

Development challenges in the province of Río Negro, Argentina

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Abstract

This article examines rural development in the North Andean region of Río Negro province, Argentina. The authors analyze an environmental area suitable for extensive rural development that is not fully integrated as a productive area. Additionally, this article associates present difficulties with structural contradictions inherent in its regional incorporation to the national and provincial administrations. It then investigates the significant terms that characterized territorial policies, while illuminating how these terms viewed the inhabitants of the region and their activities. Finally, the article goes on to expose how the limits to the dynamics of integration are sustained by growth models that, based on notions of progress, development, and innovation, have overlooked local productive actors.

Keywords: rural development; progress; technical innovation; northern Andean region; territorial integration; economic policy.

1. INTRODUCTION

This article examines rural development in the Andean region of Río Negro province, Argentina. The article contributes to the debate on rural development, both from economic and multi-causal perspectives (Garcés, 2019), as well as from other perspectives that seek to improve the way theoretical considerations are transformed into policy interventions (Lattuada *et al.*, 2015). Our aim here is to incorporate geographical and historical perspectives into the development agenda (Delgadillo, 2009), highlighting the need to reconsider forms of regional integration by taking a marginalized area as a case study (Serje, 2005). This case study demonstrates that local development policies reinforce this marginal status (Herrera and Herrera, 2014; Núñez, 2016).

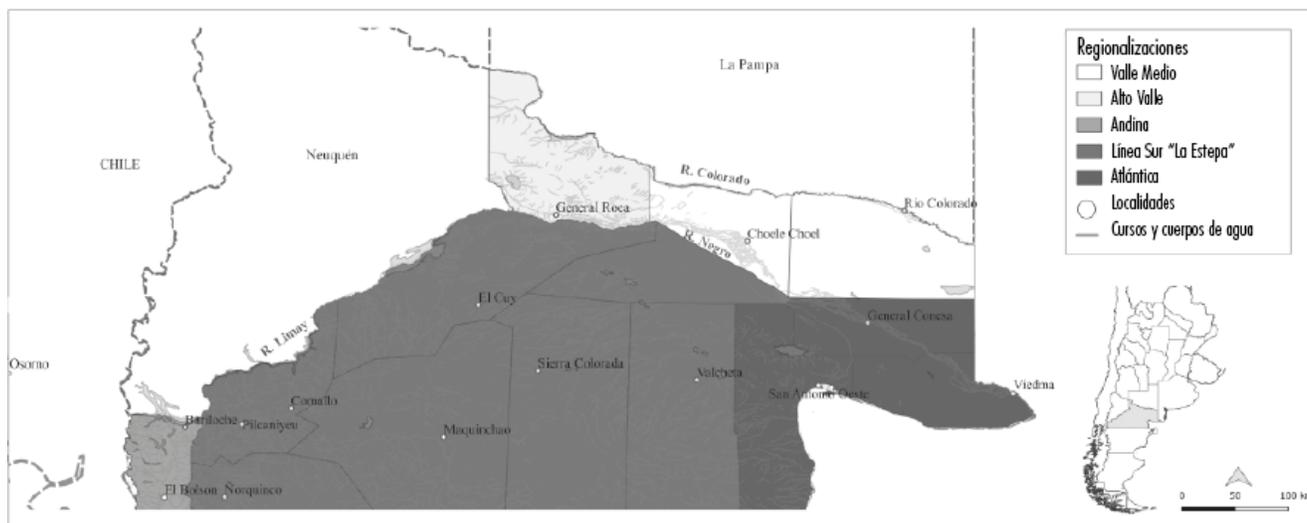
The existing literature identifies inequalities of regional integration within Patagonia, where the province of Río Negro is situated, exposing the colonialism that persists in Patagonia's internal dynamics, in both Argentina and Chile (Navarro, 2011; Núñez *et al.*, 2017; Klubock, 2014). The case study chosen here also has implications for this debate, given that it is a region located close to the Chilean border (Bessera, 2008).

We will explore the productive dynamics of a region affected by territorial inequalities, inequalities which are evident in the restricted access to rights and basic services, as well as limitations in terms of production, infrastructure, and communication (Herrera and Herrera, 2014).

We have attempted to engage with certain specificities resulting from broader territorial integration dynamics, both spatial and temporal, which impact on local production and the actors who engage in it.

Río Negro is a region with a low level of regional integration at the provincial level, i.e. with the Andean region (see Figure 1). We analyzed Río Negro's characteristics and the conditions prevalent within it by examining the economic policies outlined for two of its most important locations: San Carlos de Bariloche, located on the shores of Lake Nahuel Huapi, and El Bolsón, located 130 kilometers to the south.

