

Dialectic between the Countryside and the City: Histories of Dialogues and Discussions between Urban and Rural Areas in the Metropolitan Region of Rosario (Argentina)

Dialética entre o campo e a cidade: Histórias de diálogos e discussões entre o urbano e o rural na Região Metropolitana de Rosario (Argentina)

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Abstract

The relationship between the countryside and the city has long been central to the formation of territorial identities and spatial configurations. In Latin America, this relationship has been transformed by global and regional processes such as agricultural modernization, the expansion of agribusiness, industrial development, and more recently, metropolitan urbanization. This article takes the Metropolitan Region of Rosario in Argentina as a case study. This region has been a significant global agro-exporting hub since its origins and continues to play this role today, while also being subject to various urbanization processes. Through a multi-scalar, historical-regional approach, the article presents a descriptive-exploratory historical account of the region's transformation, focusing on how agricultural, industrial, infrastructural, and real estate dynamics have shaped localities and their identities. The article argues that understanding long-term continuities and ruptures is essential for interpreting contemporary conflicts at the rural-urban interface, including land-use disputes, low-density urban expansion, and socio-environmental conflicts associated with agribusiness.

Keywords: Rural. Urban. History. Territorial transformations. Metropolitan region

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Resumo

A relação entre o campo e a cidade tem sido, há muito tempo, central para a formação das identidades territoriais e das configurações espaciais. Na América Latina, essa relação foi transformada por processos globais e regionais, como a modernização agrícola, a expansão do agronegócio, o desenvolvimento industrial e, mais recentemente, a urbanização metropolitana. Este artigo toma como estudo de caso a Região Metropolitana de Rosário, na Argentina. Essa região tem sido um importante polo agroexportador global desde suas origens e continua desempenhando esse papel na atualidade, ao mesmo tempo em que é atravessada por diversos processos de urbanização. Por meio de uma abordagem multiescalar, histórico-regional, o artigo apresenta uma narrativa histórico-descritiva e exploratória sobre a transformação da região, com foco em como as dinâmicas agrícolas, industriais, infraestruturais e imobiliárias moldaram as localidades e suas identidades. O artigo argumenta que compreender as continuidades e rupturas de longa duração é fundamental para interpretar os conflitos contemporâneos na interface rural-urbana, incluindo disputas de uso do solo, expansão urbana de baixa densidade e conflitos socioambientais associados ao agronegócio.

Palavras-chaves: Rural. Urbano. História. Transformações territoriais. Região metropolitana

Introduction

“Cities are a product of the earth. They reflect the peasant’s cunning in dominating the earth; technically they but carry further his skill in turning the soil to productive uses, in enfolding his cattle for safety, in regulating the waters that moisten his fields, in providing storage bins and barns for his crops. Cities are emblems of that settled life which began with permanent agriculture: a life conducted with the aid of permanent shelters, permanent utilities like orchards, vineyards, and irrigation works, and permanent buildings for protection and storage. Every phase of life in the countryside contributes to the existence of cities”¹.

Since their origins, the city and the countryside have had an inseparable connection in the experience of human communities. Throughout the long history of human settlements, we all, directly or indirectly, derive from the countryside what we need to live, while recognizing society’s achievements,

¹ MUMFORD, Lewis. *The Culture of Cities*. New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1970, p.3.

one of the greatest being the city with its distinctive form of civilization². These two spatial forms are deeply interconnected throughout history, influenced by complex socio-economic-political processes, impacting each other over time. Thus, space's analysis is approached from its dialectical relationship through its long history.³

Currently, many metropolitan territories are undergoing profound transformation processes, with a global increase in urbanization dynamics over land traditionally occupied by rural practices. The boundaries between the countryside and the city are becoming increasingly blurred, creating multidimensional, heterogeneous, and complex interface spaces that are arenas of disputes between various uses and actors.

In Latin America, this dialectic has been further shaped by distinctive historical processes: colonization, agrarian expansion, railway-based territorial organization, the agro-export model, waves of industrialization, and the neoliberal restructuring. Neoliberal policies identified in recent decades, alongside the trend of diminishing state power, have strengthened the private sphere; resulting in territorial transformations driven more by capital logic than by local state directives. This dominance of financial and economic capital is reflected in the worsening socio-economic territorial structure. There is a dual process led by market pressure: on one hand, agricultural rents driven by the commodities boom, and on the other, the generation of urban rent in new urbanization processes. In this sense, city edges are under strong real estate pressure, as urban rents are much higher than rural rents, anticipating future expansion⁴. This often leads to normative changes, despite the lack of real need for new urban land, since only this change causes an exponential increase in land prices.

In Argentina, and particularly in the province of Santa Fe, the rural-urban relationship is deeply marked by the agro-export economy, agricultural colonization, migration flows, and the infrastructure concentration along the Paraná River. The Metropolitan Region of Rosario⁵ (RMR) constitutes

² WILLIAMS, Raymond. *The Country and the City*. Oxford University Press, 1975.

