz

If in the modern 21<sup>st</sup>-century city one of the main activities consists on watching and being watched, it is worth identifying the ubiquitous cases of TV consumption inside and outside home in the various urban agglomerations, and particularly the agro-town, as a basic experience in contemporary life.

As Gorelik (2002) states, an articulation among capitalism, state, society and territory defines urban modernity from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a triple tension: toward outside the territory, from the urban expansion; toward inside society, for social integration; and toward ahead in time, with the idea of a project. The preparation of the so-called urban strategic plans constitutes one of the current experiences of the very difficult convergence among these urban tensions (Busso & Carniglia, 2013).

The peripheral advanced modernity implies, for Latin America, the constitution of some complex societies. These, from a very long-term perspective, were constituted and tend to be constituted as configurations that are at the same time: a) economically heterogeneous, b) socially fragmented, c) politically unstable, d) culturally hybrid, and e) spatially diverse. In turn, in terms of mediatized communication, a key feature in the contemporary socio-culture, those societies evidence the hegemony of the concentrated mercantile systems and a predominance of cultural consumptions centered on television (Carniglia, 2010).

The constitution of Latin-American societies with this complex configuration is by no means natural but it is due to the historical processes because of which the nations of the subcontinent have lived and live as a periphery the great modern transformations, that is, both constitutional revolutions in the political aspect and industrialization in the economic aspect (Zanatta, 2014). Thus, for example, unlike the European world, the post-Columbian America began in the urban space and only starting from there was the development of agrarian activities fostered (Villavicencio, 2011).

Within these conditions of the peripheral advanced modernity, the city is never unique (Clemente, 2014; Marcús, 2011) nor does it stop constituting itself from a specific history (Harvey, 2014) and by its relationships with other urban and/or rural spaces

(Cimadevilla & Carniglia, 2009; Cloquell, 2014; Hernández and others, 2013.) It is, therefore, appropriate a perspective of the urban territories in the 21<sup>st</sup> century considering the historical, fragmented, and relational condition of each urban configuration.

Cities are thoroughly approached from the various disciplines of society, the culture and the human being, but a one-dimensional approach prevails. Thus, cities are alternatively conceived as the core of industrial development and capitalist concentration (Gorenstein and others, 2012), as the resulting text of the rapid exchange of messages (Di Felice, 2012), as a social space different from the rural space (Cimadevilla & Carniglia, 2009), as an enclave displayed along the historical time (Sennett, 2010; Harvey, 2014), as an alternative fictional discourse generating spaces for social desires (Heffes, 2008), and as a tension of the Latin-American narrative between a real city –taken and barbarian– and an absent city –imaginary and future– (Villavicencio, 2011), among other perspectives.

Regarding all that, the need of a situated treatment of the urban structure and dynamic emerges, which can make possible the knowledge and action with regards to an environment and a territory –the city– that increasingly prevails in the daily experience of contemporary individuals. Argentina, often regarded as an intermediately developed country, gathers approximately 90% of its population in different manifestations of the urban agglomeration: megalopolis, intermediate-sized towns, medium-sized towns, small towns, and villages.

Advanced modernity includes –even in peripheral societies– the simultaneous globalization, urbanization, individualization, and mediatization processes, among other dynamics of daily life. Usually, mediatization refers to the processes through which the core elements of a social or cultural activity such as politics, religion and education, are influenced by and dependent from the media. The importance of these is related to their presence within society as a semi-autonomous institution and, at the same time, integrated within other social institutions (Hjarvard, 2008; 2012).

Urban life in the peripheral modernity also occurs permeated by the experience with the media. Thus, individuals do not only live in cities and towns, but their daily activity also includes, for example, the systematic consumption of the media, within which television together with its many genres and modalities stands out. This way, urban residents live as in a television mode. Maybe in the modern city, the main activity may still

be watching and being watched, an experience in which television is established as one of the predominant ways.

As a consequence, a socio-communicational analysis should be conducted of the towns in the Argentine Pampas Region and of the media consumption of the urban population, which does not recreate a one-dimensional and dichotomous tendency of the social theory. That is, given the historical characteristic of the predominance of agriculture in the inland of the Argentine Pampas, now globalized under the agro-business model, it is appropriate to assume a perspective on the possibilities of hybridizations or mixtures on the display of urban systems that, as said before, are always constructed dynamically with reference to a multi-dimensional context.

In this sense, the discussion of the concept of “agro-town”, generally limited to the acknowledgement of those urban spaces with a predominance of agro-industrial activity, seems relevant in order to analyze, from a relational and historical perspective, several towns in that region made up of the provinces of Buenos Aires, Córdoba, Entre Ríos, La Pampa, and Santa Fe. At the same time, it is worth identifying the specificity of the mediatized cultural consumptions of these particular territories that are, in some sense, “rurban” territories, i.e. urban and rural spaces at the same time.

Thereby, this text establishes a connection between the hegemonic urbanization and mediatization processes in order to demonstrate how TV consumption inside and outside home, an experience of contemporary life, also permeates, in a particular way, a specific territory made up of the interpenetration of urban and rural features.

