

## NATIONAL AND LOCAL APPROACHES TOWARDS THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NEW URBAN AGENDA IN ARGENTINA

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Urbanisation is transforming societies around the globe. Every day, millions of people move to urban centres, drawn by job opportunities, a better quality of life, greater security or other reasons. According to UN-Habitat's *World Cities Report* (2016), in the next ten years two-thirds of the world's population will live in cities, and by 2050 this figure will have reached 72%. In this context, the role of cities as engines of social and economic change is increasingly important and evident.

However, rapid and unplanned urbanisation has also led to pressing challenges. Beyond the economic and social benefits of urbanisation, the expansion of cities has led to increased inequality in access to land and public services and exacerbated pollution and risks linked to global warming. Additionally, the governance of large metropolitan areas, where institutional fragmentation obstructs decision-making, has become more complex as urban challenges and problems have extended beyond the traditional boundaries of the city. Access to an equitable urban habitat remains an outstanding debt in many parts of the world. Argentina, where 92% of people live in cities and 40% of the country's urban population is concentrated in the city of Buenos Aires and its metropolitan area, is no exception (INDEC, 2012). An estimated 30% of the country's population still resides in inadequate housing, 15% have no access to potable water, and 45% lack access to the sewage system (Lanfranchi et al., 2018c). To respond to these conditions, and in line with the urban focus of the post-2015 UN development agendas, the central Argentinian government embarked on formulating a comprehensive urban strategy, a process that culminated in the passing of the country's first National Urban Policy (NUP) at the end of 2018.

This chapter provides an overview of the different dimensions of Argentina's NUP, its strengths and its weaknesses. An introduction is then given to "PlanificACCIÓN", a complementary initiative run by the Cities Program at CIPPEC – The Centre for the Implementation of Public Policies Promoting Equity and Growth. PlanificACCIÓN was launched one year earlier than the NUP with the aim of supporting the

localisation of the New Urban Agenda (NUA) in Argentinian cities and metropolitan regions, but from a more local perspective. As its name suggests, the programme prioritises “planning in action”, that is, it promotes active citizen participation in the policy planning process so as to generate specific solutions based on peer learning for particular communities.

## **I. The role of cities in global urban development agendas**

Urban development is a challenge for local administrations. They know the most about the territorial realities of their domains and, to varying degrees, they hold competences and responsibilities in the domains of housing, urban services, transport and environment. However, whether due to budgetary or technical constraints, or situations in which isolated decision-making is inadequate, the challenges of urban development cannot be faced by local governments alone (Lanfranchi et al., 2018c). Instead, integrated national strategies are needed for “good” urbanisation that fosters social inclusion, economic development and environmental sustainability (UN-Habitat, 2017).

Over the last decade, the international community has worked to address the challenges of urbanisation by defining general guidelines for a common agenda that promotes national policies. In 2015, the UN’s 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted, which include a stand-alone goal on “Making cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable” (SDG 11). Further, within the framework of the UN conference on climate change, The Paris Agreement, which seeks to engage nations in mitigating climate change through the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, highlights the important role of cities, in particular for the promotion of actions toward carbon neutrality by 2050. Finally, the UN’s New Urban Agenda, which was adopted at the Habitat III Summit in 2016, marks an important milestone. The resulting declaration established norms for the planning, construction, development, management and improvement of urban areas according to six guiding principles: equity, security, health, affordability, resilience and sustainability. The goal of the NUA is to define a shared vision towards a sustainable future, where all people have the same rights and can take advantage of the benefits cities offer. The agenda also urges governments to agree on long-term national strategies to tackle urban challenges through cooperation and coordination, not only among different levels of government, but also with other non-state stakeholders from the private sector, civil society and knowledge-based organisations.

The inclusive and participatory approach of the NUA is crucial: urban planning needs to be a collectively negotiated and agreed upon development process. If national policies aim to develop solutions to local problems without actively involving the local community, their effectiveness tends to be radically diminished. A new model of urban governance is required where cities and local governments are granted a role that corresponds to their development contributions and vulnerabilities, and where urban leadership has a legitimate and valuable place (Lanfranchi et al., 2018c).

## II. Argentina's National Urban Policy

When Argentina adopted the UN 2030 Agenda and the NUA, it had no national urban regulation in place. Moreover, only four of the 24 national jurisdictions have some kind of legislation that regulates urban development within their boundaries, and only a handful of municipalities have up-to-date urban laws or plans (Lanfranchi et al., 2018c).

