

## Contextual Changes and Their Influence on the Development of Professional Skills of the Agents of the Horticultural Belt of La Plata, Argentina

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** This study aims to analyse the major political, socio-economic and technological changes that have occurred in recent decades and their influence on the analysed territory and to reflect on how the adaptive processes of development actors have emerged in the horticultural zone of La Plata, Argentina. **Design/Methodology/Approach:** A qualitative methodology is used to address the object of study. A non-random purposive sampling was taken of state officials and the private sector, and semi-structured interviews were conducted. **Findings:** It was observed how changes in context have impacted the development actors, who mobilise different personal and institutional resources to adapt to the changing situations. To assess the degree of adaptation, the trajectory of the agents from their internship experience as professionals, work in the territory with other actors, training and experience reports were considered. **Practical implications:** In the territory under study, a professional heterogeneity is observed, comprised mostly by agronomists (both in the public and private sector), who develop different working strategies in the context of the individual policies and guidelines of each institution. The changes that have occurred in the country during the past 25 years have impacted policy related to rural development, creating situations that have led to various professional development actors to resignify their careers. **Originality:** The careers and competences of development agents acting in rural areas are an emerging theme under extensive discussion in Argentina.

**Keywords:** Policies, Competences, Agents, Development, Public, Private, Horticulture, La Plata

### Introduction

Changes in the political, social, economic and technological scenarios on the national and international levels promote a dynamic that requires rural development actors to incorporate new skills and to strengthen and create new professional competencies, starting from the recognition of the different needs and possibilities that are presented in the different situations they face. Therefore, it is important to study and analyse the skills and trades of development agents for their contributions to territorial development in a scenario that is becoming increasingly complex, uncertain and unstable. It is also important to recognise that these changes include the historical similarities and differences between the interests of the public and the private sector, including problems of articulation and fragmentation. Therefore, in Argentina, a set of institutions gathered in Agriterris<sup>1</sup> for different levels of reflection to contribute to their study and complement it with current research. In the region of the horticultural belt of the municipality of La Plata, Province of Buenos Aires, Argentina, since the early 1990s and the advent of the greenhouse, a set of situations occurred that enabled the strengthening of the private sector in a particular context of neoliberal policies implemented at the time, including the withdrawal of the State in activities related to rural development. After the crisis of 2001, the State regained its leading role in the definition and implementation of public policy; rural extension work in the region was consolidated with multiple experiences related to family farming.

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<sup>1</sup> Agriterris: Land and Agricultural Activities Laboratory and Located Systems. Constituted in France by the following institutions: INRA, University of Toulouse L' Miral from France and the ECOLE NATIONALE SUPERIEURE D'AGRONOMIE DE MONTPELLIER - (SupAGRO). From Argentina: INTA and the National Universities of La Plata, Del Sur and Mar del Plata.

This study complements the various tracks of research conducted by the Department of Rural Development, School of Agricultural and Forestry Sciences, National University of La Plata, and aims to provide knowledge of the professional skills of the development agents at different times in our recent history and its contribution to the regional development in the La Plata horticultural sector. This line of study is part of the guidelines defined in the INTERRA<sup>2</sup> project.

### ***Theoretical Framework***

To analyse the aspects of changing reality in Argentina in recent decades, with influences on different economic, political and social issues, the 'Theory of transitions' (theories on political change) will be used as a reference. This approach will offer a conceptual framework for the changing context, the transformations produced and the impact of such situations on the behaviour of development agents, in pursuit of its inclusion in new scenarios. Gil Pérez (2011) considers it necessary to differentiate the concept of 'political change' from 'political transition'. With regard to the first, and following different authors, *'it is understood to be the passage from one political system to another, i.e., replacement by other elements of the political community: ideologies and beliefs of the community, parties, unions, corporations and decision-making elites and of the political regime: institutions and political authorities, standards on which these institutions rest and the ideology and values of the regime'*.

