

## **Integración y producción de espacialidades transfronterizas: un estudio a partir del turismo en la Circumpuna\***

### **Integration and production of transboundary spatiality: a study of tourism in Circumpuna**

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#### **Resumen**

Este artículo propone analizar las iniciativas de integración transfronteriza que emergieron de la valorización turística de la Circumpuna (Argentina, Bolivia y Chile) en las últimas dos décadas. La integración fue liderada por un conjunto heterogéneo de actores locales y subnacionales, quienes buscaron incidir en las prácticas turísticas vigentes. El trabajo se centra en la dimensión espacial de la integración transfronteriza, interrogando acerca del modo en que este proceso crea, refuerza o transforma centralidades y periferias. Se realizó un análisis cualitativo del contenido de diversas fuentes documentales, las cuales fueron complementadas con entrevistas a informantes claves, referentes de las diferentes iniciativas de integración. Se muestra que la integración turística posiciona a la frontera como recurso y espacio de oportunidades para diferentes actores, quienes buscan controlar los flujos

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turísticos y captar parte de sus beneficios económicos. La integración transfronteriza tensiona con las construcciones Estado-céntricas que aún modelan las fronteras nacionales, pero también delinea una disputa entre las diferentes integraciones posibles, creando nuevas fragmentaciones y diferenciaciones.

*Palabras clave:* integración, transfronterización, espacialidad.

### **Abstract**

This article proposes an analysis of the transboundary integration initiatives that emerged from the appraisal of tourism in the Circumpuna sector (Argentina, Bolivia and Chile) in the last two decades. The process of integration was led by a heterogeneous set of local and sub-national stakeholders, who sought to influence current tourism practices. The work focuses on the spatial dimension of transboundary integration, questioning the way in which this process creates, reinforces or transforms centralities and peripheries. A qualitative analysis of the content of various documentary sources was carried out, which were complemented with interviews with key informants, who are representative of the different integration initiatives. It was possible to ascertain that tourist integration positions the border as a resource and space of opportunities for different stakeholders, who seek to control tourist flows and capture some of the associated economic benefits. However, cross-border integration leads to friction with State-centric constructions that still shape national borders, and also underlines a conflict between the different possible forms of integration, creating new forms of fragmentation and differentiation.

*Keywords:* integration, transboundary, spatiality.

### **Introduction**

The Circumpuna tri-national border or the Circumpuna links the west of the Province of Jujuy (Argentina) with the southwest of the Department of Potosí (Bolivia) and the center-east of the Antofagasta Region (Chile). Since the 1990s, this tri-national border has been intensely transformed by tourism development processes that have positioned a group of places in the range of international destinations: the Atacama Desert in Chile, the Uyuni Salt Flat in Bolivia and the Quebrada de Humahuaca in Argentina. This appreciation has led to the increasing arrival of visitors —largely international—, in addition to the proliferation of numerous tourist service ventures by residents, becoming established as one of the main economic activities for some of the small towns and villages, traditionally dedicated to mining, animal husbandry and small-scale farming. A cross-border mobility was configured that brought together the different sectors of the Circumpuna, transforming it into a space that is interconnected by tourist consumption (Amilhat- Szary and Guyot, 2009).

As a result of the intensification of tourism development in the Circumpuna, in the 2000s various cross-border integration initiatives were launched to influence the development of this activity. The initiatives were led by a heterogeneous set of governmental and non-governmental actors, especially at the subnational and local levels. This process originated in a stage of a certain political-administrative decentralization of the functions of the national States in South America, which favored greater participation of subnational administrations in foreign relations.

This paper focuses on the cross-border integration promoted by tourism in the Circumpuna, seeking to answer questions about the actors and scales involved in the initiatives, the participation of the different communities and localities, where each one was led or designed, what were the proposals, meanings, and representations that these initiatives projected on the border, and what were their scope and limitations.

In contrast to studies on regional or supranational integration that rely on macro analysis and national scales, the approach to cross-border integration requires the consideration of scales that privilege proximity relations and the perspectives of those who live, travel or work on the borders daily. Studies on cross-border cooperation have often focused on actors and institutions, generally linked to perspectives and concepts from political science and international relations. This paper will take a part of these contributions to put them in dialogue with the contributions of critical political geographies and the transdisciplinary field of border studies, to reflect on the spatial dimension of cross-border integration processes, understanding space as a participant in social relations. Taking into account the spatiality of integration allows us to ask ourselves from where the projects are defined and how the different actors are inserted, but also what are the spatialities that these initiatives project on the Circumpuna, recognizing the centralities and peripheries they create and the power relations that run through them.

The objective of this paper is to analyze the spatialities produced by the processes of cross-border integration on a subnational scale, deployed through tourism in the Circumpuna in the last two decades, and to examine the links with other forms of spatial construction associated with the dominant tourist practices and state-centric models. For this purpose, three central elements were analyzed: (i) the paradiplomatic networks created from the bringing together of situated actors, (ii) the tourist mobility that was configured through their intervention proposals, and (iii) the spatial representations that accompanied them.

It is argued that the cross-border spatialities emerging from integration are configured from the interest of local actors to influence current tourism practices and to participate in the economic benefits generated in the Circumpuna, consolidating the border as a resource. This paper shows that cross-border integration creates both tensions and dialogues with the state-centric constructions that still shape tourist destinations. In any case, alternative projects that struggle for the definition of centralities and marginalities are recognized, defining a dispute between different possible integrations. Transborderization creates new fragmentations within the Circumpuna in multiple directions and ways, which are articulated with the traditional national divisions in force, as well as with the networks that have historically

shaped each binational border pair.

