

Growing Complexity in Rural Areas. Networking through Tourism and Recreation

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Abstract Changes in rural functions also involve the development of the tourist trade. Focused on host communities' participation and strengthening territorial identity, local and regional networks are essential in coordinating, developing and supporting learning and cooperation activities. Considering these factors it is necessary to take a broader view of local development, from actions carried out in different dimensions, both local and non-local, to strategies (formal and informal) to revitalize economic activities and create attractive areas for living. The purpose is to analyze conditions, mechanisms and agents that have significant impact on the territorial dynamism. South West Buenos Aires Province (Argentina) has been selected as a case study. The empirical data used is a set of in-depth interviews with identified agents and experts. It is a non-random selection of 20 respondents. The analysis is structured through a network of interactions with a mapping of key local stakeholders, identifying moreover, agro-productive establishments and institutions that are working with new tourist alternatives. In the case study it is possible to observe a process generated by private and individual (not systematized) initiatives, which in recent years has been supported by public bodies. This shows a starting process where social networking and new forms of knowledge transfer are an influential part of articulated strategies to support territorial dynamism.

Keywords: rural tourism, learning and cooperation networks, local development, territorial dynamism, Sudoeste Bonaerense, Villa Serrana La Gruta, Argentina

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1. Introduction

The territorial transformation produced by the process of globalization and the new trends in economic activities involve adjustments, adaptations, substitutions and innovations in the type, shape and management of activities in rural areas [44]. In this context, it is also clear that the function of rural areas is no longer merely provide food. There are small-scale and medium-sized industries offering a range of products and services from agro-industrial services, handicrafts, extraction of natural resources, environmental services, and different types of rural tourism, to mention a few examples. Then the inevitable question is how do we redefine the current rural condition? [43].

For more than half a century, an extensive body of literature relating to rural geography and sociology, economy, cultural and social theory, including the area of tourism [7,8,14,17,18,19,24,25,26,27,30,33,36] has focused its efforts on interpreting changes in rural conditions.

It is generally accepted that a range of social, economic and political forces became a challenge for traditional agricultural activity. According to Mackay, Perkins and Espiner ([20]:4), these pressures included, "(1) a growing

public awareness of the environmental damage intensive farming was causing and a related shift in consumer preference towards 'green' commodities and organic food, (2) social and political concern for the ongoing cost of supporting 'over-production' in the rural sector, and (3) more general pressures emanating from the rapidly globalizing and neo-liberal economy".

During the 1980's and early 1990's, a group of British Geographers [19,26,27,30] began to pay attention to the 'great spatial variability' within the process of rural modification. This included the increase of residential use in rural areas, along with the importance of acquiring activities related to rural tourism and recreation [19]. These new conditions of development in rural areas were identified as post-productivism which implies 'a turn' into practices and agricultural policies that were earlier implemented. Although the term post-productivism generates disputes around whether it manages to capture, with precision, the changes in contemporary rural areas [20], some authors indicate a coexistence of systems, productivist and post-productivist [34], which suggest the existence of a multifunctional rural space [2].

As the post-productivism research has focused strongly on the diversification of rural economies, some analysts have recommended that the term should be replaced by an approach capable of capturing the multi-functional aspect

of rural areas, including current productivist agriculture and new economic activities related to tourism, recreational activities, environmental services, and so forth. Holmes [14] has been one of the authors that initiated the idea of a multi-functional rural space, a phenomenon that is driven by consumption values (tourism and recreational activities) and conservation values (protection of resources, healthier environments). McCarthy [21] considers that the multifunctional character of rural space is the result of neo-liberal reforms and is focused, unlike the post-productivist thought, in implementing an economic reconversion, incorporating different strategies – including, tourist and leisure activities – in order to diversify production through complementary income sources to traditional agricultural activity.

Recent works on post-productivism and multifunctionality, have also led to growing literature around the commodification of rural space. Studies in this regard noted that rural areas have switched from being an organized space, exclusively used for primary production, to one also formulated for the sale of a growing set of non-traditional products (services, lifestyles, experiences) [20]. This research line coincides with a ‘cultural turn’ within social sciences in studies of this type.