A study with these objectives and corresponding with the available resources includes at least three sets of integrated operations. On the one hand, a theoretical discussion of the antecedents, the relevance and the significance of the “agro-town” notion within the frame of the sociocultural studies is necessary in order to understand its implications on the studies about the relationships among communication, media, and urban territories. On the other hand, on the empirical level, the secondary quantitative data on TV consumption at home in this particular urban configuration will be analyzed. Finally, a preliminary ethnographic exploration of other urban places will describe certain ways of exposure to television also given on a daily basis and outside home. As a consequence, a convergence or triangulation methodology is preferred, thought as a knowledge strategy or

action plan combining, in the same research, several observations, theoretical perspectives, sources of data, and methodologies that positively complement it.

## **2. About the Agro-Town, its Conditions and its Forms**

The presence of the rural dimension  
in the urban dimension is kept half-lighted due to  
some discourses that try to hide it when conceptualizing the urban world  
Saskia Sassen

If the understanding of problems or objects of study under dichotomous, one-dimensional, synchronous and reduced-functionality formulas is sometimes an aspect of the disciplines of society, the culture and the human being, the emergence and evolution of social studies could depict such characteristic as a significant condition tending to dissolve as, in the last decades, thought over the subjects, objects, instruments, and contexts of sociocultural research grows.

The dichotomy permeates in particular the theory of the city and the countryside. On the one hand, Edel (1988) acknowledged in the later 1980s that Latin-American urban studies were organized, for a long time, around dichotomies. As research has favored the differences over the similarities and the relationships among social phenomena, the simplest way of taxonomy was displayed into dichotomies such as traditional-popular (“folk”)/urban, traditional/modern, urban/rural, and formal/informal. On the other hand, Cloquell (2014) highlights that, after the deruralization processes that have almost depopulated the Argentine pampas countryside, the boundaries between the countryside and the city in this region have become not just physically blurred, creating spaces of special importance different from those within the rural/urban dichotomy.

Cecchini (2010) recalls, in this sense, that in Latin America and other regions in the world there exist different official perceptions of what is urban and what is rural. Thus, in the region, census criteria in the countries include definitions of the variable number of people living in certain locality (Argentina, Cuba and Mexico), the number of inhabitants together with the absence of infrastructures such as pavement or electric lighting (Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama), the number of dwellers together with the percentage of people working on the secondary sector (Chile), the number of contiguous houses (Peru), and the administrative or legal definitions (Brazil, Colombia and others.) Particularly in

Argentina, since 1914, any agglomerated population of 2000 or more inhabitants is considered urban.

Beyond the various official definitions of rural and urban, a relational and dynamic perspective of the territories in the peripheral modernity is sensitive to the territorialization, deterritorialization, and reterritorialization processes. From this point of view, in the conceptualization of agro-town, criteria such as the number of inhabitants, the function, the history, the location in the regional/national/global network, the environment, and the local imaginary are considered simultaneously. Thus, for example, a recent definition gives priority to the first two criteria to conceive the agro-town as a unit with 5,000 to 35,000 inhabitants made up of a reference urban area plus the rural space on which it rests in terms of organization. The urban centers are those to which the agricultural and cattle raising activities and the rest of the productive and service sectors (industrial, administrative, legal sectors, etc.) that organize the territory's dynamics (Hernández and others, 2013) are articulated. Under this concept, the predominance of the urban location in the management of a form of agriculture prone to industrialization in the Argentine pampas (Cloquell, 2014) is assumed.

However, a more complex perception of the urban condition includes, as it was said before, the relevance of other complementary criteria for the definition of agro-town. Thus, a long-term historical observation signals that many of the current towns in the Argentine pampas arose or were redefined at the pace of an Argentine-Pampean agriculture (Hernández & Carbonari, 2012), early globalized in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which became modernized in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, after a large growth process with exclusion, embracing the agro-business model as the hegemonic norm. In chart A (see Appendix) some features of the setting-up process of Gran Río Cuarto are shown. A three-locality urban agglomeration that operates as a commerce and services center of a large region, the four departments of southern Córdoba province, with a predominance of an extensive agricultural and cattle raising activity.

A geopolitical observation, sensitive to the growing contemporary globalization, also considers the agro-town as a node of a network of cities from different counties and even continents, the interconnection of which facilitates the circulation of products of an increasingly globalized agriculture such as the one displayed in the Argentine pampas. This

way, Río Cuarto town is a link point among the ports of South America's Atlantic and Pacific littorals (Busso & Carniglia, 2013), i.e. a strategic place in which local, national, and global interests are combined.

Environmental conditions, for example the characteristics of the pampas soil, establish another criterion of the agro-town configuration. The early conformation of a mercantile and globalized agriculture in the Argentine pampas was made easier because the social actors, and the global and local capital in particular, have always had a large availability of fertile lands for the agricultural and cattle raising activities. The Pampas Region is an enormous 129-to-135-million-acre (52-to-55-million-hectare) plain spread out Buenos Aires, Córdoba, Entre Ríos, Santa Fe, and La Pampa, which actually gathers both the majority of the Argentine population and the production of commodities such as soybean, corn, and bovine meat.

As previously said, the place imaginary also establishes notions about the agro-town. Demarchi (2014) identifies some evidence of the mediatization of some features of the rurban condition in the city of Río Cuarto. Her recent study originates in some previous research about the local press treatment of “rag pickers”, some rurban actors, i.e. a mixture between what is rural and what is urban, who use carts pulled by horses for, among other activities, the collection and recycling of solid residues within the urban areas (Cimadevilla & Carniglia, 2009.) Among the analysis results, the fact that this press links the visible presence of such actors to poverty, sanitary risks, and traffic problems stands out. Consequently, this mediatization by local newspapers addresses one of the manifestations of the rurban condition and other social emergent elements, belonging to three moments of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, from a naturalized imaginary that considers the city as exclusively modern.

