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Small publishing houses in Argentina. Their dynamism and limitations within the publishing industry

Abstract

The goal of this article is to analyze the market insertion that small Argentine publishing houses underwent between the late twentieth century and 2015. We take into account the sector's evolution in the country, the worldwide concentration of the publishing market, and the business strategies these firms adopted, from a historical standpoint. Sources are institutional and periodical publications, oral sources obtained through interviews with key actors, statistical sources, repository information, and secondary literature. Some comparisons with other Latin American countries are also presented. The conclusions highlight elements such as the publishing houses' accumulated historical experience, business strategies, speed of adaptation to digital and multimedia formats, production focused on specific areas or topics, and the leveraging of a minimal and flexible structure, many times in unfavorable circumstances, as key factors that allow a correct understanding of the complexities of the business of publishing for small and medium enterprises in Argentina.

Keywords: Argentine publishing industry; Small and medium publishing houses; Business strategies and editorial policy; Publishing industry; Publishing history in Argentina

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1. Introduction

Small publishing houses are interesting, due partially to their worldwide dynamism lately, and partially due to their importance as part of the “cultural” sector. This area has become so important for “measuring culture” that Argentina created the Cuenta Satélite de Cultura (Satellite Account for Culture), within the Sistemas de Cuentas Nacionales (National Accounts Systems), acknowledging its importance in the country’s development.

In the past few years, a significant number of these publishing firms have appeared in the country. Speaking in relative terms according to their scale, many have become cultural reference points. This is a fundamental turn of events since it ensures bibliodiversity in the midst of the process of economic concentration and growing control by foreign capital that the industry is experiencing.

Regarding the dynamism that these smaller firms have recently shown, the interest they have sparked can be seen in several international academic articles about the role they have played in the context of the second global economy. Different authors have pointed out the important role these small companies assume in various economies, regardless of their level of development: how many there are vis-a-vis the total number of companies, how much they add to GDP, how many jobs they generate, how they help diversify the economy, and how they help contribute to the development of entrepreneurial skills (Romero 2006; Orlandi 2006). According to data from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), in the majority of member countries, at the beginning of the 21st century, small and medium companies accounted for between 96% and 99% of all companies, for one-sixth of industrial production, and for approximately 60 to 70% of jobs, as well as the majority of jobs

in the service sector (OECD 2002). There is a great deal of specialized literature regarding the business articulation, either vertically, between a small or medium company, and a large one, or horizontally, between small or medium-sized companies. Several authors state that this is a crucial factor in determining the strength and competitiveness of a production system in a given territory, within the context of said second global economy (Romero 2003; CEPAL 2004; Capó-Vicedo, Expósito-Langa and Masiá-Buades 2007; Humphrey and Schmitz 2002). In this review of Argentina's publishing sector, we have detected horizontal connections between smaller publishers. The identified networks, which are described later in this article, show these mentioned horizontal connections. However, there do not seem to be any vertical integration between small or medium publishing houses and large publishers, which are mostly multimedia, given the concentration and dominance of foreign capital in the country's editorial sector.

In regards to the creation of small and very small publishing houses in Argentina, which were launched mostly in the 1990s, several authors (Velázquez 2017, 77) state that they offer a sort of resistance to the process of profound economic concentration and increasing foreign capital that has taken place in the sector. This aspect, however, does not explain the phenomenon in its entirety: small printing houses were not born in the last few decades. The Argentine publishing industry has historically had a number of these companies, located mainly in Buenos Aires. The city has maintained its centrality in the publishing sector, followed in importance by Cordoba and Rosario (the second and third cities of the country in terms of population). Without disregarding the notion of resistance, it is essential to take historical experience into account, which shows us that small businesses are a feature of this publishing industry. The more recent small operations have generally focused on certain subjects, carved out a market niche, relied

on the possibility of printing fewer copies, and used their small structure and flexibility to their advantage in hard times.

In the midst of the economic transformations that took place in Argentina in the 1990s, publishing house merged, or were incorporated into business conglomerates mainly focused on multimedia.¹ It is essential to point out two things: first of all, that these transformations took place alongside the cycle of concentration and arrival of foreign capital that was taking place in the rest of the economy, and, secondly, that the process of mergers and acquisitions within the publishing industry happened all over the world.

These aforementioned multimedia business groups have required their publishing divisions to yield profit margins between 10 and 15%, similar to those made by their other companies. This is three to four times higher than what the publishing industry has historically produced. Large multimedia conglomerates began placing their book “products” in their “leisure and entertainment” departments (Getino 2008, 77), establishing that every book should yield a profit, setting aside a criterion that established that books with bigger sales subsidized those destined to smaller audiences. This is particularly relevant, given that the publishing houses analyzed here found their niche in these markets that were not suitable for mass production (Penrose 1959).

The acceleration in the renewal rate, the expansion of available markets brought on by globalization, and the increase in the speed of purchasing stand are distinctive features of the problems the publishing industry faced. Also, published content became obsolete due to new

¹ We are aware of literature that analyzes how business conglomerates are built, but since this article focuses on small and medium publishing houses, we have not taken it into account.

information in books, and a highly diversified demand pressured traditional sales levels downwards. There were other factors that played a role in the crisis the publishing industry has faced since the end of the twentieth century: the explosion of photocopies, illegal reproductions, the expansion of online information, videotext and reference material on CD-ROM, among others (Rama 2003, 125 -126). By the first decade of the twenty-first century, the publishing industry came to be seen as an industry that produced editorial content in several formats and platforms.

In Argentina, important publishing houses, such as Kapelusz, Javier Vergara Editores, Emecé, Paidós, Sudamericana, El Ateneo, Estrada, as well as most local publishing houses specialized in law, such as Abeledo – Perrot, Depalma, and La Ley, among others, fell into the hands of major actors of the international publishing industry. According to data from 2005, they controlled up to 75% of the Argentine market (*Informe CEP* 2005, 65). The economic concentration was also visible in the commercial realm, which was made up of two large chains (Yenny-El Ateneo and Cúspide), some medium sized operations, and a few bookstores considered “independent” or “traditional.”

This article focusses on the period between the early 1990s and 2015. The timeline begins when the process of economic concentration and arrival of foreign capital started to become evident. Its end point is directly linked to the significant advantages in publication and distribution made possible by new technologies. Also, to the speed with which small and medium publishing houses started to appear, especially after the crisis in 2001, up until 2015. At that point in time, Argentina’s economic direction began to change. Also, the historical aspects of the Argentine publishing industry are taken into account. For this analysis we have adopted the size criteria used by the publishing industry. Large, medium-sized, small, and very

small firms can be identified according to the number of new titles they publish annually. Large publishers churn out 100 or more per year, whereas medium sized firms publish between 20 and 99. Small and very small firms are under 20 titles a year (Libro Blanco de la Industria Editorial Argentina 2015, 6).

A few questions are posed. Can we establish any historical continuities regarding the dynamism of the smallest publishers by identifying them from the very moment the publishing industry in Argentina began? Can the appearance of so many of them in this timeframe be ascribed to the competitive advantages that became available due to new technologies? Does the fact that many of these founders saw themselves as cultural agents play a significant role? Or does the cultural aspect, dear to many of them, also play a significant role? What is the connection between the staying power of these publishing houses, their editorial policies, and their business strategies? What mechanisms have they used to promote, sell and distribute their work?

This article, therefore, focuses on how these small and medium publishing houses have inserted themselves into the market place since the end of the twentieth century. We have used source material such as institutional and periodical publications, interviews with key actors, statistics, information from several archives and analysis of the topic conducted by different researchers.