³ LEFEBVRE, Henri. *The production of space*. Basil Blackwell, 1991

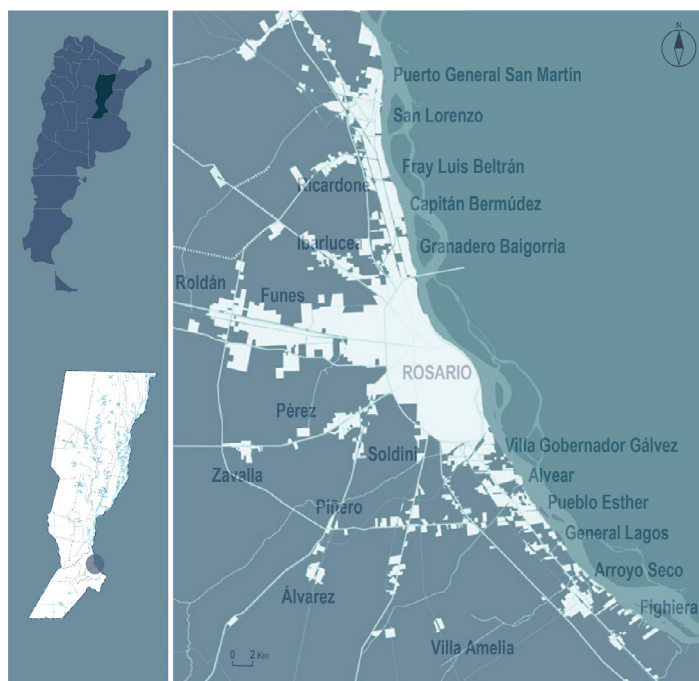
⁴ JARAMILLO GONZÁLEZ, Samuel. *Hacia una teoría de la renta del suelo urbano*. Ediciones Uniandes, 2010

⁵ Although various delimitations of the region have been identified over time according to spatial, functional, or political analytical approaches, this study, which takes a historical perspective of the area, uses the delimitation established by the Prefecture of Gran Rosario in 1969. Additionally, it is important to note that this work does not focus on the specific development of the main city (Rosario), as it has a particular autonomy and there is already a large amount of literature on its history. Instead, this article focuses on the regional history and the specific characteristics of the other localities that make up the region.

an exemplary case for understanding these transformations. Since the nineteenth century, the area has been a central node of the national and international grain economy, first as the heart of wheat production and later as the world's leading soybean-processing hub. Simultaneously, it is the third-largest metropolitan area in Argentina, with significant demographic growth and territorial expansion since the late twentieth century. These overlapping processes have created a complex and conflictive rural-urban interface where agrarian production, industrial activities, and dispersed urbanization coexist often with strong tensions. (Fig. 1)

This article aims to interpret the dialectical relationship between countryside and city in the RMR through a historical-regional reconstruction of productive, infrastructural, demographic, and urbanization processes. The objective is not to exhaustively reconstruct all historical periods, but to identify significant turning points and continuities that inform present-day conflicts. We argue that understanding the complex historical transformation of the region and the unique characteristics of its localities enables a deeper comprehension of current challenges and opportunities, as well as the identification of potential guidelines rooted in an integrated environmental perspective that supports sustainability. The methodology employs: Historical periodization based on major shifts in land use, infrastructure, and production; Multi-scalar analysis, examining regional dynamics and local trajectories; and, Use of diverse sources, including historical studies, population censuses (1947, 1970, 1991, 2010), official reports, planning documents, and regional cartographic archives.

Figure 1 – Location of Metropolitan Region of Rosario.



Source: Author's elaboration based on cadastral data and the Spatial Data Infrastructure of the Province of Santa Fe (IDESF).

The paper is organized into five sections. The first examines the formation of a regional rural identity, tracing the continuity from original livestock practices to the contemporary soybean boom. The second analyzes the development of urban settlements associated with railway expansion and with subsequent industrial and residential processes. The third adopts a scalar approach to explore the differentiated local trajectories within the RMR. The fourth addresses recent tensions generated by the overlap between agrobusiness dynamics and metropolitan urbanization. Finally, the conclusion revisits the countryside-city dialectic and reflects on its implications for territorial planning.

Formation of a Regional Rural Identity: From livestock to Soybean boom

The rural identity of the Metropolitan Region of Rosario is the product of a series of long-term and overlapping processes that began with Spanish colonization and have continued into the present. The first significant territorial transformations occurred during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when colonizers introduced cattle and horses. As agrarian historians⁶ have shown, the rapid reproduction of livestock and the establishment of extensive cattle ranching produced a new agrarian landscape.

During the 17th century, the figure of the *accioneros* (stakeholders) stands out, who were granted fiscal concessions to gather the wild cattle that had multiplied freely. These stakeholders began to settle in the territory, initiating the trade of cattle, meat, hides, tallow, and bristles for internal consumption and exchanges. This was made possible through land grants by the Government of the Río de la Plata, creating the first large estates that laid the groundwork for land subdivision. In 1689, the land grant between the Salinas stream (now Ludueña) and the Matanza area (now Arroyo Seco) was given to Captain Luis Romero de Pineda⁷. Over the years, the original land strip was subdivided (due to inheritance), characterized by long, narrow tracts perpendicular to watercourses (access to which was crucial for livestock activities). Thus, the early occupation practices of the territory already established the initial logic of land division and the arrangement of settlements and future activities⁸.

The mid-19th century marked a process of change that profoundly shaped regional identity. National modernization policies, particularly agricultural colonization, significantly altered territorial dynamics. The concept of *colonia* characterized new settlements linked to the “agricultural revolution”, involving the introduction of external populations and the transformation of pastoral land into agricultural land via the grid system⁹.

⁶ BARSKY, Osvaldo; GELMAN, Jorge. *Historia del agro argentino*. Desde la Conquista hasta fines del siglo XX. Buenos Aires: Grijalbo-Mondadori. 2001.

BARSKY, Osvaldo; DJENDEREDJIAN, Julio. *Historia del capitalismo agrario pampeano Tomo I: La expansión ganadera hasta 1895*. Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno.