The second concept is described as follows: *'it is the process by which a political regime is replaced by another'*. Thus, in his approach, it is accepted that political transitions appear in a lower step toward political change, as it will not be producing a deep structural transformation of the political system. The modifications that occurred in Latin America, in Argentina and in the sectorial, although vast and very intense, did not achieve the status of political change; they were, however, a set of variations that strongly affected the politics, economy and society as a whole. In this study, various situations of the last two decades will be analysed, with their incidence in regard to the changes in the relationship between the State and the market, economic policy, education, the development of science and technology, the importance of technology, the changes in production systems and the effect on the skills of development agents who have acted and continue to act in the territory under study. The concept of professional competence is complex and belongs to the dimension of expertise. The demonstration itself is more important than accreditation or intention, but from the perspective of comprehensive training, all three aspects must be considered. The professional competencies trigger action (Erosa 2008). In this study, the concept of competence is analysed based on the requirements during various historical periods to achieve adaptation to changes in the productive context. The term 'competence' is used as being synonymous with ability, capability, competitiveness, skill, talent, fitness and skill (Quiroz 2007). Thus, the emphasis will be on identifying and understanding the mechanisms of adaptation, the resources mobilised to achieve it and the skills and abilities necessary to achieve continuity in the agents' actions in the territory under study.

Nonetheless, we agree with Quiroz (2007) that, from the labour standpoint, competence is seen as the productive capacity of an individual, defined and measured in terms of performance (quality standards) in a given context of work. This last point is important because the knowledge, abilities, skills and attitudes, while necessary, are not sufficient by themselves. Context is central for an effective performance, defined as the specific actions to achieve concrete results in a given framework of policy, procedures and organisational conditions. Moreover, in terms of the development of the actors to variations in the context, Olivier de Sardán (cited by Chavarri 2007) considers that there is no unique or central logic; rather, the different actors also have internal contradictions, and their logic varies depending on the situations and contexts instead of responding directly to the structure. This search for the forms of rationality of the actors is part of the confrontational approach of social logics. In that sense, we agree with Albaladejo (2008) that *'...the concept of competence is intermediate between knowledge and action and is more about the skills effectively performed in particular contexts of action than the skills possessed and recognised'*. Some studies focus on *'competence in action'*, that is, the agent's performance during an activity; others study competence through life and career performance, emphasising *'competence as experience'*. This study corresponds to the second approach, associated in turn with a framework of the sociology of professions and action.

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2 The project is called Territorial insertion of agricultural activity and local control of resources. Place of family farms in the offices of development in Argentina and Brazil. It is developed jointly by institutions in France, Argentina and Brazil.

This study hypothesised that the continuity in the professional activities of the rural development agents who work in the horticultural belt of La Plata is derived from the differential adaptive capacity of the agents in the public and private sector in the face of changes in their context. Continuity in professional activities is seen as the sustained development of the activities conducted by the agents over time.

The following objectives are pursued:

- To analyse the major political, socio-economic and technological changes that have occurred in recent decades and their influence on the analysed territory.
- To reflect on the adaptive processes of different development agents in the La Plata horticultural area facing the changes cited.
- To define similarities and differences among the cases analysed, finally developing a scale of adaptation to the variations observed in the territory.

### ***Methodology***

To conduct this research, a qualitative methodology was used, which allowed a better approach to the reality studied. In the first stage, reports and documents of the various institutions and organisations involved in the area addressed were consulted, in addition to literature on the subject. Then, to design the interviews to be conducted with the professionals, the following variables were considered:

1. Sector and institution to which they belong: to define the public and private sectors and, within each sector, the task the individual performs.
2. Educational and professional trajectory, including training to build skills and professional competencies: to analyse the career path, with the most significant events for each actor interviewed.
3. Activities performed currently: to differentiate the activities that each agent develops in each sector bounded in variable 1, such as agents in direct contact with producers for different purposes, in activities for project regional coordination, sale of supplies, product development and marketing strategies.
4. Characterisation of the institutional guidelines at different times and how they were made compatible with daily actions in the territory: to investigate, in the words of the interviewees, a characterisation of institutional policies from the late 1980s to the present and how those policies influenced the tasks or experiences of the agents.