We conducted interviews with 17 key informants that carry out their professional activities and business ventures within this sector. They were chosen based on their background, the fact that they belong to different age groups (ranging from 18 to 30), and because they occupy, or have occupied, different positions within the publishing industry. Some of them have owned medium and small publishing houses, distribution and logistics companies, and bookstores. Also, among them are those who have had positions in large distributors, as well as people who have played

a significant role in the publishing industry since the 1950s, and have been involved in different entities related to this sector. They are representatives of the industry as a whole. We employed a qualitative analysis that uses historical oral sources to discover how the subjects, insofar as individuals who are part of a social collective, define the situation. We take into account that “oral history” chooses new social subjects in light of phenomena and events. They can add a qualitative interpretation of processes and historical and social events, trying to focus this analysis on the vision that manifests itself through experience (Aceves Lozano 1994, 143-144). This use of analytical language allows us to question the interviewee’s discourse and explore its inherent contradictions (Grele 1989, 125). By doing this, we add new layers of complexity to the study.

In addition to the introduction, this article has the following parts: a brief explanation of the historical origins of Argentina’s publishing industry, which is relevant in order to understand the historical continuity of small and medium publishers, a section that connects business strategies with editorial policies, a section focusing on commercialization strategies, and, finally, the conclusions. In all of them we have added analyses of the publishing industry in Latin America and other parts of the world. This allows us to understand the publishing industry in Argentina and its connection to the international context.

2. A brief history of Argentina’s publishing industry

The Argentine publishing industry started in the second half of the nineteenth century. It was made up of small companies located mainly in Buenos Aires. The number of bookstores and publishers, most of them located in the civic and historic district and usually run by foreigners, started to rise in the 1850s. New publishing technology became available in the second half of

the nineteenth century, which led to an increase in the number of published books. Companies like Kraft (1864), Peuser (1867) and Estrada (1869) were launched: these were the early stages of the publishing industry in Buenos Aires. We should also point out that an expansion of the reading public took place at the end of the nineteenth century, and the beginning of the twentieth (Valinoti 2016, 31).

New printing technology also became available in the second half of the nineteenth century, which in turn boosted production. Among them we can point to the steam rotary, in 1864, the linotype machine, in 1867, and type casting, in 1869. Thus, the basis of Argentina's nascent publishing industry began to emerge. The first professional editors appeared around this time: people who did not own a bookstore nor a printing machine, and were able to turn teaching books, local texts, and the first collection of popular writings into bestsellers.

Bookstores and publishing houses many times diversified their activities. Sometimes, they even received work outsourced by the commercial graphic industry, mainly by printing commercial stationery (De Sagastizábal 1995 43 – 44). In 1885 there were eleven bookstores, ten printing houses and two lithographers. According to information from the Printing and Publishing Activity Record of Buenos Aires, in 1859 there were fifteen bookstores and twelve printing houses. Based on a study of ads that appeared in the press, we know that by 1870 there were 18 bookstores located around the Cabildo of Buenos Aires; the municipal census of 1887 showed that there were 100 bookstores and 89 printing houses (Eujanián 1999, 559). Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the diversity of the reading public also grew: this can be seen in the products advertised by different businesses, which tended to satisfy the public's demand through specialization, either with books in different languages, ancient books, or scientific texts (Eujanián 1999, 559). The growth in literacy should also be taken into account, since it

played a role in the increase of the reading public. In absolute numbers, the National Population Census showed that in 1869 there were 310,259 people aged 6 and above who could read and write. In 1895, the number of people in this age bracket who could read and write had grown to 1,479,704. In 1914, the number of literate people aged 7 and above was 3,915,949 (Censos Nacionales de Población 1869, 1895 y 1914. República Argentina). The expansion of the education system played a role in this process of literacy growth: considering the number of students and their elementary school attendance rates, according to data from the National Census and the Memories of the National Education Board, between 1850 and 1895, the student population grew from 183,000 to 877,810. Attendance also grew from 11,903 up to 246,132 (Tedesco 1994 131). In 1914, the student population between ages 6 and 14 was 1,485,785, and 828,987 boys and girls were attending school (Censo Nacional de Población de 1914. República Argentina). This evolution took place within the context of an economic growth that occurred in Argentina at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, during its integration into the world economy, based on the exports of its primary sector. Even though its industry began to experience a gradual and sustained growth starting during the final decades of the nineteenth-century, agricultural production was the main driver of the Argentine economy until the aftermath of World War I.

In the first decades of the twentieth century, we can point to collections from Tor, Sopena (Spain) and Editorial Cooperativa Claridad, as well as serialized romance stories and local texts, known as *criollistas*, among many others. Around this time there were about 800 different titles published annually. All this speaks to the beginning of the publishing sphere, which consolidated itself through the expansion of the market of cheap books: serialized stories, written by local and foreign authors, and local literature, known as *gauchesca*. Towards 1910,

there was also a substitution in the process of importing books. The growth of the reading public allowed, for the first time, large print runs of highbrow literature at a low price (Aguado 2006, 97).

In the first decades of the twentieth century, there was also a significant surge in the number of public libraries. A new urban subject began to emerge: the educated citizen. Particularly in the years between the two World Wars, a series of publishing houses that offered a significant variety of works of literature and universal ideas—reinforcing a tendency that had already been seen earlier—appeared in Buenos Aires.

During the 1920s, there was a greater diversification of industrial activity: new production and management technology, as well as innovations in commerce, became available (Barbero, 2004, 206). The “modern editor” appeared during this time. The activities of the publishing industry started differentiating themselves in the 1930s: book dealers, writers, editors, proof readers, translators, and collection directors, among others. This modernized the sector and gave it certain characteristics that are part of its founding morphology. It also aided in its configuration, which started with a number of small and medium publishing houses that showed great dynamism and the ability to adapt. Publishing houses such as Losada (1938), Emecé (1939) and Sudamericana (1939) were created; Espasa-Calpe set up a headquarters in Argentina, the bookstore El Ateneo started publishing, and Paidós was created in the 1940s. The bookstore El Ateneo, which belonged to Pedro García, started to publish a variety of topics, from Philosophy and Art to History and Medicine. Before launching his own bookstore and publishing operation, this editor of Spanish origin had already worked in the bookstore his brother Martín had in the city of La Plata.

Many publishers sought to satisfy the demands of a reading public that continued to grow and diversify. One key factor is that some of these editors, which came from Europe and launched these small and medium publishing houses, had previous experience in the publishing world. Some of them had worked as booksellers. Others had gained their experience in other sectors: either the book industry or in magazines, or because they came from a family connected to the editorial industry, or because they had previously worked with important editors or booksellers. The editorial businessmen who shone in the Argentine publishing industry first arrived between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, as part of the great international migration that took place around that time. They also came in the final years of the 1930s, due to the situation unfolding in Spain in the years leading up to World War II, such as the Spanish Civil War and the advancement of fascist forces in several places of Europe.

In Argentina, as was the case in large portions of the world, the economy in the 1930s was also suffering due to effects of the world economic crisis. The economic policies of those years were drawn up as a response to the instability of the world economy, as well as to the changes in the economic structure of Argentina that became, to a certain degree, a consequence of the Great Depression. A series of counter cyclical economic measures were set into place. Several broadly accepted studies from several years back point out that the expansion of the industrial sector in Argentina during that decade had to have been based on the idle capacity generated during the previous decades. Based on this perspective, investments in the industrial sector had already occurred prior to the 1930s (Villanueva 1972). Within this context, the task differentiation process within the publishing industry took place, as well as the aforementioned creation of small and medium publishing houses in the 1930s.

Gonzalo Losada founded the publishing firm Losada in 1938, along with a group of intellectuals and people specialized in publishing. He based this venture on the same business model used by other important publishers around the world. They set up subsidiaries in Uruguay, Colombia, Peru, and Chile. From the beginning, they used different strategies to encourage literary activities; for example, writing competitions, that not only offered a chance to be published, but also a possible income (Gudiño Kieffer 2004, 13 – 15). We should point out that Gonzalo Lozada was the manager of Espasa–Calpe in Argentina, but decided to leave and start his own publishing house. He was born in Madrid in 1894, and before even turning 20, he was working as a representative for the Spanish Papermill of Nicolás María Urgoiti (Gudiño Kieffer 2004, 25 – 26). After this he worked for Espasa – Calpe, and later emigrated to Argentina with his wife and children.

