

# Evolución histórica de las telenovelas en Argentina

## *Historical evolution of Argentine soap operas*

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### **Abstract**

*The soap opera represent a Latin American genre on its own. Its role is central for the values and ideas it transmits and for reinforcing the region's identity. In addition, these audiovisual contents are economically significant both to the production industry and for export purposes. This article aims to account for the evolution of soap operas in Argentina. In order to do so, this paper addresses the genesis of soap operas from the first television broadcast of the century to the production of pieces specifically for the web. A total of five stages are identified, and explanations of the main technological axes and political-economic factors are provided.*

### **Keywords**

*Television industry; soap operas; fiction; Argentina.*

### **Resumen**

La telenovela representa uno de los géneros propios de América Latina. Su rol es central por los valores e ideas que transmite y por reforzar la identidad de la región. Además, estos contenidos audiovisuales son significativos económicamente por su producción industrial y por la exportación. El presente artículo da cuenta de la evolución de las telenovelas en Argentina. Para ello, se reconstruirá su génesis desde la primera emisión televisiva hasta la producción de piezas específicas para la web. En total se identifican cinco etapas y se explican los principales ejes tecnológicos y los factores político-económicos.

### **Palabras clave**

Industria televisiva; telenovelas; ficción; Argentina.

## 1. Introduction

Television is one of the nodal medias to entertain and inform. It is characterized for producing, distributing and putting into circulation audiovisual content of high symbolic and economic value. The soap opera is a cultural good that is well-established in the television industry and is part of fictional audiovisual production.

Soap operas are the most popular Latin American genre, a cultural product that reinforces regional identity and integration via a common language and the circulation of artists (Martín-Barbero, 1992; Mato, 1999). At the same time, they became one of the most successful exports in terms of TV material in countries like Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico and Venezuela, where the sale of prerecorded shows and/or formats soared into the millions.

The origins of soap operas date back, on one hand, to the 19th century novels linked to sagas aimed at a recently literate population of viewers. On the other hand, radio soap operas were promoted by the invention of the radio broadcast in 1920. Its development paralleled the insertion of TV into the Latin American region starting in the 1950s. The new media passed through a process of consolidation, from an experimental and artisanal type of production to its conversion into a TV industry. This transformation affected the development of the genres that came to comprise the program listings, among them was the soap opera.

In addition, the soap operas—similar to the rest of the fictional audiovisual productions—have an economic dimension, promoted by the search of economic profitability. At the same time, they symbolically impact society and offer a cultural field for the insertion of habits and values (Martín-Barbero, 1987).

We understand that the study of soap operas can be addressed from production, distribution, consumption and analysis of texts.

If we put emphasis on the production of the fictions it is necessary to observe what is produced and why, consider the phases of the productive process and the workers involved.

Production means have changed with the arrival of technological advances. At first programs were broadcast live. In the 1960s, the videotape appeared and over time, technical advances implied more sophisticated equipment for the filming, processing and editing of images.

On the other hand, if focus is placed on distribution, we must analyze who produces the fiction and who hold the rights for its commercialization. Soap operas are exported regionally and globally, via the sale of prerecorded shows and/or formats.

Nevertheless, if we look at soap operas from the consumption standpoint we must identify the end consumers. At the beginning, the soap opera was aimed at female audiences. Over time, this tendency changed given that productions were focused on attracting large audiences.

Moreover, using the consumption standpoint favors the semiotic analyses that allow for the consideration of the kinds of circulation of meanings that soap operas promote, and evaluate the conditions in which the messages are received.

This being said, the present work is focused on identifying the evolutionary phases of soap operas in Argentina, with an emphasis on the 21st century. In this sense, we make a series of considerations for a thorough understanding of the proposed approach. Firstly, gradually during the 21st century, a shift began in the way television is watched, from collective to individual, a trend that was encouraged by the increasing number of receiving devices. Secondly, the study focuses on an approach from the production standpoint. We believe that the changes that took place in the production and airing of fictions were not caused, exclusively, by the incorporation of technology, but rather

derive from the combination of political, economic, business and regulatory factors of the TV industry, which interact with each other and with the various parts that make up the productive chain. Thirdly, the productions of this century are identified and analyzed contextually. Nevertheless, we believe it is necessary to show the historic evolution of soap operas in Argentina from the country's first television broadcast in October 1951, since recognition of these stages enables one put into context and understand the productive dynamic of the industry.