To achieve the objective of this paper, a qualitative methodological strategy was designed and supported by extensive fieldwork carried out in the period 2014-2018. There, a wide range of documentary sources were collected, including different state plans for multilateral integration, minutes of multilateral meetings, technical reports from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and cooperation agencies, press releases from local media, digital documentation on Internet portals of private operators and NGOs, as well as printed dissemination materials from NGOs, local governments and private operators, all of them related to different integration initiatives. The analysis of the contents of this corpus was complemented and put in dialogue with the information gathered through semi-structured interviews with key informants, representatives of the different integration projects or representatives of strategic sectors, such as tourism officials of local and subnational governments, foreign affairs officials of subnational governments, consular representatives in the localities of the area, representatives of regional integration institutions, NGO managers, tourism operators and representatives of community associations.

The study's spatial and temporal scope was delimited by considering the bordering subnational entities (Province of Jujuy, Antofagasta Region and Department of Potosí) and the scope of the tourism development processes that took place in the area since the end of the 1990s. This delimitation was specified with respect to the processing of the information collected, which allowed the identification and delimitation of cross-border integration initiatives and the recognition of their central characteristics, based on the following: the institutional affiliation and level of action of the parties involved, the localities from which the projects emanated and those participating or involved in the proposals, the periods of validity, the objectives, the intervention proposals and the visual and textual representations that supported them.

The following is a theoretical-conceptual construction for thinking about the relationships between transborderization, integration, and spatiality in relation to the approach of the study processes. Next, we examine the paradiplomatic networks that tourism integration has delimited in the Circumpuna over the last two decades to understand how the objectives and strategies are linked to the differential participation of the various actors and localities. Third, the intervention proposals of these projects are examined to recognize the forms of cross-border mobility they project and the spatial representations they create. Finally, we present an analysis of the scope and limitations of tourism integration for the different sectors of the Circumpuna, considering the forms of historical relations and the special features of each binational border pair.

## **Theoretical and conceptual reflections on transborderization, integration and spatiality**

The notions of transboundary, transborder, or transborderization are emerging and gaining more and more visibility in current studies, although their meanings are still being constructed and rethought. For Tapia Ladino (2017), the transborder concept is constituted from below, by the people who inhabit the territory, from "the interaction produced by the mobilities of people in their constant and continuous crossings and by the deployment of a series of social practices that have the border as a reference and as a resource" (p. 61). The production of transborder spaces results, according to Durand (2015), from the interaction and strengthening of social links, the lowering of barriers and the development of forms of cooperation between distinct territorial systems, which generates new spatial rationalities and practices.

Transborderization is expressed in a set of socio-spatial practices that have the border as their center. Therefore, the border is not destroyed, eliminated, or does not disappear, but is appropriated and re-signified. As Tapia Ladino (2017) argues, "exchanges are energized by the existence of the border, thanks to it and sometimes in spite of it, so that it is the border, in its territorial expression, that acts as a reference for such links" (p. 72).

Part of these transborder processes is linked to the networks of local and subnational, state and non-state actors on either side of the international border, which define a set of instruments or organization mechanisms, with a greater or lesser degree of institutionalization, to work together to improve economic or social aspects of the population. Academic literature, mainly from political science and international relations, has been accounting for these mechanisms through the concept of transborder cooperation (Celata, Coletti and Sanna, 2013; Rhi Sausi and Oddone, 2009). This is considered in dialogue with the concept of paradiplomacy, decentralized diplomacy or diplomatic pluralism, through which the participation of a wide variety of state and non-state actors, at subnational and local levels, in foreign relations is accounted for (Cornago, 2016; Ovando Santana, 2013).

Other papers have brought together these contributions with geographical perspectives to examine their relationship with the production of space, the construction of borders, territorial projects, spatial imaginaries and the creation of transborder regions (Durand, 2015; Kramsch, 2012; Sohn, 2014; Reitel, 2013). Following some of these proposals, the starting point here is the concept of transborder integration, conceived as a driving force in the production of transborder spaces, as it stimulates close contacts, makes it possible to create links between territories and generates changes through the flows and associations that take place there (Durand, 2015). Integration is permanently articulated with multiple other transborder practices associated with mobility, trade, migration, work, fairs and festivities.

Transborder integration does not refer to a mechanism that re-establishes pre-existing continuities, nor does it imply a return to a previous, idealized state. Integration creates new relational spaces, which are in dialogue with the historical links forged by the different inhabitants of the borders, as well as with the national constructions that have produced reorientation effects towards the central areas of each country. As a transborder practice, integration is neither linear nor continuous, but is part of a complex and changing process that unfolds at different paces and on different scales —temporal and geographic— (Durand, 2015).

Integration is often associated with the concept of *project*. For Rojas Aravena, Altmann Borbón and Beirute Brealey (2012), it refers to a strategic political project that requires “thinking and feeling in a shared way, to build a common voice in substantive areas that allow the proposed goals to be achieved” (p. 6). Transborder integration projects contain a common vision of the future that indicates the convergence of interests and includes a statement of objectives, a spatial projection and some form of institutionalization (Reitel, 2013). This shared vision is often linked to the search for economic and social development, especially for local governments that have become promoters of transborder relations in order to improve their economies (Coletti and Oddone, 2016). Tourism has been one of the most frequent work axes in these types of initiatives in South America, based on the idea of its contribution to local development.

This form of integration can also promote the mobilization of the border as an object of territorial and symbolic recognition, building a shared vision and a territorial identity that transcends the interstate border (Sohn, 2014). This shared identity occasionally arises from the feeling of abandonment or relegation from their respective national centers, as a form of territorial alienation (Ovando Santana and González Miranda, 2018).

As Kramsch (2012) proposes, the transborder concept implies negotiation, resistance, and transformation of the meaning of the political. In any case, the meanings of this contestation or resistance are neither simple nor linear. Future projections may not be shared by all actors or may define an unequal participation for them. In this context, far from being harmonious and always virtuous, integration is constituted and traversed by power relationships, conflicts, competitions and disputes for the control, appropriation, regulation, or transformation of reality.

