

Chapter 6

Urban Dynamics and Regional Development in Argentina



Nueve de Julio, A Modern Small City in the Pampa

Abstract With 92% of its population living in urban areas, Argentina is one of the most urbanized countries on the planet. The province of Buenos Aires, which is located on the outskirts of the national capital, is home to 16.65 million people, or 39% of the national population. Like in many South countries, the populations of the small and medium-sized cities, which serve as intermediate centers between the countryside and the urban network, are growing steadily. Such cities offer services and infrastructures to both urban and rural populations, as well as a residential alternative to the Greater Buenos Aires metropolitan area. However, these cities face specific problems that require appropriate responses.

In this respect, Nueve de Julio is emblematic of the challenges that confront these intermediate cities. One of the hundred cities created in the nineteenth century by the Argentinian government to colonize the country and turn it into a major agro-producer and exporter of cereals and meat, it is purely a product of top-down territorial planning. Today, with its 50,000 inhabitants, Nueve de Julio is a city whose population is increasing and whose territory is expanding. Yet, it that lacks any foresight to anticipate the next 20 or 30 years.

Following J. Robinson's concept, Nueve de Julio is an "ordinary" city founded on modernity and tradition, and which must be analyzed for what it really is: a mere reproduction of a European city model that is facing serious development problems, whose territory is disparate in terms of facilities and 20% of whose population is living in poverty.

The government seems helpless when it comes to dealing with these issues. Though aware of the issues – social inclusion, improving public services and more efficient land use – it seems unable to act. At a participatory planning training seminar in 1994, participants were already pointing to the many shortcomings in urban management. Twenty five years later, these same problems have only intensified. Unfortunately, political activism prevails over planning and varies from one election to the next depending on the party in power. Means are lacking, both financially and in terms of technical skills. For several decades now, it is the electricity and services Cooperative that has been meeting many of the population's needs (paving the streets, supplying electricity, developing the mobile phone network, etc.), but without any real dialogue with the local administration.

Establishing an open system of urban planning is imperative. This begins with the collection of technical and social data, which is currently scattered between the local government services and the Cooperative, which must then be processed digitally and geospatially. Based on this, and with the collaboration of these two institutions (as well as citizen participation), a rational diagnosis can be established and priorities set. These goals should include social, economic and spatial integration, efforts to include the city's poor and more rational, less costly development of the suburban periphery. This will enable Nueve de Julio to better play its role as an intermediate city for the entire urban and regional population with regard to business, administration, education and health services.

Keywords Intermediate city · Ordinary city · Medium sized city · Urban growth · Urban planning · Urban poverty · Cooperative of services · Nueve de Julio · Province of Buenos Aires · Argentina

6.1 An Argentinian City Under Pressure

Nueve de Julio is undoubtedly a rather “ordinary” intermediate city, like hundreds of others throughout Argentina and Latin America. Located outside of the oppressive Buenos Aires conurbation, it is one of the hundred new towns built during the nineteenth century by the Government of Argentina to reinforce the country's colonization and encourage agriculture and export breeding. A medium-sized city in terms of its population size and surface area, it is also an intermediate city in that it creates a direct link between the rural economy and the public services required by the regional population. Nueve de Julio thus appears as a quiet city of 50,000 with no major issues, with its shopping area, health facilities and educational institutions.

Yet, in the past 30 years, its population has grown rapidly and its inhabited territory expanded exponentially, like other similar cities of the pampas region. This dynamic is specific to an emigration of inhabitants from the Buenos Aires metropolitan area to cities that, though more remote, are considered more hospitable. However, it is not without links to national and international strategies of a globalized economy that dictates the price of raw materials and consumers products. During a scientific assessment of the urban management headed by the local government of Nueve de Julio, we had the opportunity to reflect on the shortcomings in the city's urban planning and on possible solutions.

In what ways is Nueve de Julio an “ordinary” city whose characteristics are reproducible in other cities in South America? What can we learn from how it is actually governed and the fact that changing its management and planning organization appears impossible? The studies, analyses, exchanges, improvements as well as the shortcomings and failures all served as lessons and were extremely useful in terms defining an urban development strategy that targets both sustainability and

inclusiveness – like those promoted by international organizations. The concepts of “ordinary city” and “intermediate city” will help to shed light on an initial diagnosis of the urban planning and governance implemented in Nueve de Julio.

6.2 Argentina: One of the Most Urbanized Countries in the World

According to figures from the World Bank,¹ in 2017, the urban population of Argentina represented 92% of the country’s 40.1 million people, or 6.8% of the population of Latin America, making it the fourth most populous country on the sub-continent after Brazil, Mexico and Colombia. In Argentina, any locality with more than 2000 inhabitants is considered an urban settlement (Pellegrini and Raposo 2014). According to Velásquez (2015) and the Ministry of Planning’s population censuses (MPF 2011a), urban growth has continued uninterrupted since the late nineteenth century (1895: 37%, 1914: 53%; 1947: 62%, 1960: 72%, 1980: 83%, 1990: 86% and 2000: 90%). Hence, Argentina is one of the most urbanized countries in the world (Fig. 6.1), surpassing both European and United States averages.

At the national level, it is interesting to consider experts’ analysis of the progress of urbanization in Argentina.