From the very beginning, Emecé set itself apart from most Argentine publishers that also had a large number of best sellers. Its directors also deployed other strategies that entailed significant benefits, such as the purchase of the Compañía Impresora Argentina (Argentine Printing Company) (De Sagastizábal 1995, 83-85). When Mariano Medina del Río, a Spanish citizen who came to Argentina in exile after the Spanish Civil War, created Emecé, he received literary contributions from Álvaro de las Casas. The visual artist Luis Seoane,² and the writer Arturo Cuadrado, who were both Spanish exiles, also participated. In its early days, the firm published books related to Galicia, in Spanish as well as in Galician, since their first collections were aimed at readers of this origin.

² Luis Seoane was a sketch artist, painter, engraver, and, also, an editor, who was born in Argentina to a Spanish family. In 1916 he went to live in Spain. After the Spanish Civil War, he sought exile in his country of origin (Costa 2014).

As we have already pointed out, Sudamericana was founded in 1939. Antoni López Llausás was hired to run it. After a while, he started to acquire the majority of the shares. The company set out to accomplish two initial goals: promote Latin American authors, and translate and promote contemporary foreign literature. López Llausás belonged to a family of publishers and booksellers: his grandfather owned a bookstore in Barcelona that started publishing between 1869 and 1870. He later had his own publishing house, and published his own books. As other Spanish publishers who harbored republican ideas, the Spanish Civil War forced him into exile, and he emigrated from Spain to Argentina (López Llovet 2004, 11– 27).

The Editors Society was created at the end of the 1930s. In 1941, it would become the Cámara Argentina del Libro (Argentine Chamber of Books, CAL, for its initials in Spanish) (Giuliani 2016, 95). The 1940s, and most of the 1950s, were the years of largest prosperity for the local publishing industry. The problems the industry was having in Spain because of the Civil War contributed to this bonanza on Argentine soil, and the Spaniards in exile played a significant role in its development. Another important event in the 1940s was the creation of Editorial Abril, by César Civita (1941). They published important magazines, and also book collections aimed at children and young people, which were run by Boris Spivacow. César Civita was a Jewish Italian publisher who emigrated to Argentina due to the racial laws of 1938. His first publishing experience was a magazine for the clients of a company owned by his father in Milan that imported industrial machines. Later on, he met Alberto Mondadori and started working in Edizioni Disney. In 1936, he started working regularly in the Milan publishing industry: he collaborated with several publishers, and even became General Co-director of the publishing house Mondadori, where he worked alongside Arnaldo Mondadori (Scarzanella 2016, 22).

Children's literature in Argentina had grown and developed independently from schools since the end of the nineteenth century. It should also be noted that it experienced significant growth starting at the beginning of the twentieth century, a tendency that deepened after the 1940s and 50s. In addition to Abril, other publishing firms created during these years, like Sigmar, Codex and Acme, focused on this audience as well. Other publishers that had traditionally geared their titles towards this segment –such as Atlántida and Peuser– also increased their production (Gociol 2010, 80-81). This is important in the long run, given that these books have always been known for their dynamic nature. Since the rearrangement of the publishing sector in the 1990s, a significant number of small, very small, and medium publishing houses have inserted themselves in this market niche, which constitutes an element of continuity in Argentina's publishing history.

In regards to the most prosperous years of the publishing industry, which took place in the 40s and 50s, we should consider some facts that may have influenced the domestic consumption of books: the growing literacy, and, at the same time, certain elements pertaining to salary levels. Regarding literacy, the population census of 1947 registered a total of 11,318,896 people who were 14 years old and above; 1,541,678 of them were illiterate, about 13.6 % of the total. This is indicative of high literacy levels in the population. The census showed that, if we only took the urban population into account, the illiteracy rate dropped to 8,8%. This is important for our analysis, given that book sales have historically been concentrated in urban areas (IV Censo General de la Nación. Población. República Argentina 1947).

During Juan Domingo Perón's first presidential term, which started in 1946, the government favored the domestic market. The economic policies of Peronism were aimed at strengthening the State, as well as making industrialization a State policy, and promoting the expansion of the

demand for consumer products in the domestic market. At the same time, and without diving into the complexity of measuring and analyzing the sectorial evolution of real salaries in Argentina, investigations show that in the second half of the 1940s, certain sectors, like industry, experienced an increase. Workers also received more labor benefits that were not directly remunerative, which lasted for the following decades (Newland y Cuesta 2017; Belini 2014).

In the final years of the 1940s, the shortage of imported paper started to become an issue, as well as the increase in production costs, and the lack of funding. Offset printing started to expand locally in the mid-1950s, and this technical improvement revolutionized visual arts, but production output showed important variations.

The Editorial Universitaria de Buenos Aires (University of Buenos Aires Publishing House, Eudeba) was created in 1958. Two iconic editors played a role in this: Arnaldo Orfila Reynal, and Boris Spivacow. In the 1960s, publishing firms such as de la Flor, Periferia, Tiempo Contemporáneo, Jorge Álvarez Editor and Centro Editor de América Latina (CEAL), among others, were a part of a renovation of the publishing industry. In the 1950s and 60s, production costs rose, as well as the lack of foreign currency. The publishing industry, however, started to recover towards the second half of the 1960s, and exports started to rise (*Informe CEP* 2005, 62). Between 1964 and 1974, Argentina's economy experienced a period of sustained growth evidenced in its GDP, in the increase of labor demand for its industrial sector, and in the reduction of cycles originated by external sectors, among other variables. At the end of the 1970s, some authors stated that this characterization of Argentina's economy could be clearly seen between 1964 and 1971 (Portantiero 1977, 541–542). More recently, others have said that there was sustained growth between 1963 and 1973, with an estimated 6% annual increase in

GDP for those years (Gerchunoff and Llach 1998, 309 - 313). Within this context, companies like Sudamericana, Emecé and Losada, for instance, were reference points of the so-called boom of Latin American literature in Spanish.

Another institution that represented the sector, one that has managed to remain active, came along in 1970: The Cámara Argentina de Publicaciones (Argentine Chamber of Publications, CAP).

The publishing industry was severely affected by the last military dictatorship. The renovation process that had begun the preceding decade was cut short. When democracy was restored, the industry's performance was not up to par. The statements of publishers published during those years revolved around issues such as inflation, the cost of paper, the lack of credit, and a graphic industry that was obsolete, among other things (Aguado 2006, 99 – 100). The economic instability in the second half of the 1980s created difficulties in the commercialization chain. Therefore, we should note that between 1980 and 1989, 176 million books were printed, a figure well below the 312 million copies printed between 1970 and 1979, taking the whole decade into account. Following the military-civic dictatorship, the publishing industry suffered a strong collapse, and went from 41 million copies produced in 1976, to 31 million in 1979 (*Informe CEP* 2005, 63).

In the last few years of the 1980s, the editorial production process went through a series of technological changes that led to a decrease in production costs. The early signs of the industry's reconversion that would take place in the following decade also became visible in those years.

A polarized publishing sector was born: on the one hand, there were publishers of large conglomerates focused mainly on multimedia; on the other, an uneven group of small, very small and medium publishers. It should also be noted that this realignment did not bring about a change in location. In the twenty-first century, the majority of companies that produce books were still located in Buenos Aires and its metropolitan area. In our view, this geographic concentration is linked to at least two causes: 1. Buenos Aires has become a cultural node in South America; and 2. historically, many important productive, commercial and service industries of the Argentine economy have concentrated in Buenos Aires; in turn, this is where the highest levels of consumption and purchase are registered.