⁷ MONGSFELD, Oscar. *Evolución Histórica del Área de la Prefectura del Gran Rosario*. Cuadernos de Trabajo Prefectura del Gran Rosario 7, Rosario: Prefectura del Gran Rosario, 1971.

⁸ GALIMBERTI, Cecilia & Jacob, Nadia. “Entre el campo y el río: transformaciones del paisaje productivo en la Región Metropolitana de Rosario (Argentina)”. In *Anales de Geografía de la Universidad Complutense*, 41, 2021, pp. 81-101. <https://revistas.ucm.es/index.php/AGUC/article/view/76723/4564456558051>

⁹ MARTÍNEZ DE SAN VICENTE, Isabel. *La construcción del territorio de las colonias de la “Central Argentine*

Within approximately two decades (1870-1890), agricultural colonization resulted in a new productive landscape based on small cereal farming properties.

Nicasio Oroño (governor of Santa Fe between 1865 and 1867) played a key role in promoting agriculture. Colonies grew from four in 1864 to 31 in 1872. By the end of this period, approximately 600,000 hectares of colonies dedicated to agriculture were established. In fifteen years, Santa Fe experienced a 22% increase in wheat-cultivated land¹⁰. According to Garavaglia and Gelman¹¹, colonization had a significant impact on this province, with its population growing from 41,000 inhabitants in 1858 to 400,000 in 1895 due to the strong immigration process.

Despite the discourse in favor of small landownership, the latifundia structure persisted. Colonization, as the distribution of land ownership, was largely replaced by the expansion of the agricultural frontier through leasing. It was thus that the figure of the 'farmer' became the central actor that enabled the expansion of cereal agriculture. They were the agent that made the productive diversification of the Pampas possible, complementing and at times competing with livestock farming. The conditions of the tenants, far from the ideal of the landowning settler, generated growing discontent that erupted into protest movements seeking to improve contracts and living conditions¹².

By the late 19th century, Santa Fe accounted for more than half of the country's sown area, earning it the nickname "Argentina's granary," especially noted for its wheat, maize, and flax crops (Fig. 2). This productive transformation was enabled by railway and port infrastructure development. The railway system radically altered the regional structure, not only from a communication and production perspective but also as a catalyst for urbanization. Throughout the area, each railway station gave rise to a population center, leading to the establishment of many towns¹³.

Land Company". Tesis Doctoral. Departamento de Urbanismo y Ordenación del Territorio. Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura, Universidad Politécnica de Cataluña, 1995.

¹⁰ MARTÍNEZ DE SAN VICENTE, Isabel. "La inmigración y la formación de la red urbana de la Provincia de Santa Fé". In Gastone Ave y Emmanuella de Menna (Eds.), *Arquitectura y urbanística de origen italiano en Argentina*. Gangemi Editores, 2010.

¹¹ GARAVAGLIA, Juan Carlos & Gelman, Jorge. "Capitalismo agrario en la frontera. Buenos Aires y la región pampeana en el siglo XIX". In *Historia Agraria*, 29, 2003, pp. 105-121.

¹² MARTIRÉN, Juan Luis. *La transformación farmer: colonización agrícola y crecimiento económico en la provincia de Santa Fe durante la segunda mitad del siglo XIX*. Buenos Aires: Prometeo libros, 2016.

¹³ CABALLERO, Adrián (Coord). *Proceso de Formación urbano-territorial y dinámica de transformación del Área Metropolitana de Rosario*. Consejo Federal de Inversiones, 1991.

Figure 2 – Fragment of the cadastral topographic map of the Province of Santa Fe from 1895, corresponding to the current Metropolitan Region of Rosario



Source: Map Library of the National Library of Argentina.

Thus, the region experienced rapid transformation around the installation of railway branches and stations, as well as the formation of towns mostly linked to them. While a regional identity initially associated with livestock was recognized, it continued with a strong process of agriculturalization, linked to railway-port infrastructure and its connection to the beginning of urbanization. Although agricultural activities played a founding role in the region's early formation, strategically positioning it both nationally and internationally for its primary exports, after the 1920s, with the beginning of import-substitution industrialization, there was also significant industrial growth, leading to a substantial increase in urban land in localities where these productive components were established¹⁴. By the

¹⁴ANSALDI, María Delia; COREA, Mario & Pla, Lidia. *Análisis preliminar de la estructura física del Área Metropolitana de Rosario*. Cuaderno 9 Prefectura del Gran Rosario. Prefectura del Gran Rosario, 1971.

mid-20th century, with significant foreign capital involvement, new basic industries were established in the region, revealing a decrease in agricultural activities. Comparing the 1947 and 1969 censuses, the area for rural uses decreased from 367,806 hectares to 348,577 hectares in favor of increased urban uses¹⁵. Regarding agricultural production, in 1968, the cultivated area was distributed as follows: 62.25% cereals, 17% forage crops, 10.5% oilseeds, 7.75% potatoes, and 2.5% vegetables.

From the 1970s, agricultural production methods changed significantly, especially with the widespread cultivation of soybeans. Particularly since the 1990s, various technological innovations have occurred, such as the approval of RoundUp Ready genetically modified seeds (resistant to herbicides like glyphosate), direct sowing, and the substantial increase in processing and export plants along the Paraná River. This led to the soybean cultivation area in Argentina expanding from 2 to 17 million hectares between the 1980s and 2005¹⁶. Thus, from the approximate 10% of oilseed cultivation in the Greater Rosario region in the late 1960s, it increased to 40% of the total grain cultivation area by 2013. Moreover, it is important to note that the region concentrates 40% of the provincial population while occupying only 1.4% of Santa Fe's area, and in the southern part of the province, 60% of its cereal and oilseed production is generated. Additionally, the RMR hosts the main national agro-export complex (and one of the most important in the world)¹⁷.