According to Milne & Ateljevic ([29]: 381) tourism is nowadays placed in the context of the contemporary cultural economy where “...groups and individuals increasingly attempt to construct their identities by certain consumption preferences and lifestyle practices which signal taste and position in society.” Recreational and tourist activities are based on the ‘enhancement’ of the countryside, making it attractive to a mid-range/high income population segment that is willing to consume ‘a country lifestyle’. As Fonte ([12]: 42) explains “Material elements (handicrafts, cuisine, architecture [...]), in interdependence with habits and customs of the place and of the natural environment (landscape, vegetation, biodiversity), acquire a symbolic value linked to the local identity [...]”.

In consequence, marketing and promotion of destinations are key elements to highlight the ‘unique’ characteristics of territories. Valued images, built or recovered (through a process of marketing, in many cases) become places and recognizable products in a symbolic building process. For Ray [36], this process can also involve the rediscovery of lost cultural traits, or even the creation of new cultural products and places. In this regard, Fonte [12] states that different agents have the chance to economically consider their local identity and connected resources through initiatives focused on specific cultural and natural issues. From the interaction between the local identity and the outside (extra-local) the convenience of building an economic value can be pursued.

In this regard, tourism is viewed in policy terms as a tool to stimulate the development of lagging peripheral and rural regions [5,31]. Despite general recognition of the potential significance of tourism in regional growth, there has been a lack of integrated research covering the tourism sector as a system, especially in those regions with minor tourism functions, or tourism structures that are limited relative to other territorial functions [32,49].

Connected to this, rural tourism is closely linked to local community and, therefore, its culture and economy [4]. Diverse assets are recognized as being key sources of

market advantage at a community level, such as: physical environment (landscape and certain natural attractions which are used for recreation), heritage and local culture (buildings of historical and cultural value, festivals or other cultural practices) and a social ‘tourism-friendly’ context and economic resources (referring to investments in infrastructure and tourist equipment). To achieve this, researchers suggest an effective management of networks, horizontally, at local level among institutions, businesses and communities and, vertically, between non-local agents and institutions.

However, to some observers that analyze the European countryside, as rural areas are being (re)made due to these current global dynamics and as a result of economic activities, social and political, the networks of agents (local and non-local) are increasingly complex. In addition to this, there are doubts about the capacity for locals to act in these global processes [21,50].

In spite of what we stated above, the geographical and socio-cultural proximity bolsters a probability of interaction and synergy; resulting in what Camagni ([6]: 40) has called “local relational capital”. This capital is a bias in favor of cooperation, trust, cohesion and sense of belonging, which is related to the reduction of uncertainty, coordination and collective learning. To some observers, this synergy particularly exists in cases where prevails a “rise in the performance of a network through efficient and effective interaction” ([28]:767). Pursuing with Mader ([22]: 84) the factors that play a significant role in shaping of social networks are: “...the method of cooperation and the intensity of trust”. In that regard, Milne & Ateljevic ([29]: 383) note that networks are based more on “notions of trust and reciprocity” than on spatial proximity or common interests.

Within the context of tourism, networks undoubtedly are essential mechanisms to achieve competitiveness in destinations. The development of regional tourism thereafter will not simply depend on a destination’s natural and cultural resources, its ability to harness new technologies, or its depth of human capital. Success will also depend on attributes of trust and reciprocity [13,46]. Dense relations are considered that “...develop trust and favour the transfer of tacit knowledge and fine-grained information exchanges...” ([46]: 25).

Thus the focus here is the growing importance of interaction among stakeholders [5] in redefining concepts of partnership and networking within local development.

The article emphasizes the need to disentangle and further specify interactions between different levels of agents (local, regional, national and global) which (re-) mould the arena (political, economic, social) of conflict and negotiation that affect local development processes in lagging rural areas. The purpose is analyze conditions, mechanisms and agents that have significant impact on the territorial dynamism, based on tourism and recreational activities. South West Buenos Aires Province (Argentina) has been selected as a case study.

In the case study it is possible to observe a process generated by private and individual (not systematized) initiatives, which in recent years, has been supported by public bodies. Consequently, this shows a starting process where social networking and new forms of knowledge transfer are an influential part of articulated strategies to

support territorial dynamism, concerning tourism and recreational activities.

2. Study Area and Methods

The empirical data used is a set of in-depth interviews with local and non-local agents and experts identified in the Region of Sudoeste Bonaerense (SWBAP), conducted mainly in 2012. Due to a notable lack of systematically compiled databases, intensive field work has been necessary, to contrast institutional lists. A non-random selection of 20 respondents were interviewed. They were selected based on the following criteria: firstly, interviewee had to be directly related to identified agro-productive establishments (farmer or expert), and, secondly, it was necessary to have a background in tourism or recreational activities.

