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LOCAL MEDIA AND POLITICAL PRACTICES: NOTES FOR ADDRESSING MEDIATIZATION

Mg. Carlos Rusconi
Departamento de Comunicación, Universidad Nacional de Río Cuarto, Río Cuarto, Argentina
carlos.rusconi@gmail.com
ORCID iD: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3289-2635

Lic. Eugenia Roldán
IDH-Conicet-Universidad Nacional de Córdoba, Córdoba, Argentina.
eugeniaroldan@hotmail.com
ORCID iD: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7226-4705

Abstract

The major issue underpinning this research paper is how to address the fundamental question concerning media, that is, to what extent and how media permeate contemporary society and culture. In this context, we aim to put forward a methodological proposal on how to account for *mediatization*. This concept emphasizes the *networks* connecting media actors with actors in the most diverse social spheres. These networks are important given that they comprise the arena in which meaning is constructed. Although in recent years this concept has been very helpful in order to understand theoretically the key role played by media in the process of social and cultural change, there are not many methodological proposals based on it, and some of the existent ones are defined from deterministic macro-approaches, indifferent to the developments of the constructivist paradigm. On the basis of a methodological qualitative design that seeks to reconstruct and analyze the interactions

linking media actors (mainly journalists) with politicians and neighborhood associations, we examine the resulting networks and their different levels of communication. Therefore, the paper addresses four main topics: first, a theoretical overview of the category of mediatization. Second, the presentation of an interactional approach grounded in some important categories of the constructivist paradigm. Third, a proposal based on qualitative research covering the mediatization of political practices in a middle-sized city in Argentina. Finally, an epistemological question regarding the major level of media interaction, i.e., the mediatization of the public sphere.

MEDIOS LOCALES Y PRÁCTICAS POLÍTICAS: NOTAS PARA ABORDAR LA MEDIATIZACIÓN

Resumen

En este trabajo, nuestro objetivo principal es abordar una cuestión fundamental en el estudio de los medios: en qué medida y cómo los medios penetran la sociedad y la cultura contemporáneas. En este contexto, realizamos una propuesta metodológica sobre cómo dar cuenta de la mediatización. Este concepto enfatiza las redes que conectan a los actores de los medios con los actores de diversos ámbitos sociales. Estas redes son importantes dado que constituyen uno de los escenarios centrales en los que se construye el significado. Si bien "mediatización" ha sido un concepto muy utilizado en los últimos años para comprender teóricamente el papel clave que juegan los medios de comunicación en el proceso de cambio social y cultural, no existen muchas propuestas metodológicas basadas en él, y algunas de las existentes se definen a partir de macro enfoques deterministas, ajenos a los principios del paradigma constructivista. A partir de un diseño metodológico cualitativo que busca la reconstrucción y análisis de las interacciones que vinculan a los actores de los medios (sobre todo periodistas) con los de la política y las asociaciones vecinales, estudiamos las redes de relaciones resultantes y sus niveles de comunicación. El artículo presenta: primero, una presentación teórica de la categoría de mediatización. Segundo, la construcción de un enfoque interaccional dentro del paradigma constructivista. Tercero, desarrollamos la propuesta metodológica basándonos en una investigación cualitativa que abarca la mediatización de las prácticas políticas en una ciudad mediana en Argentina. Finalmente, dejamos planteado un interrogante epistemológico referido al nivel más general de funcionamiento de la interacción mediática, es decir, la mediatización de la esfera pública.

Palabras clave: mediatización, análisis cualitativo, medios de comunicación, redes, prácticas, política.

Introduction

The major issue underpinning this research paper is how to address the fundamental question related to media, that is, to what extent and how media permeate contemporary society and culture. The literature on this topic is vast and almost unfathomable. Nevertheless, we think that there is a fruitful theoretical approach in the field of communication studies, which in recent years has proved to be helpful in order to understand the key role played by media in the processes of social and cultural change, namely, in the transformation of everyday practices, different social spheres and institutions. We refer to the concept of *mediatization* developed mostly by scholars such as Andreas Hepp (2014), Stieg Hjarvard (2013), Knut Lundby (2014) and Eliseo Verón (2013), among others. Despite its growing significance in the field, methodological proposals based on this concept are the exception and many of the existent ones are defined from the standpoint of deterministic theoretical macro-approaches, indifferent to the influential developments of the constructivist paradigm within qualitative research field. Thus, firstly, we concentrate in outlining *mediatization* as a mid-level concept defined from an interactional-constructivist perspective. This perspective emphasizes the *networks* that connect media actors with actors in the most diverse social spheres. As argued in the second point of the article, an interactional approach is necessary given that these networks are important as they constitute a central arena in which meaning is constructed.