### **The Agro-Town and its Nuances**

The discussion laid down emphasizes, among other aspects, the need for a renewed observation in order to understand the relationship between the rural and the urban in peripheral advanced modernity contexts. Thus, the concept of agro-town proposes that the structure and the dynamic of the urban concentration are defined by a particular logic linking the countryside and the city. The analysis of the urban nucleus reaches a more complex orientation if it is considered how, in a specific social agrarian region of

Argentina, the countryside conditions the form and the dynamic of the town and, at least, some of its actors, allowing for various integrations into “rurban” formations (Cimadevilla & Carniglia, 2009.)

The agro-town manifestation shows several situations in contexts such as the Argentine Pampas Region. One case is the configuration of agro-industrial towns, i.e. urban spaces with a predominance of companies specialized in raw material transformation (mainly grains, meat and milk) and/or in the manufacture of equipment and supplies for the agro sector (machines, seeds, agrochemicals, etc.) This situation belongs to some agro-industrial enclaves linked to oilseed processing, mainly soybean but also sunflower and peanut, emerging since the 1980s in different areas of the Argentine pampas. In southern Córdoba, the reference region of this text, these agro-towns reach their most significant manifestation in the town of General Deheza.

A second nuance of the agro-town belongs to those urban agglomerations that may not always be towns in the strictly legal sense because their population does not surpass 10,000 inhabitants, but which have a key role as a residence for the domestic producer groups and agricultural and cattle raising workers, and as the most nearby node of the urban network of grain, meat, and milk production intermediation. These rural villages (Cloquell, 2014) include several places of the Argentine pampas operating as material support for the production, transport, and commercialization management of globalized agriculture; such as the habitat for rural, industrial, and service producers and workers; and as a locality situated within a socio-economic space strongly associated with the activity of the future agricultural and cattle raising productions.

Another form of agro-towns is made up of major urban agglomerations, in this case, towns that are medium or intermediate-sized, operating as commerce and services centers of a regional territory where the agricultural and cattle raising activity predominates in its economy, especially, extensive agriculture and livestock showing historically low capacity to generate direct employment. This agro-town configuration has hardly been object of social studies and would include several situations of the five Argentine provinces encompassed in the Pampas Region.

Along the immense Pampean plain, there is a subset of towns that may be easier to define by providing what they are not instead of stating some of their features. Those towns



are not a megalopolis as in Argentina there is one, which is unique and, up to the present, irreplaceable. These configurations are not examples of intermediate-sized towns either, i.e. they are not important fluvial and maritime port locations (Bahía Blanca, Mar del Plata, Rosario), and/or ports belonging to the capital city of a political-administrative provincial unit (Santa Fe, Córdoba, Paraná, La Plata), and they do not necessarily constitute industrial urban areas. These towns' population varies approximately between 30,000 and 150,000 inhabitants, and each town often constitutes a services and commercial center in the Pampas Region area with a predominance of agrarian, agricultural and cattle raising, and agro-industrial activities. The towns of Río Cuarto, Pergamino, Villa María, Venado Tuerto, Tandil, San Francisco, and Olavarría are some of the urban centers constituting this text's reference points, which analyzes some aspects of the mediatization, particularly TV consumption inside and outside home in a specific Latin-American agro-town.

Río Cuarto town is the main city in the southern region of Córdoba province (Argentina) that encompasses General Roca, Juárez Celman, Presidente Roque Sáenz Peña, and Río Cuarto departments. As a medium-sized urban area, with around 160,000 inhabitants, it is a typical case in this third agro-town modality, and it represents an urban nucleus with a significant population growth and a remarkable population capturing capacity in southern Córdoba. During the 1947-2001 period, Río Cuarto took part in two of the main population growth trends in Argentina in the last decades: a) there was a significant local population growth during a time (until 1970) with a greater relative growth of big cities such as Buenos Aires, Rosario and Córdoba; and b) there was also a major growth above the national average during a period (from 1970) with a greater population growth in intermediate and medium-sized towns including, among others, provincial capital cities. During the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the population of this town rose in part due to the inter-urban migration, but also by capturing residents from several regional areas and from other national and international spaces.

Rural migration to the agro-town was due, partially, to a very significant decrease in the region's agricultural and cattle raising production units, which took place within a process, still current, of deep capitalism in Córdoba's countryside (Carniglia, 2012). The main changes in land use include an agriculturization based on the expansion of soybean growing, new agricultural technology (transgenic seeds, digital machines, agrochemicals,

and zero tillage, among others), a renewed cattle raising modality (feed lot), and the emergence of new agrarian actors (contractors, sowing pools, and foreign investors) together with the redefinition of the traditional rural subjects. These transformations caused a great increase in cereal and oilseed production, which was at least doubled between the agricultural campaigns of 1984/1985 and 2004/2005. However, this significant agrarian modernization includes a notorious reduction of the agricultural and cattle raising establishments, especially the smaller companies (less than 500 hectares –1235 acres– for this region), which involves the countryside expulsion and, many times, the social exclusion for certain rural categories, such as family farmers and dependent workers, and their associated household nucleuses. The urban counterpart of this selective agrarian modernization shows a greater intensity for the usual rural-urban migration processes in some region's advanced demographic transitions, such as southern Córdoba. Thus, from the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, around eighty percent of the regional population lives in urban territories.