The National Urban Policy (NUP), the country's first comprehensive urban policy, was launched at the end of 2018. Emerging from the commitments made by the Argentinian government during the Habitat III Summit in 2016, the purpose of the NUP is to establish guidelines for inclusive, productive, innovative, resilient and sustainable urban development based on solid normative, institutional and financial frameworks generated through participative decision-making and multilevel coordination. The policy expands on three existing national programmes: the National Housing Plan ("miCASA"), the National Habitat Plan ("miBARRIO"), and the National Water Plan. It is important to underscore that doubts have been cast on both the effectiveness and longevity of these three plans because of their markedly sectorial approach, which lacked coordination, and their implementation by decree, which meant that they lacked a more active participatory process. By contrast, the design and formulation of the NUP, which was led by the National Ministry of the Interior, Public Works and Housing, together with secretariats, decentralised offices, and other national ministries responsible for urban and housing policies, actively involved subnational and non-governmental actors from the private sector, civil society organisations, academia and international organisations.

The NUP is built around nine axes:

1. Comprehensive management, urban planning and land management focusses on coordination and agreed policies for tackling the challenges of rapid urbanisation;
2. Integrated mobility and transport that targets deficient urban transport systems, accessibility and service delivery;
3. Integrated equipment and urban infrastructure which targets the lack of proper infrastructure and services to promote healthy urban growth;
4. Socio-habitational equity which targets problems stemming from unequal and fragmented access to urban land;
5. Competitive and inclusive economic development which targets challenges arising from disparate socioeconomic development and the inequitable distribution of resources;
6. Environmental management, resilience and climate change adaptation which targets the consequences of global warming, such as the degradation of soil, air and water;
7. Effective local governance which targets the challenges local governments face when they implement public policies related to urban issues;

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8. Sustainable local finances to address the financial fragility of local governments;
9. Community empowerment, targeting the lack of public participation and the exclusion of certain groups from planning and policy decision-making processes.

Each of these axes contains different public policy guidelines, possible instruments for their implementation and an overview of the key actors involved. Further, each guideline proposes a set of strategies for how the different levels of government should be involved in the short, medium and long term.

The NUP also includes a four-pillar Action Plan for its implementation. First, the plan recommends a multi-channel and multi-dimensional communication and dissemination strategy which aims to foster NUP adoption by key actors. Second, it recommends building on and aligning with previous policies, plans, programmes, projects and normative frameworks, and mapping the actors involved in these processes. Third, it proposes strategies for good governance that target all levels of government with a focus on access to housing; integral urban planning and land management; risk and environmental management; and training programmes for sustainable urban management. Finally, it supports the monitoring, evaluation and updating of policy tools to ensure accountability and the continuous improvement of policies.

The NUP certainly marks an ambitious first step in government efforts to link national policies to the goals laid out in the NUA. Taking advantage of the window of opportunity created by Habitat III, the national government achieved something unprecedented, which was to engage several public departments and agencies at the national level to develop an instrument for urban development. At the same time, the 2015 change of government brought several officials from the Secretariat for Habitat and Inclusion of the City of Buenos Aires into the national government administration, where they gained access to national platforms and applied their previous experiences involving the implementation of public policies in informal settlements in the city.

These policy advancements notwithstanding, the NUP falls short when it comes to consistency and participation. The main weakness of the policy lies in its limited scope within a federalist context: in Argentina, although many investments in infrastructure require the participation of the national government, urban policy is largely left up to the provinces. Besides which, the NUP has not been enshrined in law. This arrangement leaves the NUP susceptible to political shifts and changes in government administrations. Moreover, despite early attempts to include diverse actors in its design, particularly from within the national government, an overall lack of citizen participation threatens to undermine the sustainability of the NUP.

At the same time, the NUP lacks a clear set of quantifiable goals able to help local governments in evaluating and implementing policies. Well-defined mechanisms for financing the programmes that are essential to meeting NUA objectives and overcoming institutional barriers to effective governance are also needed. Yet, the implementation of the NUP is

already under way. Time will tell if the guidelines provided will be implemented or ignored by future national and local administrations.

### **III. PlanificACCIÓN: a method for implementing the NUA in Argentinian cities**

In November 2017, about a year before the NUP was passed, CIPPEC's Cities Program launched a new initiative called PlanificACCIÓN that seeks to promote the comprehensive development of Argentinian cities in line with the NUA. Led by CIPPEC and supported by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) Lab and the National Ministry of Production and Labour, PlanificACCIÓN is a method for participatory planning that occurs over a period of 24 months.