In a third stage, we propose a methodology for addressing mediatization, derived from an empirical research carried out in the city of Río Cuarto (Argentina) which examined the link between media and political practices (See Section 3). [1] For this approach, we deployed a pair of methodological tools rooted in qualitative research. On the one hand, and in order to reconstruct the interactional networks, we made use of the tracking strategies postulated by George Marcus (1995) in the context of multi-sited ethnography. On the other hand, in order to carry out that reconstruction, it was necessary to gain access to the subjects' discourse. Therefore, we used some strategies deriving from the biographical research methods

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1 The aim of our paper is not to present the specificities of the empirical research but to put forward a methodological proposal grounded on an interactional approach to mediatization. In this framework, we use the research only as a backdrop from which to illustrate some of the issues arising from the theoretical reflections elaborated here.

(Berteaux, 2005; Ferrarotti, 2007), in the light of which we put forward the concept of communicative trajectories.

Tracking strategies were originally coined as a technique for constructing the object of study, based on the track of actors, objects, practices, etc. In our own case, we found them promising in order to reconstruct the social relations that we wanted to examine, i.e., actors that coordinate their actions in order to reaching particular intervention fields. We postulated three strategies that we found instrumental for the study of mediatization. We call these strategies: *reaching the media*, *reaching the sources,* and *reaching the public*.

The other methodological tool we deployed has its origin in biographical methods. In this case, our fieldwork was carried out primarily with in-depth interviews aiming at obtaining life stories, i.e., a thoroughly personal description of communicative experiences that allowed us to reconstruct what we call *communicative trajectories*. These trajectories gave us an account on how social actors, coming from different positions and contexts have experienced communication, creating, and destroying interaction networks, throughout their entire life. Furthermore, this kind of tool allowed us to account for the *temporal dimension,* crucial if we intend to explain the *process* of mediatization and social *change* in general.

In the following sections, we begin our presentation by developing our own operative conceptual framework based on the discussion of the concept of mediatization from a constructivist standpoint. Secondly, we describe the interactional approach supporting the methodological decisions we have made. In the following section, we unfold the two main methodological tools postulated by us: tracking strategies and communicative trajectories. Finally, we pose an epistemological question regarding the relationship between the different levels of abstraction, i.e., between interactional networks and the major process of mediatization of the public sphere.

1. Defining Mediatization

The concept of mediatization has been a controversial subject matter for the past few years. Indeed, this term is used with different meanings and in several contexts (for a useful map to trace these ambiguities, see Stig Hjarvard, 2008a). Within the specific bibliography, there is no utter agreement on the use of this term to conceptualize the social phenomena generated by media over the last decades. The terminological variations expand into a whole

family of concepts: mediation, medialization, media turn, mediatization, remediation, etc. (Livingstone, 2009; Lundby, 2009; Schulz 2004; Strömbäck 2008). The discussion of this term is recent, particularly in Spanish literature and in the Latin American academic context.

In general terms, and following Stig Hjarvard, we make a basic distinction. While *mediation* refers to "a concrete act of communication by means of a medium in a specific social context" (Hjarvard, 2008a, p. 114), mediatization can be understood as a long-lasting process through which the consequences resulting from the growth of media manifest themselves in social and cultural modes of interaction rather than in specific contexts or just as a medium.

In order to better describe our own position regarding the theoretical matter of mediatization, in this section we present two different sets of schematic oppositions. The first one refers to a conceptual struggle that defines mediatization either as a *logic* of increasing media intervention in other social institutions **(a)** or as an interrelated transformation *process* that involves mainly, but not only media. **(b)** The second one opposes two different perspectives regarding the level of abstraction of the concept: whether mediatization should be considered as a *macro-process* **(c)** or as a *mid-level process* empirically reconstructed through everyday interaction. **(d)** The distinction between these four aspects has only an analytical purpose, as the interrelations among them are to be considered. In other words, we can state that, in most cases, the deterministic conceptions are developed at a more macro level (a/c) and the interactional ones at a mid-level (b/d).

(a) Mediatization as a logic

A significant number of studies among different fields –referring mostly to the mediatization of politics and religion- share a sort of linear vision on the effects, influence, or determination exerted by media on other spheres, spheres that would only *suffer* and change due to this influence. Several scholars studying mediatization as "a social process of media-induced social change that functions by a specific mechanism" (Schrott, 2009, p. 47) have adopted the idea of a *media logic*. The social spheres, which were previously considered to be separate from mass media, are induced to change and in consequence become more and more dependent on media (Hjarvard, 2008b, p.13). Kepplinger's (2002) work gives us a clear example of this process. His study conjectures that politicians have adjusted their activities to the expectations of the mass media in order to reaching their constituency. The activities are aimed at getting publicity, that is to say, they need the media, and this need, in turn, affects the whole political process itself. Both are long-term processes that can be

explained in terms of the growing number of politicians related-media activities and the increasing urge of political press coverage. Another interesting example of media-induced social change is given by Hjarvard`s (2008b) own study on religion in Denmark, where he intends to show how deeply the logic of the media subsumes religion. To sum up, we deal with the idea of the institutionalization of media logic in social spheres that were considered to be separate from mass media.