As we have already mentioned, numerous publishing houses in Argentina were either sold or merged with large corporate multimedia holdings in the 1990s. This also happened in other Latin American countries, like Mexico, for example. The economic concentration and growth of foreign capital within the publishing industry has been a worldwide phenomenon since the 1980s. In the United States, for example, 80% of its publishing industry ended up in the hands of a very few large conglomerates –Bertelsmann, Holtzbrinck, Longman, News Corporation and Viacom–, which absorbed other prestigious publishers. In France, something similar happened, where Lagardère –the multinational multimedia communication group that belongs to Hachette– purchased the largest share of Vivendi Universal Publishing in 2003. Italy and the United Kingdom also had similar scenarios; in the UK, mergers like this were already taking place in the 1970s. In Germany, the internationalization of the publishing house Bertelsmann, and its transformation into a business group, has been an important development. In Spain, the *Planeta* and *Santillana* groups have both expanded their businesses internationally (Fernández Moya 2010, 79 - 81). The “Americanization” strategy implemented by some publishers

materialized through the mergers and acquisitions done by some of the main publishers on the American continent (Fernández Moya 2011, 230), a particularly important feature in the case of Argentina and Mexico. The following table shows the amount of business done by the 12 largest European publishing groups, based on data from 2006. Some of them have acquired Argentine publishers, like, for example, the aforementioned Sudamericana and Emecé.

TABLE 1. The 12 largest European publishing groups, according to data from 2006. (Amount of business done – In millions of euros)

Group	Amount (millions of euros)
Reed Elsevier	5,851
Pearson	5,616
Thomson	5,108
Bertelsmann	4,612
Wolters Kluwer	3,693
Hachette Livre	1,975
Mac Graw – Hill Education	1,942
Readers Digest	1,835
Scholastic	1,757
De Agostini Editore	1,607
Holtzbrinck	1,227
Grupo Planeta	1,015

Source: Self-made based on data from the *Dossier de Livres Hebdo* 2007.

Within this context, in the 1990s Argentina experienced a sharp increase in book production. This growth, albeit with some ups-and-down, remained constant until 2001. The broad set of structural changes introduced in the 1990s included economic deregulation, privatization, and the adoption of a conversion system that set the exchange rate at a fixed amount, tied monetary policy to the outcome of foreign accounts and eliminated controls on the movement of capital. Tariff reduction and a real appreciation of local currency reduced the relative prices of capital goods and intermediate imports; this in turn stimulated modernization and an increase in productivity (Bouzas 2004, 158). Publishing started to grow between 1991 and 1992 after a series of dispositions, such as the aforementioned economic deregulation, which made it possible to print books abroad and reimport them; a reduction in postal tariffs; as well as the

elimination of copyright taxes and taxes on book exports. The editorial activity in the 1990s was greater than in the previous decade, the number of published books grew two and a half times, surpassing even the figures of the 1970s (Perelman 2003, 21). In line with a worldwide tendency, the number of registered titles also grew.

Alongside this process of economic concentration and growth of foreign capital, numerous smaller publishers were created in Argentina. This was not something unique, and many other countries underwent similar developments. The proliferation of small publishers could also be seen in Mexico. In 2004, the publishing houses Aldus, Ediciones Arlequín, Ediciones Educación y Cultura, Ediciones El Milagro, Ficticia, Itaca, Juan Pablos Editor, Lunarena, Mangos de Hacha, Mantis Editores and Nitro-Press, among others, created the Alianza de Editoriales Mexicanas Independientes (Alliance for Independent Mexican Publishers). Some of their stated goals were the promotion of reading, of books, and of new and upcoming literature. Amongst these types of publishers worldwide, there is a strong belief in the importance of bibliodiversity, and that small, very small, and medium publishing houses can guarantee it (Alianza de Editoriales Mexicanas Independientes, 2019).

Regarding the historical development of their publishing industry, the significant similarities that Argentina and Mexico share in the way this process took place are interesting: given their economic and cultural influence, they both were two major centers of Spanish speaking publishing in the 1940s and 50s (Fernández Moya 2016, 132-135). Towards the end of the twentieth-century, and the beginning of the twenty first century, book publishing in both countries experienced the growing concentration and dominance of foreign capital previously explained, as well as the aforementioned growth of smaller publishing operations.

Taking into account that Argentina is located at the southern end of Latin America, this analysis can be considered also valid for countries like Chile and Uruguay. Both have small publishing markets, and have also seen the appearance of small, very small, and medium publishing houses. When reviewing Chile and Uruguay's publishing history, a series of similarities with Argentina and Mexico become apparent. These countries went through modernization processes at different times, which in turn led to the expansion of reading and publishing. Also, certain events of the twentieth-century, like the Great Depression, the Spanish Civil War, and World War II, left their marks. The publishing industry in these four countries received Spanish publishers who fled in exile after the Spanish Civil War. We can also see some differences in the 1970s and 80s, given that the publishing industry in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay, suffered due to appearance of dictatorships, which shut down different processes that had begun in previous decades, especially in the 1960s. In this sense, the Mexican case was different.

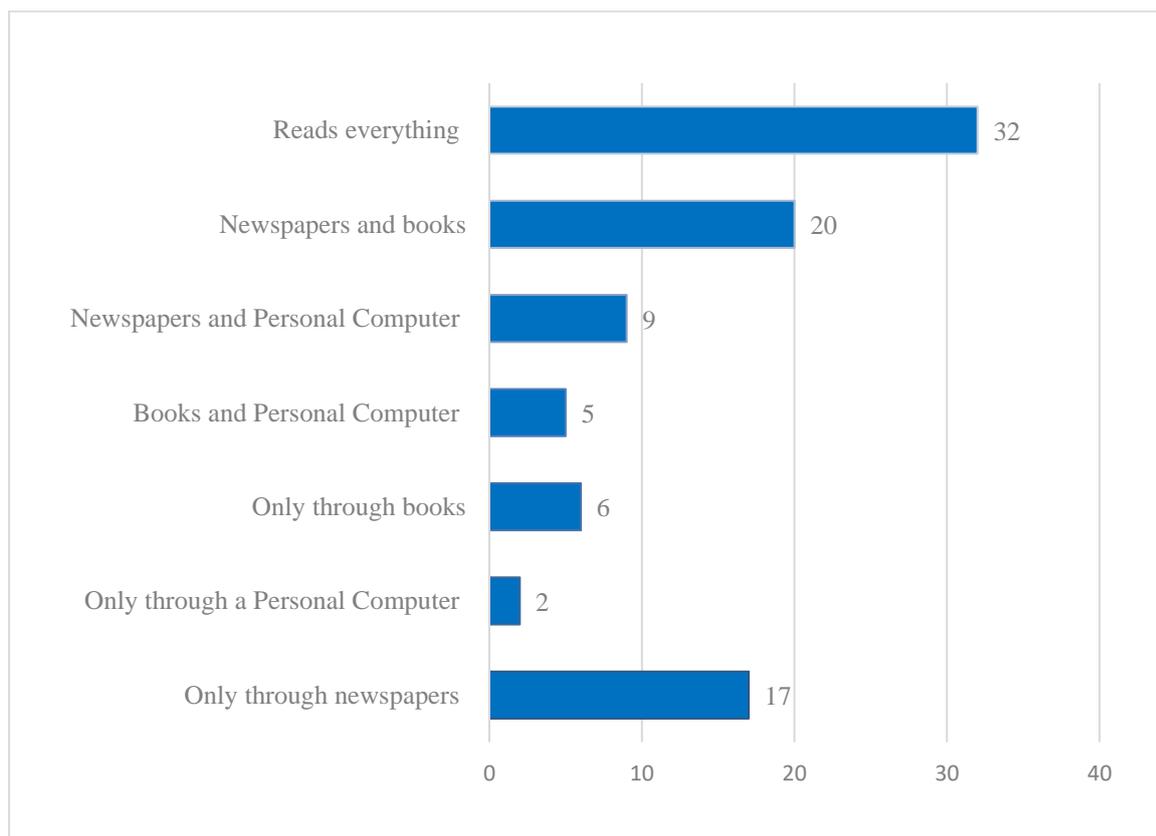
In the first decade of the twenty first century, Chile witnessed the appearance of many very small publishers linked to youth collectives. They were located in its capital, Santiago de Chile, as well as in other parts of the country, where they worked on combining arts-and-crafts techniques with new technologies of scanning, digitalization, and photocopying. Some of these publishers were Punto Ciego Ediciones, Lanzallamas Libros, Rabiosamente Independientes, Canita Cartonera, Corriente Alterna, and La Piedra de la Locura, among others. Some of them no longer operate as a formal business; in some cases, they publish between 1 and 10 books a year, and in others, none at all. There is another group of small publishers, with a greater track record and more formal business practices, such as Uqbar Ediciones, El Mosquito Ediciones, Metales Pesados, among many others. There is also a number of medium-sized publishers that print between 30 and 80 titles a year, many of which started in the 1990s. We can point to