The questionnaire was semi-structured around a set of questions relating to socio-demographic characteristics of interviewees (age, sex, educational background) and general features of agro-productive establishments (extension, participation of family group, employees, ways of marketing and promotion, personal view of economic situation) followed by a set relating to visitor behavior (origin, average accommodation period, leading channels) and concluding with questions relating to tourism offers and demand, infrastructure and equipment, networking and conflicts.

The interviews were generally recorded, transcribed and analyzed in detail, considering geographical and socio-economic contexts. The subsequent presentation of results is structured through a network of interactions with a mapping of leading local stakeholders, identifying moreover, participants and institutions that are working with renewed tourist alternatives.

SWBAP is the empirical reference selected to verify these processes. Specifically, rural tourism is an activity in support of traditional livestock work. At a general level, the services offered to visitors vary and may include accommodation, guided excursions and sport-related activities.

3. SW Buenos Aires Province: Multi-Functional Activities in Rural Areas

SWBAP (Figure 1) is formed, from the administrative point of view, from a set of counties which include rural and urban areas with concentrated localities ranging from small-scale settlements to a middle-sized city, with more than 300,000 inhabitants, which is Bahía Blanca.

The provincial law No 13.647/07 creates the Development Plan of SWBAP and establishes an official zoning based on attributes, basically, climatic and agro-productives. This sub-area is formed by the counties of Adolfo Alsina, Saavedra, Puan, Tornquist, Coronel Rosales, Coronel Dorrego, Bahía Blanca, Villarino, Patagones, Guamini, Coronel Suárez and Coronel Pringles.

From a physical point of view (Figure 2), various authors agree in describing the SWBAP as a transition area between two distinctly different regions: Pampa and

Patagonia. It represents 25% of Buenos Aires Province which belongs to sub-wet-dry and semi-arid regions of Argentina, with climatic and soil characteristics that set it apart and place it in a position with clearly lower comparative advantages over the rest of the Province [44]. However, this is a singular space compared with the rest of the Province given its "... geo-environment and cultural diversity..." [53]. Zinger states ([52]:49), [...] the current landforms of the landscape in the Southwest are, in first place, linked to regional tectonic behavior and morphogenetic processes who acted from the beginnings of its geological history and, in the second instance, morphological, natural processes and anthropogenic, contemporary.

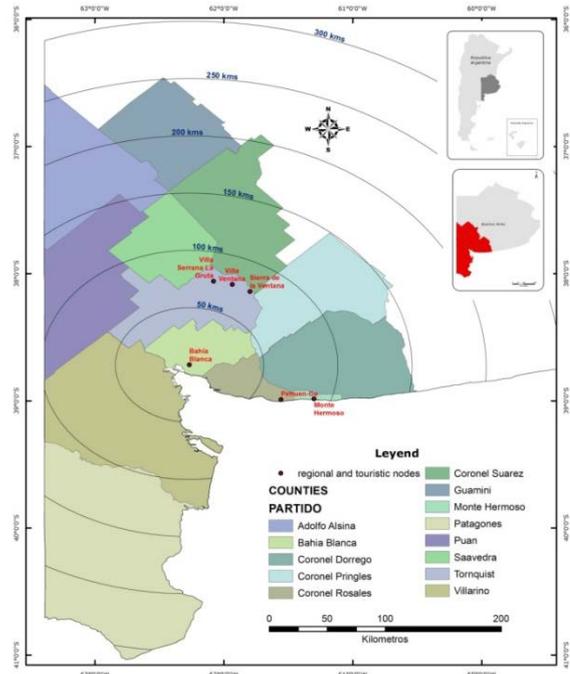


Figure 1. SWBAP Counties and main nodes (in red). Schroeder, R. 2015, from Ángeles, G. GIS base layer