Like the NUP, the "PlanificACCIÓN" method is deeply inspired by the principles and goals of the NUA. As a result, they share several characteristics. For instance, both are based on a horizontally integrated approach to urban planning that aims to overcome the sectorial structures and silo thinking that are typical of 20<sup>th</sup> century urban planning. Both address similar issues, including housing and the urban environment, urban resilience, modernisation and multilevel governance. Finally, the overarching goal of both is local community empowerment.

What distinguishes the PlanificACCIÓN method from top-down traditional urban planning and the NUP is that it focuses on the generation of social capital among the city's main stakeholders to ensure a collective and participatory planning process that meets the demands of the community as a whole. Social capital is generated through collaboration with different leaders from the public, private, social and academic sectors who are involved in multiple phases of the public policy design process, including implementation. In this sense, PlanificACCIÓN is based on a deeper process of collaborative peer learning, rather than a top-down directive from the central government to the cities. Given that state institutions and the implementation of public policies in Argentina often suffer from changes of government, one of PlanificACCIÓN's central aims is that by empowering local actors across the civil, business and governmental sectors policies can be promoted that outlive single-term administrations.

PlanificACCIÓN is currently being applied in five Argentinian urban agglomerations. Puerto Madryn (Patagonia region), Greater Mendoza (Cuyo region), Greater Córdoba (Center region), Greater Resistencia (North East region) and Greater Catamarca (North West region) were selected via a contest in which 22 urban agglomerations and their municipalities participated. They represent each region of the country (except Greater Buenos Aires) and encompass 38 municipalities governed by mayors from a wide range of political backgrounds.

The PlanificACCIÓN method consists of five stages:

#### ***Stage 1: Diagnosis (duration: 3 months)***

The first objective of this stage is to identify leaders in the ecosystem of local actors and carry out interviews and perception surveys to reveal local attitudes about the challenges and opportunities facing the city.

PlanificACCIÓN is based on a deeper process of collaborative peer learning.

The second objective is to compile and analyse existing information that can inform the planning and implementation process. CIPPEC analyses existing plans, studies and projects for each urban area. To uncover patterns of urban expansion and growth, the Digital Urban Laboratory (LUD) at CIPPEC studies spatial and social changes in each urban agglomeration over recent years. This analysis has two parts. First, urban expansion is considered through the prism of land use to understand how this factor explains urban sprawl and population growth. Second, existing census and survey data on access to water and sanitation infrastructure, population density, and poverty, is analysed using the Urban DNA methodology.<sup>1</sup> This methodology combines these data to generate eight categories for measuring the quality of urban growth and predicting scenarios of future urban growth.

Finally, CIPPEC's Social Vulnerability Index (IVSD) is used to assess risks faced by the population of each agglomeration. Territorial information is crossed with population, housing and household information and the vulnerability is established.

Stage 1 culminates in the presentation of the findings from CIPPEC's initial diagnosis in a forum that brings together local leaders with the aim of generating public dialogue and consensus on issues that will be developed in the next stage of PlanificACCIÓN.

### ***Stage 2: Defining strategic projects (duration: 3 months)***

The objective of this stage is to devise, select and develop strategic projects that address the key challenges identified in the diagnostic stage. Unlike traditional planning, where the development of a strategy precedes the design of programmes and projects, in the PlanificACCIÓN methodology the strategy grows out of a dialogue between local leaders and decision-makers, their interests and commitment.

Local leaders begin by choosing projects that will be developed through a participatory process. This process is guided by the Scrum project management methodology which provides a framework for creating face-to-face learning spaces that promote the exchange of knowledge and peer learning. Through participation and collaboration, leaders share their knowledge and expertise and define projects to tackle the challenges of the selected metropolitan area.

At the end of the process the agreed projects are presented to the local community. Notably, Stage 2 strengthens the ability of local actors to influence the production of urban space. Through exchange and collaborative debate, Stage 2 promotes consensus and strengthens local relationships that extend beyond local government terms and, in turn, allows leaders to prioritise public policies.

### ***Stage 3: Implementing a strategic project (duration: 3 to 6 months)***

Following the Scrum process and the definition of strategic projects comes implementation. This phase involves local leaders working with experts at CIPPEC.

1. This methodology was developed by Gabriel Lanfranchi at Di Tella University with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Lanfranchi, 2017).