The study of the spatial dimension of integration makes it possible to reposition the border in geographic studies, questioning approaches to space as something static, timeless, immobile, or unchanging. Following Soja (1985), spatiality is socially produced and at the same time is the producer of social relations, in a socio-spatial dialectic. The concept also makes it possible to recover the symbolic dimension as a form of appropriation and social construction of space, spatiality being the product of a historical-cultural convention that projects it, a collective representation whose meaning or value is socially given (Núñez, Arenas and Sabatini, 2013).

The concept of spatiality emphasizes the unfinished character of space, as an exercise or practice that is continuously being executed. For Soja (1985), spatiality is permanently reproduced and reinforced, presenting an appearance of stability but, when reproduced, it presents itself as a continuous source of struggle and conflict. Doreen Massey (1999) recognizes spatiality as the engine of social change, where different trajectories and a plurality of voices coexist, enabling the multiple, the unexpected, the new or different.

The concept of transborder spatiality seeks to show the formation of multiple relational networks, bringing together each side of the interstate border, which are materialized or symbolized in different ways, and which participate in the permanent redefinition of the border. Transborder spatiality does not imply crossing a border as if it were a localized and immobilized object. On the contrary, a transborder spatiality produces the border, moves it and alters it, since the relationships that constitute it are being reproduced and transformed. Through this concept it is possible to recognize the way in which integration materially and symbolically reconstructs the border and the power relations that cross it, prioritizing certain links over others, configuring networks, defining command centers, generating inclusions and exclusions, defining centralities and peripheries.

To visualize the spatial dimension of integration and operationalize the concept of spatiality, three elements will be analyzed: *paradiplomatic networks*, *transborder mobility*, and *spatial representations*. The first refers to the networks that are created between situated actors, who meet and work for cooperative purposes, through different mechanisms and with varying degrees of institutionalization. Rhi Sausi and Oddone (2009) point out that reticular governance is linked to the management of networks, based on decentralization, subsidiarity, and autonomy. In these networks, some sites will be positioned as command-and-control nodes, from where the actors with the greatest capacity for agency will be able to shape these structures. It operates a spatial selectivity, i.e., a classification of elements that remain together and others that are left out (Blanco, 2007).

The second element refers to *transborder mobility*, which includes the different ways of transiting, stopping, experiencing, and consuming the interstate border as part of a tourist trip. It can be thought of as a strategy of different social actors to occupy, control or appropriate places, to sustain or create social links (Benedetti and Salizzi, 2011). Through their intervention proposals, integration initiatives seek to influence these mobilities, defining localities and corridors with greater relevance and contributing to produce or reinforce centralities and peripheries.

The third element is that the integration initiatives produce *spatial representations*, based on the dissemination materials designed as part of the projects. These resources propose ideas, images and meanings about the border and transborder relations. They bring into play a certain geographical common sense that includes assumptions and knowledge that are recovered, activated, transformed, and reproduced (Lois and Hollman, 2013). As geographic imaginaries, representations are immaterial in essence, but they materialize (Hiernaux and Lindón, 2012) and participate in the transformation of space, since they guide or model the

ways of planning and acting on it.

### **Paradiplomatic networks in Circumpuna tourism development**

The integration initiatives that emerged in the Circumpuna from tourism gradually began to take shape in the late 1990s. One of the first initiatives can be traced to the program "Strengthening of commercial, touristic and cultural links of the Argentine Northwest Region (NOA) with neighboring countries", developed in 1998 by the House of Salta and the NOA, located in the city of Antofagasta (Federal Investment Council, 1998). Since then, several encounters, fairs, meetings, plans, programs, and agreements have taken place, with greater intensity since the mid-2000s, coinciding with the intensification of tourism development processes.

The different initiatives conceive tourism as a promoter of development for the localities and communities of the Circumpuna. This vision was consolidated after the rise of neoliberalism, the retreat of the State and the primacy of foreign capital around the 1990s, which led to the breakdown of traditional marketing circuits and generated significant socioeconomic inequalities, mainly affecting the rural areas of this tri-national border (Cowan Ros, 2005; Galaz, 2014). In this scenario, different intervention proposals sought to promote and legitimize the presence of tourism in local communities through discursive strategies linked to economic contribution and cultural and environmental diversity (Bolados García, 2012). Tourism has become the main economic activity for many towns and communities in the Circumpuna.<sup>1</sup> While much of the benefits have been concentrated in the larger or better-serviced towns, a number of smaller towns or rural communities have developed initiatives to capture the growing tourist flows and retain some of their economic benefits (Carrillo and Colque, 2013; Galaz, 2014; Nielsen, Calcina and Quispe, 2003).

In a context of increasing political-administrative decentralization of national states in South America, subnational and local entities became responsible for the economic development of their populations, which began to compete in the new global context to attract capital, markets and technologies (Boisier, 2004; Carrizo and Velut, 2010). The business sector, NGOs, credit organizations and international cooperation agencies also came to play a central role in development strategies, influencing different sectors of the Circumpuna (Arellano López and Petras, 1994; Manzanal, 2000). Likewise, during this stage, new forms of paradiplomacy were expanded through the bringing together of some of the subnational capitals, as well as between the business sector of the area, for example, through the Integration Zone of the South American Center West (ZICOSUR), in addition to the institutionalization of the Integration and Border Committees in the three binational border pairs (Calleja and Safarov, 2009; Karasik, 2003).

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<sup>1</sup> Personal communication with C. P., local level tourism official, Purmamarca (November 27, 2017). Personal communication with J. P., subnational level tourism officer, local headquarters, Uyuni (April 21, 2016). Personal communication with M. G., subnational level tourism officer, local headquarters, San Pedro de Atacama (April 13, 2016).