(b) Mediatization as a process

Contrasting with this linear and deterministic position, there is, we argue, a more accurate perspective, one focusing on interactional processes. Mediatization involves different areas -among them, mass media- that function as opposite poles of multiple determinations, i.e., each of them shaping the others and intervenes in a particular way in the overall relationship (Ferreira, 2007). As Marian Adolf (2011) puts it, by mediatization we mean "the interrelation and interdependence of *social change* and *media change*" (p. 156). In addition, Roger Silverstone (2004) considers mediatization to be the description of a dialectical process in which mass media are part of the general circulation of symbols in social life. They comprise a relationship between individuals, institutions, and the environment that these links create, and which involves producers, consumers, and media texts.

Among the authors that have insisted most fervently on this perspective, it is worth mentioning Knut Lundby (2009, 2014), who asserts that the focus of mediatization studies must center, first, on concrete interactions; then, on the patterns that such interactions shape; and finally, on the role that media play in those interactions. Andreas Hepp (2014) has made another important contribution. He insists on the non-linearity of the process and advocates analysis of the interrelation between changes in communication and mass media, on one hand, and changes in culture and society, on the other. In this regard, Eliseo Verón (1997) confirms that mediatization allows us to consider, at the same time, aspects of the social change of industrial societies that, until now, have been regarded only separately[2]. Thus, he finds, for example, that mass media led to "profound transformations in the management modes in democratic countries" but, in turn, "those transformations in the

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2 We refer to Veron`s sociosemiotic approach on mediatization, which he maintains until approximately 2005. This approach differs from the semio-anthropological one proposed in his last works.

functioning of the political system" affect the media, "for example, by modifying the format of TV news" (p. 16)[3]. Therefore, within this approach, we insist on paying special attention to the interactional, interrelated, and interdependent processes that dialectically relate the media to social life[4]. Our aim in the next section is to develop this notion a little further.

(c) Mediatization as a macro-process

There is another clear opposition within mediatization studies, one referring to their levels of analysis. One way of focusing mediatization is to consider it as a historical transformation of the social system, i.e., a historical *macro-process* with the power to change social institutions. Krotz (2007) states that mediatization has been under way for centuries and is not limited to a single cultural area. The process of mediatization has neither a beginning nor an end, yet it certainly has a clear-cut direction; therefore, it is hard to know which elements belong to the mediatization process and which elements do not. He affirms that globalization, individualization, mediatization and commercialization can be seen as *meta-processes*[5] that impact on democracy, society, culture, politics, and other life conditions in the long term. These *meta-processes* are crucial to future ways of life and important to people, their actions, and the social construction of meaning. These macro-processes are even regarded as ascending and accumulating phases, as delineated by Jesper Strömbäck (2008), which start by taking media into consideration in order to reaching the public, and end in a fourth stage where politics is only driven virtually by media logic. Thompson (1998) also considers mediatization in the broader context of a theory of modernity, by positing culture in its entirety as a social life sphere that has been and continues to be transformed by developments in mass communication. Right from the start, improvements in mass communication have interwoven with the expansion of commercial organizations and the development of the modern state. These developments are the institutional core of modern

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3 Translation is ours.

4 As we have stated, this is a schematic presentation, since we are simplifying theoretical perspectives that are, in effect, more nuanced and changeable. As a matter of fact, authors like Hjarvard and Altheide emphasize, in their last works, the necessity of situating media in a more complex and multidimensional, interactional framework, even though they do not abandon the idea of a media logic.

5 It seems more accurate to speak of macro-processes instead of meta-processes. Even though it may be possible for some of them to work as meta-processes, i.e., processes of processes, this specific function is not mentioned in the author's arguments when he refers to this term.

culture mediatization, for they have molded not only the ways in which symbolic forms are produced, transmitted, and received but also the mode in which individuals experience events and actions in spatially and temporally distant contexts.

These approaches can account for significant historical changes by paying attention to the central role that media have played in them. Nevertheless, they are not able to comprise the specific modes in everyday transformations, those that contribute to defining *history* in the long-term. Nor do they offer an observation standpoint for us to focus on the present, on the current point of the historical movement.

(d) Mediatization as a mid-level process

Knut Lundby (2009) agrees that macro-level approaches on mediatization have been extensively developed and to counteract them he calls for meso-level investigations. That is to say, he insists on exploring how these larger transformations can be seen as particular modes in everyday life. Sonia Livingstone (2009) stands by this point of view by arguing that it is only through these subtle but ubiquitous moments of mediatization that historical changes take place. Furthermore, Andrea Schrott (2009) draws on James Coleman and argues that the effects on the macro level of society can never be direct effects, and that individuals' behavior in specific situations is crucial to understanding those effects. In this sense, Mabel Grillo (2010) claims that questions of mediatization must outline a meso-level approach capable of clarifying the process and reconstructing it empirically.