Urban Formation and Expansion: Railway Towns, Industrial Poles, and Residential Developments

Urban formation and expansion in the Metropolitan Region of Rosario unfolded through successive waves of infrastructural, industrial, and residential transformations that reconfigured historically rural landscapes into an increasingly metropolitan environment. The first major wave occurred between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when railway development played a foundational role in shaping local settlement

¹⁵ ROFMAN, Alejandro. *Prediagnóstico de la estructura productiva del área del Gran Rosario*. Municipalidad de Rosario: Comisión Coordinadora Urbanística, Ferroviaria, Vial y Portuaria para la ciudad de Rosario, 1971.

¹⁶ GALIMBERTI, Cecilia. "Entre la soja y la casa: Incremento de suelo urbano en el ámbito rural del Gran Rosario". In *Arquitectura, Urbanismo, Sustentabilidad*, 30, 2021, pp.18-25. <https://doi.org/10.4206/aus.2021.n30-04>

¹⁷ ENTE DE COORDINACIÓN METROPOLITANA DE ROSARIO. *Desarrollo productivo en el Área Metropolitana de Rosario. Aportes para la gestión territorial*. Rosario: ECOM. 2015. <https://ecomrosario.gob.ar/web/uploads/biblioteca/70/DESARROLLO%20PRODUCTIVO%20EN%20EL%20AMR.pdf?1606827018>

patterns. The establishment of the Rosario–Córdoba Railway reorganized mobility, connected agricultural production to national and international markets, and stimulated the creation of new population centers around railway stations. These emerging towns, characterized by grid layouts and a mix of agricultural, commercial, and service-related activities, embodied the early interdependence between rural and urban dynamics. They hosted diverse social groups (including railway workers, agricultural colonists, and immigrants) whose daily practices produced hybrid identities and established the region's initial multi-nodal territorial structure.

A second wave of expansion took place in the mid-twentieth century with the consolidation of industrial activities. Beginning in the 1930s and intensifying during the postwar period, factories specializing in petrochemical, metallurgical, and cellulose production transformed towns such as San Lorenzo, Puerto General San Martín, Capitán Bermúdez, and Granadero Baigorria into significant industrial–port complexes. Industrialization attracted waves of workers, stimulated the construction of new neighborhoods, and triggered outward urban growth. Although the industrial corridor became one of the most dynamic economic zones in Argentina, agricultural activity remained predominant across much of the region, reinforcing the coexistence of agrarian and industrial landscapes and sustaining the dialectical relationship between countryside and city. Spatial expansion during this phase also blurred municipal boundaries, leading to early conurbation processes with Rosario.

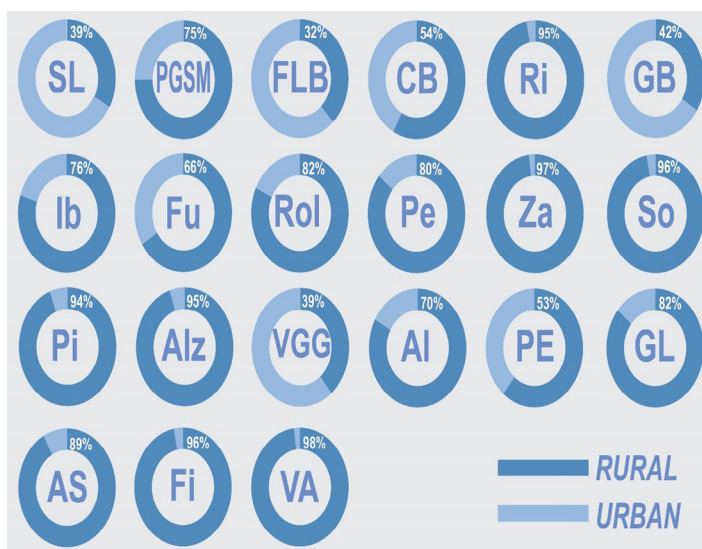
A third wave of transformation began in the late twentieth century, driven primarily by residential expansion and the increasing commodification of rural landscapes. Localities such as Funes, Roldán, Pueblo Esther, and General Lagos evolved into residential destinations attracting middle- and upper-middle-class households seeking amenities associated with greenery, lower density, and lifestyle imagery linked to rurality, even when such environments functioned as extensions of metropolitan life.

The proliferation of gated communities and open subdivisions since the 1990s accelerated land-use change and produced significant socio-spatial segmentation. Many new developments encroached upon agricultural areas where agrochemical spraying generated health and environmental concerns. Simultaneously, fragmented and dispersed urban growth posed governance challenges for municipalities, which faced increasing difficulty in providing infrastructure, managing mobility, and enforcing land-use regulations.

A Scalar Approach: Local Trajectories within the Metropolitan Region

A multi-scalar analysis reveals the diverse trajectories of localities within the RMR, illustrating how general processes of rural transformation and urban expansion manifest uniquely in different contexts. Figure 3 shows the percentages of rural and urban land by locality in 2022.

Figure 3 – Percentages of rural and urban land by locality in 2022.



Source: Author's elaboration based on Ente de Coordinación Metropolitana de Rosario¹⁸.