In addition, employment contemporary situation in Río Cuarto town emphasizes the urban nucleus as a services and commerce center of a surrounding region with a predominance of agricultural and cattle raising activities. Cimadevilla and Carniglia (2009) signal that at least half of the employed individuals works around the services and commercial activities, in that order of importance, and that these activities, together with the industrial and building sectors, gather more than 70% of the employed individuals. At the same time, an amount of the town's population, quantitatively scarcely significant, is in charge of the agricultural and cattle raising production, setting up another feature in the countryside-urban articulation in the regional context: the experience of “working in the countryside and living in the city.” In general terms, employment in this agro-town includes around 40% of informal workers, one of the highest numbers in Argentina (Puntal, various editions.)

Certain repeated sociocultural expressions illustrate, as well, this relationship between the city and the countryside in the main urban area of southern Córdoba. Any journey by taxi allows for the chance to hear the driver saying that “the town works well when the countryside is doing well.” Thus, this rurality is thematized as a key productive space for regional life, as well as a territory under working and living conditions that

require significant effort and sacrifice. Another eloquent evidence of this particular urban formation is the traditional “rural expo”, the greatest-audience annual event in Río Cuarto, which has been organized for eight decades by the most powerful regional organization of agricultural and cattle raising producers. This meeting, conceived as a “countryside festivity in the city”, includes production, trading, and artistic activities, among others, that bring together, every year in September, more than 100,000 visitors from the region's towns, villages, and depopulated rural areas (Puntal, various editions).

### **3. TV Consumption in the Pampas Agro-Town Homes**

The study on television includes the analysis of a complex means of communication's structure, content, and forms, within the dynamic multimedia environment of some increasingly mediatized contemporary societies.

Currently, the theory on television fluctuates between an essay for the debate of ideas and the more or less systematic theory, i.e. the formulation of concepts and propositions related to methodically collected and analyzed empirical evidence (Corner, 1997). Examples of the intellectual debate about television and its role in society, politics and culture are displayed by Bourdieu (1997) and Sartori (1998), for the European case, and Landi (1993), Sarlo (1992) and Piscitelli (1998) with regard to Argentina. Corner (1997) emphasizes, in this context, the need to going deeper into the systematic orientation of the theory on television from a process perspective that does not avoid the discursive, technological, and institutional aspects in the study of this key means of communication in contemporary cultural consumptions.

In this sense, from the contemporary life mediatization perspective, television is conceived as a means of communication, i.e. a techno-significant institution situated within the peripheral advanced modernity conditions. This insight emphasizes the interaction and interdependence issues by which television is both a public information and knowledge agency and a popular culture and entertainment space, and this same perspective also highlights TV production and consumption processes. Asamen and Berry (1998), on the other hand, signal that in the methodological sphere a perspective with such orientation shall be combined with a cooperation of efforts from various perspectives, e.g. quantitative

and phenomenological perspectives, in order to generate scientifically valid and contextually relevant answers.

Even though television emerged in Argentina in the 1950s, it did not set up in Río Cuarto until 1964, taking a close circuit model developed in Pennsylvania (USA), from a business venture of 20 local business persons eager to encourage TV sales (Carniglia, 1999). Half a century later, this town has a free TV service, an emergent digital TV system, free of charge as well, and some other three per-connection-periods pay TV modalities. A hertzian TV channel broadcasts its own daily program guide, especially daytime and nighttime one-hour news broadcasts, and the program guide of a channel from Buenos Aires –the Argentine capital, located 600 kilometers (373 miles) away from that agro-town. The emergent digital television includes 16 channels, the local broadcasting of which started on July, 2014. The cable TV system includes two options, one of which belongs to a national network. Both signals include around 65 national and international channels with a varied broadcast program guide: films and movies, music, documentaries, news, child content, sports, arts and entertainment, rural themes, educational content, information on economy, woman content, American series, and air or satellite signals of local, provincial, national and international origin. Finally, a transnational company offers the TV viewers a satellite TV service with several broadcast alternatives and other services as well. The monthly subscription payment to the different pay TV services varied from USD 25 to USD 60, according to September 2014 official exchange rate.

In other respects, TV consumption is conceived as the set of processes where the situated appropriation and usage of TV products are accomplished. In addition, a more operative definition establishes a difference among the practices, the representations and the usages of media consumption. Consumption as practice includes, in general, the sensory and relatively conscious activity through which human beings, i.e. women and men, (re)produce both material and symbolic conditions as well as the social relationships of situated daily life. Representations are condensations and crystallization of meanings, generated in and through symbolic systems, which are constitutive of life in society and which have also a per formative character, i.e. the capacity for action through language. Usages are related to the what for or the purposes of media exposure, either instrumental, aesthetic, or entertainment purposes, among others.

In this sense, another definition acknowledges that, given the ubiquity of TV consumption on an agro-town like Río Cuarto, it is necessary to do some research on TV consumption both inside and outside home since this last experience is being facilitated by the increasing availability of TV screens in various urban spaces. It is even pertinent to start a study on local TV consumptions currently made easier by Internet access and TV digital networks.