Cuatro Vientos, LOM, Cuarto Propio, Ril Editores, among others, as well as some of the older ones, like Universitaria and Andrés Bello. Unlike the ones mentioned previously, these firms had tried to keep an economic balance in order to sustain a constant workflow (Subercaseaux 2010, 290-293). Small publishing firms also appeared in Uruguay at the end of the twentieth-century and the beginning of the 21st-century. We can point to Ediciones Trilce, Editorial Fin de Siglo, Más Pimienta, Topito Ediciones and Criatura Editora, among others. One firm that stands out is Banda Oriental, a small publishing house created in the 1960s that has managed to stay in business, and continues to publish Uruguayan writers. In any case, publishers agree that independent publishers, as well as smaller operations, have serious market limitations (Machado 2021). At the same time, Chile and Uruguay also suffered the impact of economic concentration and the arrival of foreign capital in the publishing sector. The sale of the Argentine publishing house, *Sudamericana*, impacted the region; Random House Mondadori/Grupo Bertelsmann appeared in Uruguay after buying *Sudamericana*, since this company had a branch office in Montevideo (Estol 2014); in Chile, *Sudamericana* was part of a group of publishers that were active in the literary field (Subercaseaux 2010, 263). *Sudamericana* was known for promoting Latin American writers, and thus fulfilling a very important intellectual task in the region (Estol 2014).

In the case of Argentina, the profound economic crisis it suffered in 2001 and 2002 deeply affected production and sales in the publishing sector. It is important to take into consideration that, within this context, the chain of payments was broken: since bookstores were unable to sell, they could not keep up with their payments, and, therefore, saw their credit lines cut, and stopped receiving new books.

The prices of imported books grew up to two and a half times following the devaluation of 2002. The prices of locally produced books also went up, since the cost of supplies, like paper and ink, were determined by international markets. Despite all this, books published in Argentina became affordable for the Latin American market. According to data from the Cámara Argentina del Libro (Book Chamber of Argentina, CAL), the abrupt end of convertibility, the deepening of the recession, and the immobility of deposits in the financial sector, introduced strong changes in the publishing sector's performance (Getino 2008, 72-74).

FIGURE 1. Combined reading formats

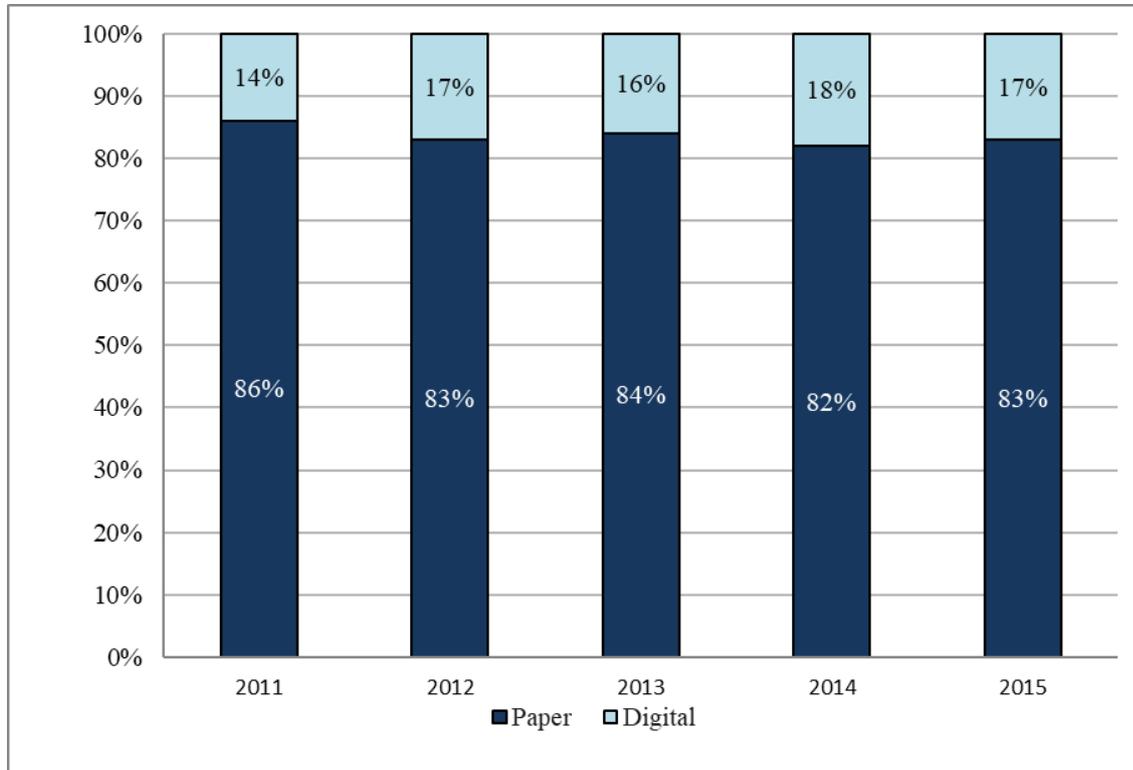


Source: 2011. Encuesta Nacional de hábitos y prácticas de lecturas. Secretaría de Cultura de la Nación. Between 2002 and 2008, Argentina's book industry experienced a recovery. In 2009, however, it started to feel the effects of the global crisis of 2008. It experienced a relative recovery between 2010 and 2011; according to data from the CAL, between 2003 and 2015, a peak

number of books were published in 2014 (*Informe Anual de Producción del Libro en Argentina 2016 2017*, 8).

On the other hand, the growing use of new technologies has allowed the owners and publishers of small Argentine publishing houses access to the publishing sector, not only with physical books, but also through other formats and platforms, working with different possibilities in terms of promotion, commercialization and distribution. According to data from 2011, 56% of the Argentine population 12 years old and above used computers, and 48% read for more than 10 minutes on a screen (*Encuesta Nacional de hábitos y prácticas de lecturas 2011*, 134). At the same time, this way of reading overlapped with traditional formats in a complementarily way. The following graphic, which takes into account reading traditional formats and texts on screen, highlights this issue.

Taking age differentiation into account, the data showed that, in 2011, 76% of the younger segment read on screen, which led us to assume that this trend would continue to grow (*Encuesta Nacional de hábitos y prácticas de lecturas 2011*, 93). In 2013, personal computers were the fastest growing format for cultural consumption in general, encompassing 45% of Argentina's population (*Encuesta Nacional de hábitos y prácticas de lecturas 2013*). As far as specific data regarding book production, in 2015, 17% of all new publications were texts for digital formats. This was a very slight variation when compared to 2014, where it reached 18% of new publications. Taking into account the interannual evolution of different formats, in the following graphic we see that, in 2011, it represented 14%; in 2012, 18%; and in 2013, 16% (*Informe estadístico Cámara Argentina del Libro 2015*).

FIGURE 2. Interannual evolution of different formats

Note:

Total publications: 28. 966 new works.

Source: 2015. Informe estadístico Cámara Argentina del Libro (Statistical Report of the Argentine Chamber of Books from 2015).

This information regarding digital publications does not allow us to analyze the multiple digital options available to produce editorial content. Smaller publishing houses adopted these new technologies at different rates.

3. Business strategies and editorial policies

An editorial policy becomes a business strategy insofar it limits the market segment in which a publishing house operates. It tends to display motivations present at the time the company started, and later remain in place. At the same time, and taking into account observations made by authors who have analyzed smaller publishing houses, these policies are linked to issues such as flexibility, the capability to adapt to different circumstances, and an innovative attitude

(Piore and Sabel, 1984, 29 and 435, Julién, 1998 35-37; Kantis, Angelelli and Gatto 2000, 1). The characteristics of these companies indicate that their “individual related origin” is a factor in their decision-making process. This is a key element in understanding the vitality of smaller firms, since, to a certain degree, they are strongly intertwined with the personal qualities of their owners (Boutillier 2011/2012, 20). The following cases are examples of all which has been previously laid out.