The methodological approach is qualitative and develops the descriptive and interpretative levels in order to understand the evolution soap operas in Argentina. This way, the analysis is based on the bibliographic and documental review, and the systematization of data for analysis, among them the titles produced and aired in Argentina during the 21st century. In regards to the development of these productions in this century, the research is exploratory given that there are few works on the productive oscillations of soap operas. Evaluating the evolution of soap operas gives us the chance to consider a wide variety of final reflections as to the development of productions in Argentina, their international perspectives, the relations between international companies and their interaction with the emerging consumption platforms.

## 2. Studies on Soap Operas in Latin America and Argentina

The history of soap operas is linked to the development of television. Rincón (2006) states that purpose of television is to make money, tell stories and entertain. In Argentina, came to be and developed adopting a mainly commercial model based on profit and the entertainment dynamic. Entertainment involves a wide variety of genres talk shows, general interest shows, reality shows, series and soap operas. At certain points in the text we use the term "fiction" to refer to a number of proposals that

include but are not limited to soap operas. In this sense, we understand that the concept of fiction refers to a variety of audiovisual productions, in this case, made for television that imply the telling of a fictitious event and/or situation, whose characters are not real although they could exist by coincidence in reality. Thus, the televised fictions include soap operas, single productions, series, mini-series and sitcoms, among others. Their basic function is entertainment, and they come in the form of episodes (daily or weekly) and their economic formula provides that upon increasing the number of episodes produced, the average cost per episode is reduced.

Once explained the use of the term "fictions", we believe it is necessary to concisely review the approaches in the study of soap operas in Latin America and Argentina. Although the research surpasses by far what is mentioned here, we have selected those that contribute to this work, without ignoring the vast bibliography that exists on the cited material.

On the national scene, we highlight the research done by Mirta Varela (2005) who studied the acquisition and adaptation of the country's TV system. Upon describing the TV industry during its first 20 years of existence, we are able to discuss the development of the first fictions.

The work of Nora Mazziotti and Oscar Steimbergson are mentioned because both carry out a classification of Argentine soap operas. Mazziotti (1996) analyzed the soap operas from the production standpoint (creation, sale and circulation of these products). The researcher defines the production of soap operas in 4 stages:

First: involves the first decade of TV history with the existence of a sole channel.

Artisanal: occurring in the 1960s and 1970s, characterized by the use of videotapes to solve the inconveniences of live and in direct. In the artisanal stage, screenplays of the fictions were sold in order to make local versions.

Industrial: included the 1970s and 1980s with more consolidated and standardized products. The soap opera became the top exportable genre of Latin America, mainly in Brazil, Mexico and Venezuela.

Transnational: developed in the 1990s and focused on the search of an international market. Soap operas neutralized their features in order to commercialize prerecorded shows.

At the same time, note that the author performed quite a bit of specific research on soap operas. Thus, in the rest of her work, Mazziotti (1994, 2006, 2008) wrote about the origins of the soap opera and the main titles that consolidated Argentine fictions. In addition, it details the main characteristics and styles of the genre in the countries of the region (Mexico, Brazil, Colombia and Venezuela). At the same time, it addresses the exportation of prerecorded shows and/or formats in Latin America and includes the deregulation of the European TV market, given that it led to the commercialization of audiovisual content throughout the continent. This systematization constitutes the key to understanding and analyzing the exportation processes of the Argentinian TV audiovisual productions.

From another perspective, Oscar Steimberg (1997) carried out a taxonomy, based on identifying the stylistic differences of Argentine soap operas. The author defined 3 stages. During the first 2 decades of Argentine television, the soap operas featured the melodramatic aspects and the themes of the sagas. The second phase (1975-1990) was characterized by the social realism, including the era's conflicts and social changes. The soap opera began to refer back to itself, upon surpassing the sphere of fiction and appearing as a social event, susceptible of being commented on. Finally, in the 1990s a mixing of genres occurred as well as the multiplication of stories of events occurring at the same time.

Lastly, the Argentine author María Victoria Bourdieu (2009) identified the genre's cons-

tant narrative features and observed that these brands relate with public opinion and the audience's expectations in relation to content. We understand that those responsible for the audiovisual project must consider the social climate and the topics addressed in the fictions, all while considering technical and economic aspects.

