



Local Government in Argentina

Responses to Urban-Rural Challenges

edited by

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The H2020-MSCA-RISE-2018 project aims to provide solutions for local governments that address the fundamental challenges resulting from urbanisation. To address these complex issues, 18 partners from 17 countries and six continents share their expertise and knowledge in the realms of public law, political science, and public administration. LoGov identifies, evaluates, compares, and shares innovative practices that cope with the impact of changing urban-rural relations in major local government areas (WP 1-5).

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People's Participation in Local Decision-Making



6.3. Government Goals Plan: Citizen Participation in the Control of Compliance of the Mandates in Córdoba (Action Plan of the Government)

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Relevance of the Practice

The practice described below is important because Córdoba is one of the first four cities in Argentina that implemented the Government Action Plan (*Plan de Metas de Gobierno*) in 2012. Currently, this tool is being extended to other cities, such as the Federal Capital. This practice allows us to highlight the differences that exist between urban and rural settings regarding representative democracy and accountability. In larger cities, where direct contact with government officials is more difficult, citizens need tools to facilitate interaction with them. We also highlight the relevance and effects of the Action Plan in relation to citizen participation, its impact in the provision of public services, and its challenges to make this a more efficient tool.

Description of the Practice

The Government Action Plan is an instrument for planning, management, and accountability, which consists of transforming government proposals into concrete and measurable objectives through compliance indicators.¹⁶³ In the City of Córdoba, it was unanimously approved by the municipal council in 2011 (Ordinance no 11942/11). It mandates the local government to establish strategic actions and indicators for each area of the municipal public administration and to annually monitor and report its evolution.

A network of citizens and organizations, the *Red Ciudadana Nuestra Córdoba*, endorsed the approval of the ordinance, inspired by other similar networks: the *Red Nossa Sao Paulo* and *Cómo Vamos* from Colombia. These organizations demanded an instrument to know the priorities and criteria of the decisions public agents take and to allow citizens to control them. Before, public officials had various plans that were not designed to allow citizen monitoring and which were, in most cases, abandoned. Therefore, having an ordinance that mandated the

¹⁶³ Virginia Romanutti, 'Plan de metas: una experiencia de incidencia colectiva' (*Red Ciudadana Nuestra Córdoba* 2012) 4.



same officials to present a plan of action, represented an institutional improvement for local democracy.¹⁶⁴

Some contextual factors and certain actions made possible the approval of this regulation. First, the support of several organizations and key local stakeholders was crucial. The two most important universities in the province, together with other 50 civil society organizations are members of the *Red Nuestra Córdoba*. Second, the demand from this network got large publicity in the local media, ‘allowing the Action Plan to be installed as an issue in the public agenda.’¹⁶⁵ Finally, the municipal council was divided in several factions, not having any of them the majority of the votes. Members of the *Red Nuestra Córdoba* stated that although this situation could have put in danger the approval of the law, in practice, it forced local representatives to reach a common agreement. In a context of a financial and legitimacy crisis of the local government, as a consequence of several problems inherited from previous administrations and having to face a project endorsed from civil society, the best strategy for local councilors was to reach a consensus. As a result, the local council presented the Action Plan as ‘an instrument to rebuild dialogue and mutual trust between citizens and the municipal government.’¹⁶⁶

The ordinance sets a maximum of 120 calendar days from the beginning of the mandate for the presentation of the Government Action Plan. It also indicates that the municipal government must submit to public hearings annual reports before March 10. Nine years after its approval, the municipal government presented two action plans for the periods 2012-2016 and 2016-2019. Both were organized around four topics: sustainable development, competitiveness, equity and inclusion, and institutional development. Within each topic, the local government defined goals and responsible areas to implement them.¹⁶⁷

Assessment of the Practice

The first two experiences of the Government Action Plan in Córdoba were positive and its approval was an important way to promote local government transparency, accountability, and citizen control. However, this does not mean that the process is not free from challenges.

First, it is necessary to improve the presentation of the plan. The local government has to train public officials because many of them do not know how to define goals in the plan. They also have to geolocate each of the goals, so that decisions are more transparent. These decisions need to have a budget attached to it and to pay attention to problems of the metropolitan area. The metropolitan area of Córdoba has grown enormously in recent years and the

¹⁶⁴ Romanutti ‘Plan de metas’, above, 4.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 15.

¹⁶⁷ Municipalidad de Córdoba, Plan de Metas.



coordination among its local authorities is still deficient, as well as the integration of rural and urban areas. The Action Plan in particular and participation mechanisms in general, are not designed to promote cooperation among municipalities and between rural and urban local governments. The city is physically and socially integrated with rural and urban spaces surrounding it, but in practice the action plan does not favor the interaction between the city and those other areas. The plan's goals are circumscribed exclusively within the limits of its territory.

The second challenge is that citizens and organizations should make the instrument their own, so they can monitor and control the local government.¹⁶⁸ To achieve this, it is important for the municipality to widely publicize the tool (as the ordinance mandates). Although in the two previous periods, the government complied with the mandatory communication, most citizens do not know what the action plan is. The appropriation of the Action Plan by marginalized sectors of society is particularly relevant. This is a common problem of mechanisms for semi-direct democracy, in which people with less education and lower income often have difficulties to get involved. Despite the fact that the Action Plan is described as 'a simple tool',¹⁶⁹ it requires citizens to have time and accurate information to use it.

Third, the organizations that participate in the action plan's public hearing underscore the need for public officials to answer to their proposals. Although public hearings are not a binding mechanism, the municipality could justify the reasons for the decisions that citizens object. Citizens are not involved in the development of the action plan. Currently, the 'control' that this tool allows consists of influencing the public agenda with the visibility of the urban problems or the inconsistencies between the plan, its reports, and the actions of the municipality. Sometimes what the organizations report is taken over by opposition parties, putting greater pressure on the government.

The last challenge for this participation tool is the current context. Due to the global pandemic and the emergency the municipality declared, the incoming government has not yet presented its Action Plan. Its public officials reported that it would be irresponsible to present a four year plan in a context of this uncertainty, with consequences that cannot yet be measured.¹⁷⁰ Civil society organizations and opposition councilors requested to the local government that the institutions and democratic controls become effective.¹⁷¹

There is still no research on the results of the Action Plan for the provision of services in the city, so it is not possible to draw conclusions on the effectiveness of this monitoring mechanism. Its advantages and disadvantages still have to be further evaluated.

¹⁶⁸ Romanutti 'Plan de metas', above, 15.

¹⁶⁹ *ibid* 4.

¹⁷⁰ Diego Marconetti, 'Llaryora le pone pausa al "plan de metas"' *La Voz* (Córdoba, 14 May 2020).

¹⁷¹ Editorial, 'Piden al municipio que vuelva la "efectiva vigencia de las instituciones democráticas"' *La Voz* (Córdoba, 11 June 2020).



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