Northern Industrial-Port Corridor

The consolidation of San Lorenzo (SL) began in the early 19th century, linked to the San Carlos College and Franciscan Convent, which attracted settlers and formed an initial stable village. Railway development accelerated its growth: the establishment of the San Lorenzo station in 1887 reshaped land plots and promoted new urban extensions, while the arrival of major

¹⁸ ENTE DE COORDINACIÓN METROPOLITANA DE ROSARIO. *La urbanización vacía: hacia una nueva política metropolitana del suelo*. Rosario: ECOM, 2022.

industries from the 1930s created a distinct productive profile that drew workers and intensified conurbation with nearby localities¹⁹.

North of SL, the localities of Camilo Aldao and José María Cullen developed around the Cullen and Cerana stations, fostering colonies and villages from the 1880s onward. Favorable natural port conditions supported early cereal shipping facilities and linked the area to agricultural and livestock production. Renamed Puerto General San Martín (PGSM) in the mid-20th century, the locality expanded with new industrial-port facilities and residential areas, generating conflicts due to the juxtaposition of housing, industry, and heavy truck circulation. The resulting urban layout is fragmented, reflecting sequential and discontinuous neighborhood growth.

Between San Lorenzo and Rosario, three jurisdictions emerged: Fray Luis Beltrán (FLB), Capitán Bermúdez (CB), and Granadero Baigorria (GB). Their development combined port advantages provided by the Paraná River's high cliffs, railway infrastructure, and the installation of industrial components. In FLB, the construction of Puerto Canaletas and the railway station were decisive, followed by the establishment of the Regional Arsenal of the Litoral in 1904, which triggered new urbanizations²⁰. CB originated from the Estancia Los Paraísos; the colony was founded in 1886, the railway station opened in 1892, and later industrial establishments (particularly the Celulosa plant in 1929) stimulated population growth²¹. To the west, Ricardone also emerged from Ortiz's estate, with an early agro-livestock orientation and a village formally established in 1890; subsequent urban expansions accelerated from the 1970s and especially after 1990, doubling the original settlement in the past two decades²².

Although its earliest occupations date to the 18th century, Granadero Baigorria's modern development began in 1884 with the extension of the Rosario-Buenos Aires railway. The creation of a village near the Paganini station promoted settlement, and industrialization from the late 1920s attracted workers and spurred urban growth. By the mid-20th century, the locality had become conurbated with Rosario and FLB. While agricultural activities persisted in adjacent areas, GB evolved with a predominantly

¹⁹ Currently, only 39% of its land is rural.

²⁰ Currently, 32% of the land in its jurisdiction is rural.

²¹ Considering the activities across its entire jurisdiction, it exhibits both an industrial and an agricultural-livestock profile, given that 58% of its jurisdiction is rural land.

²² 95% of the land in its jurisdiction is rural.

industrial and port orientation, differentiating it from other localities in the region²³.

Western Residential- Recreational Axis

West of Granadero Baigorria, Ibarlucea developed around the railway station opened in 1891. The first extensions appeared in the 1930s, and more substantial urban growth took place between 1960 and 1970 through dispersed developments detached from the original layout. Over the past three decades, new subdivisions have intensified territorial transformation and attracted a rapidly growing population²⁴.

The Central Argentine Railway also structured the development of Funes and Roldán. Funes originated around the Bandera station and the early settlement of San José de Ávila (1874–1875), which from its beginnings had a recreational and weekend profile. Although livestock initially shaped its economy, urbanization gradually expanded, modifying the original subdivision and extending the urban area throughout the mid-20th century. By the 1990s, the town had surpassed 800 blocks, and since the opening of the Rosario–Córdoba highway segment, Funes has become the locality with the highest number of new private and open developments in the corridor, deeply reshaping its morphology and accelerating population growth.

Roldán emerged with the installation of its station in 1866, associated with Colonia Bernstadt. The original 120-block layout expanded over time, notably with the creation of Villa Flores in 1937, whose radial design contrasted with the earlier grid. From the 1960s onward, new developments linked to mobility routes (Route 9 and A012) marked the town's expansion. As in Funes, the Rosario–Córdoba highway triggered strong urban growth, incorporating new open and gated neighborhoods. The urbanization of rural land adjacent to Funes led to conurbation between both localities. Consequently, this formerly agriculture-based area has transformed into a predominantly residential-recreational locality.

²³ Currently, only 42% of its jurisdictional area is rural.

²⁴ Nevertheless, the town continues to play a predominant role in agricultural activities, with 76% of its land being rural.

Southwestern Agro-Industrial Zone

To the southwest, the Ferrocarril Oeste Santafesino played a decisive role in the origins of Pérez (Pe) and Zavalla (Za). The area originally formed part of Estancia La Azotea. In 1886, a strip of this land was expropriated and sold to Carlos Casado to establish the railway station and the first urban layout. The installation of the Gorton railway workshops in 1914 generated a new neighborhood with a morphology distinct from the original plant, and that same year Villa América was developed at some distance from the urban core. Subsequent decades saw continued growth through autonomous and spatially detached neighborhoods, including Guardia Nacional (1930), Cabin 9 (1948), Parque Güemes (1968), and the 1990s expansion of Villa América²⁵. Zavalla experienced a similar process, emerging from Casado's subdivision efforts and officially established as a village in 1887. Throughout the 20th century, it expanded through new developments, while the installation of the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences of the National University of Rosario in 1967 became a major attractor of population and urban growth. Although extensive agriculture dominates, the locality also stands out for significant agroecological and horticultural production²⁶.