Luckily, a local systematic survey on media consumption practices (television, radio, and newspaper), probably the only one known about a medium-sized town in Argentina, provides some details about TV exposure inside home. The study was conducted on six opportunities between 1996 and 2010 from a survey to Río Cuarto's older-than-18 population, in a sample of 440 cases, according to gender and age quotas, done in urban residences selected by systematic sampling and located in homogeneous conglomerates classified by socio-economic level (Grillo and others, 2004).

Data on Table 1 (see Appendix) depict a ubiquitous nature of TV, i.e. its significant presence in these subject's daily life, household members of this particular agro-town type, for a very recent fifteen-year period. On the one hand, on all six reports, the percentage of urban homes without a TV device is almost statistically insignificant. Additionally, nearly more than half of the homes in Río Cuarto has just one TV set, while around a third of household spaces has two TV sets. In the last available report (year 2010), the percentage of homes with two or more TV devices has increased significantly, adding a 60% of the houses.

Other significant recurrent evidence on the status of TV in agro-town homes during the 1996-2010 period is depicted on Table 2 (see Annex): a very high percentage of household spaces, roughly three quarters, has a monthly subscription to pay cable or satellite TV with a price, as it has been said before, that is never lower than USD 25. On the other hand, changes in the number of homes with access to pay TV could demonstrate that the purchase of this service is sensitive to income variations in each household since the number of homes with pay TV in Río Cuarto was significantly reduced during the deep Argentine socio-economic crisis of the 20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> century transition.

Data on Table 3 (see Annex) offer other significant references about the reach or scope of television on the agro-town inhabitants' cultural consumption during the long process of reporting:

- virtually every subject of 18 years of age or older is exposed to TV between Monday and Friday, but around a sixth of the survey respondents does not watch TV during the weekend, i.e. Saturday and Sunday are days when, in general, television is given less attention,
- around a quarter of TV viewers attends TV broadcasts less than two hours on working days, that is from Monday to Friday, while on weekends, less-than-two-hour-exposure TV viewers rise up to around the 30% of such population,
- nearly more than half TV viewers watches TV for an average close to three hours a day on working days, and this frequency is a little reduced, up to around a 40% of the cases, during the rest of the week,
- at least a sixth of the respondents admits to watch different TV programs for more than four hours on the different days of the week, and
- around two thirds of the local TV audience is exposed to the screen at least three hours a day between Monday and Friday, and nearly half of the TV viewers watches TV at least for this number of hours on Saturdays and Sundays.

#### **4. Local Scenes of TV Consumption Outside Home**

The agro-town's landscape has changed, from an air view perspective, during the two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> century transition. Toward 1990 there were still on the urban horizon the metal towers or columns that supported the also visible TV antennas, essential to capture air or hertzian TV transmissions. Two decades later, there is no sign of such media infrastructure in Río Cuarto, and on the city horizon the skyline of more than 600 nine-floor-average tower buildings noticeably stands out now, which were built during the unprecedented real-estate expansion from the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Puntal, various editions). In this sense, different actors of this real-estate expansion or boom identify that a significant part of the corresponding investment came from the predominant regional agricultural and cattle raising production's economic surplus. This activity is generally based on soybean growing and is organized under a hegemonic agro-business

model that during that decade got through very favorable international commercial circumstances.

In this sense, if it is assumed that 21<sup>st</sup>-century Argentina lives on a television mode, the study on TV consumption shall spread out beyond the household domain, normally the house. Therefore, it is appropriate to register the extent and diversity of exposure to this means of communication in other events generated outside such canonical space of mediatized daily experiences.

Thus, from an ethnographic observation, some scenes from daily life outside home can be taken, where different subjects are exposed to television in an agro-town with, as said before, certain sociocultural significance at a sub-regional level in the Argentine pampas. TV consumption situations in bars, canteens, chemical and biological analysis labs, service stations, neighborhood clubs, drugstores, clinics and hospitals, public offices, hairdresser's salons, motels, and transport stations, among other urban places, are introduced below. These situations are observed and codified in order to suggest and discuss their relevance for the joint study on urbanization and mediatization in 21<sup>st</sup>-century Argentina.

### **The stadium in front of the square**

The town has embraced a checkerboard style design since the colonial period, in some cases, or since its foundation during the setting-up of modern Argentina in the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century transition. The main urban outbuildings have striven, and still do, for being close to the central core of such design: for town halls, churches, banks, stores, schools, bars, hospitals, etc., a location next to or in the main square meant and means a power position within the urban flows and structures. In turn, the majority of population that can effectively choose their residence location is also gathered in downtown houses and the up-to-15-story buildings that constitute an emerging skyscraper horizon in the pampas agro-town. Thus, in front of, or very close to, the main square are the bars that symbolized an avant-garde among the TV consumption places outside home. A lot of time before cable TV installation, and when local audiences only had two hertzian or “open” TV signals, a local one and a provincial one, TV viewers used to meet in those bars during night direct football match broadcasts, for example those contested by Boca and River, the most popular national football teams. The members of an audience of up to 30 supporters of both

football teams used to witness inside and outside one of those bars, and in many cases standing up, as if they were in the massive popular stands in those clubs' stadiums, the course of the matches broadcast on color television since 1980, and rebroadcast by the local or provincial television. The joyful cry of football fans due to the scoring of goals by their favorite team, or their cursing due to the misadventure given by the unfavorable final score were accompanied, in more than one opportunity, by an annoyed grimace from the bar's owner and/or waiter. They could notice how that important number of spectators would not turn into an effective demand for an infusion, an alcoholic beverage, a soda, and/or some fast food (empanadas, hamburgers, sandwiches, etc.) Those pioneering tele-football stadiums still work but have been replaced, in the cable and satellite TV times, by a significant number of bars that also even offer, with a minimum consumption, the pay per view matches of Argentina's most popular sport.