Figure 1. Map detailing Río Negro and its regions



Source: produced by the authors

To illustrate current development challenges, the first section of this article reviews the literature on the region's current production levels and economic integration, before analyzing the national government's agricultural census forms. In the second section, we turn our attention to the present development process, informed by the current debates developed by local actors reflecting on these issues.¹ The third section analyzes local development historically, interrogating the meanings of three crucial terms in government documents: "progress," "development," and "innovation." The paper closes with a reflection on the importance of considering these variables in subsequent economic studies.

2. THE ANDES OF RIO NEGRO

The Argentine province of Río Negro is located in northern Patagonian, a region of high biogeographic diversity. The Andes are a particularly mountainous region containing lots of woodland and lakes, and which was historically used for livestock and agricultural activities (Méndez and Muñoz, 2013).

One of the defining characteristics of the Andes is the centrality of tourism. In Bariloche, starting in the 1930s, tourism has replaced the agribusiness prevalent during the early twentieth century, via processes similar to those currently occurring in the town of El Bolsón (Cobelo, 2017). Thus, Bariloche constitutes an early example of the incorporation of a protected natural area whose internal dynamics differed from the rest of the territory of Río Grande do Sul, and indeed the country (Oglietti and Colino, 2011), and placing tension on the possibility of conceiving of rural production as an important element of local initiatives. Rural production in El Bolsón, on the other hand, primarily consists of hops and fruit.

North Patagonia was late to integrate into national accords. When it did so, however, plans were made for the entire region's agricultural activities, without this area having been surveyed (Núñez and Lema, 2018). Despite the recognition of a significant trans-Cordillera trade between the Andes and the North Patagonian steppe (Méndez and Muñoz, 2013), the region is not considered significant in terms of national agricultural development.

Fine fruit, one of the area's most important products, illustrates the paradoxical burden of current production in the region. Fine fruit production is part of the region's identity, to the extent that a "Festival of Fine Fruit" is held every year.

According to regional records, fine fruit production began in the 1960s after it was decided to commercialize fruit production (Méndez, 2010). However, this contradicts with the recognition, within the same sources, that fruit was being consumed domestically on a widespread level as far back as the 1940s. What we can infer here is that, in contemporary academic studies, the visibility of productive activity depends on its being traded commercially in formal markets.

Economic studies on this subject use market debut as the starting point of their analysis when seeking to understand an activity that is anchored in family and informal dynamics, to the extent that studies on regional development and territorial organization in the Andean area elaborate temporalities linked to market debut, omitting elements and networks of family production (Méndez, 2010; Dankmaier *et al.*, 2013; Valtriani, 2008).

An example of this tension is the report by Dankmaier *et al.* (2013), which employs a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis, based on meetings with the region's main productive actors. The authors examine fine fruit production, which is described as one of the most important in the region. They point out that the quality of local production is superlative in comparison to the rest of the country and that its local identity is part of its commercial value. In spite of all this, however, they point out that "'homemade' processed products make up a significant portion of the informal market. There is currently no statistical data for this sector" (Dankmaier *et al.*, 2013, p. 34). The authors also mention that there is no data on so-called "self-consumption" production, despite the extensive exchange network between domestic products which is an element of informality and constitutes part of the resilience network in the framework of instability that is characteristic of the area (Cobelo, 2017; Dankmaier *et al.*, 2013).

The studies make it clear that certain modes of production become invisible when formal commercialization is used to determine the existence of an economic activity. This process also occurs in horticultural production, which is described as especially important and widespread at the domestic level (Danklmaier *et al.*, 2013), but almost absent in commercial terms, as well as in forestry, given that "[...] there is forestry with a social focus, based on community participation, with a systemic vision of the forest and the plantations, in terms of decision making about the management of their natural resources, with the integration of the family as the core of the enterprise and with a strong gender component. These experiences are very local and have not been articulated at the territorial level." (Valtriani, 2008, p. 278) Another example from forestry is the collection of mushrooms or native species of fruit, such as elderberry, which are of enormous importance in the domestic economy and considered some of the most valued products of the region.

The disproportionate centrality afforded to the market as a source of solutions to the contradictions of the local economy also applies to productive activities that have been present in the region for over 70 years. Such productive activities exist only if they are traded on formal markets, regardless of their history or social importance.