Soldini (So) presents the distinctive case of having two origins: Pueblo Viejo, created by Domingo Arán in 1891 as an agricultural–livestock settlement, and Pueblo Nuevo, developed from Luis Soldini Domeq's land donation associated with the Rosario–Peyrano railway station. The first comprised 10 blocks and the second 20, extending the initial layout. While the locality experienced moderate expansions over the following decades, the most substantial growth occurred recently, transforming peri-urban land and consolidating continuity with the historical urban plant²⁷.

Piñero (Pi) also originated from the Rosario–Puerto Belgrano railway line, with the Don Erasto station established in 1906 and an initial 16-block layout. From the mid-20th century onward, dispersed urbanization emerged far from the original core, particularly along Provincial Route 18 and National Route AO12, a trend that has intensified in recent years²⁸. Further south, the

²⁵ Although agriculture continues to play a predominant role today, given that 80% of the land in its jurisdiction is rural (in addition to extensive agriculture and cattle farming, notable floricultural and horticultural plantations exist), its industrial profile has increased in recent decades.

²⁶ 97% of the jurisdiction is rural land.

²⁷ Currently, 96% of its jurisdiction is rural, primarily used for extensive agricultural practices of soybeans, wheat, and corn, as well as livestock activities, but horticultural production is also present.

²⁸ Its jurisdiction remains predominantly rural, with 94% of the land classified as such.

Central Argentine Railway branch line led to the establishment of Álvarez station on Estancia San Antonio, giving rise to the settlement of the same name. Although expansion followed the original layout, major transformations occurred in the 1990s, significantly enlarging the urban area.

Southern Mixed-Use Corridor

South of Rosario, the Buenos Aires–Rosario Railway played a key role in shaping several towns, each with distinct trajectories. Villa Gobernador Gálvez (VGG) emerged as a single city formed from three historical urbanizations: the 1888 foundation of Villa Gobernador Gálvez, developed south of the Saladillo stream to avoid frequent flooding; Villa Diego, associated with the railway line, station, and workshops; and Pueblo Nuevo, created near the Swift meatpacking plant to house its workers. Predominantly urban and suburban, only 7% of VGG remains rural, characterized by orchards, greenhouses, and extensive agricultural and livestock activities. Today it is a strongly industrial locality, especially in meatpacking and metallurgy, and the most populous municipality after Rosario.

South of VGG lies Alvear (Al), whose natural port conditions enabled the installation of the Punta Alvear dock. The first permanent settlers arrived with the opening of Alvear station in 1886, and its urban layout was approved in 1915; Monte Flores station was incorporated in 1917. Since the second half of the 20th century, dispersed and peripheral urban expansion has intensified, driven by major mobility corridors such as Provincial Route 18 and the Rosario–Buenos Aires highway. This fragmented urban growth has created land-use conflicts and significant challenges for service provision, despite the area's predominantly rural and industrial profile²⁹.

Farther south are Pueblo Esther (PE) and General Lagos (GL). PE does not have its own station but was strongly influenced by the population dynamics generated by the GL station. From the mid-20th century (especially after 1970), PE developed various subdivisions, initially used as second homes, with diverse layouts and low-density patterns. In recent decades, this trend accelerated through new open and gated communities and increasing permanent residency³⁰. In contrast, GL originated with its station in 1886,

²⁹ Although it plays a significant industrial role in the area, 70% of the land is rural, primarily dedicated to extensive crops and, to a lesser extent, horticultural production in its peri-urban areas.

³⁰ 53% of its land remains rural, largely used for traditional extensive crops, but also featuring notable horticultural production.

though its urban layout was only officially approved in 1929, marking a later urbanization compared to other towns. Expansion intensified from the 1960s onward, extending urban land across different sectors of its jurisdiction, often with low occupancy. The past two decades has seen continued growth, including several gated developments³¹.

Arroyo Seco (AS) and Fighiera (Fi) experienced similar processes. Although the Arroyo Seco Post existed as early as 1774 along the historic Coastal Road between Rosario and San Nicolás, the 1887 extension of the Buenos Aires–Rosario Railway enabled the establishment of AS station and its urbanization. Its original 79-block layout (with 112-meter blocks subdivided into 10–16 lots) was initially surrounded by agricultural production, particularly potatoes and cereals. Over time, AS expanded its contiguous urban area and developed new subdivisions along the riverfront, including weekend and gated communities³². Fighiera, in turn, developed around its railway station, with modest 20th-century expansions but significant recent growth along the Paraná River. Contemporary transformations include the development of the Azahares del Paraná gated community, which now occupies 75% of the town's central urban area³³.

Most of these towns originated from rural activities and saw their urban development linked to railway stations. Accelerated urbanization also occurred around industrial installations from the 1930s onwards, particularly evident in northern corridor towns³⁴. Since the 1960s and 1970s, municipalities have cataloged new urban land, which sometimes remained unoccupied for extended periods, particularly along national and provincial highways. This scalar perspective confirms that while the RMR is a functional metropolitan region, it remains a territory where rurality, in its productive and identity dimensions, continues to dominate most of its land, coexisting (and clashing) with new urban forms.

³¹ 82% of its land is rural, mainly dedicated to livestock activities and extensive agriculture, with horticultural production also identified in its peri-urban areas.

³² 89% of its jurisdiction consists of rural land, mainly devoted to soybeans, wheat, and corn, but also features production of peas, potatoes, and parsley, along with livestock farming and poultry breeding.

