

The Spatial Circuit of the Audiovisual Industry in Argentina: From Monopoly and Geographic Concentration to New Regionalization and Democratization Policies

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Abstract : Historically, the communication sector in Argentina is characterized by intense monopolization and geographical concentration in the city of Buenos Aires. In 2000, the four major media conglomerates in operation - Clarín, Telefónica, America and Hadad - controlled 84% of the national media market. By 2009, new policies were implemented as a result of civil society organizations demands. Legally, a new regulatory framework was approved: the law 26,522 of Audiovisual Communications Services. Supposedly, these policies intend to create new conditions for the development of the audiovisual economy in the territory of Argentina. The regionalization of audiovisual production and the democratization of channels and access to media were among the priorities. This paper analyses the main changes and continuities in the organization of the spatial circuit of the audiovisual industry in Argentina provoked by these new policies. These new policies aim at increasing the diversity of audiovisual producers and promoting regional audiovisual industries. For this purpose, a national program for the development of audiovisual centers within the country was created. This program fostered a federalized production network, based on nine audiovisual regions and 40 nodes. Each node has created technical, financial and organizational conditions to gather different actors in audiovisual production - such as SMEs, social movements and local associations. The expansion of access to technical networks was also a concern of other policies, such as 'Argentina connected', whose objective was to expand access to broadband Internet. The Open Digital Television network also received considerable investments. Furthermore, measures have been carried out in order to impose limits on the concentration of ownership as well as to eliminate the oligopolies and to ensure more competition in the sector. These actions intended to force a divide of the media conglomerates into smaller groups. Nevertheless, the corporations that compose these conglomerates resist strongly, making full use of their economic and judiciary power. Indeed, the absence of effective impact of such measures can be testified by the fact that the audiovisual industry remains strongly concentrated in Argentina. Overall, these new policies were designed properly to decentralize audiovisual production and expand the regional diversity of the audiovisual industry. However, the effective transformation of the organization of the audiovisual circuit in the territory faced several resistances. This can be explained firstly and foremost by the ideological and economic power of the media conglomerates. In the second place, there is an inherited inertia from the unequal distribution of the objects needed for the audiovisual production and consumption. Lastly, the resistance also relies on financial needs and in the excessive dependence of the state for the promotion of regional audiovisual production.

Keywords : Argentina, audiovisual industry, communication policies, geographic concentration, regionalization, spatial circuit

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