But in addition to these dissonant local perspectives are other interpretations of the wider context. One of the region's productive characteristics is that its production is less recognized than that of other regions. This can be seen in the way that the indicators of the National Agricultural Census (CNA) are constructed. Here, it should be noted that the census is one of the state's main organizational instruments (Otero, 1999). Specifically, the national agricultural census pertains to the country's main production base. These censuses, which serve as a basis for productive knowledge, systematically omit non-market activity (Michel *et al.*, 2020), generating serious problems. There are numerous productive units of family agriculture in Patagonia. In our study area, almost the entire population is engaged in small scale production, demonstrating that family and self-consumption activities are especially dynamic. Conti and Núñez (2012) recognize that self-consumption in the area of El Bolsón not only refers to what is consumed by the productive unit, but also to a wide range of informal exchanges that are sporadically transformed into commercial sales, thereby establishing non-monetary modes of exchange. These modes of exchange have implications for the future of production and therefore important. However, the CNA does not collect data on this activity. Furthermore, neither do farmers do not consider it as a mode of production during meetings to discuss the subject, due to the lack of data.

Consequently, finance goes to the most important sectors (most highly-capitalized producers of export-oriented products), which are located outside the study region. In the province of Río Negro, the fruits most commonly surveyed are pome fruits, such as apples and pears grown in Alto Valle and Valle Medio (see Figure 1). For fruits for which less data is available, such as those grown in the Andean region, the lack of funding may well be due to a lack of data. Thus, the lack of recognition not only undermines the pillars on which local identity is constructed, but it is also an obstacle to accessing finance and higher levels of management.

Fine fruit, for example, is measured across two variables. The censuses factor in 84 variables regarding apple production and 52 variables regarding pear production. The quantity of data for apples and pears contrasts with the lack of interest in understanding factors that could be significant for non-export products. Vegetables are another example, as they are surveyed by production area only, rather than by kilograms produced, demonstrating that they are seen as secondary.

The censuses give the impression that the potential for change depends on a structure in which the foreign market and commercial centers outside of the Andes seem to be the inevitable benchmark for rural production.

This poses questions regarding the variables used to measure development. As long as development is measured in terms of export, technological innovations will continue to seek ways to access a market that ignores the enormous productive potential based on local networks, despite the fact that development should be designed to attain a higher quality of life for the general population.

There is an approach that has yet to take hold of the regional economy. Solidarity exchange has been the central response to phenomena such as volcanic explosions, domestic fires, snowfalls, floods, and even hyperinflation (Lacoste, 2003), throughout the region. Bartering became more prevalent during the crises (Colino *et al.*, 2016). An example is 2002, when the CNA was faced with the regional consequences of the 2001 national economic crisis. That year, no data was taken from the region as the local population was not trading with the official currency. Does this mean that production had ceased? Of course not. There was in fact a significant amount of exchange, with nuts becoming a common community currency in rural areas, resulting in the dynamization and stabilizing of local production.² The question remains, then, whether the information gap contained in the census is reproduced or modified when measuring and planning technological interventions for the region's activity.

3. TECHNICAL INTERVENTION IN INVISIBLE PRACTICES

Measuring and identifying economic activity occurs via technical interventions. The province of Río Negro was an early adherent to national development programs that privileged innovation (Lattuada *et al.*, 2015), but there are persistent dynamics of inequality that seem to transcend the transformative agendas. Programs, such as censuses, reproduce trade overestimation, and this, in turn, conditions the design of technological tools.

Extension agents recognize the existence of local knowledge. This knowledge has holistic characteristics, with affective and cohesive functions, and is central yet invisible.³ The objective of market entry serves as a disruptor rather than as an articulator or promoter, given that heightened levels of commercialization do not imply improved labor integration, or even integration at all.

Technicians "discover" the overestimation of the market in the ideas of "improvement" and "competitiveness" inherent in development strategies (PROSAP, 2011), within which interventions must be designed to achieve increased levels of market insertion. According to one of the participants in

the "Epistemology and Methodology of Scientific Research" course, they also discover that this overestimation is based on an ideal and alien production model, without knowing whether what is done in this system really needs improvement or is the best thing that exists for that context.⁴ The model does not involve studying the local; rather, it proposes an ideal type for the local. An example of this is the proposed genetic improvements which do not factor in the productive environment, or the sometimes impractical and inefficient management of the system due to the use of inputs that the producer does not know how to use or has difficulty obtaining, such as non-conventional foods or mechanisms to expand the fodder base.