In the next stage, a non-random purposive sampling (Ander Egg 1974) was conducted among professionals in the public and private sector working in the La Plata horticultural belt. The sample consisted of a total of 15 cases (7 in the public sector and the rest in the private sector), selected based on the experience and knowledge of the team members. Subsequently, semi-structured interviews with actors from the public and private sector working in the La Plata green belt were performed. The results show a descriptive analysis of the socio-political context of Argentina, the moments of change (located on a timeline) and the approaches related to the training of professionals. To analyse the adaptation of agents, a table was constructed based on the data gathered in the field, showing a scale of adaptation and the current activity of the agents, which enabled visualisation of the differences between and within the targeted sectors.

### ***Results***

#### **Changes in the Socio-Economic and Political Context that Impact Development Activities**

In 1989, Argentina underwent an economic, political and social crisis that led to the assumption of a new democratically elected government, which decided to apply new policy measures recommended by international lending institutions, such as public sector reform based on fiscal discipline, the reduction of public spending, the privatisation of public enterprises, economic deregulation, market liberalisation and encouragement of foreign investment (Devlin, Ffrench-Davis, and Griffith-Jones 1995). In 1991, Argentina launched the Convertibility Plan, whose central purpose was to establish the parity of the domestic currency to the dollar (\$ 1 = US\$ 1). The farmer's adaptation to these conditions required large amounts of capital investment, conditions that could only be accessed by farms that were producing large surpluses and were not in debt (Lattuada 1998). The implemented model presented serious difficulties for Argentina's economy in 1995 (due to the effects of the Mexican crisis known as the 'Tequila Crisis') and then, by the successive crises of 1997-1998 in Asia and of 1998-1999 in Brazil that hit Argentina, where a recession period started that deepened until the exit from the severe crisis of 2001-2002.

Beginning in 2002, under a new economic model, the actions of organisations and public institutions were reoriented, responding to new policy guidelines. The State regained the initiative and implemented a set of policies at the national level, in coordination with other national, provincial and municipal governments, which were reflected in changes in the developing intervention strategies. In the La Plata green belt, the greenhouse appeared in the late 1980s, in a context that facilitated the import of a set of technologies from abroad. In this context, producers could take the form of production under cover and began to demand agronomists for the management of the new and highly complex production systems. At this time, a group of young professionals who had graduated from the National University of La Plata (UNLP, for its initials in Spanish) were inserted into the workplace as private consultants. The professional activities developed in the La Plata region positioned them in a reference place. In the 1990s, the hypermarkets appeared. The quality requirements of products and the appearance of the greenhouse changed the traditional forms of production.

These changes also positioned the agronomists, who provided the necessary knowledge that enabled the management of production systems in a landscape of profound transformations. This new position responded mainly to the need for expertise in agronomic issues that were no longer in the domain of producers, as the increased activity demanded deeper knowledge than the techniques of traditional production. During the 1990s in Argentina, the structural adjustment policies that were implemented limited State involvement in various areas, including the work conducted in rural extension. In the La Plata region, the Ministry of Land Affairs of the Province of Buenos Aires stopped performing outreach activities that had been implemented for some time, and the outreach activities from the National University of La Plata were also limited. In this decade, many small and medium farmers left the business. In the same decade, the National Institute of Agricultural Technology of Argentina (INTA, for its initials in Spanish) was partially reducing its rural extension activities. This institution suffered severe and sustained budget cuts, as well as freezing of vacancies, all of which generated effects of various types on the organisation in general and on extension and transfer in particular (Thornton 2006). During the 1990s, in response to the negative effects of the implementation of policies, the State created different agricultural sectorial programs, including the Federal Programme of Productive Restructuring for Small and Medium Producers ('Rural Change'<sup>3</sup>), which at the time was part of the new strategy of intervention of the National Government in the agricultural sector. In the beginning, the agents who were responsible for executing it received intensive training on issues such as farm management, management and construction of records to achieve the transformation of small producers into new entrepreneurs. This proceeding was held in a context that advocated improvement in the levels of competitiveness of enterprises to allow them to grow and generate profits for the rest of society.