On a Latin American level, we mention some works done by different researchers. Tomás López (1987) studied the beginning of soap operas in the region and the characteristics that define the genre, from unpredictability to repetition. This allows us to consider the volatility of the demand of cultural products, given that you can't predict the success or failure of content until it is put on the market. Nevertheless, you can design strategies to reduce commercial uncertainty. For this reason, mechanisms of repetition, successful formulas or using actors that are part of the star system are used.

In the late 1980s, Jesús Martín-Barbero (1987) indicated that the majority of the studies on TV were done from a legal standpoint, the economic structure and the ideological effects. The author researched the soap opera as a popular concrete product of the TV industry and in order to observe how the commercial aspects of production relate with the cultural aspects of consumption. His innovative and ambitious proposal suggests studying the soap operas based on the convergence of three factors: the TV industry, cultural groups and cultural products. In later research, together with Silvia Muñoz (1992) they addressed the economic and industry aspects of soap operas in relation to the demands and the different perspectives of various social groups.

Other Latin American authors focused on observing the commercialization and internationalization of soap operas, their economic effects, themes and adaptation to international standards of production (Mato, 1999; Kalikoske, 2009; Kalikoske & Cruz; 2010 and Medina & Barrón, 2010).

Kalikoske and Cruz (2010) studied the main countries production companies and the market expansion since 1970. In addition, they identified for the first time that each country had a particular production aesthetic, allowing for its recognition worldwide.

Likewise, Mercedes Medina and Leticia Barrón (2010) analyzed the production and distribution of soap operas from the main regional exporters (Televisa in Mexico, TV Globo in Brazil, Telefé in Argentina, RCN in Colombia, TV Azteca in Mexico, Telemundo in the USA and Venevisión in Venezuela) and alluded to the emergence of competitors in soap opera production in other parts of the world.

This brief review of soap operas shows the inexistence of uniqueness to address the object of study. On the other hand, you can see that addressed different perspectives and conclusions on the different axes of analysis. In summary, the studies reviewed are based on different aspects of soap operas and consider diverse variables in their research, including: production, distribution, consumption, reception and text or content analysis.

### 3. Evolution of soap operas in Argentina

In this section, the development of soap operas in Argentina is categorized into 5 stages. You could refute the generalizations of the organizing of these stages, that are not subject, but are related to the country's political and economic history. This generalization subscribes to the challenge of identifying the historic phases of evolution of soap operas in Argentina. The premise applied is that production of these cultural goods is affected by internal and external factors. Among the internal aspects are the evolution of the TV system, the implementation of technological equipment that transformed productive and work processes. Technology encompasses from the appearance of the videotape to the microchip, the advances in editing systems (from lineal to non-lineal), the use of computers

and mobile telephones, the evolution of filming and image capturing systems, among others. This implies changes in qualification and disqualification of workers, and the appearance of new job profiles. Plus, noteworthy are the business to business relationships, the associations established between TV channels and TV audiovisual production companies, or the relationships between production companies making local content and international companies. Among the external factors are the economic and political cycles that have an impact in television (for example, a drop in advertising or the fixing of the exchange rate to the dollar to either promote or discourage foreign investments), regulations in terms of labor and communication law, and the measures governments take to stimulate (or not) the production of audiovisual content, including fictions.

Finally, we make note in each one of the stages mentioned, as examples, the soap operas representative of that period. Selection criteria was based mainly on the innovative production element of the soap opera. Nevertheless, we cannot isolate this factor of the impact of the content on the local market, the impact on the audience and the story's theme. Although this work is not presented as an interdisciplinary study, the bibliographic referencing performed enables us to carry out such cross referencing.

Based on the aforementioned, the periodization proposed constitutes one of the possible forms of classification.

#### 3.1. The soap opera, an artisanal product

The first phase took place from the implementation of television in the country (1951) to its consolidation with the arrival of privatized television. Between 1951-1959, the Argentine TV industry experienced an experimental phase that affected the various genres. The public TV channel, Canal 7, was the only channel in operation. In the 1960s, private television came about and new channels brought about competition and the search for audiences.

The TV soaps on Argentine television began with Celia Alcántara who had written soap operas since 1948. This first age was characterized by adapting the scripts of writers who had come from the radio. In general, the screenplays were 25 - 30 pages, there was only one writer and the episode was an hour long (Mazziotti, 1996).