The specialists consulted during the meetings highlighted the fact that local knowledge is often separated, thus generating a well-oiled production chain to respond to a temporary or permanent market. This process often damages those who engage with it and displaces those who remain outside of it.⁵ Professionals from both the public and private sectors participate in the production chain from the primary sector onwards. These professionals seek not only to attend to the essential aspects of production, but also to ensure quality food and agriculture for the population. They call for interventions designed from diverse perspectives such as animal genetics, health, property management, and the promotion of intensive activities, in which innovation is the main focus. In a meeting on sheep production, R.,⁶ one of the participants, mentioned that field workers saw that producers and herders had a deep knowledge, but "seeing" this depended on individual technician's perceptiveness in a context that R. considered complicated by a need for permanent innovation seemingly at odds with local populations' interests.⁷ The technicians are therefore faced with the dilemma of being required to implement changes that are at odds with local practices. In El Bolsón, other specialists who met to review fine fruit production⁸ recognized that there is no technical consensus on the existence of the productive potential of raspberries, a production that has been central in the region since the 1960s.

The courses and meetings emphasized that change is approaching, and that the need to increase value and access to commercialization is not only an objective of the state, but also of many producers and inhabitants. In this context, the importance of invisible production (e.g. self-consumption, bartering, etc.) at the local level clashes with the concealment of such production that results from reducing productivity to the capacity to monetize.

It is, therefore, possible to conceive that social force becomes apparent strictly during moments of emergency, when what is important is "that" which impacts on the neighbor, friend, or relative, and when the context of emergency accounts for such solidarity. But this is lost when the territoriality of the region participates in a government program, where "that" commonality is absent in both policy and planning. But there is one more element: to those living in the Andean area of Rio Negro, the importance of provincial membership is systematically unknown (Núñez, 2016). It is as if the main administrative structure that contains the localities were of no importance. This aspect differentiates Rio Negro from other provinces and deepens the framework of invisibility already mentioned.

4. PROGRESS, DEVELOPMENT, AND INNOVATION IN THE ANDEAN-PATAGONIAN REGION

While the notions of "progress," "development," and "innovation" do indeed overlap, they are, however, distinct. They have all been references in the design and implementation of economic policies over time and, in fact, are terms that allow for analysis from a historical perspective. The idea of "progress" appears in the writings on the region from the end of the 19th century to the middle of the 20th century. From then on, the notion of development began to rule as a reference until the 1990s, when the concept of innovation emerged. The way in which these concepts inform debates around territorial and rural issues links the region's specificities to the global dynamics that underlie development policies.

Progress

Since its incorporation to the National State after the military advance at the end of the XIX century, Argentinian North Patagonia was used to illustrate the self-evident character of progress. This implied an assumption that advance towards structural improvement was an unavoidable destiny (Navarro, 2004 and 2007). Núñez and Lema (2018) assert that notions of progress were premised on the assumption that progress in Patagonia would come about via the destruction of the existing. The authors draw attention to a paradox here: on the one hand, the environmental conditions were evidence of an inescapable progress; meanwhile, people, plants, and animals simultaneously had to be removed in the name of progress. Navarro (2011) points out that the desert was the reference with which Patagonia was assessed during the first governmental discussions on the region. But before being categorized according to environmental factors, it was a government program that marked the incorporation of the territory. Thus, the lack of culture was used as the justification for this destruction.

In this scenario, the subjects of progress and change were not local, but rather foreign capital, which was considered better-suited to planning due to its links to international trade. In the process of conquest and the reflection that triggered the accompanying scientific inquiry, it was understood that the extermination of the population was a necessary condition to attract "the most frightening of the frightening things in the world, the capital destined to vivify livestock and agricultural companies..." (Ebelot, 1881, p. XI). Consequently, investment capital was the nature that had to be preserved and consolidated in the region and was more important than any other element.

Coronato (2010) characterizes the "ovization model" configured in the late 19th century for Patagonia, and describes the introduction of huge flocks of merino sheep in the steppes, to promote the export of wool, resulting in a concentration of land ownership in large estates.

This initial economic structure of Patagonia has a fundamentally geopolitical dimension, as this economic dynamic was linked to the transatlantic trade with Great Britain. But there was also a binational dimension, resulting from the connection with the territorial organizational model of southern Chile, which was also linked to foreign capital, although mostly German.

Argentine Andean Patagonia's economic growth was made possible by the social and commercial articulation with dynamics in southern Chile. This articulation has been explored from economic-family alliances that unified in the same economic zone the adjacent Chilean and Argentinean areas of the Andes (Méndez and Muñoz, 2013). Furthermore, however, this linkage was based on an environmentally diverse integration, as it linked Andean dynamics with the steppe area's quintessential forms of production. Thus, there was an articulation between sheep production, which is classically steppe (Coronato, 2010), with maize and agricultural and livestock production, typical of the Andes (Méndez, 2010; Méndez and Muñoz, 2013).