Hence, the theoretical and methodological constructs we need to elaborate in order to understand mediatization should consider concepts such as *interaction, network, scene, flow, definition of the situation, conditions of production*; namely, concepts that refer to relationships. This forces us to shift the primary focus towards the communicative dimension. Only in the relations that build up communicative processes can we observe the circulation and transformation of meanings that mediatization establishes. Moreover, only a view from this perspective will allow us to move forward towards the integration of other aspects of the mass media.

2. Constructing an Interactional Approach

If it is true, as Stig Hjarvard (2008a, p. 113) puts it, that mediatization should not only be specified in theoretical terms, but also prove itself to be an analytical tool through concrete

empirical studies, this raises the question as to how the inherently procedural nature of mediatization can be methodologically acknowledged.

While mediatization, understood as a logic and a macro-process (see points (a) and (c)), has developed its own methodological approach (as shown by some examples above), the perspective we intend to further develop poses major methodological questions. How can we verify processes? How can we escape from the structural perspective of the *media logic*? How can we reflect on the daily impact of mass media on people? Doubtlessly, one difficulty lies in considering media interaction processes when there is no space/time co-presence of the actors, and the social networks where they act continue in very different places, practices, and mediations. So how do we connect the daily activities of journalists, their sources, publicists, politicians, the public, activists, trade unionists, and everyone else who is, to some extent, involved in media?

Our proposal implies the reconstruction of *interaction networks* among the actors in the specific area that is mediatized and its connection with the networks of actors in media realm. In speaking of networks, we do not refer to the formal or structural analysis postulated by the *social network analysis*, which generally entails a formalized quantitative approach, even though we can adapt useful elements from it. Rather, we refer to social formations produced by interaction, like George Simmel's (2002) *social forms* or Norbert Elias`s (2008) *figurations*.

According to Knut Lundby (2014), all changes occur during the interaction, and symbolic circulation is part of the social interaction that involves both actors and actions. We understand that *action* brings us to explore bonds, links, relations, and shifts, because in interaction the action is always directed at others. Finally, *communication* invites us to pay attention to symbolic circulation, "scapes", translations, and shifts.

Our purpose in further developing our proposal on a methodological level implies abandoning the classical information model of production, circulation and reception, a scheme that has extensively dominated our field, thus compelling us to endorse only one pole: messages of all-powerful mass media or reception studies with strong faith in an extremely resistant kind of public.

What we mean is that journalists themselves are also part of the public of some of the mass media. Therefore, it would be worth studying how they behave as public and to what extent such behavior affects their work. On the other hand, social movement models, social organization representatives, trade unionists, participants in civil associations, among others, serve as journalists' information sources, yet they are also the public of media and, sometimes, producers of different kinds of information circulating mainly in the new media. Finally, what we call –from a given point of view- "the public" is people who not only read the newspapers, listen to the radio, or watch TV, but also take part in organizations, arrange social activities, and socialize in fields open to becoming part of news information. Then, how can we track them in order to reconstruct the processes of mediatization?

From a constructivist point of view, and in order to further develop this interactional approach, another key concept besides *networks* is *mediations*. By this term we refer specifically to the sense in which Bruno Latour (2008, p. 63) uses it in the sociological field, which should be distinguished from the sense given above in mediatization studies. According to Latour, *Mediations* do not merely relate to intermediaries that carry meaning; mediations "transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry".

In Sonia Livingstone's (2009) words, mediations overcome distance, both physical and symbolic, as well as time and space, thus connecting otherwise separate parties. As we are interested in communicative mediations, it is worth considering three different types of mediations:

Traditional media communication, one that considers a media product generated by a complex commercial institution in accordance with specific working and commercialization guidelines broadcasted to a large audience. This is a fundamental level to take into account regarding mediatization, especially the mediatization of a public domain, whose mediating function involves group scale breaking and articulation of audiences (Verón, 1997).

Interpersonal interactions that involve, among others, links between channel managers and journalists with actors in the political, neighborhood, business systems, etc.; well-established relationships that journalists maintain in order to reaching the sources; links between the producers of a news bulletin and the different sectors meant to be its

public; and networks within audiences (and neighbors) where media content is spread, discussed, challenged, etc.

Interactions from social media that operate thanks to the technological support of the Internet, producing multiple, diffuse uses and relationship systems. They enlarge interpersonal interaction networks, facilitate channels to reaching media, and offer greater chances of media resonance; yet they also impose special modalities of public commitment and participation, and generate, for journalists, new ways of working with and relating to the sources.