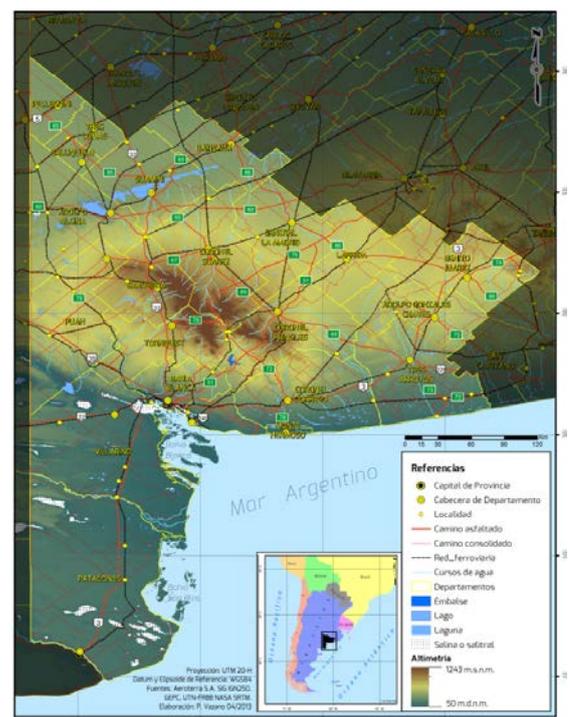


Figure 2. SWBAP Physical aspects. Vazano, P. 2013

Connected to this, there are three well-defined environments:

1. A flat area which barely exceeds the altitude of 200 meters and stretches largely in SWBAP.
2. A relief of low height that extends nearly 175 km in NW-SE direction and reaches a maximum width of 50 km.
3. Extensive sea beaches on the Atlantic Ocean, suitable for the fishing sectors, but also including a variety of uses e.g. balnearios (kind of beach clubs), recreational activities and water sports, and biologically valuable natural ecosystems such as wetlands [41], together with a group of islands as protected areas for different species, e.g., migratory birds.

3.1. General Living Conditions

This region, with an estimated 47,000 km² area has 586,635 inhabitants [38]. It is estimated that the rural population of this area consists of 60,000 inhabitants (concentrated and dispersed).

SWBAP counties have shown, in recent decades, a strong trend towards rural depopulation, which is associated with negative average annual rates of growth of several of their counties and the slow growth of the rest, according to census data. The process seems to be more intense in the period 1991-2001, noting a recovery in the period 2001-2010. Changes in the dynamics of growth and spatial distribution of the population of SWBAP are linked to socio-economic and technological changes since 1960s in the context of Argentina and, in particular, those that occurred in this particular region [45].

According to what was referred in the study area, it can be seen that a number of events related to transformations in rural conditions occurred, essentially: (a) deepening of rural displacement processes for technological and economic reasons, which particularly affects small and medium-sized producers; (b) worsening conditions of family farming and rural workers; (c) presence of networks increasingly delocalized of agents, investment and income.

A climatic condition of continuous drought for more than fifteen years, coupled with indiscriminate deforestation, along with aggressive tillage practices, has exacerbated the decline of economic outcomes which has produced, apart from resource exploitation, soil degradation, which endangered the continuity of agricultural livestock production.

In traditional agriculture, wheat and sunflower production still dominates the local market, with a trend towards the inclusion of beef cattle, swine production and sheep farming (which used to be characteristic of the region), with diversification in wool, meat and milk. Additionally, in recent years, the implementation of tourism-related activities has also increased; alongside second homes, property development and diversification into new crops, such as plantations of grapes and olive groves, among others.

Consequently as a result of a range of current economic and social activities, the rural landscape is changing.

3.2. Main Regional and Touristic Nodes

In the study area, Bahía Blanca city serves as the regional center for the SWBAP, as a supplier of goods and

services. Evidence also indicates that it shows potential as a tourist and recreation nodal center, since natural and cultural resources can be found in a radius of approximately two hours away.

The importance of tourism resources for the area has been evident since the early twentieth century. The development of second homes gave rise to two traditional tourist centers in the region, Sierra de la Ventana and Monte Hermoso, which are both approximately 130km away from Bahía Blanca. The rich landscape of Sierra de la Ventana, in the interior, was valued by the British investors, linked to new railway lines network. On the coast, Monte Hermoso town also recorded its first settlements by 1918, with the construction of Hotel Balneario Monte Hermoso, which was followed, a few months later, by a wide afforestation in the waterfront in order to fix the dunes.

The change was first observed in the nineties, when these two small urban centers recorded an impact of dynamism in residential aspects and in investment in tourist services and equipment. Thereafter, there is a strong boost to tourism and a focus from local management to promote further development of its potential, yet within the traditional framework of tourist towns. In recent years the rapid growth of Monte Hermoso is evident in attracting investments, in both commercial real estate and services, which are evident in the vertical and horizontal expansion of its urban structure and in the hierarchy of its buildings; it is becoming a major seaside resort on the coast of Buenos Aires Province.