During the 1990s, the private sector companies consolidated their actions, including in the La Plata region, through supply sales houses (agronomies), transferring technologies of various types with professional technical support. The economic crisis of 2001 and subsequent devaluation of the national currency impacted the production costs faced by producers heavily, given the foreign origin of most of the technology used. This situation created the need to implement techniques that deepen the rationalisation of resources to maintain competitiveness. Likewise, many respondents noted that there was a complete change of scenery, where producers with low quality parameters in their management processes were seriously affected, while producers who were more organised in financial and administrative matters could pursue different possibilities to weather the time of crisis. In contrast to other productive sectors of Argentina, it is necessary to clarify that the regional horticulture activity intends its products to supply the domestic market. Therefore, and considering the recession that was facing the country, the cost increases could not be passed fully to the final price of vegetables. Another feature that could be seen in relation to the private sector was the development and commercialisation of more environmentally friendly technologies. The commercial firms began to target differentiation as a strategic tool to deepen their market position. In 2003, the State regained its role in the definition and implementation of policies, including policies related to Rural Development. In this new context, the INTA was reorganised, recovering its role in rural extension to enhance the development process.

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3 The program has belonged to the structure of INTA since its inception in 1993. From then until now, it has provided technical assistance through a professional (whose fees are funded in the first year by the state) who works with a group of producers.

In 2005, the National Program of Territories Development (PNDT, for its initials in Spanish) arose in this institution with the aim of promoting economic and social development, looking beyond technology for products and processes to new forms of organisation, information, communication, finance and marketing. Additionally, the 'National Programme for Research and Technological Development for the Small Family Farming' (PNPAF, for its initials in Spanish) was implemented at INTA in 2006, responding to political and strategic definitions framed in State policies that began to move towards Family Farming as the central line for the achievement of sustainable development. The Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries of the Nation formulated and introduced a set of policies related to family agriculture.

Figure 1 presents a timeline of the most notable facts and events mentioned above.

Figure 1 Timeline Showing the Main Changes Happened During the Period Analysed



Figure 1: Elaboration Based on Data from Several Previous Investigations of the Study Team

From 2003 onwards, the informal networks among technicians in the territory from different activities led to the establishment of a professional association. Thus, in 2006, the Association of Agronomists of La Plata Horticultural Belt (AIACHOLP, for its initials in Spanish) was created. Today, in the La Plata territory, increasing area devoted to greenhouses can be observed, being started by producers specialising in leaf cultivation (mostly of Bolivian nationalities) using a particular type of greenhouse (giant chapel) that is the most important in La Plata

**Evolution and Adaptation of Activities and Development Agents**

In the early 1990s, in a context in which international lending agencies had great influence on policy-making in Argentina, an educational reform was introduced that, among other things, involved the shortening of degree programs, so that professionals would enter the labour market earlier with a degree of Specialisation or Master, embarking on post-graduate degree programs that are charged tuition fees, unlike undergraduate education, which is free. In the case of the Agricultural Sciences programs, cuts occurred in the contents, including the socio-economic issues. This situation negatively impacted professional training and skills, especially ones related to social approaches to rural development, according to some of the cases analysed, and specifically those individuals who work in the State field, understanding that their responsibilities to rural development from a social perspective are greater (Hang, 2014). With regard to the cases studied and in relation to the training and careers conducted, although this development occurred at different historical moments, it is possible to identify the common denominator of a strong encyclopedic training that transmitted content in a cumulative way, with a strong focus on productivity and the market.