These interactions bring into play the practices of very diverse actors, coming from varied locations, possessing uneven resources, communicating in different ways, taking possession of different technologies, and using them for multiple purposes.

3. Applying Mediatization as an Interactional Concept

The insights that inform this paper are part of a larger Research Program taking place in the context of the Communication Research Centre of the National University of Rio Cuarto, which since 2013 deals with the mediatization of political practices. Río Cuarto is a city of 160,000 inhabitants (a middle-sized city) located in the inland of Córdoba, a province in the central part of Argentina. Particularly, between 2016 and 2018 we carried out a project that sought to understand different modalities of mediatization in various levels of these practices, i.e., the sphere of the political parties and neighbourhood associations[6]. The project developed a methodological qualitative design that aimed at the reconstruction and analysis of the interactions that link media actors with politics and neighborhood associations (Rusconi, 2016; Rusconi, et al., 2017).

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6 Neighborhood associations are a well-established institutional and collaborative practice in the city of Rio Cuarto. They emerged during the first decades of the 20th century when groups of neighbors began to meet for different purposes such as requesting improvements in their neighborhoods, the development of different activities, and assisting those who were in need of help. In 1953 the city passed an ordinance regulating their activities, and it was during the 1980s –after the Argentine military dictatorship ended- when the associations experienced major growth in participation and scope, which include among other things the provision of services that had been previously administered by the city.

In other words, in that study we outlined for the first time the methodological proposal we present in this article. The empirical research was grounded on open interviews to the different actors of the process: **a.** local journalists of media which have substantial participation in the construction of the political and social agenda of the city; **b.** neighbourhood members belonging to seven different neighbourhood associations; **c.** politicians of the most significant political parties in Río Cuarto[7]. It is worth mentioning that in the last two cases we looked for variations that contemplated the time they had been part of the respective institutional spheres and the frequency of their participation in media. The interviews adopted the modality of life stories (Berteaux, 2005) orientated towards reconstructing the trajectories in which actors established the various relationships considered (see below). In the analysis of the communicative trajectories, we found traceable associations (Latour, 2008) that allowed us to advance in the reconstruction of interaction networks.

The developed strategy proved to be productive since it enabled us to access both the relationships and interactions that configure the networks and the meanings that emerge, dissolve, and consolidate around what could be termed "the political and the mediatic" in the situations and actors studied. However, the exclusively constructivist bias of the strategy finds limitations in the possibility of a deeper characterization of the structural aspects of the networks. This does not imply abandoning the processual and mid-level approach, but rather means to include quantitative data. Therefore, we understand this proposal as a first step towards a mixed methods approach, integrating more quantitative studies, such as those of the *social networks analysis tradition* (Domínguez & Hollstein, 2014).

3.1. Tracking Strategies

Our study is inspired by George Marcus' (1995) ethnographic development and his tracking strategies, which shape multi-sited ethnographic research. This research method acknowledges a *world system* and does not restrict itself to the local sphere; on the contrary, it distances itself from it in order to examine the *circulation* of meanings, objects and

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7 For more details: journalist working in Canal 13 (TV), Diario Puntal (Press) and radio stations LV 16, FM Ranquel, FM Gospel y FM Libre. Politicians of Justicialismo, Radicalismo y Respeto parties. And leaders of the neighborhood associations: Jardín Norte, Fénix, Roque Saenz Peña, Indio Felipe Rosas, Santa Rosa, La Agustina y Peirano.

identities in unspecific space-time. The author asserts that even though postmodernism has contributed several ideas to this new kind of ethnography, it actually arises as a response to empirical challenges in today's world. Marcus mentions feminism, science, and technology, as well as media studies as being among the fields that define these challenges. These fields show that objects can no longer be studied in one single place; therefore, the approach must be mobile, following the connections between the different places where people's activities take place.

With the aim of showing the contribution of multi-sited ethnography to qualitative sociological investigation in general, Eva Nadai y Christoph Maeder (2005) consider that the distinction between the place and the object of study has not been a problem in the investigation of complex societies in which it is difficult to find a bounded group in a single place and, consequently, the field "cannot be found somewhere out there" (§10). Both the *object* and the *field* are constructed by the researcher, "derived from theoretical knowledge and questions"; "its contours emerge only during the research process as the ethnographer traces informants across multiple sites that turn out to become relevant in the light of the research question" (§10).

The authors seek to define the idea of "diffuse fields" of sociological work through the interactionism concept of "social worlds"; i.e., a group of actors centered on common activities and interests and bound by a network of communication. They believe that those social worlds provide the context for the actors, processes, practices, and ideas which make up the "real object" of the investigation, an object that generally covers more than one social world and therefore cannot be reconstructed by exploring a single "field".