The proliferation of transborder tourism integration initiatives in the Circumpuna can be understood in this context, with a view to promoting the development of the localities and communities in the area. More than 20 initiatives were surveyed over the last two decades, some corresponding to specific tourism projects and others linked to projects with different productive axes, in which tourism plays a leading role. These initiatives have been promoted mainly from below, at the local or subnational level. The lack of supranational organizations that bring together these three countries and define programs and policies of organization, in an effective and sustained manner over time, has limited the development of tourism integration proposals from above, as has occurred in an incipient manner in the Latin American region through MERCOSUR. As analyzed by Ovando Santana and González Miranda (2014), these transborder relations respond to regional projects of their own, without a general framework of supranational integration that facilitates it, or even in conflictive diplomatic contexts.

The transborder integration that promoted tourism in the Circumpuna is complex, as it involves a wide variety of actors, scales, and institutional mechanisms, which overlap and overlap in different ways. Some projects arose from the assembly of subnational states, such as the *International Seminar on Tourism and Integration*, organized by the Regional Unit for International Affairs of Antofagasta, together with the provinces of northern Argentina, in 2016 and 2017. Several initiatives emerged from mixed mechanisms that combined the participation of actors from different administrative, state and non-state levels. For example, the subnational states, together with the regional business community, defined joint actions in the ZICOSUR Tourism Commission of 2006. The Integration and Border Committees of the three binational pairs also began working on tourism integration projects between 2004 and 2005, through the collaboration of national, subnational, and local officials, together with civil society. Many initiatives respond to cooperation between local governments, as well as between rural and indigenous communities, with frequent support from NGOs and international cooperation agencies. Among them, the "Project for the development of a rural tourism circuit in indigenous communities of the Andes" in 2003, the Tourism Borders initiative in 2008, the Border Meeting of Tourism and Culture Directors in 2012 and the Intermunicipal Border Network in 2013, among others. More recently, the business sector has also developed some mechanisms for transborder organization, mainly through tourism service providers who have gathered around the movement called Andean Tourism Integration since 2013 and the Andean International Tourism Fair, since 2015.

Integration initiatives have defined a variety of institutional mechanisms or devices through which the will to integrate, the general guidelines and the policies that guided each process are agreed upon or expressed. The mechanisms used, such as plans, agreements, conventions, associations, commissions, fairs, meetings and networks, comprise different formats and levels of institutionalization, as well as different time horizons. Some initiatives were one-off or short-lived, while others became relatively stable forms of coordination and follow-up for long-term projection.

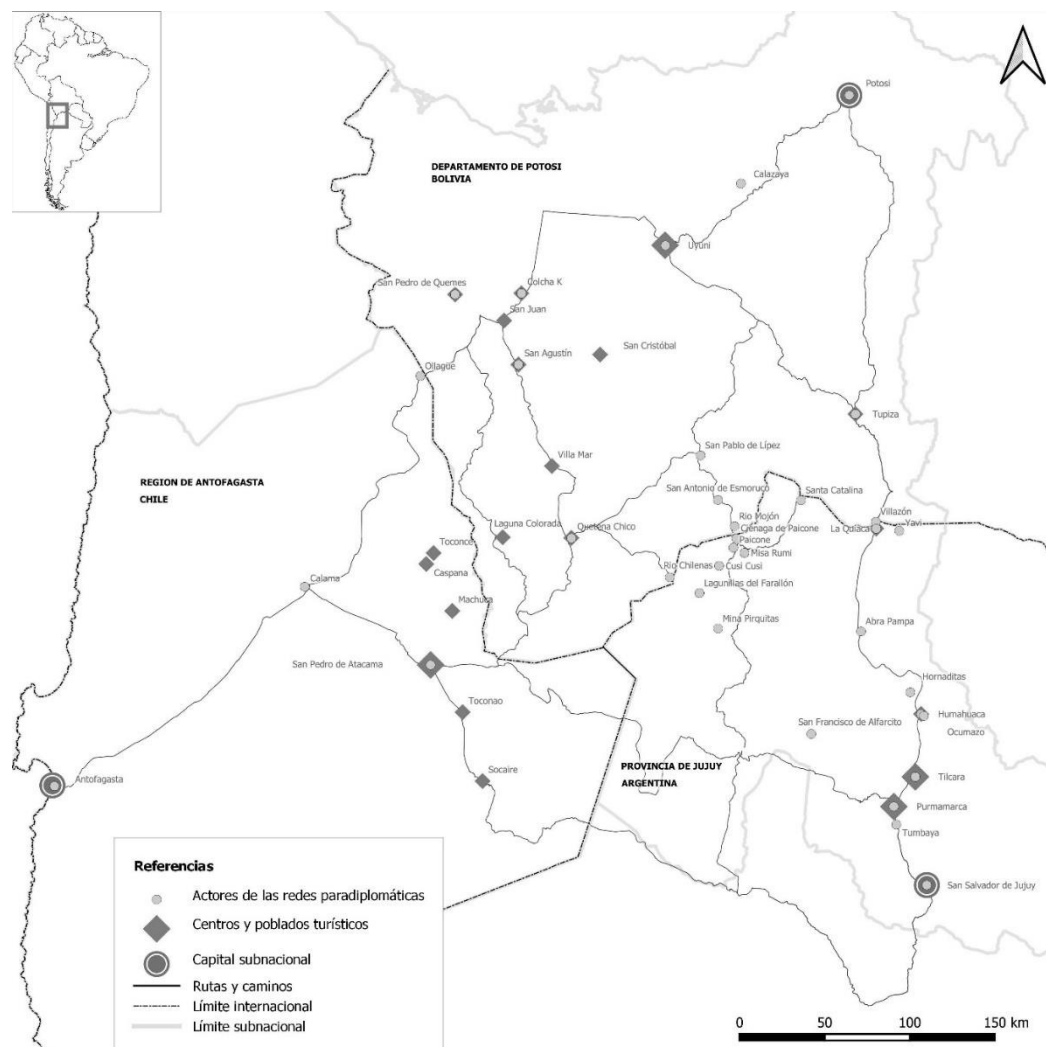
Each of the initiatives established different objectives, strategies, and proposals, although all of them reflected the integrationist impulse that promoted tourism in the Circumpuna. In general, the proposals were linked to improvements in transborder movement infrastructure, speeding up or facilitating crossing and transport services (Sicra, 2011; ZICOSUR, 2006-2012). They also referred to the need to harmonize the control of tourism services and legislation, as well as to carry out joint diagnoses and exchange experiences and work methods (La Quiaca-Villazón Integration Committee, 2004-2013, 2014-2017). They also sought to coordinate promotional activities, develop new joint ventures, tourism products and services, and organize events to improve knowledge of the attractions, experiences and operators of neighboring countries, in order to develop commercial and cultural links, create new circuits and design integrated tourism maps (Bolivia-Chile Border Committee, 2005-2011, 2017; La Quiaca-Villazón Integration Committee, 2004-2013, 2014-2017; El Tribuno, July 2, 2016; Nueva Gestión, 2012; ZICOSUR, 2006-2012).<sup>2</sup>