In the age of the 1960s the incorporation of private channels and American production companies changed the television scenario. Fiction productions became more sophisticated, set and wardrobe design improved. In this stage, the advertising agency Walter Thompson created *La Familia Falcón* designed to launch the Ford Falcón taxi model in Argentina.

In 1964 the arrival of the videotape allowed for recording and storage of programs, enabling the international sale of audiovisual products, among them, soap operas. This technology did not have a substantial impact the recording process, scripts were available in little time and they were filmed according to the timeline stipulated in the screenplay. The rate was one episode per day (Mazziotti, 1996). Editing was done mechanically, which slowed down the production process.

The late 1960s and early 1970s was considered the age of highest TV production. However, there is little information as to the role of the different workers that participated in the production of the programs and it is difficult to reconstruct the tasks performed by directors, producers, sound technicians, editors or scenographers in the germinal period of television.

### 3.2. The industrialization of soap operas

The industrial phase lasted from 1970 to 1988. The soap opera consolidated as a product of exportation in various Latin American countries. In Argentina, fiction production decreased upon the arrival of military governments starting in 1976. The television channels continued operation from 1974 in the hands of the

State. First, the military forces took control and with the return of democracy, the different internal sectors of the government of the Unión Cívica Radical. Despite this, the consolidation of the TV industry implied the opening of a process of professionalization and industrialization of productions.

During the military dictatorship, various authors were censored, similar to what happened to several actors and singers (Getino, 2008). The Argentine TV screen filled with series and movies from the United States. In regards to soap operas, instead of writing by inspiration, authors began writing by commission. It was established that each channel would broadcast 2 fictions daily and there would be a third in the event of international sales.

In 1983, democracy returned to the country. However, in 1989 programming reduced to 4 hours per day due to the financial deficit of state-funded channels and the energy crisis (Ulanovsky, Itkin & Sirvén, 1999).

In summary, the first television industry workers came from radio and theater. Later, there was a generation of workers professionally trained for the media. In regards to production, there were years of censorship (direct or indirect) that were reflected in soap operas.

### 3.3. Soap operas between channel privatization and content exportation

This phase lasted between 1989-2001. In 1989, TV channels 11 and 13 were privatized and in 2001 there was a serious economic, political, and social crisis.

The privatizing of Channels 11 and 13 in 1989 set TV programming and content on a new path. Local content production increased, replacing foreign prerecorded shows. Plus, independent production increased and began to compete with the centralized production in channels and the co-production of fiction financed with foreign capital, starting with the arrival of Televisa Group (Mexico) and the Berlusconi Group (Italy).

In 1994, *Más allá del Horizonte* (1994) with production by Omar Romay became the first soap opera to occupy the evening prime time slot on Canal 9. In 1995 Argentine television suffered the blows of the Tequila Effect<sup>1</sup> and the number of fictions produced decreased. Despite this adverse situation, the Po-Ka<sup>2</sup> production company was founded and burst into the market with *Po-liladrón* resulting in an aesthetic renovation with chiaroscuros, film texture, dynamic images and the use of special effects.

There came a period in which soap operas included humor and aspects of a comedy series that became part of its essential *leitmotiv*: love (Bourdieu, 2009). In addition, the market witnessed the consolidation of TV audiovisual production companies that would introduce soap operas into the local and/or international markets.

During this period the number of fictions produced decreased substantially. The year 1993 was the peak with 59 fictions, while in 1999 this number had reduced to 32 (Carboni, 2012).

In fact, it coincided with a drop in advertising investment, changes made to the ownership structure of Channels 9 and 11, a decrease in salaries and tension among unions. From this moment on, the country began a cycle of economic downturn and the television industry was no exception. Adrián Suar, owner of Pol-Ka, read the social humor and programmed *Gasoleros*. Until this point, stories had reflected high levels of unreality. Audiences had lost their sense of identification and needed to recognize places, times, and culture (Bourdieu, 2009).

During this stage the main changes made in production were in photography (lighting techniques), filming aesthetic (similar to film material) and editing (filming with independent cameras and advances in editing programs). Continuous filming disappeared and filming planes became more flexible, stories and characters tended to become more independent in order to maximize filming. In terms of labor laws, the age was characterized by job insecurity

and the repeal of workers' rights. The figure of the independent worker was the most common form of contract in production companies and TV channels.