In the case of small centers such as Villa Ventana, in the hills area, and Pehuén Co, located on the Atlantic coast (which are closer to Bahía Blanca, approx. 80 km), the developments in these areas are more closely linked to changes in socio-spatial structures and new lifestyles (contact with nature, communal life, personal relationships, enhancement of free time), which started in the nineties. In both, strong investment is evident, particularly in second homes.

In Villa Ventana, in the nineties and particularly in the last decade, it was observed that a significant growth and diversification of services occurred (hotel and restaurant offers), which accelerated the physical growth of the settlement. This process, in which the extension of second homes (residential and touristic use included), has caused a problem in the provision of services. This has been most evident in the supply of drinking water. The effect on Pehuén Co is similar; however its growth is limited to the balneario activity and has no relation to the surrounding area.

In both cases, in recent years, investment in real estate from people of nearby provinces and of Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires, plus the flow of tourists from various backgrounds and increasingly distant cities. The appeal of these centers is the preservation of quaint small rural town features, with unpaved streets, many green areas, large lots and limited shopping facilities. The movement that is generated on weekends and the influx during the holiday season (winter and summer) by tourists and second home owners generate an interesting demand for services and recreational activities. Thus, the tourist-recreational offer is considered in the framework of rural change process, a multi-functionality in rural space that has begun to increase.

Within the case study (SW Buenos Aires Province), processes associated with current functions of rural areas also involve the development of tourism and recreational activity. This type of tourism is driven by the appraisal of traditional lifestyles, growing environmental awareness and the desire for contact with nature [41] nevertheless it is also promoted by housing developments for rental purposes. This applies to the construction of second homes, complex hotel spas, or in the interest of giving alternative uses to rural land. This practice can promote local development, from generating new sources of revenue and employment in rural areas [41], however this contradictory process required further study.

3.3. Key Local Stakeholders

In this first approach it is possible to distinguish farmers who have been working for more than ten years, in tourism and recreational activities. In general, they are renowned establishments with a recognized family tradition: several generations have worked in rural activities and over time have adapted to circumstances and demands of their time.

Another interesting aspect is the educational level. The analysis shows a high level of training, with a predominance of University studies (agronomists, architects, teachers/professors, graduates in tourism, sociology) conjointly with rural workers with high levels of instruction and professional capabilities. This would be an indicator of 'a certain intellectual capital' that leads to positive impacts and responsiveness among these people. To this is added the possibility of clear perceptions and rapid adaptation to the economic mechanisms that operate in the tourist activity, according to changing market conditions. These findings reinforce other empirical studies that highlighted coherent perceptions and knowledge of tourism that hosts have in their communities [1]. This would indicate, in addition, a better disposition and training to generate and to undertake current projects.

A significant aspect linked with the concept of rural governance, is the possibility of establishing networks of collaboration and learning. The territorial proximity condition of several settlements (in an area of 50 kilometers) allows observing initiatives of concerted work between different types of accommodation and excursion service providers (mainly horseback riding), which predate the current proposals arising from public institutions.

Reiterated comments have seen the need for teamwork or, at least, procure a joint effort to achieve a higher influx of visitors to a destination that is still in formation. Within formal groups internal conflicts can be found related to active participation and collaboration. A fraction of the members feel annoyed by a lack of initiative or the absence of responsibility to attend meetings or training programs of other participants.

Notwithstanding, there is an exchange of skills and knowledge that drives to productive diversification of a territory through incorporated products or differentiated services. For example, a number of private partnerships at local and regional level have emerged to associatively work in promotional activities and development issues [44,45], even encouraging public institutions to promote particular geographical areas and their tourism businesses.

Below, are the details of the agents identified in the study areas which primarily focus on connections departing from Villa Serrana La Gruta (Figure 3). It should be noted that the displayed links are limited to answers that arose during the course of the interviews and informal talks and, therefore, are also restricted to the case study. Three main local agents are detected in this first approach: Campo Equino (horse riding excursions), San Hipólito (agro-productive establishment and rural accommodation) and Bodega Saldungaray (wine field and restaurant), forming networks, not only in the particular case study, but to the rest of the area under investigation.