On the ground, the presence of specific aspects in training were verified, along with improvements made by the respondent agents from a mobilisation of resources that enabled them to adapt to the various situations that had arisen facing contextual changes. Professionals of the private sector, mobilised by the great intensification that this activity involved, directed their post-graduate training toward technical issues, obtaining training in advanced intensive systems of vegetable production countries as Europe and Israel. This group of professionals has concentrated their efforts mainly on producers with a higher level of capitalisation.

With respect to the public sector agents, it is interesting to note that although their training was also linked to technical issues abroad, several cases presented had training related to Rural Development, such as Graduate Studies in Quality of Management Process and in Rural Development and Masters in Agroalimentary Economics (UNLP) and in Local Innovation Processes and Rural Development (PLIDER, for its initials in Spanish). This orientation is mainly observed in younger professionals. The analysis of the context in which the development agents work allowed the visualisation of a changing landscape in terms of the necessary skills that they must develop and acquire to achieve professional continuity. The first milestone was the profound intensification of La Plata horticulture, marked by the installation of the greenhouse accompanied by a set of technologies, localised irrigation systems, new genetic varieties and hybrids and an increase in system complexity that marked a change in the traditional way of producing vegetables in the area. A second event was the change in public policy approaches for the La Plata horticultural sector since 2003. With the arrival of the greenhouse, there was a growing need from producers to receive advice and consulting on highly specialised technical and economic issues.

Faced with this demand, it was necessary that agents develop technical skills, learning the operation of a new set of technologies coming from the outside with a complexity that merited deep technical knowledge related to plant production. Although a difference between the skills required for agents of the public and private sector throughout the periods was visualised, during the period of increased activity, a match between the two sectors occurred, as the element most necessary to achieve continuity was the technical training. The structural adjustment in the 1990s untied the State from key responsibilities for rural development, suspending a large number of actions that had previously been developed, including outreach activities and work in conjunction with producers. Thus, professionals from State institutions, including INTA, should also strengthen skills in technical issues to associate their work in many cases with the private actions through joint research experiences (joint ventures) among other modalities. It is important to take from this period the homogeneity of professional training necessary to function on the new production systems, both in the state and private spheres. It was understood that there was only one type of producer, with enterprise features, which had to be supported in technological and economic issues and transformed into a businessman, able to incorporate new technologies and to strengthen business strategy.

The crisis of 2001 was reflected in the La Plata horticultural territory by a sharp deterioration in the input-output ratio, as many inputs with dollar prices increased markedly compared to the delayed price of the products for the domestic market, therefore generating a reconfiguration of the production strategies to maintain the viability of the business. However, the small family producers were the most affected by having fewer resources to address the critical situation (Hang et al, 2013). Professionals in the private sector had to adapt to this complex economic and social scenario by generating strategies to ensure continuing selling supplies. They needed skills on trade issues closely linked to marketing. They not only had to master an unknown technological innovation but also had to learn to sell it. Today, from the private sector, topics related to marketing and differentiation have intensified due to the demands of food consumers, who are exerting pressure from their position to buy those foods considered healthier and more environmentally friendly. It stands to reason that this market requirement occurs in a portion of society with a more sophisticated pattern of consumption, having grown from an initial level of satisfaction of a basic need to satisfaction of an ethical and moral necessity. The marketing of more environmentally friendly technologies was observed, seeking thereby to respond to traceability systems of food produced and compliance with Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) and Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP). Additionally, supermarkets and hypermarkets present a high-pressure strain on the patterns of production and supply systems, so that many private practitioners must resolve the tensions that are generated when confronted with the production and trade links of the chain.

In short, private practitioners today still need strong skills in business and marketing but should also be able to understand the implicit demands, trying to provide a service or supply capable of satisfying the customer and, of course, the company they represent. On the side of the public sector, since 2003, the State has begun a process of transformation, recovering its centrality in the definition of public policies with a new approach to Rural Development and an emphasis on family farming. This situation required development agents with skills for interdisciplinary work in coordination with other professionals from different areas, with the capabilities to work within communities that had not been the subject of public policies towards the sector.