In our work the networks of communication not only form social worlds but also interconnect different worlds. Therefore, they are not just contexts but also, simultaneously, the "real object" of the investigation, which clearly shows that the field and the object are constructed together. In this sense, Marcus's suggestion is a key element:

"Multi-sited research is designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations in which the ethnographer establishes some form of literal, physical presence, with an explicit, posited logic of association or connection among sites that in fact defines the argument of ethnography". (Marcus, 1995, p. 105)

Marcus suggests that the investigation should follow the connections and associations that appear in the local sphere, and in order to do so he offers a series of modalities or techniques that multi-sited ethnographies use as practices for constructing their objects through movement and tracking in different scenarios; some of these modalities or techniques are *follow the people, the thing, the metaphor, the plot, the biography, the conflict.* Since we construct our object by means of tracking interactions, we would suggest adding to the repertoire introduced by the author, the modality *follow the actions in order to reaching.* Therefore, we propose exploring such behavior, the ways in which the interacting people, as publics, as media, as sources, and so on, imagine, act for others, and direct their work towards reaching the media, reaching the news sources or reaching the public. Hence, we suggest thinking of these networks in terms of their action goals: *reaching the media, reaching the sources, reaching the public.*

Projecting the reconstruction of these three networks requires a construct that locates a starting point to begin *tracking.* This is, actually, a methodological angle to address the continuous web of the social sphere. We will attempt to describe these networks in detail by considering, as a point of reference and just to give a few examples, our work on the mediatization of neighbourhood communities as an active field of the local public space.

3.1.1. Reaching the Media

For a social sector to become mediatized, it is necessary to build interaction networks with the media fields. Those networks are built productively if both elements, the social sector and the media, have goals that encourage the formation of such networks. For various institutions or social spheres, *reaching* the media appears as a goal that activates network links. For example, neighborhood associations reaching the media in order to get a visible scenario that allows them to keep their relationships with the council, and with other neighborhood associations; it is a space where they can voice their demands, claims, support and partnerships. Media play a key role in linking them with neighbors, since they are a regular channel through which these people can communicate their activities. Yet also neighbours build networks of their own -for instance, they contact a friend who knows a journalist- in order to reaching the media and use them to complain to neighborhood associations (usually about the decentralized public services delegated by the council to these associations). The orientation of these networks towards the media is largely founded on media *affordances.* In his conceptualization of mediatization, Hjarvard (2013) picks up the term *affordances* from James Gibson's psychology of perception in order to account for

the potential uses or possibilities for action offered by an object. *Affordances* allow for certain actions, exclude others, and structure the interaction between the actor and the object. Andreas Hepp (2014) uses the concept of 'moulding forces' in a similar way in order to grasp the specificity of media in the mediatization process. Thus, media *affordances* are defined by the assessments of the potential uses or possibilities for action perceived by users (those seeking to reaching them) in accordance with their objectives and in terms of their cultural conventions and their own interpretations (Hjarvard, 2013, pp. 27-30).

3.1.2. Reaching the Sources

We said that networks are built productively if the social sector and media have goals that encourage the formation of such networks. The orientation of the action towards the sources organizes relationships that are essential to the news media; these links often comprise a very active bilateral process and journalists usually establish, for their own purposes, regular contacts with informed and skilled people in order to ensure favorable access to the information. In our fieldwork, expressed with varying words and emphasis, the idea that sources are a journalist's greatest asset is repeated in the interviewees' discourse. Everyone understands their sources as networks of relationships built up over time that need to be maintained and constantly expanded, although variations occur within both, the people included in those networks and the modality in which they assume the different links. A network of licensed sources from neighborhood associations is not the same as a network of key actors among neighbors. Likewise, a network built from the news desk of a particular medium, looking for new sources from already established contacts, is not the same as a network built from the chronicler's *work on the street*. Finally, a network that spreads towards the sources, based on trustful relationships, is not the same as a network founded on distrustful relationships.

3.1.3. Reaching the Public

By *public*, we understand -and we cannot provide more than a circular definition here- a collective of references typical of a public sector: audiences are the public of media, neighbors are the public of neighborhood associations, and citizens are the public of political institutions. Even though we can initially track the two previous networks as if they were relatively autonomous, this is not possible here because the same actors make up different audiences. *Reaching the media* or *reaching the sources* usually represents, to those actors, an intermediate step in reaching the public; at the same time, the sources -for example, neighborhood associations- are part of the audience, and the members of the audience -as

well as neighbors- are current or potential sources. Thus, the analytical need to separate networks is not necessarily consistent with the usual way in which journalists, neighbors and members of neighborhood associations live their interactions. This is important because this twofold nature of the role within the same network is largely what enables the development of transformation processes in relation to media that embody mediatization.

