

Ramirez, Natalia* *“The construction of the social risk in the processes of agricultural modernization. A socio-political analysis of the technological risk in the central region of Santa Fe (Argentina)”** Department of Sociology, Faculty of Political Sciences and Sociology, Granada University, Spain (PhD. Dissertation-Dec 14th, 2012).*

Abstract

The present thesis centers its research in the social theory of risk and its relation towards the other capitalist modernization processes. It is particularly aimed at revealing the social construction of risks of technological origin associated to the process of agricultural modernization or “*agriculturización*,”¹ in the central region of Santa Fe (Argentina) during the last decade. To this end, three theoretical-methodological approaches or perspectives are proposed: *social vulnerability*, *social perception and risk communication*. Through these approaches, the life changes associated to the social conditions of existence of those citizens who live in a risk and vulnerability context are analyzed and interpreted. In this way, the contemporary western societies underlie exposed to the adverse impacts of the circumstances of a development model mainly characterized by a strong and vertiginous technological change in its productive systems, awakening new worries, insecurity and uncertainty in the population due to the techno-scientific development of modern capitalism in which the risk culture is built. Hence, both the theoretical development and the methodological treatment, organize the main thread of the investigation in three relevant moments. The look towards *social vulnerability* has been thought in order to investigate in the internal and external dynamics of the process of “*agriculturalización*”¹ and in how the different sceneries have been built, going in depth in potential situations of threats, risks and, consequently, new social and political conflicts manifestations. In the first part of the work, it was considered the knowledge provided mainly by secondary sources of information of known authors, identified and available bibliographic material, investigation reports and documents related to the subject. The accent in *social perception* was due to the need to recognize the common sense, through the points of views or perspectives of the different social actors (politics, economy and the civil society), in relation to the transformations produced by the new model of agricultural production and in the

investigation of future worries, in terms of risks, due to the application and use of the new techniques, biotechnological innovations, machines, among others. The analysis and interpretation of the social perception of the risk is the result of the primary information recovered from 50 interviews made, in medium-size and small populations of the central region of Santa Fe. As a third perspective, it is made relevant the *risk communication*. This allows the investigation of the relations which are built, in general, between the technology an society and, in particular, in the treatment of the risks associated to the known technological package (tillage system, transgenic soy, glyphosate herbicide) of the current agricultural model, given by the mass media, as representatives of other social systems: science, politics, justice and the civil society. Risk communication was analyzed from the design of a corpus of news made up by two of the most relevant newspapers of the studied region: “*La Capital*” and “*El Litoral*”. Finally, the thesis conclusions were focused towards the identification of coincidences, differences and/or contradictions of the partial results of the three perspectives analyzed. In this sense, the articulation of the three focuses previously described, allowed to study the problems of the technological risks in an integrated and complementary way; not finding, in this case, contradictory positions between them. Nevertheless, the fact that the process of agricultural modernization is characterized by having controversial impacts on the social structure, and that the economic and social benefits are not equitable for everyone, makes that the points of views or perceptions change according to how the people feel affected by risk situations. The environmental insecurity for the technological risks is a problem which must begin by differentiating the share of civic responsibilities. Thinking about risks also implies thinking about their distribution and intensity, in their objective and subjective conditions and in their social acceptability. The knowledge of the range of the impacts of technology and their risks, is fundamental for the social actors involved and for society in general, hence the importance of risk communication. This knowledge is the key for the management and reduction of risk and, mainly, in case that these technologies lead to situations of future disasters. As a conclusion, the interpretations, connections and imbrications between the three perspectives of this research, present themselves as a challenge for those works which study risk as a social and historical construct, recreating and broadening the critical look towards a social problem which must not be forgotten. Besides, they want to be a contribution to

those contemporary debates that try to light the complex relations between technology, the environment and society, in a context of progressive uncertainty.

Key words: *Construction of the social risk, technological risk, agricultural modernization, social vulnerability, perception of the social risk, risk communication.*

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1 “*Agriculturización:*” it refers to the predominance of the agricultural production over the cattle industry.

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** The interest and motivation to study in depth such subjects account for the following research projects that have represented the institutional and academic frame of the present thesis: “*Territorial Impacts on the transformations of the agricultural and industrial sector of the central region of Argentina. Recent past and future sceneries*” PICT REDES (2008-2011) National Agency of Scientific and Technological Promotion. Director: Lic. Hugo Arrillaga. Participating Universities: National Universities of the Littoral, Rosario, Buenos Aires, Córdoba, Río Cuarto, San Luis, North of the Province of Buenos Aires and Toulouse Le Mirrail. “*Social*



Impacts produced by the reconfiguration of the regional agricultural and farming system. The case of the Province of Santa Fe in the context of the Pampean Region” CAI+ D RED (2009-2011), National University of the Littoral. Node: “Changes in the territorial risk, its threats and vulnerability as a consequence of the productive transformation in a context of climate change.” Director: PhD. Hilda Herzer.