This whole process has, despite its expansive scope, a marginal character. The existing debates on the latifundia model which characterizes Patagonia's integration (Hora, 2019) do not focus on the region, despite the fact that it constitutes almost 60% of Argentina's territory. In Argentina, the rural sector is modeled according to the Pampean agro-export structure. This is under debate, but with such force that it eclipses the particularity of the remaining regions (Núñez and Michel, 2019). Thus, it is not only a matter of providing an account of regional production, but also of making visible the rural elements in the national model.

In general terms, Patagonia is integrated at the national level as a largely unplanned agricultural area. Since the opening of commercial borders with Chile in 1902, however, crops and livestock have been introduced to the area and commercial production to the west has been promoted. The first planning was carried out by the American geologist Bailey Willis (1914), who proposed building a National Park and an industrial city in the area of Bariloche, hoping to impact on the whole Andean area.

This plan was abandoned due to the refusal of the national government to continue with regional investments, partly due to the perceived insignificance of the region (Navarro, 2007). However, the self-evident force of progress as part of the landscape can be explicitly seen in Bailey Willis' (1917) farewell letter to his collaborator in the south, Emilio Frey, to advise him of the project's closure, which begins: "It seems for the moment that we are being detained and forced to stop work to encourage the progress of the populations on the lake..." before continuing "It matters little to a president as long as the resources and the beauties of nature exist, more attractive than ever before to war-weary populations. 'We will continue without being discouraged', is what I answered to Mr. Dr. Ruiz Moreno and it is my sincere feeling."⁹

To continue, from his point of view, was to let the strength of the landscape triumph, demonstrating that Patagonian progress would be imposed from the environment. It seems that the legacy of these notions in public policy can be seen in the constitution of Argentina's natural areas. In 1903 came the first donation for the construction of an American-style National Park in the region. The 1914 Willis plan considered that preservation of forests would ensure the basin's correct functioning, and that such conservation would also aid the construction of irrigation infrastructure, which he proposed would serve as the basis for hydroelectric power production. Interestingly, these conservation efforts did not extend to preserving species, but suggested instead changing native plants for faster-growing exotics that would give rise to younger forests (Willis, 1914, pp. 11-12). Willis repeats the paradox of self-evident progress, in a physical environment in which the native must be cleared away, even appealing to the idea of creating a National Park.

The first National Park was created in 1922, Parque Nacional del Sud, located around Nahuel Huapi Lake, in what was then known as Nahuel Huapi Agricultural and Cattle Colony, today Bariloche. This initiative linked the closure of the commercial border with Chile to the conservation of forests. This policy has been deepened since 1934, with the sanction of the National Parks Law, and the effective creation of the Nahuel Huapi and Iguazú National Parks, the latter located in the north of the country.

State documents seem to reduce the region of Rio Negro to its landscape, in a rhetoric where Patagonia's importance derived from a strategy that did not necessarily prioritize regional development. According to Exequiel Bustillo, the first director of National Parks: "to keep the Argentine spirit awake and alert, for that and nothing else, God has placed among the dangers of the border the great beauties of our land" (Bustillo, 1946, p. 26). The region would be educational for Argentine society in these terms, infringing on local commercial exchange, and based on the original trans-Andean agricultural model (Méndez and Muñoz, 2013). Progress, such as urbanization or industrialization, took place in remote scenarios. The National Parks and their surrounding regions were conceived as margins that made no sense without a center, and agricultural activity was understood as contradicting nationalist progress.

It is worth mentioning that establishing borders was not a global Argentine policy, as not only were no significant national parks established in the northern sections of the Patagonian mountain range, but also, during the 1930s, the greatest commercial exchanges occurred through the mountain passes located in the province of Mendoza (Lacoste, 2005), in the region of Cuyo in the center-west of the country. The Patagonian mountains were left as a space for the recreation of urban societies that grew in the metropolis (Diegues, 2000; Fortunato, 2005), self-referenced in a landscape understood as sublime and empty.

There is another geographical paradox here: the mountains of Patagonia are much smaller than those in Cuyo, with low transversal valleys comparable to many national routes. However, these low mountains that are presented as impassable walls, while the high passes of the center and north of the Andes are seen as natural for trade.