3.2. Communicative Trajectories

It is necessary to add a new element to the study of interaction networks if we consider that, in speaking of mediatization, we refer to processes involving changes over time. Therefore, the actors' life stories and the reconstruction of their communicative trajectories present themselves as an essential strategy for us to complete the analysis of current interactions.

In this case, our methodological approach sought to reconstruct the professional trajectories of journalists, neighbourhood association leaders and politicians, which allowed us to access the relationships inherent to journalistic sociability, the constructions of meaning that are at stake in them, and the memories of the transformations that occurred throughout their professional careers. The trajectories allowed us to access the interactions that the actors recall in their narratives in order to provide meaning to their practices. These interactions occur in certain spatio-temporal situations and involve other individuals or groups, technologies such as the Internet and traditional media, and mobilize multiple identification processes that position them in relation to the meanings that circulate in their own work environments.

To designate the type of design postulated at this point, we have chosen the term "communicative trajectories". The design, as we have been saying, is based on biographical methods. By the latter we refer mainly to life stories. Life stories have been an invaluable tool for accessing the inner perspective of human life and an inexhaustible source of hypotheses for the tradition of interactionism, but today they find their field of application in broader and more structural constructivist approaches (Berteaux, 2005) that assume that individuality is socially produced.

According to Lahire (2006), when people recount their past, they talk about relationships with other people and groups and about the institutions they have traversed. That is to say, from the personal point of view it is possible to reconstruct a history of sociability. Based on the empirical material of life stories, we derive the communicative trajectories, understood

as the succession of interactional links of different levels that subjects build throughout their personal history.

In an attempt to solve the methodological difficulty of empirical research to formulate an approach that integrates the various levels of communication processes, Mabel Grillo (2012) suggests turning to the concept of communicative trajectories and seeing those processes just as they are integrated into the social actors' own experience. The author states that "communication, from the social actors' point of view, is a continuous, cumulative and integrated process of interaction with the environment", and, therefore, "communicative trajectories account for the reconstruction of that process in a specific topic". Thus, in our research work, the trajectories of journalists, members of neighborhood associations and the public are extremely relevant. If, as Mallimaci and Giménez-Béliveau (2006) interpret Ferrarotti, life stories should be seen as a result of the accumulation of relationship networks where individuals come and go, and are linked by different needs, to understand the above-mentioned actors' trajectories requires attempting to explain their dynamic positions and ways of acting (and interacting) in the previously defined networks.

Let us consider an example. In our study, in the relations between politicians and journalists, the access and acceptance of the target audience to be reached through media communication is at stake, ever since it is fundamental for the goals proposed in each field. These goals may revolve, for example, around access to power, recognition, the organization of a specific activity, etc. Consequently, their trajectories are characterized by the search for and accumulation of interpersonal relationships that function as strategies for the development of their activity. More precisely, building an agenda of reliable sources is widely recognized as a successful trajectory for a journalist. But equally, maintaining direct communication links with the press is instrumental to a political career. The construction of those agendas is characterized by the laborious task of managing contacts and relationships throughout the professional lives of the respective individuals.

These are two trajectories with great affinity and, therefore, relatively closed networks are generated between the trajectories of the "star politicians" and the journalists specialized in politics. These closed networks imply bonds of constant activation that hinder the expansion of a net and, either consolidate the relationships or produce ruptures and redefinitions. Since their components occupy prominent positions in the public sphere and media space and their roles are not interchangeable, the most visible aspect of the relations between

journalists and politicians is mutual dependence, which can take the form of a fluid exchange or that of a strong competition.

To sum up, communicative trajectories of journalists, politicians, and neighborhood associations' leaders – as professionals but also as sources and public of mediated information- within different kinds of mediations (everyday interaction, media messages, and new media interaction), allowed us to further reconstruct the interaction networks that can only be seen as complex nets. As a result, we suggest making the old scheme of media-message-public more complex.

4. Reassessing: From Interaction Networks to Mediatization

At this point, we would like to introduce some of the questions that we have asked ourselves regarding our own proposal. For example, on an epistemological level, is it possible to justify that a research at the interaction level can be articulated as a meso-level inquiry instead of a micro-level one? On a theoretical level, and according to what has been already discussed, is it possible to delineate a mediatization concept that - besides the meaning referring to macro-social or structural changes- can in any case explain the complex changes occurring permanently in the relationships between social sphere and media? Finally, on a methodological level, would the analysis of the data collected through fieldwork allow us to follow the processes and not to "freeze" the data into preliminary concepts? In this last section, we offer our own first answers to these important questions, although it is not our intention to close the discussion with them but rather to further encourage it.

First, the activity of tracking networks and communicative trajectories, as we suggested, runs the risk of being interpreted as research work positioned at what is normally called *a micro level*, but as we explained in the first pages, we aim to place our work at a meso or *mid-level*.