From the analysis of tourism integration initiatives, it was possible to reconstruct the paradiplomatic networks that brought different localities into dialogue, based on the agency of multiple actors located on either side of the interstate border. Figure 1 shows the localities that have made up the different networks, as well as the main tourist centers and towns in the Circumpuna.

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<sup>2</sup> Personal communication with H. T., foreign affairs official at the subnational level and representative of subnational regional integration agency, Antofagasta (November 7, 2016). Personal communication with R. I., tourism official at subnational level, San Salvador de Jujuy (October 31, 2016).

**Figure 1. Paradiplomatic networks and tourist centers in the Circumpuna in the last two decades**



Source: own elaboration based on information collected during field work (2014-2018).

From the analysis of the localities that make up these networks, it is observed that the consolidated tourist centers in the Circumpuna, such as San Pedro de Atacama, Uyuni and Tilcara, do not have a central participation in the integration initiatives, while only Purmamarca has shown a greater involvement in some of the initiatives. In the same line, the numerous communities that are currently part of the most promoted tourist excursions around San Pedro de Atacama, such as Toconao, Socaire, Coyo or Machuka, or the communities around the Uyuni Salt Flat and the Avaroa Reserve, which have developed numerous tourist ventures and receive a considerable number of visitors, such as San Cristóbal, San Juan, Laguna Colorada, Llica or Tahua, do not participate in the paradiplomatic networks either, as shown in Figure 1.

In contrast, the localities that played an active role in the paradiplomatic networks were those that do not play a prominent role in current forms of tourism consumption. These include communities in the Puna Jujuy, such as Cusi Cusi, Ciénaga de Paicone, Abra Pampa, Santa Catalina, Mina Pirquitas, Lagunillas de Farallón or San Francisco de Alfarcito; also, in the Lípez region in Potosí, such as Quetena Chico, Río Mojón, Río Seco, San Antonio de Esmoruco or San Pablo Lípez; and in the Chilean Altiplano, such as Ollagüe.

Based on the preceding analysis, it is possible to observe that cross-border integration was consolidated as a strategy of different actors to insert themselves into the tourist logic and to be able to participate in the economic benefits generated by the activity, particularly for the smaller localities and communities, thus reinforcing the idea of the border as a resource and an opportunity (Sohn, 2014; Tapia Ladino, 2017).

The intention to capture or reinforce the economic benefits generated by tourism practices is at the origin of the different integration initiatives and is also reflected in the intervention proposals that these projects generate by defining ways to transit, experience, visualize and consume the tri-national border through tourism.

### **Transborder mobility and spatial representations as forms of intervention**

The transborder integration initiatives have created different intervention proposals that sought to reflect the decisions or guidelines agreed upon to influence tourism practices in the Circumpuna. These proposals function as projections that recreate an imagined and desired spatiality. Prokkola (2011) points out, in the European context, that tourism can contribute to a functional linkage through infrastructure, accessibility or the creation of routes that increase competitiveness, but also to the strengthening of the processes of construction of meanings, identities, and homogeneous images around a cross-border region. Both elements can be traced in the Circumpuna intervention proposals.

In the first place, most of the initiatives sought to influence the forms of *transborder mobility* that consolidated tourism, through the hierarchical organization of certain routes or corridors, linking the localities that were part of each project. Three general strategies can be identified in the definition of these mobilities. One of them consisted of promoting the organization of the main consolidated tourist centers through corridors that enhance their positioning, generating joint promotional activities to increase the number of visitors and exchange flows in the localities and routes that currently represent a greater number of services and attractions. This was mainly observed in projects led by subnational capitals and the business sector. For example, the Andean International Tourism Fair, created in 2015, had among its objectives to integrate the tourism business sector of the most representative cities and sought to organize the main destinations in the Andean corridor (El Tribuno, August 21, 2015).<sup>3</sup>