The 1930s saw changes in the way progress was conceived in the Andean region and steppe. The focus shifted from sheep and forests to that distant and tutelary urbanity now being framed as "natural." Progress was defined from the outside, and Argentinian interests were determined according to industrial and economic developments occurring outside of Patagonia. The exaggerated importance attributed to urban organization had its counterpart in idealized notions of nature in border areas. This served to reconcile seemingly opposing dynamics, by framing both as functional to the national order in general (Serje, 2005). In Patagonia, progress appealed to the idea of indigenous deficiencies.

Development

Development, as a public policy objective, is carried out via the planning state established by the presidencies of Juan Domingo Perón during the 1940s (Berrotarán, 2003). It is important to understand the Patagonian context at this point: during the 1940s and 1950s, sheep farming became less important, and fruit growing was established in the upper valley (see Figure 1) as the basis of the North Patagonian economic matrix (Bandieri and Blanco, 1998). Oil exploitation also played a significant role and was already beginning to be planned, although would not be consolidated until later decades (Favaro, 2001). Within the context of Peronism, the objective of industrialization required energy generation. In this scenario, the plan for hydroelectric exploitation (following on from Bailey Willis) was developed in conjunction with the advancing fruit structure (Azcoitia and Núñez, 2013).

Andean construction was different, as it was centered around Nahuel Huapi National Park, reiterating the centrality of tourism. Here, however, there was an additional paradox. In Lake Nahuel Huapi, on Huemul Island, a failed nuclear experiment was carried out which highlighted two contradictory dimensions to the state's planning: once more, the state was using an unpolluted landscape in which to undertake an initiative with high risks of pollution (Maris-cotti, 2005), one which turned out to be the largest investment in the area during the period (Bessera, 2008).

In El Bolsón, during the 1940s and 1950s, conditions were established that gave rise to systematic exploitation of timber, fruit, and hops, which would continue to flourish in the 1960s (Mén-des, 2010). This process weakened El Bolsón's historical links with the steppe region, creating a consensus on the region's future consistent with the perspective of the Bariloche region. This led to a new process opening up in Patagonia. This occurred in two ways: on the one hand, political rights were recognized from 1955 onwards, when the southern continental territories became provinces,¹⁰ and on the other, the developmentalist plan for hydroelectric and oil exploitation (Rougier, 2016), in which the state played an active role in achieving regional economic growth, a form of state intervention in which "development" was an inescapable reference point for economic policy.

Development arrived in Patagonia with another peculiarity. The province, as an administrative area, appeared after a prolonged demand for political rights. Río Negro, specifically, was proposed according to terms elaborated by its first governor Edgardo Castello, who demanded equity for the region. The first governor asserted that his provincial planning promoted a "harmonious development" that responded to historical inequities that marginalized the south (García, 1960). A strategy of unequal investment was carried out, intended to restore equity. Instead of generating equality, however, this strategy aggravated existing regional differences. Its legacy has been the abandonment of rural zones located in the most vulnerable areas (López, 2016; Herrera and Herrera, 2014), and the omission of specific policies for the Andean region (Núñez, 2016).

Specifically, with respect to the study area, there is practically no economic investment. Production in the El Bolsón area is mentioned as a potential, but is considered less important than other regions. Basically, for decades no funds were made available for crop development or to improve commercial connectivity. The thinking was that, as the landscape in Bariloche was considered so exceptional, the area did not need funds as would be able to attract adequate private investment (Fantini, 1961). In provincial planning, the area's landscape is an argument for not investing in the vast study area.

The way in which the two main activities of the region - tourism in Bariloche and agriculture in El Bolsón - were set up exposes an uneven provincial construction, where the very idea of development was based on ignoring local particularities. The paradox of tourism is an example. This activity came to Bariloche hand in hand with a very important national structure, that of the National Parks in the 1930s, impacting the entire region's organization. But even though tourism was introduced during the 1950s on a national scale, and on a provincial scale during the 1960s, it was not considered an economic activity and, therefore, it suffered from financing and organization frameworks comparable to other activities that generated similar income (Núñez, 2018).

Thus, the economic center of the region rested on an activity that, in terms of provincial integration, was not considered productive. Along with the economic eclipsing of tourism, the region declined in importance. This helps to understand why the provincial government's objectives did not include coordination with the Andean region. Its agricultural activity, also seen as almost non-existent, does not contain the same value as those of other areas. The rural sector was promoted in the irrigated area of the Alto Valle and Valle Medio, where it already existed and which became the heart of the export process.