It is interesting to note, in this period, first the differentiation from the skills demanded by the private sector and second how the technical issues fall into the background without losing relevance, positioning the agent as a professional who necessarily must have a comprehensive and systemic (biological, productive, socio-economic) perspective. Moreover, the professional must have the skills to interact with different types of actors, being able to prioritise the problems that are presented in the professional field. The latter meant that repeatedly, as in the case of the public sector, ordering the intervention priorities required first resolving the organisational, social and legal issues before working on the technical issues. This necessity generated important discussions within the institutions of the State on the role of agricultural professionals as responsible for the resolution of extra-agricultural issues. In short, beginning in 2003, public institutions began to incorporate development agents with skills in interdisciplinary work, coordinating with other professionals with knowledge of the problems of small family farming of the La Plata Green Belt, who were willing to face complex problems in the formation of cooperatives of work and marketing, and organising documents for productive loan applications involved in family matters, including land ownership, who provided more complex actions by state agents.

In relation to public sector agents, two clear profiles are present: the technicians representing the INTA and the professionals entering the field from the UNLP, with a strong presence manifested by the development of direct activities with producers, providing elements for the strengthening and management of the organisational strategy. The other profile is represented by agents responsible for the Planning, Formulation and Implementation of Public Policy Development Programs, also participating in the management to solve joint problems that directly affect the activity of the La Plata horticultural sector. In the private sector, the professional profile is more homogeneous, with increasing responsibility in commercial issues and, to a lesser extent, in the development and creation of new technologies. The dynamics of the professionals in this space are closely linked to the fulfillment of corporate business strategy. Thus, linkages with producers are generated from the update on technological developments to after-sales services. Similarly, in the private sector, professionals who do not fall within any institution are observed, basically providing individualised counselling to producers. In most cases, the agents in the latter group accompany the producer throughout the entire production cycle, receiving their fees but without being bound to any particular trading firm.

In the construction of trades and skills, formation and non-academic actualisation and capitalising on different experiences are also included. In the case of the public sector, the agents have developed their practice jointly with various institutions when possible and with technicians present in the field in an interdisciplinary way. In relation to the private sector, more individualistic practices related to competition and differentiation were observed, understanding that the private sector is competitive by nature and that the agents acting on behalf of their institutions seek to distinguish them from their competitors, a situation that allows them to position themselves. In turn, the demand from producers is tied to technical issues and is generally one dimensional, unlike the more complex and diverse demands that are commonly encountered by professionals linked to the state. The public sector professionals commonly work with family farmers, with lower endowments and complex problems, including organisational, family and work issues, reflecting the need for a professional with generalist type training prepared to address highly variable situations and to work jointly with other actors in the territory. The information gathered from the interviews, in addition to observations made in the field under study, enabled the construction of a scale of adjustment. The three levels were structured around training, internships, and work in the territory with other actors and stories of experiences that show adaptation to changes. The following table shows the results, where level 1 corresponds to the lowest level of adaptation, and level 3 is the maximum.

**Table 1: Scale of Development Agents adaptation**

Case	Sector	Adaptation scale	Current activity
1	PUBLIC	3	WP and CP
2	PUBLIC	3	WP and CP
3	PUBLIC	3	WP and CP
4	PUBLIC	2	P and CP
5	PUBLIC	2	P and CP
6	PUBLIC	2	P and CP
7	PUBLIC	3	WP
8	PRIVATE	3	S and O
9	PRIVATE	3	S and O
10	PRIVATE	3	PA
11	PRIVATE	3	S and O
12	PRIVATE	3	O
13	PRIVATE	3	PA
14	PRIVATE	3	S and O
15	PRIVATE	3	S and O

**Adaptation scale:**

- 1 Field experiences: internships, work with producers and other actors.
- 2 Internships, jobs in the territory with other actors, training.
- 3 Internships, jobs in the territory with other actors, training, case stories that show adaptation to changes.