#### **Traders, rentiers, retirees, and artists**

The pampas inland town does not have, up to the present, a globalized thematic bar. Near the main square's central fountain is the municipal theater as well. In front of it, there is another institution from the inland town: the bar or, in a more glamorous version, the café. In the bar located almost in front of this theater, a heterogeneous group of individuals is brought together during the twelve hours of customer service, that is from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m., and from 5 p.m. to 12 a.m. That group encompasses during morning and, in general, daytime hours' actors of the most visible activities in town –commerce and services– and people with access to TV at home who see the bar as, for example, a place to meet friends, workmates, and relatives. With a rough equivalent to USD 2, according to the official exchange rate, those customers with sufficient income enjoy a coffee with some biscuits, agree on the interest rate for a loan in the informal financial circuit, talk for a while with acquaintances and/or strangers, read the only local newspaper, and watch part of the broadcasting of some cable or satellite TV channel, usually the news or a sports program. During nighttime hours, especially on days with performances at the theater, that is from Friday to Sunday, it is a lot more usual the attendance of artists and their audience who create the social gathering before and after the stage play, the poetry reading session, the musician's performance, and the conference, among other activities out of a relatively large offer of artistic displays and live shows in the pampas agro-town.



### **Vital flows**

A man arrived on time at the morning hour fixed by the staff from the clinic analysis lab, holding in one hand a container with the first morning urine sample and, in his other hand, the medical prescription indicating urine and blood tests. He said “hi” to the woman at the reception desk and heard from her “just wait for a moment and we'll see you soon” and he sat down on one of the chairs to watch the images from one of the cable TV's national news channels. Minutes later, he entered the doctor's office for a blood extraction that he could bore while watching carefully that it was done with a disposable needle and syringe. When the extraction was done, he left the doctor's office with a slight pain from the needle prick on his right arm and thinking of having that good breakfast that had been postponed because of the fasting request made by the medical professional. When this patient gave a last glance at an old 14-inch analog TV set, he could have snuck a look at the journalistic images and voices from the redundant news about the previous day's bloody crimes and police cases.

### **A wide screen, patriotic goals, and right to the streets**

The inland pampas town has many stores and several shopping arcades, but there is no shopping mall. Up until the mid-90s, it hardly had a few national (supermarkets and retail stores) and provincial (electrical appliances) branch stores. After that period, subsidiaries from three hypermarkets, some branch stores from specialized shops (household appliances, canned music, etc.), and many franchise shops (clothing, dry cleaner's, call shops, etc.) were established. With these introductions, the pampas agro-town now resembles a bit more the larger Argentine urban conglomerates. One of the hypermarkets established has a facility with food stands, a child play room, some other stores, and five micro-cinemas. In the food court, four 50-inch-or-more digital TV sets stay on several hours a day. Given that, in Argentina, football is a very much shared cultural code, that system was installed for the screening of the Argentine team matches during the last World Cup competition carried out in Brazil. High school students, whose classes were put off during Argentine match times, gathered in that place to witness the encounters of an Argentine 23-player team with Lionel Messi as the renowned star. That day in July, 2014, when Argentina defeated Holland on penalties, around 200 youngsters celebrated a very significant triumph. They took the agro-town streets, walking along some 2,300 feet

(700 meters) from the food court to the main square, to express an overwhelming happiness with their t-shirts, slogans, chants, flags, caps, and other elements. An occasional passenger of the transport public service was surprised by the arrival of the enthusiastic group to that square and meanwhile he remembered a somehow emblematic student demonstration from the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In May, 1969, also a group of students, in that opportunity they were university students accompanying the working class, took the streets of a provincial capital city in the Argentine pampas to build “the Cordobazo”, one of the most significant popular protests in Argentina's social and political history.

### **Starter, main course, drinks, bread, and dessert**

Eating out on weekends represents one of the practices by the median income family in the inland town, maybe as typical as the Argentine barbecue with workmates or friends on Fridays at night and the lunch on Sundays with the whole family. This social practice has changed due to the recurrent socio-economic crises: people eat out in restaurants less frequently, more economical places are chosen, the restaurant is changed by the fast food stand (roast beef sandwiches, hamburgers, pizza, etc.), or food is bought outside and eaten at home. Thus, a ten-dollar wine at the restaurant costs half that price in the neighbor's grocery store or supermarket gondola and is tasted now with some home pleasure. However, with the crisis, the offer of restaurants with more affordable prices was also expanded or was a bit more visible. One of these eating places is strategically located, since February, 1996, in the intersection of one of the main avenues and the south ring road route of the agro-town. At that place, some lunch or dinner options from a relatively fixed menu are offered for less than ten dollars. In a rectangular hall, with a capacity for nearly 65 people, three stands were set up with 30-inch TV sets permanently on, one on each of the corners that are not used by the kitchen or the reception desk for diners. Neither the members of the family company managing the restaurant nor their usual or occasional customers can avoid a permanent feature in the place: their exposure, as focus center or as background audio-visual scene, to the three TV sets transmitting the signal of one single channel as long as diners are present.