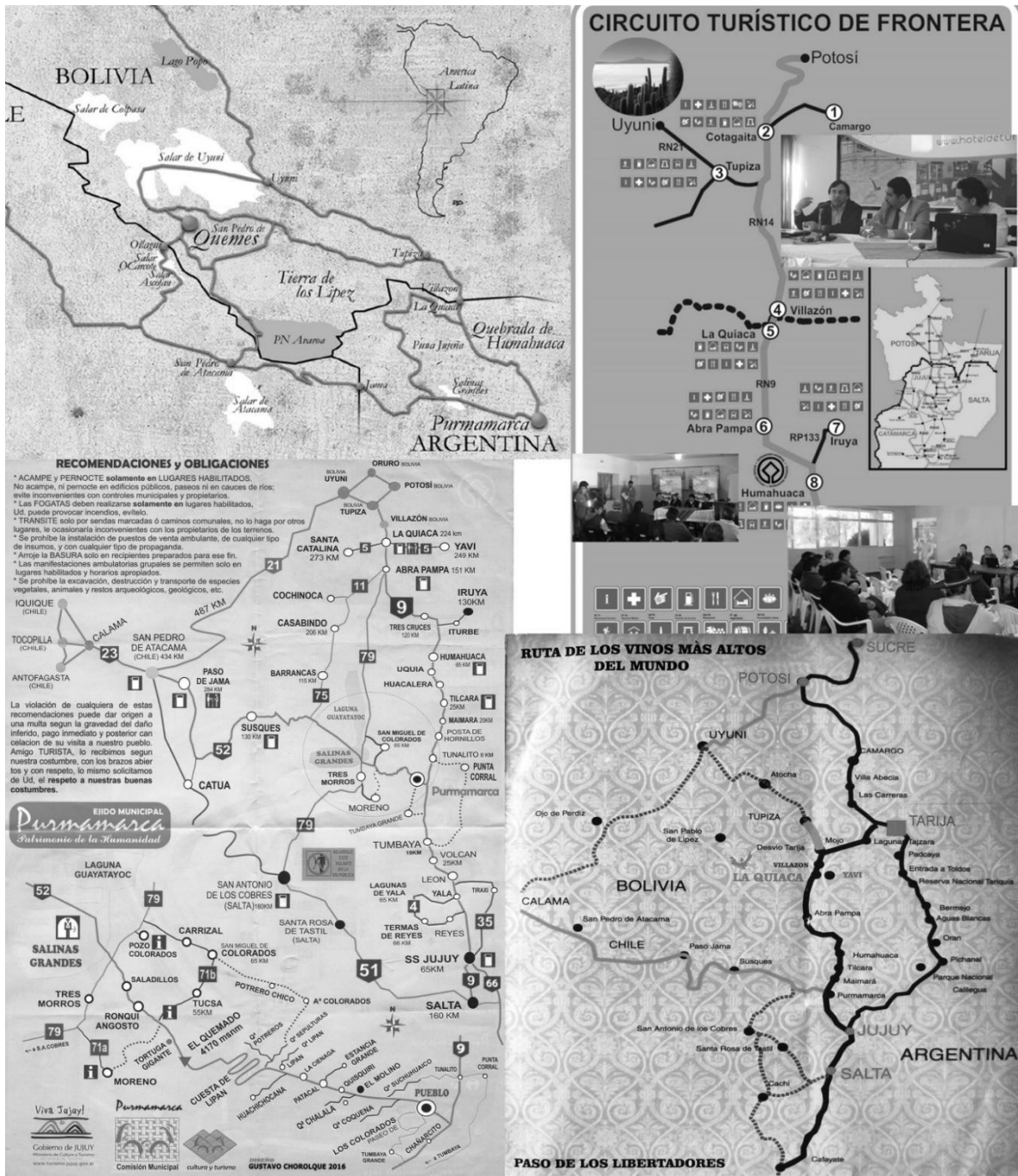
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<sup>3</sup> Personal communication with G.V., tour operator and integration network coordinator, San Salvador de Jujuy (October 26, 2016).

Another strategy consisted of incorporating new actors and localities into the already consolidated tourist corridors, developing new ventures, services or products that would attract current visitors to the area and capture part of the economic resources generated by the activity. This was most frequently observed among local government and indigenous and rural community projects promoted by different NGOs. For example, in 2013, the Intermunicipal Border Network brought together municipalities with lower and higher tourism development, such as Humahuaca, Abra Pampa, La Quiaca, Villazón, Cotagaita and Tupiza, with the aim of strengthening cooperation and solidarity between jurisdictions and achieving greater bargaining power with the State and the private sector, designing a Border Tourism Circuit between Argentina and Bolivia (Intermunicipal Border Network, 2013).

A third strategy, although less frequent, was oriented towards the creation of new centers and new tourist corridors, alternative to those already consolidated, to redirect economic benefits to areas where tourist activity is not widely deployed. For example, the Binational Integration Meeting Lipez-Rio Grande de San Juan Basin, organized by the NGO Fundandes in 2009, promoted the design of what was called the Binational Ecotourism Corridor. This incorporated small towns and communities in northern Jujuy and southern Potosí, currently not included in the consolidated circuits, such as Cusi Cusi, Lagunillas del Farallón, Ciénega de Paicone, Mina Pirquitas, San Antonio de Esmoruco, Río Mojón and Río Chilenas, demanding from the national authorities the opening of a new border crossing, in order to obtain greater regulation and control of tourism practices in the area (Fundandes, 2009).

Figure 2. Tourist maps of integration initiatives



Source: Camino Andino (November 21, 2011); Municipal Commission of Purmamarca (2016); Municipality of La Quiaca (n. d.); Nueva Gestión (n. d.).

In addition to intervening in the mobilities, the intervention proposals deployed a whole set of *spatial representations*, through different visual devices and narratives, in which they captured the ways in which they conceive the border and the relations between border places. One way of visualizing these representations was by means of tourist maps, in which the locations, attractions and corridors to be emphasized and promoted were represented, according to the objectives and interests of each initiative.

The integration projects of NGOs with rural communities or local governments of the Circumpuna tri-national border are the ones that have made the most progress in the production of these visual devices, some of which are shown in Figure 2. These maps show those localities and communities that are part of each project, including sites that do not actively participate in the current tourist circuits, but that are presented with the same or greater size and centrality than those consolidated sites. Some maps also incorporate alternative routes to the commercial circuits most frequented by visitors.