**Current activity:**

**WP** (work with producers)

**P and CP** (planning and coordination of projects)

**PA** (particular advisor)

**O** (other) **S** (Sales)

A first observation is the great adaptability of the majority of the cases studied, highlighting a greater degree of adaptation for the private sector representatives based on a stricter policy routing, which marks the limits of continuity in the work. However, within the public sector, the degree of adaptation has a different character. Although the majority of cases show a high degree of adaptation, minor adaptation levels were observed in other aspects, particularly in the case of agents who have undergone long periods of activity and who belong to public institutions such as INTA. One explanation for this difficulty lies in the profound changes to the INTA institutional guidelines in 2003. The implementation of new approaches promoted new institutional mandates for agents, implying changes that are seen in some of the cases addressed and creating tension between the institution and its previous path. In the case of the public sector, the compliance by agents with the guidance given to institutional policies presents greater flexibility. In both sectors, the experience accumulated can usually be salvaged as a resource when facing new changes. After the changes already mentioned, in most cases, the situation experienced could be observed to create a different perception of the political and social issues, allowing a greater understanding of the new situations that arise. For the private sector agents acting independently in the territory, although they are not part of a linear addressing of the policies of the organisation, its action is closely related to the dynamics of public institutions, companies and agents acting in the territory.

**Discussion and Conclusions**

The adaptation processes of agents vary across sectors. In the public sector, younger professionals have been able to adapt better to the new institutional demands beginning in 2003. The agents of the public sector with over 25 years of field trajectory offer greater resistance to adapting to changes in approach. In the same way, differences were observed between the public and private sectors. With respect to coping mechanisms, it is interesting to examine the compatibility of institutional policies framed in different types of regulations that reach the development agents, which requires accommodation based on the particular land and on the specific implementation possibilities, thus coinciding with the points made by J. Olivier de Sardán. It can be said that networks among agents made it possible to conduct actions to obtain economic resources, a situation that has increased the performance of different projects, mainly related to the public sector. There are also productivity-technology-oriented networks, such as the Association of Agronomists of La Plata Horticultural Belt, in which training spaces, actualisation and encounters between agents with different purposes are promoted.



From the year 2003, greater state intervention is seen, reflecting greater territory coverage and increasing the number of farmers who begin to be within the public policy (Seibane et al, 2014). However, the private sector, linked to the production and input-supply companies, points to the transfer of technologies that promote differentiation in relation to different demands of the market and of food consumers. The findings suggest the influence of context as a very important element that acted as a trigger for new situations of adaptation, evolving under successive transitions that, although important, would not reach the status of a structural change, in this case coinciding with Gil Pérez (2011).

It is interesting to note how the personal characteristics of individual agents become highly relevant after analysing issues related to training and experience. The results also show that undergraduate education gained through a college career is a more conceptual training that requires adjustment for different territories through the generation of actions, experiences and links that allow appropriate and coherent action within the reality of each location and the professional demands of the recipients. It was possible to identify different dimensions of the concept of professional competence, viewed, on the one hand, from the perspective of adaptation to a situation of change and, on the other hand, competence for action. With respect to the latter, these aspects are related to the ability to recognise the new situation and be inserted; making appropriate use of resources and sharing interdisciplinary work with other actors. The changes in context are generating modifications in public policy formulation, producing changes in the institutions and their mandates.

These changes are received by the agents of development: although retained by their institutions to reconcile new guidelines with the actions in the territories, in some cases, it is observed that due to their personal characteristics, the agents can incorporate some guidelines fully and others partially. Changes in public policy, with an impact on institutional guidelines, have involved the upgrading of a new alternative model of inclusive development compared to the traditional development model. This study is a starting point for the generation of future studies that will deepen into issues beyond the scope of this work.

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