To this end, and as a methodological/interpretative precaution, first we must emphasize that following the actions and interactions involves placing them within a paradigm of conditions and consequences (Strauss & Corbin, 2002) that enables to link the process and the structure. When we talk about media, neighborhood associations, and families from the public, we are talking about institutions; these institutions define frameworks of action, frameworks of possibilities, limitations for the development of certain relationships and relationships which reorganize the processes of institutionalization.

Secondly, considering interactions, and in order for us to speak of a mediatized domain, we need to account for certain formations that are gradually stabilized, reified, and institutionalized (Hepp, 2014). In this sense, we introduce some concepts that explain these formations from interactions, concepts that gradually make the relationships between these formations more complex, and which are based on rules that contextualize the operation of such formations. Those concepts are *form, pattern, practice, and configuration.* Here we have followed, although not literally, Hepp and Hasebrink's (2014) insights. The authors lay out the definitions but these do not necessarily correspond to the content developed in this section.

The concept of *form* refers, basically, to a type of action/interaction that activates or continues a given network. That would be the case, for example, of an interview with a member of a neighborhood association, or the arrangement of the interview, or a call or an email to a medium to express a claim, etc.

The term *pattern* suggests that there are certain regularities in communicative interaction within networks. For example: calling the TV show instead of directly contacting the neighborhood association to ask for street repairs. These regularities can occur at the level of a single action, or more complex patterns can be created.

The concept of *practice* explains how the different *forms* build, altogether, a more complex action *pattern* (socially situated, with meanings that are stabilized and, in many cases, institutionalized) in connection with mass media. *Practices* can be configured in many ways: as routines, strategies, habits, etc. Thus, we speak of media-use practices, production practices, media participation practices, among others.

Finally, *configuration* is the most complex concept. It refers to different ways in which media practices articulate themselves with practices of other social fields that are mediatized. In our study we were able to envisage two types of configurations of interaction networks: a broader one consisting of many sporadic and diffuse bonds involving mainly non-specialized journalists, neighbourhood members and "novice" politicians; and another, more limited and closed, relying on constantly activated ties between expert journalists and renowned politicians. We also found two modalities of mediatization: a vertical one, characterized by more fluid frontiers between media and the different social spheres and where, consequently, the different types of communication interact positively; by contrast,

a horizontal one where the different spheres clearly maintain their differentiation, and communication between them tends to shut in the respective fields. Thus, we were able to associate restricted networks with vertical mediatization, typical of "party politics", and extended networks with horizontal mediatization, more common in neighbourhood association´s politics.

The systematic character of the relationships between neighbors, members of neighborhood associations, journalists, and audiences (source-public-medium) can define institutionalization mechanisms insofar as it creates a particular group dynamic. In fact, in order to function, a community needs to be founded on laws, rules, practices, customs, and habits. In the analysis of the processes of institutionalization of new configurations of the social sphere it is important to bear in mind, as Andrea Schrott (2009) states, the pressure that opinions exert on "what is reality, what is relevant and which actions are acceptable and feasible" (p.48). In this sense, the representations of neighborhoods, neighbors, and neighborhood associations that appear in media -by means of the multiple actors that we have mentioned- all contribute to creating an atmosphere of *pressure* in favor of institutionalization.

Conclusion

The analysis of mediatization from an interactional perspective leads us to consider media as inserted into a system of relationship networks that intersect and constantly feed each other. Undertaking research in any field or sphere of our current society means trying to understand its specific contemporary characteristics, which have resulted from technological, political, social, and economic changes. Yet, as we said in section 1, this leads us to work with the mediatization category by moving away from its meaning as a metaprocess and by acknowledging that, in order to understand the social processes in which we are interested, we need to address them from a different level.

From there, as argued in section 2, if we attempt to understand mediatized processes, we must position media not as *spheres*, *spaces,* or *scenes* where the public moves, but to depart from actors´ actions, interaction networks and different levels of communicative mediations that take part in social mediatic processes.

In this regard, section 3 presented a methodological construct that proposes, as a starting point, exploring three networks defined in terms of their action components: *reaching the*

media, reaching the sources, reaching the public. Through the reconstruction of the communicative trajectories -based on the fundamentals of biographical methods- we were able to find links and mediations at the different levels of the communication processes involved in the above-mentioned networks, moving the main focus from traditional media communication in terms of its scale-breaking and collective construction characteristics, to the communication in terms of bonds and connections given in micro levels. The latter allows to bear in mind actions of different actors in the interacting diverse fields and long temporal processes.

Finally, tracking those interactional networks entails analyzing them in their situational conditions. The latter means that we find it possible to account for the formations that are gradually stabilized and institutionalized into new configurations of the mediatized social sphere, as described in the last section of this paper.

Conflicto de interés
Los autores declaran que no existe conflicto de interés.

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