It could be hypothesized that, from these unequal recognitions, agricultural production, linked to the town of El Bolsón, is doubly hidden. On the one hand, because of its denial within the framework of the tourism model, and on the other hand, because productive activities have, in the province of Río Negro, a regional recognition, and fruit production was recognized as important only in the High Valley and Middle Valley, while horticultural activities dominated in the Lower Valley. During this period the National Institute of Agricultural Technology (INTA) was created, a national agricultural development institute set up in different points of the country. One of them was located in Bariloche in 1965, but with limited links to the surrounding region. López (2016) points out that the location in Bariloche focused exclusively on ovine production, which was geographically distant from this center. The author attributes this location to the conformation of a national techno-scientific network in which Bariloche had been a strategic point since the 1950s. Thus, the local INTA adheres to a techno-scientific network while ignoring local production. This acquires even greater significance if we remember that commercial production of fine fruit began and large-scale lumber exploitation began in El Bolsón during those years, as well as hop production financed by the firm Quilmes (Méndes, 2010).

All these processes, of diverse origin and economic scale, impacted the dynamics of local organization, although they were viewed as insignificant at the provincial level and did not receive attention from INTA Bariloche until after the 1970s. On the provincial level, in the Andean zone, tourism was considered to be dependent on the landscape (Núñez, 2018); hops generated less interest and lumber exploitation, as well as fine fruit, received almost no attention in terms of public policy. State intervention at the provincial level, as reflected in the policies of the time, accounts for this unequal integration with reference to the landscape. Locally, there are no important producers. The social actors, unaware of the progress initiatives, were subordinated to the policies of development.

During the last 20 years of this trajectory, the notion of innovation began to be raised, associated with technological and planning changes based on concepts such as intelligent cities (Mitchell, 2007), territorial platform (Corrales et al., 2005; PROCISUR, 2013), and even new structural modalities of capitalism that are modifying the conditions of the periphery (Sztulwark, 2019). This raises questions about meanings that fluctuate and remain constant with respect to previous ones, that is, the echoes of the notions of progress and development mentioned above.

Lattuada *et al.* (2015, p. 94) summarize the objectives of rural development programs in the last decade, mentioning that some of those that have been linked to development in the region: i) the creation of formal associations of micro-producers, which have strengthened production units and improved competitiveness; ii) technological innovation in production, management, and administration; iii) improved marketing channels and access to markets; and iv) access to competitive information for decision-making, coordinating their participation with sectoral clusters and organizations.

In Patagonia, these objectives were projected to the most vulnerable populations, privileging young people and women, and were, in fact, deemed successful (Lattuada *et al.*, 2015). However, the structure of regional and sectoral inequality has remained practically unchanged in the study area. Instead, there is a systematic lack of knowledge about production linked to family agriculture and domestic production, an aspect that is reiterated in studies of the area (Danklmaier et al., 2013; Cobelo, 2017; Valtriani, 2008), or about small and micro-scale production in all sectors (Colino *et al.*, 2016), which is the one that contains the largest number of inhabitants.

What is interesting is that something of the order of progress persists. The main production network is invisible, as it occurs at the domestic level, which in many cases is not even recognized as a form of production, since its products are not traded on the market but instead via the complex network of exchanges and solidarity that falls into the opaque category of "self-consumption," with all the aforementioned identification problems.

The primacy of exportation, which still persists as a criterion of recognition and indicator of productive measurement, seems to be the legacy of the original vision of progress, with the burden of destiny that this entails. The problem is that innovation still privileges sectors dedicated to export trade or large-scale production. However, the unknown networks of domestic production, often unrelated to market dynamics, are central in cases of both socioenvironmental and economic emergencies

Thus, it could be suggested that the notion of innovation has done nothing to modify the agents of change. The idea of innovation has unknowingly reproduced preexisting stereotypes of progress. This impacts on integration. The interesting thing about today's world is that, far from acknowledging global processes, innovation is based on strategies that are presented as local, almost as individual options in the face of the still open path of development and progress, without even dialogue with the new global economic structures. Global dynamics, present in the above-mentioned periods, are blurred, not because they are non-existent but because of the illusion that local conflicts are due to individual agency rather than political and economic histories, which have caused tensions in the region which persist, even in the face of innovation.

In view of this, plus the lack of systematic data on family production, we once more find ourselves with a paradox. The answer would seem to lie in recognizing family agriculture at all levels. Much has been written on this subject yet, even contemporary studies ignore this angle in areas such as the Andean region of Rio Grande do Sul, where almost all producers belong to that category.

5. CONCLUSIONS

It could be argued that understandings of production and intervention, linked to concepts such as innovation or the design of intelligent territories, make it possible to reiterate the illusion of a subjectless rural development, as innovation is based on logic, either entrepreneurial or scientific (Albornoz, 2009), rather than family agriculture.