### **Card games, drinks, and football on encoded channels**

Neighborhood clubs, and clubs from the micro and macro-center, in the pampas agro-town are a typical meeting and entertainment space for members and non-members.

People who attend those clubs practice amateur sports (football, basketball, bowls, volleyball, tennis, swimming, rugby, etc.), and/or play card games with or without cash, share a drink and a political and/or sports discussion, take part in commemoration lunches or dinner-dance events, and carry out some neighborhood tasks, among other activities. These clubs' names and uninterrupted activity for several decades refer to various historical actors, institutions, practices, places, and moments in the inland town and also reflect the résumé and wallet differences among the members of the different entities: Estudiantes, Atenas, Golf, Municipal, Acción Juvenil, Gorriones, San Juan, Jockey, Chacabuco, Maipú, Pronóstico, Talleres, Bochín, El Diario, El Sol, Urú Curé, Banda Norte, Alberdi, Pasteur and Liniers, among others. All of these places gather their members and other actors in the different activities almost every day. The club, as an urban sociability space, has also included the television for a long time, and has even allowed for an optional cable or satellite TV consumption –of a lesser cost– i.e. a consumption of the highest direct cost TV images. Thus, for example, those wanting to watch their favorite team's match can avoid subscription payment by attending some of those clubs. These offer their audience exposure to TV, sometimes, without the need to pay and, some other times, by paying for a minimum consumption.

Thereby, TV consumption outside home occurs in many places of the pampas agrotown, which are different from the shopping windows in electrical appliance shops, video rental shops, and medium and long-distance public transport vehicles. It can be stated, through the descriptions done and other observations not yet codified, that in the inland pampas TV was present –though not always, as it started in the 1960s– it is present, and there is a reason for that. It emerges more and more on new urban places: bars, cafés, restaurants, hotels, pizzerias, service stations' minimarkets, clubs, drugstores, a clinic's, sanatorium's or analysis lab's waiting room, public service offices, hairdresser's salons, and motels. These spaces constitute the multiple places where television is installed for the exposure to this means of communication outside home. However, television is present as a monitoring and surveillance device as well, for example in those places where signs advise TV viewers to “Smile! You are on camera.” TV, as a complex technological device for image capturing, even penetrates inside each member in the audience, for example during an endoscopy diagnosis experience. In this situation, the distance vision, which is the

etymological meaning of the word “television”, is reduced to its minimum expression: the technological device works as an internal mirror in each individual.

Little is known about the practices, representations, and usages of TV consumption in the pampas agro-town but, a priori, it can be said that they take place both inside and outside home. In turn, some TV consumption practices are comprehensive or non-fragmented, for example, the exposure in the club to the direct broadcast of the Sunday match on a cable TV channel, i.e. as another pay-per-view show. In some other cases, the ubiquitous TV consumption is dynamically fragmented: it includes zapping, i.e. to switch channels to skip over TV commercials; zipping, i.e. to fast forward a recorded program on the VCR to avoid commercials; flipping, i.e. to jump from program to program during broadcasting with no relation to commercials; and grazing, i.e. to switch two or more programs back and forth to watch them simultaneously. It is the case, for example, of exposure during lunch or dinner alone or with someone at a restaurant, and in bars and cafés where looks go from the tablecloths, to the glasses and cups, to the interlocutors, and from there to the screen and so on. This way, this flow occurs as a movement that may be slow but that is almost perpetual and equivalent to that of the dancing waters on the fountain located in the main square in the pampas agro-town.

### **5. Agro-Town and TV Consumptions: Mirrors and Windows of a Contradictory Peripheral Modern Condition**

TV consumption, one of the experiences of contemporary life's growing mediatization, also permeates, carrying particular agro-town characteristics, a specific Argentine territory made up of the interpenetration of urban and rural features.

The urban experience of watching and being watched, a constitutive condition of modernity, is resignified in the 21<sup>st</sup> century from a mediatization, now resting upon television consumption, that permeates various spaces of daily life. Thus, urbanization and mediatization constitute basic synergistic processes of a peripheral advanced modernity ubiquitous in Latin-American countries such as Argentina.

The pampas agro-town stands out, in its different forms, as a recurrent territorial emergent element in certain conditions of this peripheral advanced modernity. A complex network of historical, economic, territorial, sociocultural, and geopolitical features creates a particular urban way, the understanding of which always requires the acknowledgement of

the relationships between the city and the countryside in territories under uneven and combined development processes, e.g. the Argentine pampas.

On the one domestic space, the survey data from Río Cuarto city shows that the percentage of urban homes without a TV device is almost statistically insignificant and the percentage of homes with two or more TV devices has increased significantly, adding a 60% of the houses. Additionally, a very high percentage of household spaces, roughly three quarters, has a monthly subscription to pay cable or satellite TV. This data offers other significant references about the reach or scope of television on the agro-town inhabitants' cultural consumption: virtually every subject of 18 years of age or older is exposed to TV two or more hours on working days.

TV consumption also occurs in new urban places of this agro-town: bars, cafés, restaurants, hotels, pizzerias, service stations' minimarkets, clubs, drugstores, a clinic's, sanatorium's or analysis lab's waiting room, public service offices, hairdresser's salons, and motels. These and other spaces constitute the multiple places where television is installed for the exposure to this means of communication outside home.