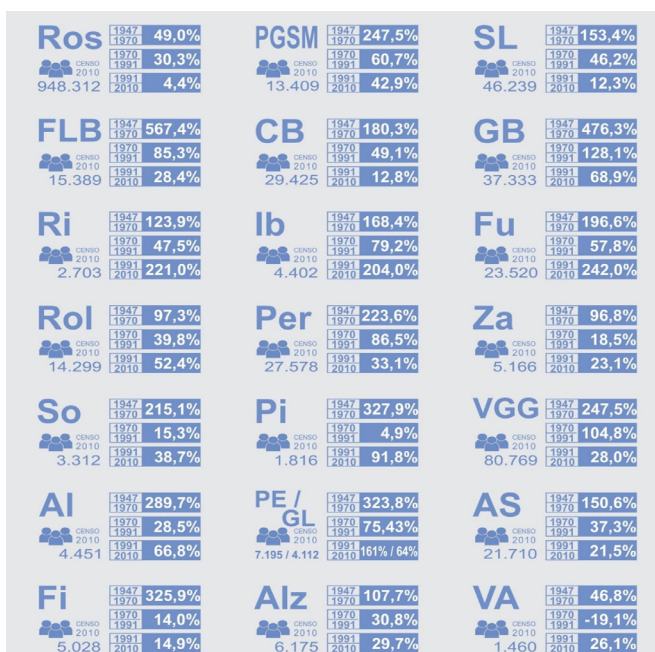
³³ The town is predominantly rural, with 96% of its jurisdiction classified as such and primarily used for extensive agriculture, although peri-urban areas are notable for horticultural production.

³⁴ Especially the riverside towns: Puerto General San Martín, San Lorenzo, Fray Luis Beltrán, Capitán Bermúdez, and Granadero Baigorria.

Contemporary Tensions at the Rural-Urban Interface

The contemporary configuration of the RMR is marked by a complex and often conflictive rural-urban interface where agribusiness expansion, real estate development, and metropolitan growth converge and compete for land, resources, and legitimacy. Demographic and territorial shifts have intensified these tensions. Analysis of National Population Censuses (Fig. 4) shows a correlation between population growth and urban land expansion dynamics. While riverside towns experienced strong growth between 1950-1970, recent decades have seen a significant deceleration in Rosario's growth rate alongside a sharp increase in towns like Funes, Ibarlucea, Ricardone, Piñero, and Pueblo Esther. This period also witnessed an expansion of urban land through new open and gated communities.

Figure 4 – Number of inhabitants in 2010 by locality and intercensal variations between 1947, 1970, 1991, and 2010.



Source: Author's elaboration based on National Population and Housing Censuses of 1947, 1970, 1991, and 2010³⁵.

³⁵ DIRECCIÓN NACIONAL DEL SERVICIO ESTADÍSTICO. *IV Censo General de la Nación. Censo de Población*. Presidencia de la Nación, Ministerio de Asuntos Técnicos, 1947.

This population increase, associated with new urban typologies (both open neighborhoods and gated communities) in traditionally rural areas, is directly linked to speculative processes of generating urban rent in weak planning contexts³⁶ (due to the lack of land use regulations and urban plans), alongside the promotion of lifestyles close to nature. The concept of “country” has emerged to describe low-density developments that celebrate a bucolic appeal of the countryside, completely detached from the region’s predominant agro-export dynamics³⁷.

The juxtaposition of new urban developments with intensive agricultural activities creates multiple conflicts. On the one hand, the recent proliferation of gated communities and suburban subdivisions reflects the commodification of rural landscapes, transforming agricultural land into real estate assets and generating land-use changes that disrupt existing ecological and productive systems. These developments frequently emerge in areas where agrochemical spraying is common, amplifying concerns over contamination, public health, and the exposure of vulnerable populations such as children in rural schools. This has fueled the rise of socio-environmental movements which have mobilized to demand regulatory changes, buffer zones, and greater state oversight. Their actions illustrate the emergence of new actors in territorial disputes and highlight the increasing relevance of environmental justice as a framework for understanding rural-urban tensions.

Following Svampa and Viale³⁸, the agribusiness model is responsible for Argentina’s most significant socio-environmental problem: “Argentina consumes more than 9% of all glyphosate production on the planet and is the country where the most glyphosate per capita is used worldwide. Data shows that in the 1948/1949 harvest, Argentina used only ten thousand liters of agrochemicals (...) today, it reaches an astonishing 500 million liters annually sprayed on fields, towns, and even rural schools”. This situation has prompted

DIRECCIÓN NACIONAL DE ESTADÍSTICA Y CENSOS. Censo Nacional de Población. Poder Ejecutivo Nacional, Secretaría de Estado de Hacienda, 1970.

INSTITUTO NACIONAL DE ESTADÍSTICA Y CENSOS. *Censo Nacional de Población y Vivienda*, 1990.

INSTITUTO NACIONAL DE ESTADÍSTICA Y CENSOS. *Censo Nacional de Población y Vivienda*, 2010.

³⁶ It is noteworthy that until 2018, most of the towns did not have updated urban plans or land use regulations; therefore, most new urban developments in the area have been done *ad hoc*, without a comprehensive plan beforehand.

³⁷ GALIMBERTI, Cecilia. *La reinención del río. Procesos de transformación de la ribera de la Región Metropolitana de Rosario*, Argentina. UNR Editora – A&P Ediciones, Colección Tesis Doctorales, 2015

³⁸ SVAMPA, Maristella & Viale, Enrique. *El colapso ecológico ya llegó: Una brújula para salir del (mal) desarrollo*. Siglo XXI editors, 2020, p.73.

collective actions, campaigns, and assemblies in the region, such as the “Stop Spraying Us” collective, the Assembly of Fumigated Towns along Route 18, and the Pueblo Esther Assembly for Life, Not AgROTOXICS, which highlight and protest the effects and impacts of this production model.