The paradoxes result from the fact that the market is the reference point for production. Investment, commercialization, and profit continue to be the central and exclusive criteria by which production is measured.

The findings and overlaps of various historical perspectives currently evident in the Andean region of the province of Río Negro, cast light on articulation across the wider Patagonian region, as well as with global policies. The landscape has been reproduced as a reference of natural destiny for over 100 years, naturalizing a particular type of producer as an agent of change, one linked to a trade that, ideally, is international. A persistent characteristic of notions of progress and development, is a negative impact on local conditions, as a strategy to justify both the successes and failures of the policies outlined.

This article traces notions of progress that persist in some provincial planning logics. Those ideas, which were part of progress as determined by the national government, today appear to be amalgamated to the provincial logic, as in the absence of provincial planning of Andean development. The legacy of Río Negro as a province that "neglects the Andean region," ¹¹ implies agreements with local actors, but above all an acceptance of that disintegration as a result of geography rather than politics.

In this Andean space, the significant national imprint of National Parks served to justify isolation. This program updated the pristine idea of nature, which refers to the national order established at the beginning of the century as if it were the result of the landscape itself. In the late to integrate territories, and above all in those invested with the imaginary of "untouched nature" (Diegues, 2000), the infiltration of politics into the landscape allows unequal integration to be justified.

The notion of innovation runs through the development programs of the last 20 years and Río Negro is one of the provinces that has tried to adhere to the implementation of such programs and ideas. However, the structure of inequality has not changed as data collection tools continue to omit central

references to actors at the domestic level.

Innovation continues to claim that progress, as an economic actor, is the subject of change. According to this logic, the tension between the local or indigenous continues to emerge, no longer in an explicitly racist way, but rather by being deliberately ignored. The local remains outside the elements of change, in a logic that seems to be replicated in the way family production is understood.

If a broader administration were considered, i.e. the national scale, the state's tools of visualization do not allow for an alternative to monetization as the exclusive measure of value. The census could be useful, although remains a hindrance for the time being, while the production and efficiency indicators of the different regional promotion programs would serve local interests, as would understanding internal dynamics. The domestic, self-consumption exchange, the local market, and even visibility of the enormous regional mobility, partially recognized, could serve as the basis for systematic thinking about innovation, in a genuinely innovative way.

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¹ In the courses "Epistemology and Methodology of Scientific Research", INTA Bariloche, in 2018, with extension workers from northern Patagonia and "Models of development and rurality in Northern Patagonia," in 2018, UNRN-El Bolsón, together with researchers on rural issues in the area, held a meeting to create the "Public Policy Observatory" in El Bolsón in 2018, which brought together more than 50 rural producers, researchers, political authorities, and teachers to discuss the challenge of local development.

² Quote from the course "Models of development and rurality in North Patagonia".

³ Quote from the course "Epistemology and Methodology of Scientific Research".

⁴ Quote from the postgraduate course "Epistemology and Methodology of Scientific Research."

⁵ IBID

⁶ References taken from the courses are non-literal citations as we did not agree quote participants literally. Instead we have shared only shared partial references that we recorded in our capacity as teachers during series of meetings cited in point 3. To preserve anonymity where necessary, we refer each person with a letter. R. is an INTA extensionist of INTA, working with small minor ruminants within the study area.

⁷ Quote from the postgraduate course "Epistemology and Methodology of Scientific Research."

⁸ Taken from the creation of the "Observatory of Public Policies."

⁹ Bailey Willis arrived in Argentina in 1910, sent by the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History States to review the data on human evolutionary history in Plata. Once there, he was hired as Head of the Commission of Hydrological Studies of the General Directorate of Railways, created in 1911 to plan the development of North Patagonia. This commission was closed in 1915. His farewell letter, dated 1917, can be found in the Frey Archive., Museum of Patagonia in Bariloche, "Frey Collection."

¹⁰ The National Territories were late to be incorporated late into the state and come under the protection of the central government. This figure was applied in the current provinces of Misiones, Chaco, Formosa, La Pampa, Neuquén, Río Negro, Chubut, Santa Cruz, Tierra del Fuego, and a space called the "Andes Territory," located between the provinces of Salta and Jujuy. In 1955, Neuquén, Río Negro, Chubut, and Santa Cruz became provinces, as was Formosa. Chaco, La Pampa, and Misiones were already provinces. The Andes Territory had been divided between Salta and Jujuy. Tierra del Fuego was a National Territory until 1992.

¹¹ Mentioned repeatedly in interviews addressing multiple issues (Núñez, 2016; Colino *et al.*, 2016; Herrera and Herrera, 2014; López, 2016).