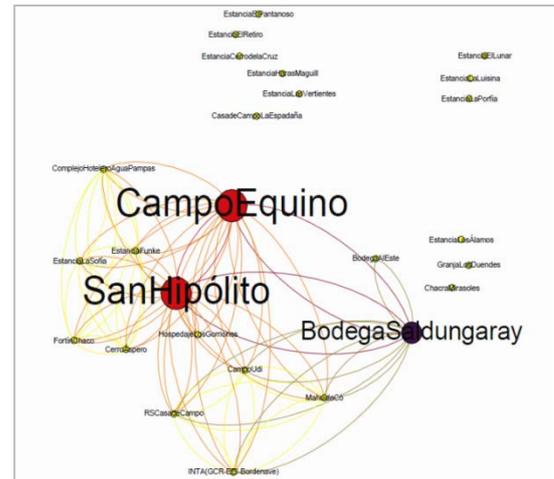


Figure 3. Agents and major networks identified. Visualization software Gephy

Now, this leads to think about the difficulty of shaping broader circuits; one determinant is the vast distances that are handled in the extended study area - Southwest Buenos Aires - and which lead to limited associations between two or three establishments, for example, combining accommodation, catering services and excursions. This was evident in comments from rural agents/developers when they referred to what extent the objectives set initially in rural tourism groups were fulfilled.

Respondents stressed the absence (or low presence) of local government in several areas: (1) creation and maintenance of infrastructure necessary for tourism (e.g., roads, airports, railways, reliable water and power services); (2) funding for tourism development and its promotion; and, (3) education and training support in tourism activities.

Cooperation and basically coordination between stakeholders and local government do not always occur easily. In communities with limited tourism structures – as in this case –, local stakeholders complain that they receive little help (mainly financial support) from public bodies and that they do not have a clear view of (or ignored) tourism needs.

3.4. Institutional Networking as Forms of Governance

As part of the territorial dynamic identified, the participation of institutions in tourism is perceived in an extremely positive way, as in the case of INTA (Instituto Nacional de Tecnología Agropecuaria) in the creation of groups of rural tourism.

The 'Cambio Rural' subprogram has been adopted as a mechanism that attempts to work with rural producers through the combined efforts among the following, a technical advisor and a professional of INTA. Technical assistance, training on various themes and the ability to access information required for decision-making is provided. Moreover, attendance and association between participants is encouraged, along with advice on finding credit lines for entrepreneurship programs to develop. This program has led to associative projects oriented to advisory functions, training and interactions between different territorial agents.

Additionally, it is recognized that the action taken by various local tourism bureaus in supporting touristic activity is a positive one.

Within the Province of Buenos Aires, the program 'Pueblos Turísticos', benefits small-scale towns through the promotion and encouragement of sustainable tourism activities and projects. To strengthen community identity, generate genuine sources of employment and incentives for people to stay in rural areas are essential. This program is developed based on the concept of community-based tourism as it promotes the relationship between the community and visitors. Here, again the complementary nature of tourism income as an economic alternative for communities is highlighted.

Continuing with the analysis of linkages, there are connections that are woven among the different territorial agents. In the area under study three institutions with stronger territorial weight in relation to tourism and recreation projects and actions have emerged: Dirección de Turismo del Municipio de Tornquist, Estación Experimental Agropecuaria Hilario Ascasubi (INTA) and Centro Regional Buenos Aires Sur (INTA). However, other far-reaching agents, such as Universities and Research and Development Centers have also been noticed (Universidad Nacional del Sur, Universidad Nacional del Centro, Agencia de Desarrollo Local de Olavarría), schools from Bahía Blanca and Villarino counties (Escuelas Medias de la Universidad Nacional del Sur, Escuela de Educación Agraria N° 1 de Hilario Ascasubi, Colegio Salesiano Fortín Mercedes), among others.

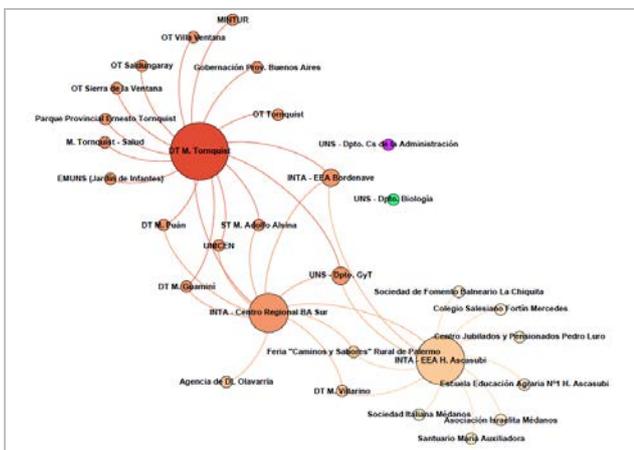


Figure 4. Institutional networking. Visualization software Gephy

In this specific case, the visualization graph (Figure 4) shows linkages and shared work of interviewed agents who, in many cases, exceed the local scale exclusively