These visual devices do not have the purpose of orientation and movement, but their function is often to construct concepts about places, propose images or evoke emotions (Lois, Troncoso and Almirón, 2008). These materials are not neutral or objective, but they rather participate in their creation through processes of selection, interpretation, and representation. Maps are constituted as devices of visibility, with a fictional function and a strategic and perspectival character (Quintero, 2000). As forms of knowledge production, they establish social differentiations, hierarchies, and orders.

The tourism integration maps are projections that aim to create an ideal or idealized image of the spatial and border relations of the Circumpuna, and at the same time, to convey actions that materialize the representations created. In contrast to official maps (which generally outline the figure of a single country, while neighbors are depicted with a white surface as empty space), these maps emphasize the continuities on either side of the interstate border.

Figure 2 shows the representation of a homogeneous surface in which the outline of any subnational or national entity is not recognized, while highlighting the routes that link the different sectors of the Circumpuna. In some maps, the interstate border has been erased and the only reference to the bordering countries is through labels. In these, the distinction of national territories is difficult for an unfamiliar eye. In this way, the maps emphasize the links between the different sectors of the Circumpuna and minimize national differences.

These maps redistribute centralities and construct new selections, differences and hierarchies, depending on the sites that each initiative seeks to highlight and where it seeks to promote tourism development. They are visualization devices that question and challenge both the hierarchies created by the consolidated tourist practice, as well as the national referents that have traditionally reinforced the divisions between countries.

In addition to the maps, the intervention proposals included the creation of tourism brands through a product or denomination that brought together the different sectors of the tri-national border, such as *Binational Andean Tourism Region*, *Andean South America*, *Andean*

*Road or Andean Macro-region.* These denominations are often accompanied by visual elements (symbols and colors) that have been associated with the idea of the Andean, as an aesthetic construction of a landscape inhabited by millenary cultures. According to Oliveras González (2015), it can be thought of as a transborder marketing strategy, through the creation and dissemination of a territorial brand that is based on certain aspects or elements of a place, which are considered positive, unique, and distinguishable. The idea is to consolidate the idea of a common tourist destination, with a view to positioning it in distant markets.

This declaration of the Andean concept as a common or unifying element, present in most of the tourism integration projects surveyed, can be read as a strategic use made by the actors located within the mobilization which claim certain features or identity traits. As Grimson (2000) proposes, the identifications that emerge and are negotiated at the border "are linked to the interests of local populations and their needs for social organization; culturally shared 'traits' (...) may be accentuated in different historical circumstances in relation to specific contexts and interests" (p. 19). As analyzed by Rouvière (2009) for the Alianza Aymaras sin Fronteras, the transborder territory is "staged and presented as a homogeneous space, the legitimization of which has a historical basis" (p. 23). For the author, there is a strategic appropriation of the dominant discourses on ethnicity to achieve an economic development objective. In any case, in the Circumpuna, these denominations compete with others, such as *South American Puna*, in which a distancing of the ethnic-identity component is sought, thus operating a naturalization of the integration landscape.

These references to a shared identity element, however, do not translate into a denial of the border effect or opposition between two symbols, state and indigenous (Rouvière, 2009). In projects for the Circumpuna region, appeals to national identities are permanent and the flags of each country are incorporated in all visual materials that design and disseminate transborder integration initiatives, where national and indigenous elements are combined to create a discourse of harmonious, non-conflictual coexistence.

In short, the intervention proposals built a transborder imaginary, a space of integration, homogeneous and continuous, with new images of a harmonious tourist destination (Prokkola, 2011). As a practice of transborderization, it reveals the agency of individuals and groups to negotiate and alter hegemonic power relations to improve their living conditions (Irazábal, 2014). This imaginary puts tension on the national, official, and authorized representations, which are widely circulated among the visual materials of tourism. From a situated perspective, these transborder practices call for reimagining borders, that is, creating new imaginative frameworks for people's encounters and interaction (Van Houtum and Strüver, 2002). These are alternative ways of thinking about, transiting and consuming the Circumpuna tri-national border through tourism.

Although the spatial representations sought to show a landscape of unity, the opposing strategies to influence mobility and the divergent territorial marks revealed projects in dispute, through which the actors sought to redefine their participation in the centralities and peripheries, reinforcing or transforming the dominant tourist logics. According to Amilhat-



Szary and Guyot (2009), transborder tourism in the Circumpuna has configured disputed territorialities and generated a conflict of opposing representations, which are the source of contradictory territorial projects.

### **Integration and disintegration of a tri-national border**

Despite the proliferation of integration initiatives, their protagonists report a set of difficulties and limitations that have led to a scarce materialization of the intervention proposals. Among the most frequent problems, the actors point out the lack of sustainability of the projects over time, difficulties in coordination and decision making, lack of continuity in governmental management or the scarce dialogue between the different levels and sectors involved.<sup>4</sup> These problems are common to the different transborder integration processes in Latin America, where several authors point to the long construction times of agreements and institutional frameworks, the limitations to transfer the powers preserved by national States (Rojas Aravena et al., 2012), the weak context of decentralization, the fragility of supranational integration processes or the multilevel governance models used (Celata et al., 2013).

These difficulties are linked to the validity of a state-centric model that still strongly shapes national borders. In this sense, tourism integration was based on the social, economic, and political relationships that have overlapped in the Circumpuna over time. Although at the beginning of the twentieth century this tri-national border constituted an integrated space organized around the saltpeter mining industry (Conti, 2011; González Miranda, 2009), their gradual disarticulation starting in the 1930s was followed by several decades of appropriation of the national peripheries by the respective centers, through increased state presence and reinforced security and mobility controls (Benedetti and Salizzi, 2011; Garcés, González, Richard and Soto, 2018; Karasik, 2003; Molina Otárola, March 20, 2008). In any case, the social and cultural effects produced by the long processes of state building (Grimson, 2000), based on their strategies of nationalization and borderization, have had different scopes in the Circumpuna. In dialogue with these general processes, tourism integration projects have been expressed in a differential manner in each of the sections that make up this tri-national border.