Finally, the privatizing of Channels 11 and 13 in 1989 brought about changes in the Argentine TV market. Labor terms were restructured and programming on both channels was organized so that in little time they held both the production (the two channels together produced around 50% of the fictions broadcast on the AMBA aired channels) and the attention of audiences (Carboni, 2012). In addition, nationally-funded TV audiovisual production companies appeared during the late 1990s. The production companies began to show the first symptoms of outsourcing of audiovisual content outside of the TV broadcasting companies which had been the traditional production units.

The recognition and exposition of the 3 previous phases allow us to understand the characteristics of the television market, production of Argentine soap operas during the second half of the 20th century and the changes that affected the industry considering the imbrication of the technological, political, economic, company and regulatory aspects that coincided during the launch of the genre. The 21st century marks a new experience in terms of production, commercialization and audiovisuals content consumption in general, especially when it came to soap operas. In Argentina, the introduction of technological equipment, and the arrival of platforms and distribution systems and online consumption cannot be interpreted separately, but rather must be analyzed alongside the country's economic and political cycles.

### 3.4. Exportation and localization of Soap Operas

This period occurred between 2002 and 2012. In 2002, the pegging of the Argentine currency to the US dollar ended. At this point, the audiovisual sector began a period of growth due to foreign demand that took advantage of

the comparative advantages of a cheap dollar, technological equipment and the professional level of workers (Bulloni, 2009). In 2012, for the third year in a row, there was a decline in soap opera production, a drop in the advertising, and a decrease in the competitiveness due to high inflation and devaluation of the peso (Carboni, 2015).

In 2001, the effects of the crisis were felt and fictions were not able to reclaim their popularity. Recently in 2003 did the market begin to recover. However, in 2004 established program start and finish times were abolished and programmers began an aggressive competition in regards to content broadcasting (Ulanovsky & Sirvén, 2009). Regardless of genre, TV programs lacked established program days and times. Even during commercials, the phrase "at the end of" appeared. TV was being deprogrammed from within. It needed no development of the internet, broadband or viewing via streaming to abandon its organizing role of social life.

Soap operas that captured the attention of audiences were: *Los Roldán* (2004, Ideas del Sur), *Padre Coraje* (2004, Pol-Ka), *Amor en custodia* (2005, LCA Producciones and Telefe), *Sos mi vida* (2006, Pol-Ka), *Montecristo* (2006, Telefe) and in 2007 *la Lalola* (UndergroundyDori Media Group). In general, soap operas that are popular among local audiences achieve higher sales, whether they be prerecorded or formats used to create another version.

In 2008, the TV industry was affected by outside events. One was local and the other international, both attracted the attention of audiences. The first was the conflict between the country's government and the agricultural sector. The second was the economic crisis occurring in the Central American countries. The two channels with the largest audiences -Telefé and El Trece- competed during the evening prime time slot with two completely different programs. Telefé decided to air *Vida Robadas* and El Trece competed with the traditional *Showmatch* which included versions of *Bailando por un sueño* and *Patinando por un sueño*.

The effects of the (national and international) political and economic events of 2008 were felt in the TV industry in 2009. This year they recycled programs from previous years and produced little. In terms of fiction, Telefé launched *Don Juan y su bella dama* and *Los Exitosos Pells*. Likewise, El Trece launched *Valientes*. In addition, la TV Pública (Canal 7) hit it big by broadcasting *Ciega a citas*. Plus, in October 2009 The Law of Audiovisual Communication Services – No. 26522 was passed and the digital TV norm was chosen in order to operate the open television system. Although the law brought about important changes in reference to the ownership structure of media, access conditions to licenses and radio spectrum allocation for the non-profit sector, it did not have direct consequences for the production of fiction content, given that it only defined screen quotas for national-produced content, but not specifically for fiction programs. However, with the purpose of promoting the creation of content for digital TV, a number of tenders were organized and coordinated by the Instituto Nacional de Cine y Artes Audiovisuales. Therefore, the number of fictions financed by public funds increased.