confined to an area identified as regional. Connected with this, as already mentioned, the socio-cultural and spatial proximity is an added value in small-scale towns and rural areas; the possibility of direct contact with local authorities and intermediate organizations gives rise to superior involvement in local management, exposing conflicts, demanding improvements and evaluation of collective projects. Here it is possible to see in terms of ([29]:374) a 'community-based' approach where "...localized cooperation, trust and networking..." are basic elements of successful tourism development.

In addition to communities' participation in decision-making structures, educational and training support together with the provision of technical expertise, are the promotional forms of territorial embedding that have a central role to play in identifying common cultural values that contribute to the formation of a regional space-oriented identity. The above arise, on one hand, new forms of governance and, on the other, the likelihood of boosting local socio-productive structures.

Then, there are good initiatives to improve cooperation of institutions at local and regional level; horizontal linkages between municipal departments (health, sports, media or environment sectors), with tourism bureaus (DT and OT) of different municipalities, with educational establishments at different levels and with other agencies at national scale. INTA is a good example of this, with strong participation in the study area. Additionally, can be seen vertical links with non-local agents, especially in matters related to tourism promotional activities and sources of funding for tourism infrastructure: Ministry of Tourism (MINTUR) and Province of Buenos Aires Government.

Undoubtedly initiatives and linkages that have been analyzed, have projected a positive impact on the local population, likewise change in strategies, aimed at local development, where tourism highlights strong participation. Knowing these circumstances helps detect co-benefits resulting from these processes, such as planned infrastructure works (water supply, improvement of roads, signs) and awareness and appreciation of the heritage present in the towns (tangible and intangible), through training aimed at the community and relationships with schools. In addition, the above is connected with municipal provisions that promote resource conservation, involving education in environment issues and waste disposal management. On the other hand, events and festivals related to different regional cultural expressions (productive, gastronomic, religious, folklore) result in an interaction between institutions of local government, private agents and, at the same time, there is vertical institutional cooperation with provincial and national authorities. These kinds of cultural events highlight local heritage and generate added value throughout identity formation.

One of the elements that *a priori* is identified as an increasingly relevant tool is the use of technologies, e.g. institutional websites or social networks, which not only facilitate information and experiences exchange, but in many cases, include monitoring of scheduled events, dissemination of tourism plant improvements and knowledge transfer, seminars and workshops events, tips in quality management, among other aspects.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

Rural sphere in lagging peripheral areas – such as SWBAP – are adapting to new technological, economic, political and social conditions; an economic reconversion in order to diversify production through complementary income sources to traditional agricultural activity is currently observed. This includes the increase of residential use along with the influence of activities related to rural tourism and recreation. Whilst impact of rural tourism is very limited, since it develops in bounded-capacity drives, it is relevant due to diversification and localization of dynamic nuclei in the territory.

This research has underscored the importance of examining relationships at local and non-local scales in tourism activity. The interviews have widely documented that there are horizontal and vertical connections. Affinities between institutions and local communities are starting an idea of shared work, which might not be limited to administrative boundaries. In particular strong horizontal networking can be observed: inter-municipal (technical staff), with common areas of work, mainly in environmental aspects, and those related to tourism promotion. In addition, public-private linkages introduced new rural governance in pursuit for territorial dynamism. While is necessary to delve into the research, apparently, small towns and rural areas show signs of greater socio-cultural and political cohesion than other urban scale (at least in certain tourist actions). In consequence, it is vitally important understand the roles and capacity of local/regional institutions and agents in order to learn about changing conditions, to generate and disseminate knowledge [16,47], likewise, influence tourist experiences and behavior, impacts and tourism linkages.