On the other hand, the expansion of urban land in a dispersed and fragmented manner poses significant challenges for territorial governance. Many new developments are located far from historical centers, often beyond the effective reach of municipal infrastructure networks. As a result, local governments struggle to provide basic services, regulate land use, and manage mobility in environments that are expanding more rapidly than institutional capacities allow. The distance between new residential areas and existing urban fabrics exacerbates car dependency, increases travel times, and complicates emergency and educational service provision. It also generates significant fiscal pressure on municipalities, particularly those with limited budgets and personnel, forcing them to grapple with the long-term costs of supporting low-density urbanization that was often approved under pressure from real estate markets rather than as part of coherent planning strategies.

The agribusiness sector simultaneously exerts strong pressure on the region, reinforcing the productive dominance of soybean cultivation and consolidating a territorial model centered on export-oriented agriculture. The advance of this model has intensified competition for land, driving up land values and reducing the viability of non-agribusiness forms of rural life, including small-scale farming and horticulture. These pressures intersect with urban expansion, creating complex scenarios in which real estate developers, agricultural producers, environmental activists, and local governments all lay claim to overlapping and often incompatible uses of the same spaces. The result is a dynamic but unstable interface where territorial boundaries (physical, functional, and symbolic) are constantly negotiated and contested.

This situation is further complicated by spatial and social imaginaries that shape how different groups perceive and value the countryside. For many residents of new subdivisions, rurality is associated with tranquility, safety, and aesthetic appeal, even as their lifestyle remains deeply dependent on metropolitan infrastructures and services. For agricultural producers, rurality represents economic livelihood, cultural heritage, and productive identity, all of which are threatened by urban encroachment. For environmental movements, the countryside is a site of ecological vulnerability and political struggle, where extractive practices must be challenged to protect

human and non-human life. These competing interpretations reinforce the dialectical tension between countryside and city that defines the region: each transformation is both product and producer of rural-urban relationships, reshaping identity, space, and practice.

The limits of existing metropolitan planning instruments become apparent. Although the Rosario Metropolitan Coordination Board has developed regional guidelines and planning frameworks since 2010, these efforts have not been sufficient to anticipate or manage the speed and complexity of current transformations. Many municipalities continue to authorize urban expansion without comprehensive planning or environmental assessment, responding more to short-term pressures rather than long-term visions. This regulatory weakness reinforces fragmentation and undermines the region's capacity to address structural challenges related to environmental risks³⁹, social inequality, and infrastructure provision.

Conclusions

The RMR exemplifies the long-term and evolving dialectic between countryside and city, revealing how rural and urban logics have continuously intertwined, overlapped, and reshaped one another across centuries. From livestock practices to the establishment of agricultural colonies, from railway-driven growth to industrial poles, and from the agribusiness to dispersed residential developments, the region's history demonstrates that rural and urban dynamics form a complex and interdependent continuum.

Contemporary conflicts at the rural-urban interface reflect the cumulative effects of these historical processes. Real estate expansion has intensified competition for land, transforming agricultural areas into fragmented suburban landscapes and pushing municipalities beyond their regulatory and infrastructural capacities. At the same time, the consolidation of soybean-based agribusiness reinforces an extractive and export-oriented model that amplifies environmental risks and concentrates productive power. These overlapping dynamics give rise to socio-environmental disputes that reveal underlying inequalities in how different actors experience and negotiate territorial change.

³⁹ The absence or non-compliance with regulations leads to daily conflicts. While there are provincial and, in many cases, local regulations related to restrictions on phytosanitary products, the difficulty in enforcement results in non-compliance in many jurisdictions.

While residents of new subdivisions often pursue lifestyles premised on selective rural imaginaries, agricultural producers confront pressures linked to land values and regulatory uncertainty, and environmental movements seek to mitigate the health and ecological impacts of intensive production. Each of these actors embodies competing visions of rurality and urbanity, illustrating how identity and territory remain deeply contested dimensions of metropolitan life.

The persistence of structural asymmetries in land-use regulation and governance complicates coordinated responses. Despite advances in metropolitan planning frameworks, institutional fragmentation undermines long-term strategies integrating rural and urban needs. Municipalities often operate with limited capacity, responding to immediate development pressures rather than formulating comprehensive plans.

Reconceiving the relationship between countryside and city as a dialectical and interdependent process provides a conceptual foundation for addressing these challenges. It implies recognizing that rural and urban transformations are mutually constitutive, shaped by global economic forces, national policies, local practices, and everyday territorial negotiations. An integrated and territorially sensitive approach should aim to reconcile agricultural productive needs with the social and environmental demands of urban expansion, ensuring developments are planned within a sustainable, inclusive, and long-term vision. It also entails valuing the multiplicity of identities and uses that coexist at the interface, rather than treating these areas as peripheral.

Ultimately, the case of the RMR demonstrates that addressing the challenges of rural–urban coexistence requires navigating structural and emergent tensions. The region’s future depends on moving beyond fragmented responses to develop integrated strategies that acknowledge the complexity of its territorial dynamics. Recognizing the countryside and the city as intertwined and evolving categories offers a path toward more equitable and sustainable metropolitan development, where historical legacies and contemporary demands can be articulated within a shared territorial project. These findings underscore the relevance of adopting long-term, historically grounded approaches when analyzing rural–urban transformations in Latin America.

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