Between 2002-2012, 215 fictions were produced and 2 production companies created 45% of all national fiction productions, Pol-Ka and Telefe Contenidos (Carboni, 2015). Of the total number of programs produced, only 108 were soap operas, the rest were divided between single productions, series, mini-series or sitcoms. This phase was characterized by an increase in audiovisual content exportation (pre-recorded shows, formats or certain products made by request or commissioned). Among the main Argentine exporters were: Cuatro Cabezas, Pol-Ka, Ideas del Sur, Promofilm, Cris Morena Group, Telefé Contenidos, PPT, GP Producciones, among others (Argentina.Ar, 2008).

During this period, there was an increase in the amount of technological equipment available (computers, smartphones, cameras, sound and editing consoles), communication networks (Internet) and software programs (mainly for edi-

ting purposes) that would imply a faster work rate. On the contrary, work time remained the same or increased. One of the most significant changes was the use of high-definition that created new textures, colors, sounds and image quality. Starting in 2009, the memory card replaced the video tape. Filming aesthetic improved by the use of better, lighter cameras, enabling its transport, meanwhile the storage capability and information (images, sounds) increased.

In summary, the production process transformed due to technology and in order to adapt stories to modern times. In terms of contracts, the passing of Law No. 25.877<sup>3</sup> enabled improvement of employee contract conditions. Nevertheless, contract formats like trial period contracts or freelance still exist. In fact, in order to protect employee job stability, a clause was included in the Convenio Colectivo de Trabajo 634/11<sup>4</sup> to prohibit production companies from using a temporary contract with workers.

### 3.5. Creation of fiction content for multiple devices

Starting in 2013, marks the production of fiction content to be watched on different devices, even public TV channels delved into the *Youtube*<sup>5</sup> experience, creating their own channels and ad hoc content was prepared for the web. In general, fiction programs are available on the official pages of the channels after their TV broadcast. In the case of Argentina, production and circulation of the web series is developed outside the traditional production units.

Although TV channels have corporate pages on the internet since the beginning of the century, recently during 2010 and 2011 they began to create content specifically for that platform.

Since 2013, open TV channels began a period of social network exploitation and an increase in ad hoc content creation for these platforms<sup>6</sup>.

Telefe created content exclusively for the web, among them *Vera Blum* (Telefe, 2013)<sup>7</sup> and an experimental product that mixed traditional television and internet, the children's program *Aliados* (2013 and 2014) produced by Cris Moreno Group in association with Fox Studios. In total, there were 23 episodes and 140 *webisodes* which lasted from 3 - 10 minutes.

When it comes to soap operas, the most important productions of that year *Farsantes* (2013, Pol-Ka), *Mis amigos de siempre* (2013, Pol-Ka) and *Los Vecinos en Guerra* (2013, Underground/ Endemol). *Farsantes* was present on Facebook and Twitter and the audience could comment on the programs development. In addition, character profiles were created as well as content specifically for the web. The novelty is that *Farsantes* began activity on Facebook before its television debut (Aprea & Kirchheimer, 2014). In 2014, the most successful show was *Guapas* (Pol-Ka) and the characters also had their profiles on social media. In 2015, Pol-Ka produced *Esperanza Mía* which hit number 1 in El Trece's evening prime time slot and carried out season of soaps in winter. That year, Pol-Ka created the web series *Igual te quiero*, that was based on one of the story lines from *Esperanza Mía*.

In 2016, there were changes linked to regulations of communication media, a refocusing of the official scheme and the passing of ownership of Telefe of Grupo Telefónica to Grupo Viacom. In regards to national content, there was *Educando a Nina* (Underground/Telefe), *Los ricos no piden permiso* (Pol-Ka/El Trece) and *El Marginal* (Underground/Televisión Pública) that was later shown by Netflix.

The various sectors that comprise fiction production in 2016 created the Multisectorial por la ficción, el trabajo y la Industria Audiovisual, with the intention of banding together and reverting the adverse situation in terms of national fiction production. From 2013 to 2016, 79 fictions were produced and aired, of which only 21 were soap operas. Some 60% received public funding (39 productions were a result of tenders organized by the Instituto Nacional de

Cine y Artes Audiovisuales (INCAA) destined to production companies with backgrounds and presence in the local market). Another 30% were made by the 2 top private production companies *Telefe Contenidos* and *Pol-Ka8*. An interesting fact is that in 2016, 14 fictions debuted, representing the lowest number since 2002, after the 2001 crisis.