The Argentine-Bolivian border has maintained, over time, important commercial, family and cultural exchanges and has been relevant for local populations, markets and national states (Benedetti and Salizzi, 2011; Conti, 2011). The wide availability of public passenger transportation and the presence of different localities with services for tourism on the main route promoted intense tourist mobility on this binational border. It represents the largest

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<sup>4</sup> Personal communication with F. H., responsible for integration project, Purmamarca (March 13, 2014). Personal communication with I. Z., representative of the business Chamber (Cámara empresarial) and participant in integration networks, San Salvador de Jujuy (October 31, 2016). Personal communication with J. J., NGO tourism manager and integration project coordinator, San Salvador de Jujuy (July 4, 2014). Personal communication with R. I. (October 31, 2016).

number of tourism integration initiatives in the Circumpuna, mostly deployed between rural-indigenous communities and between local governments, with the support of NGOs, with important references to the notion of cooperation, solidarity and twinning ties, as well as the appeal to local development (Camino Andino, November 21, 2011; Fundandes, 2009; Nueva Gestión, 2012).

The Argentine-Chilean border has been an area of intense historical transit with pack animals by local communities, until the geopolitical conflicts of the dictatorial governments and greater state control disarticulated these movements (Molina Otárola, March 20, 2008). Since the 1990s, a concept of a border neighborhood and a rhetoric of integration and brotherhood (Karasik, 2003) was established between the subnational capitals of Jujuy and Antofagasta, and different mechanisms of business organization at the regional level were outlined, as mentioned above. Subsequently, supranational infrastructure projects have transformed this area into a fast lane for bioceanic transport on a continental scale, while the interests of the local communities in the border area were not considered (Benedetti and Tomasi, 2013). Recently, tourist mobility has begun to use this fast road to connect the main tourist centers, although with less frequent use than the other binational pairs. Since the tourism development, integration projects on this border have multiplied, led mainly by governmental and business actors from the subnational capitals and the main tourist centers, focusing on the generation of a combined commercial offer or product, promotional activities, attracting visitors, streamlining the movement of tourists, and the actions of the private sector (El Tribuno, August 21, 2015; ZICOSUR, 2006-2012).<sup>5</sup>

Finally, the Chilean-Bolivian border has been of great relevance for historical local mobilities, although of little interest for national States and for supranational integration processes, where the transport infrastructure has condensed few technical innovations. Despite the lack of interest, diplomatic disputes and the latent territorial dispute after the War of the Pacific (1879-1884), as well as the migratory flows of Bolivians to Chile, have exacerbated nationalist representations and discriminatory discourses in the local populations (Blanes, 2017; Ovando Santana and Ramos Rodríguez, 2016). In any case, the cultural, family, and commercial networks in this border have developed extensively over time and continue to be relevant today (Garcés et al., 2018). The few innovations in the transport infrastructure in this area were re-signified by tourist practices, from which an itinerary intensely demanded by international visitors was structured. Thus, local tour operators had to network on each side of the interstate border, in conjunction with some rural and indigenous communities that began to provide services to visitors passing through. This exchange has generated significant competition between tour operators in each country to maintain control and dominance of the excursions on each side.<sup>6</sup> This has resulted in the limited participation of this binational border in transborder tourism integration projects.

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<sup>5</sup> Personal communication with H. T. (November 7, 2016).

<sup>6</sup> Personal communication with F. E., tour operator, Uyuni (April 21, 2016). Personal communication with L. L., tour operator, San Pedro de Atacama (April 16, 2016).

## Conclusion

Transborder integration in the Circumpuna enhanced cooperative and complementary relationships between actors on either side of the interstate border based on tourism practices. It was clearly positioned as a strategy for the development of local populations, by the conception of the border both as a resource and an opportunity, especially for those localities and communities that do not greatly benefit from this activity.

Integration projects contributed to produce, materially and symbolically, multiple transborder spatialities that questioned and challenged national constructions. They sought to transform hegemonic tourist narratives and current border imaginaries, reinforcing the imagination and experience of the border in a transversal sense. The appeal to common features and shared identities, the dissemination of images and the new ways of traveling around the tri-national border region shaped a common and articulated vision of the Circumpuna. In this sense, the initiatives of rural, indigenous, or local government communities appear as the most transgressive ones. Not only did they seek to configure new ways of crossing the border through alternative routes to those consolidated by business practice, but they also demanded that the national State open new border crossings and promoted alternative images to the dominant national imagery, with representations of the border as a homogeneous and integrated space.

However, the integration initiatives highlighted the coexistence of competing transborder projects, outlining a scenario with multiple possible integrations. In this way, the Circumpuna was consolidated as a force field of tension, where different actors at multiple scales fight for the control of tourist mobility and the appropriation of its benefits, configuring new centralities and peripheries. This tension revealed a differential capacity of the various agents to influence the development of tourism, in which alternative projects have encountered significant difficulties to realize their proposals, while business logics and global tourist flows appear to be the main forces that currently reticulate the Circumpuna tri-national border.

The Circumpuna was also configured as a fragmented space in three binational border pairs, with different forms and intensities of linkage, where the various sectors have had an unequal participation in the projects and tourism integration has tended to reinforce the dominant historical relationships in each case. A tri-national border is thus delineated, crossed by multiple differentiations, divisions and fragmentations in the most varied ways, with new interiors and exteriors, which are produced, reproduced and transformed through these practices of integration, thus contrasting with the image of unity and homogeneity.

The multiplicity of conflicting projects, the unequal participation of the different actors and sectors of the Circumpuna, the different ways and intensities of historical relationships and the persistence of the State-centric model that still organizes these areas have contributed to a scarce materialization of the intervention proposals, at the same time hindering the consolidation of a notion of community, integration space or transborder region, within the

framework of tourism practices.

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