The founder and owner of Dialektik —a publishing house created in the mid-2000s that specializes in Social Sciences— says that the decision was due to “an affinity with the field, a knowledge of the authors, and a know-how regarding how to get it done” (interview with Stukalsky 2009).

The publishing firm Adriana Hidalgo —granddaughter of a publisher named Pedro García³—, created in the late 1990s, carved out its editorial policy by identifying books or authors that were “missing” within a legitimized tradition, and embarking on either the publication, republication, or translation of a text. They also by published new manuscripts by authors that had considerable symbolic capital (Botto 2006, 231). *Serapis*, a publishing firm created in Rosario in 2006, has focused on the translation of fiction, essays, short stories and poetry (Editorial Serapis, 2019). The publisher, Carolina Lieber, said in 2014 that “there are certain curious and attentive readers who go to bookstores looking for the kinds of books we publish. There are not many, which is why we do not make large print runs (...)” (*La Capital* 2014). Las Cuarenta (interview with González 2013), a publishing house created in Buenos Aires also in 2006, favors books that allow an escape from modernity, and aim at broadening the reader’s

³ Adriana Hidalgo is the granddaughter of Pedro García, the founder of *El Ateneo*, a bookstore and publishing house created in 1912/14. She started the small publishing house named after her in 1999.

horizons, in line with the founder and owner's preference. The owner's background in philosophy was the reason they took this direction, satisfying the demand of a niche interested in these topics. Caballo Negro, a publishing house launched in the city of Cordoba in 2009, publishes fiction. Alejo Carbonell, the publisher, defined his editorial policy by saying that "it was easier to talk about what we did not want: an endogamous catalogue, books that follow the aesthetic mandates of the present for the sole purpose of garnering a bit of symbolic capital on the author's Facebook page. We are not interested in that" (*La Voz* 2014).

Gourmet Musical Ediciones is a publishing firm created in Buenos Aires in 2005 (interview with Donozo 2013). It publishes books about music, musicians "from rock and tango, all the way to classical music," as well as musicology devoted to Argentine and Latin American topics. The publisher has a background in musicology research, and, before he started the company in 1998, he ran an internet site called Gourmet Musical. Years later, he turned it into a publishing house. Ediciones Disconario is a publishing house born in 2010 that specializes in books about music and musicians, and shares a similar target audience with Gourmet Musical Ediciones. It began with a series of books about Argentine rock and roll, while noticing that downloading music from the internet left the experience a bit vacant, since all the accompanying information was now lost: "(...) the object, and the information that came with it, have been lost (...) The rest of the graphic information, the design element, who are the musicians playing, you do not have that anymore (...) There are very few sites that provide (...) this kind of documentation (...) Our goal is to gather all this information by author (interview with Dente 2013).

Arte a Babor is a publishing house created in 2009 that specializes in art books for children. It started within the Metropolitan Center of Design in Buenos Aires, where the publisher worked as a designer (interview with Sirkis 2014). The firm began by noticing that "(...) Argentina has

a very important architectural and artistic heritage (...) that children do not know, they eventually learn about it later; if we think about France, children are aware of their cultural heritage (...) their artistic, cultural and architectural heritage.” Bajo la Luna —a literary publishing house that started in Rosario in 1991 and moved to Buenos Aires in the early aughts—stood out at first for their poetry. It later began including other literary genres. In the last few years, they have added books written by Argentine and foreign authors. Through the purchase of copyrights, it has translated authors from several languages, especially from “those that are not considered central languages” (interview with Balaguer, 2013), such as Icelandic, Korean, and Portuguese from African countries.

Calibrosopio is a publishing house created in Buenos Aires in 2006. It specializes in illustrated books for children and young people (interview with Wilhelm 2013). They broadened their scope, from children’s books to illustrated ones, because they started publishing books for all audiences. They started out as the expansion of a project from 1997 called El Libro de Arena, an Exhibition of School Books aimed at children and young people in Buenos Aires. Publishing decisions are made jointly by the two founding partners. Comiks Debris is a small publishing house that started in Buenos Aires in 2010. It specializes in comic books for children. Marcelo Danza, the founder, is a graphic designer, and in charge of book design. They originated from a proposal made by those who run the collection with which the firm started: Roberto Sotelo, Director of *Revista Virtual Imaginaria*, and César Da Col, who is part of the Movimiento de Banda Dibujada (Drawn Band Movement)⁴ (interview with Danza 2013).

⁴ This is a non-profit cultural movement created in 2004 in Argentina. Its goal is to promote and encourage the reading, creation, edition and expansion of comics for children and young people. It includes artists, writers, strip cartoonists, journalists, editors and cultural managers from the entire country <https://sites.google.com/site/bandadibujada/Home>, available as of December 15t, 2018.

La Brujita de Papel is a family enterprise run by the firm's creator, Gloria López Llovet de Rodrigué, along with her daughters. They are, respectively, the fifth and sixth generation of publishers. They specialize in children's books, and their catalogue has a literary and an educational section. As most of these publishers, the owners are in charge of certain aspects of editorial production—which in line with their background—and they outsource others. López Llovet de Rodrigué started working with her grandfather, Antoni López Llausás, at Sudamericana publishing house. After it was sold, she started La Brujita de Papel in Buenos Aires (interview with López Llovet de Rodrigué, 2013). The literature on family business' in Latin America and Spain has covered this subject from different angles (Lozano 2000, Fernández Pérez 2003, Colli, Fernández Pérez and Rose 2003, Fernández Pérez and Colli 2013, Fernández Pérez and Lluch 2015, Barbero and Lluch 2015, among others), and has established a few definitions. We define a family business as one owned by a number of families with varying degrees of biological or spiritual bonds, that, over the course of several generations, has tended to invest in different businesses they do not necessarily own nor control, with the goal of ensuring that the values and continuity of said family persist over time (Fernández Pérez y Lluch 2015, 19). In the case of these publishers, we use the concept of family business, albeit with a few particularities, like the fact that their business is concentrated in the publishing sector, and that they are characterized as a "family of editors". The decision to count the generations of editors of a same family is based on this idea. This is the case of Gloria López Llovet de Rodrigué (Sudamericana, La Brujita de Papel, among others) and her descendants. The same can be said of Adriana Hidalgo, the granddaughter of the creator of El Ateneo, Pedro García, who has a publishing house named after her; or Miguel Balaguer (Bajo la Luna), whose mother started the firm, which he later started managing along with his wife. The common

denominator in all these cases has been a transference of knowledge regarding the know-how of publishing, and also of established networks within the publishing world built. It depends on the subsequent generations to later strengthen their knowledge and skills, as well as those inherited connections.

Alción was created in the city of Cordoba in 1983. Its founders, Juan Carlos Maldonado and Julio Castellanos, spent their first decade struggling for survival. In the second decade, they started “building a catalogue with books on ‘philosophy, translation, poetry, critical essays and fiction.’” They later turned their attention to “(...) ‘learning the art of publishing, treating it like an art form, which has nothing to do with creating books that are graphically beautiful, but instead books that are precious due to their content’” (Rodríguez 2013/interview with Maldonado 2019).

The use of new technologies is present in these publishing houses. It has allowed them to gain access to the publishing subsector not only through physical books, but also by other formats. As we shall later see, it has also allowed them to expand their promotion, commercialization, and distribution operations. The path from the twentieth century to the twenty-first was marked by the appearance of new way of consumption, as well as ways of producing editorial content with new elements, such as internet sites, YouTube videos, Facebook pages, and other social media platforms. The development of ICTs gave smaller publishing houses the chance to use cheaper technology. This changed the way editorial content was produced and consumed, although it did not erase its more traditional features (Román, Ruffolo and D’Ángelo, 2018).