#### 4. Conclusions

This study gives us a chance to reconstruct the history of soap operas in Argentina, categorizing its development into 5 different stages, albeit focusing on the last 2 stages which allow analysis of soap operas in the 21st century. Time and time again, the top fiction productions were aired in regards to one of the following factors: exportability, popularity in the local market or type of story theme.

In regards to the productive structure of the fictions we observe the shift from in-house productions (inside the television channels) towards TV audiovisual production companies. The first signs of audiovisual content production outsourcing in Argentina appeared in the 1990s, although its later development was more stable. For TV channels, outsourcing production meant a reduction in production costs and risks related to a return on investment, regarding products subject to high volatility in their demand.

In terms of the production of local fiction, from 2002-2016 a total of 294 pieces were produced. Of this total, 44% correspond to soap operas shown daily. Plus, the existence of an oligopoly was verified, having a scarce number of offerors that monopolized the production and airing of audiovisual content, among which are the production companies *Pol-Ka* (*El Trece*) and *Telefe Contenidos* (*Telefe*). Also, from 2011-2015, there was a public policy created to finance audiovisual productions, including fictions, throughout the country. To this end, a number of tenders were held and the winning production companies received public

funds for content creation. Therefore, in the last years, there was an increase in the number financed by the public sector.

On the other hand, the existence of co-productions between national and international companies aided the international distribution of products the sharing of costs derived from the production process. In general, the sale of audiovisual products is based on content that combines local brands with forms of entertainment that make up culture worldwide.

One of the problems stemming from the sale of fictions is the global increase in production of audiovisual content, the appearance of strong markets and new competitors. The audiences' need to see their own people in the fictions and to not resort to outside talent constitutes a new challenge for national production companies. In addition to this, there is the difficulty to sell prerecorded shows in Argentine Spanish, and for this reason the local industry has sought different options, such as: dub with neutral Spanish, co-produce content and adapt the local market to neutral Spanish. The best option is yet to be determined.

Historically Argentina has been known for creating fiction projects instead of purchasing them. Today we are facing a great many changes in the ways to make and watch TV. The challenge lies in the promotion of products for the international market. Therefore, production companies must restructure themselves in light of the converging digital scene, reorganize production based on co-existing screens (mobile phones, tablets, smart TVs), widen the distribution boundaries of these goods and allow for the entry of new competitors to the audiovisual market, such as the case of Eastern European countries that stopped being mere fiction consumers and launched their creation themselves. In 2017, there were a few efforts to stimulate and accompany the emerging forms of consumption, like the soap opera *Amar después de amar* (*Telefe*) that competed with a transmediatized narrative, with the web series *La búsqueda de Laura*. In addition, *Pol-Ka* offered the fictions *Quiero vivir a tu lado*

and *Las Estrellas*, together with *La fragilidad de los cuerpos*, a co-production between Pol-Ka and TNT. TV industry workers protested against the launch of the soap *Funny, la fan* (Under-ground/Telefe) which upon falling short of programmer expectations, was taken off the air and broadcast only on the internet.

Finally, in the last 5 years of fiction content production in Argentina, there are the commercial ties that national audiovisual production companies built with foreign companies and State's support of TV audiovisual production.

## Notes

1. The economic crisis originated from an overvalued currency, large public sector deficits, and the government's reliance on financing linked to the dollar. The "Tequila Effect" affected the entire region and other emerging markets and is what sparked their 1995 crisis in Argentina.

2. In 1994, Adrián Suar and Fernando Blanco founded Pol-Ka. In just a few years it made the majority of fictions for El Trece. Grupo Clarín acquired 55% (2008).

3. The law created the Sistema Integral de Inspección del Trabajo y de la Seguridad Social (SIDITYSS) whose mission is to control and supervise compliance with labor laws and social security.

4. Entre SATSAID-CAPIT N° 634/11. The agreements includes personnel represented by SATSAID that work in audiovisual production companies. Before this law, production company workers were not recognized in any labor contract laws.

5. This information comes from a series of interviews between the author and different key players in the area of digital content creation at Telefe, El Trece and la TV Pública.

6. Vera Blum: co-production between Telefe and Terra Networks S.A.

7. Data sourced from previous research by Carboni (2012, 2015) and studies in process.

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Argentina Association of Television Broadcasting.  
Convenio Colectivo de Trabajo SATSAID-CAPIT N° 634/11

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