CIPPEC helps local leaders target financing options and coordinate meetings with key actors. Local leaders also receive technical assistance to carry out project objectives. At this point, PlanificACCIÓN diverges from the NUA: citizens are not only given the power to participate in the diagnostic stage or formulate solutions that meet their necessities, they are also given the necessary tools for the implementation and management of the agreed-upon strategies.

***Stage 4: Creating the development strategy for the city and its metropolitan region (duration: 9–12 months)***

The formulation of a comprehensive development strategy for a city and its metropolitan region is informed by the diagnosis conducted in Stage 1 and the definition of strategic projects in Stage 2.

To assure that each development strategy is consistent with the objectives of the three UN agendas introduced above, CIPPEC employs a framework called the “Comprehensive Development Cities Approach” (CDCA) (Lanfranchi and Yañez, 2018), which is based on four axes: *equitable habitat, climate change, digitalisation, and metropolitan governance*.

*Equitable habitat* focuses on implementing the NUA based on the orderly growth of the city, the eradication of poverty, the “right to the city”, security, and the “healthy” city.

*Climate change* links urban planning to climate change response. It focuses on mitigation of and adaptation to climate change as well as the implementation of the Paris Agreement by reducing greenhouse gas emissions, on the one hand, and increasing resilience, on the other.

*Digitalisation* aims to modernise and improve local management processes and accountability through open data. It also promotes local digital entrepreneurship.

*Metropolitan governance* targets effective management of urban development. It also aims to improve urban finance and create instruments for metropolitan coordination, such as the *Corporaciones de Desarrollo Metropolitano*.

Following the application of the CDCA, Stage 4 provides a forum for local leaders that targets each thematic axis, during which information is gathered that assists CIPPEC’s technical team in defining strategies. This process is repeated four times so that the four thematic axes can be addressed. Stage 4 ends with the preparation of a final document that synthesises the outcomes of the work done on each of the four axes and the development strategy.

***Stage 5: Acceleration of platform economy projects (duration: 12 months)***

Stage 5 empowers the digitally based entrepreneurial ecosystem and promotes local models of collaborative economy while targeting local training

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and mentoring programmes as well as the problems and opportunities identified in the diagnostic process. To achieve these goals, CIPPEC works with digital business specialists and the Small and Medium Enterprise Secretariat of the National Ministry of Production and Labour to assign models. This process culminates in the selection and promotion of platform economy projects. Engagement with other sectors of society is crucial throughout Stage 5 in order to promote the inclusion of additional actors in the opportunities offered by collaborative and platform economy models.

## Conclusion

The role of national governments in making urbanisation processes more dynamic is increasingly important. To make a real change the Argentinian government must take a more proactive approach towards urban development. We believe that a national urban law that gives the issue the necessary relevance and puts in place general guidelines and tools for policy planning and decision-making should be the next step. Until legislation exists at the national level that guarantees the implementation of comprehensive urban habitat policies, any initiatives carried out are likely to remain susceptible to the whims of the Argentinian political system.

While the NUP marks an ambitious step toward urban habitat policy advancements at the national level – an issue usually left off the national policy agenda –, its power and scope are limited. Far from being a national law with binding norms, the NUP serves as a guide to policymakers. Its ideas and policy recommendations are promoted by the national government without legal recourse being available to guarantee compliance. On the other hand, a national habitat law such as the one we have proposed in this article includes political instruments necessary for guaranteeing implementation at the local level as well as the mechanisms essential for funding such policy interventions.

CIPPEC's PlanificACCIÓN method aims to address some of these shortcomings, and it can be replicated by national and subnational governments. Using a comprehensive approach the method improves the capacity of local administrations and citizens to intervene in urban planning and provides them with a framework and concrete strategies for action to align local policies with the objectives of international development agendas, such as the NUA. The objective is that in the territories where PlanificACCIÓN is applied at least one of the planned projects will be implemented, that a collectively formulated agenda for development policies will be put in place, and that a group of local leaders committed to their implementation is formed. We also hope that a series of collaborative economy projects will be launched and that an innovation network of local entrepreneurs which responds to the needs of the community is created. We believe that if the PlanificACCIÓN method had the support of local and regional governments in terms of financing, diffusion and technical assistance it would have deeply transformative consequences. With this support, the method could facilitate both the activation of strategic projects for communities and the reissuing of urban planning plans, a part of urban policymaking that is largely neglected in Argentina.

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