In the following chart, we establish a distinction between “traditional” and “new” business strategies. The production of physical books is prevalent in the first group; as well as books for

children and young people –as previously mentioned, this has been a historically dynamic segment–; we can also mention the production of comic books for a diverse audience, and the nationalization of the catalogue through authors and topics from different parts of the country.

The “new” strategies are closely linked to the use of new technologies. They are based on doing short book runs of a single title. Thanks to new technologies, this does not have a significant impact on the cost of production. The segmentation is greater, with multiple “niche markets”, and editorial content for new formats can be produced thanks to the possibilities afforded by digital platforms (for example, multimedia content can be produced to be read, watched, and listened on several electronic devices). The production of “books as objects” is advanced, which usually entails a story told through the intervention of an artist, many times a visual one, who uses techniques that include new materials.

TABLE 2. Business strategies, “Traditional” and “New” in the production of editorial content

“Traditional” Strategies	“New” Strategies
The production of physical books is predominant	Short book runs
Book production for children and young people	Very segmented production. Market niches.
Comic book production for audiences in different age groups	Production of editorial content for digital platforms. New formats.
Nationalization of the catalogue, including authors and topics from different parts of the country.	Production geared towards “books as objects”

Source: Self-made based on information received through interviews with key informants.

Following Porter (Porter 2008, 3 - 4), we can state that the internet does not erase traditional competitive advantages. These publishing houses were either created when it already existed, or have incorporated it into their operations, and have standardized its use.

4. Business strategies and commercialization

The promotion and sales division of publishing houses have always been linked to their catalogues, which is defined by its editorial policy. In the domestic market, the traditional channels for promotion and distribution have been retail bookstores. Over time, they have become the main environment where publishers and readers have come into contact. Another current possibility is through Book Fairs, which are now more regular occurrences. This is not exclusive to Argentina, and also happens in other Latin American countries.

TABLE 3. Number of bookstores (retail commerce) in different countries of Latin America in 2003

	Argentina	Brazil	Colombia	Ecuador	Honduras	Mexico	Chile	Guatemala
Number of bookstores	800	1500	300	200	50	650	384	200
Distribution through bookstores	70%	70%	37%	50%	30%	38%	60%	35%
Percentage of bookstores located in the Federal Capital	50%	No available information	40%	25%	24%	38%	49%	70%

Source: Made by Brunetti, Collesei, Vescovi and Sòstero 2004, based on data from the Centro Regional para el Fomento del Libro en América Latina y el Caribe (CERLALC), an intergovernmental body that operates under the guise of UNESCO. Proyecto Estudio de Canales de Comercialización del Libro en América Latina y el Caribe, with an emphasis on bookstores, 2003 (Dato 2019).

Based on data from 2004, the following table shows the number of bookstores⁵ (retail commerce) in different countries of Latin America, what percentage of distribution they do compared to the different ways they carry out this operation, and the percentage of bookstores located in the Federal Capital of each country. Argentina and Brazil are at the top of the list of countries where books are distributed mainly through bookstores; Argentina is also one of the

⁵ In this case, we are talking about brick-and-mortar bookstores. We must take into account that bookstores that operate on the Internet are referred to as “virtual bookstores”.

countries with the largest number of bookstores in its Federal Capital, Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires.

In 2015, there were 1210 stores in Argentina where books were the main item sold: brick-and-mortar bookstores. This figure does not include stores that sell old books, used books, or books at a discount. The following table shows the type of bookstores that exist, and how many stores are in each category. We can say that there were 855 traditional or independent bookstores, 265 stores belonging to chain bookstores, and 90 stores of booksellers with 3 or 4 branch stores.

TABLE 4. Different types of brick-and-mortar bookstores in Argentina, 2015 (in number of stores and percentages)

Different types of bookstores	Number of stores	Percentages
Traditional or independent bookstores	855	71%
Chain bookstores	265	22%
Bookstores with branch stores	90	7%

Source: 2016. *Libro Blanco de la Industria Editorial Argentina. Informe de datos estadísticos*. Cámara Argentina de Publicaciones (Argentine Chamber of Publications). Drawn from PROMAGE.

The Feria Internacional del Libro de Buenos Aires (International Book Fair of Buenos Aires) started in the 1970s, but there are also others in different parts of Argentina. There are also specific fairs for small publishers (Esses 2017). They not only allow small publishers to sell their books, but also allow them to show their catalogues. There are also other channels for sales, like the internet, direct sales, and other environs directly linked to a publisher's catalogue. We should also point to sales made to government and state entities, even though some smaller firms think this should not be a central feature of their operation due to its instability. They choose to consider them a supplementary business channel.

Distribution has always been a thorny subject for these publishing houses. Some publishers in Buenos Aires, and also in the rest of the country, have chosen to do their own distribution. There are others who work with this model and also use distribution companies, and others who

instead have opted to outsource all their distribution. Some interesting ventures have also sprung up, such as *Distribuidora Llegó*. It began in 2004 as a distribution operation for books and other related content of psychoanalysis, bundling together small publishers, magazines and/or self-made print runs that lacked the necessary infrastructure to do direct distribution. In June of 2004, it advertised its activity with the following words: “There is a void between bookstores and small publishers. We are trying to fill this void and offer a solution so we can prevent these texts and books from ending up in moist boxes and empty shelves, books we know how much work they require” (Distribuidora Llegó, 2013).

There are also publishers that use logistic and distribution companies. Ignacio Arrieta (interview with Arrieta 2014), the head of *Libro Express* —logistics for publishers— works on load consolidation from Buenos Aires to the rest of the country, picking up packages from several publishing houses and setting them up for shipping. Transportation costs are reduced, since the minimum transportation weight is 20 kilos.

Along with the arrival of foreign capital and economic concentration, the sales and distribution process also changed: bookstores began turning more to allocations from publishers to keep up with such a large and diversified offer. The number of published books has grown steadily in the last few decades. Another aspect to consider is that these books started appearing in large chains like Yenny-El Ateneo and Cúspide, where the sales percentage (known as “the bookseller discount”) they require since the early 2000s is very high, in some cases as high as 50%. Some small publishers even stopped working with these chains. In the second half of the 2000s, Yenny-El Ateneo decentralized its purchasing operation. From that moment on, every branch was responsible for their own acquisitions (interview with Winnik 2014).

Some publishers (interviews with Ávila Huidobro 2013, Balaguer 2013, Wilhelm 2013, Kulesz 2010 and Donozo 2013) have tried different options, such as doing their own distribution and outsourcing logistics, or outsourcing both; sometimes, even outsourcing the deposit where they keep their stock. Others have continued doing some of these operations since they started. Some publishing houses have chosen to do their own distribution, trying to work with bookstores as well as small operations that are mindful of the books and commit to putting them on display. Other small and medium publishing houses have even put together their own distribution structure, and brought smaller firms with fewer titles into their operation.

Ediciones Disconario, for example, has adopted two forms of distribution. On the one hand, it supplies books to twenty-five stores in Buenos Aires City directly from the publishing house; on the other, there are three different stores that buy books from them through the allocation system and operate through internal distribution. One of these stores is a distributor that, in 2013 —according to Miguel Dente, one of its co-founders—, had eighteen stores of its own in Buenos Aires Province: we are talking about the Librerías El Aleph distributor. Ediciones Disconario has also distributed its books through the publishing house Calibrosopio, without any route overlap. Since Disconario is a publisher devoted to books about music and musicians, their initial plan was to distribute to record stores: according to data from 2013, 80% of stores they distributed to were “places you could buy music” (interview with Dente, 2013). Editorial Comiks Debris distributes its books through two different channels: the publishing house Calibrosopio (the same as *Disconario*), and two comic book distributors. One of them is Districomix, and the other is Plan T. They are in charge of getting these books to comic bookstores all around the country. The publisher, Marcelo Danza, also offers supplies to stores that sell comic books (interview with Danza 2013).