TV consumptions appear as ubiquitous, at least regarding their practices, both inside and outside home in the pampas agro-town in such a way that daily life occurs as on television mode. The multiple contents of the TV offer, specially of pay TV, are consumed in different household and extra-household spaces which ask for new studies on the practices, representations, and usages of the mediatized cultural consumption.

As a means of communication, television constitutes a situated techno-significant institution operating both as a mirror to reflect our Latin-American societies and as a window showing them with their complex and dynamic contradictions. Thereby, the experience of watching TV in the agro-town is set up in the core of social and political disputes about the visibility, credibility, and legitimacy of some dynamic, comprehensive, and sustainable urbanization ways that go beyond the very critical dilemmas of the peripheral advanced modernity.

**Chart A. Gran Río Cuarto (1786-2011.) Historical Periods and Significant Urban Problems**

<b>URBAN PHASES AND ASPECTS</b>	<b>Formation and Colonization (1786-1880)</b>	<b>Agro-Exporting Demographic Expansion (1880-1930)</b>	<b>Urban Modernization and Infrastructure Coverage (1930-2001)</b>	<b>Agglomeration and Regional Commerce and Services Center (2002-2011)</b>
<b>Habitat and Public Space Quality</b>	Central town exposed to natural phenomena, Indian raids and internal conflicts. Border town.	Territory configuration by equipment and iron structures, with redescription and segregation of areas.	Deterioration and intervention on the river and the streams. Urban growth back toward the river.	Recovery of stretches of Río Cuarto river. Social enhancement of river coasts. Intervention in the center of Río Cuarto and Las Higueras.
<b>Land Use and Urban Regulation</b>	No regulation.	First rules on urban problems.	Urban planning codes. Regulations on Río Cuarto river and Santa Catalina stream.	Approval of Plan Urbano 2011 in Río Cuarto and Las Higueras. New urban bridges and connectivity. New Provincial Civic Center. New hospital. Need for a joint regulation in the three areas.
<b>Access to Housing</b>	Auto-building.	Quality building for high-income economic sectors.	Mortgage loans. Quality according to payment capacity.	Difficulties for the “middle class” and the median and low income population.
<b>Services and Public Infrastructure</b>	Sidewalk tiling. Definition of roads in Río Cuarto's micro and macro center.	Street paving and first sanitation works.	Ring road route building, national roads and bridges detour.	Collapse of the sanity infrastructure. Sewage treatment plant of insufficient dimension.
<b>Historic Heritage</b>	Train station construction.	Disappearance of colonial historic heritage with home predominance and scarce stylistic value. Public buildings construction.	Acknowledgment of the need for protection. Passing of the first regulations.	Heritage deterioration due to the expansion of buildings construction.
<b>Emergent Topics</b>	Use of the “Laws of the Indies model.” Segregation of usage, access to water, and unrest levels.	Need for the regulation on the subdivision of lands.	First attempts at a comprehensive arrangement of the provincial territories. Río Cuarto's arrangement plan.	Plan Estratégico Río Cuarto 2005. Río Cuarto, alternative capital city of Córdoba province. Environment and Landscape Aspects

Note: Gran Río Cuarto encompasses the towns of Río Cuarto, Santa Catalina and Las Higueras.

Source: Busso & Carniglia (2013)

**Table 1. Río Cuarto (1996-2010.) Homes per number of TVs (%)**

TVs	YEAR					
	1996	1999	2002	2004	2007	2010
0	1,2	4,5	3,9	5,2	3,6	1,8
1	54,5	58,0	52,3	55,7	51,8	38,1
2	36,5	31,4	31,1	27,3	31,8	38,8
3 or more	7,8	10,6	12,7	11,6	12,7	21,2

Source: Grillo and others (1996, 1999, 2002, 2004, 2007, 2010)

**Table 2. Río Cuarto (1996-2010.) Homes with pay television service (%)**

SUBSCRIPTION TO PAY TV	YEAR					
	1996	1999	2002	2004	2007	2010
Subscription	73	68	68,6	73,7	76,6	79,8
No subscription	27	32	31,4	26,3	23,4	20,2

Source: Grillo and others (1996, 1999, 2002, 2004, 2007, 2010)

**Table 3. Río Cuarto (1996-2010.) Individuals of 18 years of age or older per number of daily hour exposure to TV (%)**

DAYS AND HOURS		YEAR					
Days	Hours	1996	1999	2002	2004	2007	2010
Monday to Friday	0	0,3	0,8	4,8	6,1	4,5	2,3
	Less than 2	23,8	23,3	22,5	27,3	23,9	27,6
	Between 2 and 4	56,9	49,8	50,7	52,1	55,0	54,1
	More than 4	19,0	20,5	22,0	14,1	16,6	16,0
Saturday	0	14,9	13,5	16,6	22,3	16,8	13,9
	Less than 2	31,7	24,3	26,4	30,0	24,8	30,4
	Between 2 and 4	42,2	38,8	34,3	30,2	43,1	37,6
	More than 4	11,3	18,0	22,5	17,5	15,2	18,1
Sunday	0	18,7	14,8	17,9	25,0	18,9	15,9
	Less than 2	28,1	26,5	27,0	27,3	26,4	32,2
	Between 2 and 4	38,2	38,5	33,2	29,8	37,8	36,8
	More than 4	15,1	14,8	21,8	18,0	17,0	15,1

Source: Grillo and others (1996, 1999, 2002, 2004, 2007, 2010)

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