It can be seen that the territory is under a permanent construction process involving institutions, agents and strategies deployed to meet the challenges and opportunities based on active participation and shared learning. As Oscar Madoery ([23]: 7) argues, the territory is comprehended “as a resource built from concrete practices and identifiable behaviors”. Even though a process of searching for common identity elements has started, this does not mean that it has been implemented, at the regional level. There are multiple initiatives, often unconnected, from micro-locals levels to a reassessment of landscape aspects, traditions and activities related to agricultural/livestock production in the region, but without being able to articulate a concrete territorial strategy, despite the actions of public bodies, host communities, private institutions, universities and centers of research and development.

There are some authors who considered that “the feeling of belonging to a community is likely to grow through a deep interest in the knowledge of the region.” ([3]:202). One aspect that deserves a in depth study are popular festivals, since they allow to make visible practices of high content of family and community integration; the Rodeo skills, regional products (canned foods, sausages, homemade jams, pickles) and local handicrafts, constitute an added value that adds to entertainment and activities. They also generate an interesting visitors flow. Therefore, we emphasize the importance of tourism and recreation promotion at a

regional level as a key element that can contribute to social and cultural cohesion to support a shared identity.

Petrou, Pantziou, Dimara and Skuras ([35]: 422) state that territorial dynamics are related to “...a set of specific regional and local factors, structures and tendencies...” such as entrepreneurial traditions, public and private networks, regional identity, participation and attractiveness of the cultural and natural environment.

In the case study it is possible to observe interesting components that could lead a territorial dynamism processes such as resources and knowledge transfer, entrepreneurial local culture and linkages between different levels of institutional scales. There is a process generated in private and individual (not systematized) initiatives (tourism/recreation), which in recent years has been supported by public bodies. In relation to what is mentioned above, evidence indicates a mobilization of farmers, representatives of the private sector and institutions that accompany the promotion in the development of local capacities. They are highly positive elements – due to geographical and socio-cultural proximity – partnerships and networking observed between agents and places in pursuing survival strategies.

However, it is necessary to remember the importance of the territory as a fundamental factor in the determination of the potential for local development, in terms of opportunities, potentials and constraints offered by the place. In this regard, many authors consider that historical and geographical contexts and its complexities must be addressed and embraced to gain an understanding of the links between different types of tourism and broader processes of development [29,39,40].

This research arises difficulties in terms of statistical information, due to temporary and scales differences from official data sources. In general, there is no available information on local offices of the studied aspects. Given this situation, it is prerequisite to obtain data from particularized studies, which allow the application of specific surveys, interviews with agents qualified and in-depth interviews to people directly linked to these processes, to capture the time-space experiences. Among the weaknesses, is possible to observe deficiencies in formulation, monitoring and control of policies and strategies aimed at cultural, tourist and recreational activities. For this, should be greater cooperation between municipalities, public institutions, universities and research institutes, as well as, information transfer to achieve tangible results.

Problems around a lack of coordination among public and private institutions due to geographical scales (regional, sub regional, local scales) and opposite political parties might not achieve this synergy in an effective way. Furthermore, policy-makers should address a number of key issues [15], including the need for better training programs adapted to the needs of farmer producers and to rural tourism businesses.

It is essential to take into account that to stimulate the development of interior rural towns and peripheral regions depends not only on their accessibility and endogenous territory potential [48], it also relies upon the ability of diffusion of innovations, knowledge and information, socio-institutional dynamics and networks achieved and the quality of creative initiatives and projects [41].

Hence the importance of a proactive planning, framed in processes of long term, with the consequent revision and adaptation of public policies and strategies. Such policies, to be efficient, must take into account the levels of heterogeneity (social, cultural, economic) to the interior of the region, based on its distinctive characteristics and demands of the different population groups. This implies having a data base that transcends governmental mandates, conceived from an overview and planning that goes beyond isolated projects. Count on tools of control and review - as the creation of indicators - coincident with a policy of regional development, would help to prevent environmental problems and enhance the attractiveness of the region allowing, at the same time, comparative analysis.

The principal focus of this article has been on analyzing primary conditions and mechanisms related to territorial dynamism in peripheral rural areas that are adopting tourism activity. Within the next steps it is necessary to intensify research on the following aspects for a fuller understanding of the effects and impacts of networking in tourism, especially in terms of increasing the understanding of how territorial dimensions affect local/rural development: (a) the role of the local territory, as a bounded space, on the one hand geographically dispersed but on the other hand with a joint identity; (b) the role of local agents and land developers (urban and rural), which are already implementing projects and strategies and, (c) the encouragement of a certain social mutuality starting to articulate current dynamics of political construction, including the ability to generate innovative activities, within local development frameworks.

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