Bajo la Luna has always considered distribution a key component of their operation. They tried many different formats, until they decided to do the distribution themselves. They now use a logistics company like the one mentioned earlier, Libro Express. They have changed the way they handle distribution over the years, particularly after they moved to Buenos Aires (they started in Rosario). Between 2003 and 2009, their distribution was handled by Tusquets, a distributor with a significant number of publishers “which allowed us to be close to some very good publishing houses, we would say that it was a challenge to compete with them, and, at the same time, it was a huge support. After that, we tried a system of cooperative distribution, we started a distribution company (...) we worked with four different publishers trying (...) to do a collective distribution, it was very convenient economically because all the expenses we now have to pay ourselves, we split four ways (...)” The publishing houses involved in that operation were Cactus, La Cebra and Caja Negra (interview with Balaguer, 2013). The books of Ediciones Iamiqué have made it all over the country, especially through the exclusive distribution of Alberto Luongo (interview with Baredes 2013, Dalsa 2019). This distributor has a great presence and reach across Argentina, and has been distributing books and content, mostly educational material, for many years from 150 different publishers of all sizes.

Editorial Serapis from Rosario sells its books in bookstores around the country through *Liber Distribuciones*, which is based in Buenos Aires, and through a distribution company from Rosario: *Julia Ossana*, publishing representative (*La Capital* 2014, Editorial Serapis, 2019). With regards to distribution, Alejo Carbonell —head of the publishing house *Caballo Negro*, from Córdoba— said in 2014 that distribution was one of their problems. “(...) For publishers of our size, using a distribution company puts your entire economic fragility at risk, because the percentages are overwhelming, and the payment chain is really long. (...) It is very

important that every publisher know what their actual range of production and reach is, so that they can build a strategy that allows them to function properly” (*La Voz* 2014, interview with Carbonell 2019). In 2010, Adriana Astutti, who co-founded *Beatriz Viterbo Editora* in 1991 — together with Sandra Contreras and Marcela Zanin—, a publishing house devoted to Argentine and Latin American literature, critical essays, and cultural studies (*Beatriz Viterbo Editora* 2019), talked about how they resolved this issue. “We went through a lot of ups and downs, a lot of distributors, until 2002, when *Tusquets*, in the middle of the crisis, put together a catalogue of independent publishers and called us. We have been with them ever since, and are still with them today. At the time, *Adriana Hidalgo*, *Bajo la Luna* and *Elefante blanco* were also there” (Vignoli 2010). It is evident that not all these publishers have found the same distribution format to be useful. By 2010, *Bajo la Luna* had already changed the way it handled distribution, and had left the *Tusquets* operation. The following chart summarizes the different distribution strategies these publishers have used in the domestic market. Some of them avoid reaching the public through chain bookstores, and favor working with “traditional” or “independent” booksellers; others aim for a distribution that grants them access to the public that consumes their products through a diversity of channels, which include chain bookstores.

When it comes to commercialization, foreign markets are another issue that needs to be taken into account. Some smaller publishing houses have managed to do exports through distributors in other countries. However, *Libros del Zorzal* (a publisher created in Buenos Aires in 2000), discovered it was more profitable to open a local branch in a foreign country (interview with Kulesz, 2010). There are also some publishing houses that have made exports the key component of their operation. This is the case of *Ediciones Manantial* (created in Buenos Aires

in 1984): they specialize in books on social sciences, education and psychoanalysis, and have been exporting to Spain ever since they started (Interview with de Santos 2010).

TABLE 5. Distribution strategies in the domestic market

Through a logistics and distribution system
Distribution done by the publisher only in “traditional” or “independent” bookstores
Distribution done by the publisher and an outsourcing of logistics
Distribution and logistics are outsourced
Distribution done by the publisher in traditional or independent bookstores plus distribution of books from other publishers with less titles
Distribution through a consignment system
Distribution through a consignment system and sales system
Distribution through a sales system without consignment
Distribution in stores that specialize in other cultural products destined to the same market segment in which the publisher operates.
Cooperative distribution

Source: Self-made based on information received through interviews with key informants.

It is important to point out that the CAL offers counseling on how to export books. The Comisión Asesora para la Exportación de Libros (Advisory Committee for Book Exports, CAEL, for its initials in Spanish) is a department within the CAL, which offers information on book commercialization, as well as how to navigate the exportation and importation process. Judith Wilhelm —the head of Calibrosopio— points out the importance of the advice these organisms provide, adding that there are customs officers that work alongside publishers in meetings organized by this committee regarding the foreign exchange of books (interview with Wilhelm 2013).

Regarding the placement of books abroad, international fairs are also an opportunity for smaller publishers to commercialize books, as well as for purchasing and selling copyrights of original works and translations. Ediciones Del Naranjo (created in Buenos Aires in 2004) points out that, in order to connect with Latin American publishers, and librarians from Los Angeles, it is necessary to have a presence in the Guadalajara Fair (interview with Ávila Huidobro 2013).

Thanks to connections made at this fair, Calibrosopio started selling books to the Mexican government through agreements draw up with publishers from that country. Calibrosopio has also made sales through bookstores of other Latin American countries, like Colombia and Chile (interview with Wilhelm 2013). Small publishers have managed to place their books in several international fairs thanks to other publishing houses who were interested in taking certain titles they had not published (interview with Dente 2013).

International fairs are also environments ripe for networking with publishers and distributors: editors from different countries connect and share information on titles.

Social media is key since it allows publishers to establish a system of formal and informal contacts and relationships, which tend to compensate for weaknesses associated with the company's size (Szarka 1998, 311). In 2001, a group of editors and small publishing houses started working to export books together, and to participate collectively in international fairs. In 2006, this led to the creation of the Colectivo de Editores Independientes por la Bibliodiversidad de la Argentina (Collective of Independent Editors for Bibliodiversity in Argentina). Argonauta, Asunto Impreso Ediciones, Biblos, De la Flor, Del Zorzal and Ediciones del Signo (Fernández Moya 2011, 232), were some of the publishing houses involved in the creation of this organization.

5. Conclusions

This article has analyzed how small and medium publishing houses have gained access to the Argentine market since the end of the twentieth century. We have included a brief explanation of the historical origins of Argentina's publishing industry, as well as some considerations regarding the link between business strategies, editorial policies, and commercialization

strategies. In order to do this, we started with some questions about the historical continuity of smaller publishing houses, the appearance of so many of them in recent years due to the comparative advantages in publication and circulation of editorial content afforded by new technology. Another aspect we covered was the role of the cultural aspect, and, finally, the connection between these publishers staying power, their editorial policies, and their commercialization strategies, with the way they handle their operations of promotion, sales, and distribution.

There are a few things we can say. First, the cumulative historical experience, and the ability this sector has shown at adapting to technological and organizational changes for over a century is significant. This includes individual actions as well collective ones, through associations and network generation. From this point of view, dynamism presents itself as a long-term continuity. The fact that some of the publishers who created these small operations come from families with long traditions in this realm also strengthens this idea.

Secondly, editorial policies, seen as strategies, have allowed many smaller publishing houses to have a strong dynamism, insuring diversity in editorial content in regard to subject matter, treatment of the subject, authors, formats, platforms and proposals. Growing market segmentation can explain, to a certain degree, the multiplication of market niches that has taken place in the last few decades. These are the spaces where smaller firms operate.

In third place, the generational renovation, seen in the growing number of small publishing houses that have appeared since the end of the twentieth century, seems to be an important factor in explaining the speed with which they have adopted digital and multimedia platforms.

In fourth place, and regarding the ways in which these companies have sought to gain access to foreign markets, we have seen that building a catalogue capable of sparking interest in other countries has had direct implications in their commercial policies.

In fifth place, there is a certain interest in firms that have managed to sustain themselves over time by publishing only sporadically, due to the fact that they have minimal infrastructure, and that their owners have worked simultaneously on other jobs –many times within the publishing sector. There are also publishers that maintain a certain presence but have only managed a short life span as a business. Their importance lies in the fact that they contributed to the development of bibliodiversity and, in many cases, have helped identify new authors and subjects.

Finally, their innovation and display of creative energy deserve to be pointed out as general characteristics observed in small, very small, and medium publishing houses.

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