Buenos Aires’s urban primacy can be traced back to the eighteenth century and can largely be explained by Argentina’s position as a major agro-exporter, and as an industrial investment area starting in 1937, with Europe on the brink of armed conflict. Starting in the 1970s, this import-substitution model, which led to the spread of Buenos Aires’s metropolitan area and the development of large agglomerations like Rosario and Cordoba, was challenged by the political changes imposed by the military dictatorship. “Greater Buenos Aires”, the majority of whose population lives in the State of Buenos Aires that surrounds the national capital, still was home to 50% of the Argentine urban population at that time. As Ainstein (2012) explains, Argentina’s urban expansion has been marked by the waning primacy of Buenos Aires and several other large Argentine cities. The Greater Buenos Aires’s population thus totaled 37.2% in 2002. However, the unemployment rate has also increased, as has the rate of informal employment. The poor population increased from 5% in 1980 to 51.7% in 2002 (Portes and Roberts 2005).

In 1947, the urban configuration likewise reflected Buenos Aires and the *pampas* region’s dominance, thus reflecting a concentration that is specific to the agro-export system chosen by the country. Moreover, most of the country’s medium-sized cities were located there. According to the 2010 census, while this urban concentration continues and includes more than 50% of medium-sized cities, it is now more diffuse. Hence, cities are now scattered throughout the country’s provinces (Manzano and Velazquez 2015).

¹ <http://datos.bancomundial.org/indicador/SP.URB.TOTL.IN.ZS> (Accessed 23 November 2015).

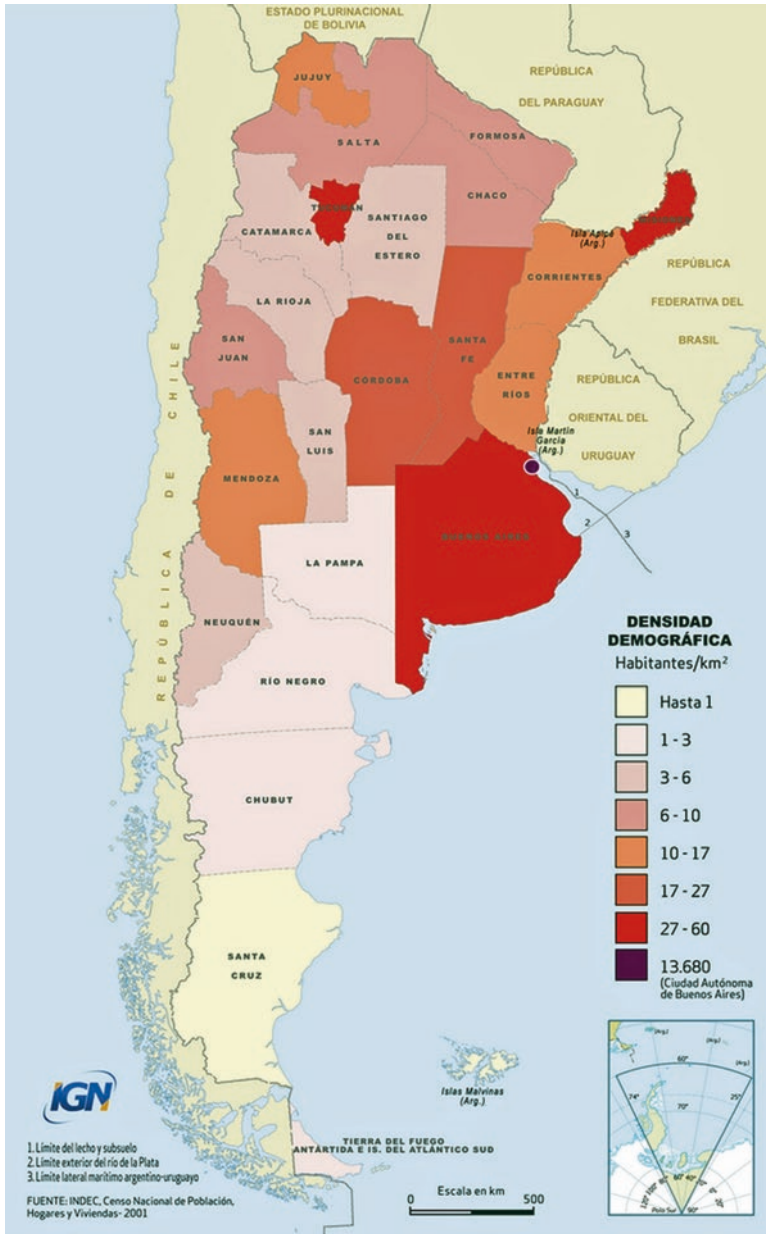


Fig. 6.1 Argentina – Population density (Reproduced from <https://www.educ.ar/sitios/educar/recursos/ver?id=89787>. Accessed 21 May 2019)

According to the 1970 census and those that followed (the most recent dating from 2010), demographically speaking, the traditional migratory process that gradually brought scattered rural inhabitants towards villages, and from villages towards small and medium towns, and finally to Argentina's largest metropolitan areas, is now being challenged. As Ainstein (2012) states, national urban expansion has been marked by a decrease in the primacy of Buenos Aires and several other large cities. The result has been a marked proportional increase in the number of agglomerations of more than 50,000 inhabitants at the expense of major Argentine cities (Velásquez 2015).

Lindemboim and Kennedy (2003) confirm this trend towards small and medium cities. They conclude that, from 1960 to 2000, Greater Buenos Aires and the Pampas region – the country's two most populated areas – were also those whose urban growth was the most moderate compared to the country's other regions. In addition, like the federal capital, slower growth can be observed in Argentinian cities with more than 500,000 inhabitants. According to these experts, it appears that, since the 1970s, the urban population of cities with 5000–500,000 inhabitants has grown faster than the national average. For them, from 1960 to 2000, the dynamics of the urban population saw a double decline: that of cities' population size and that of their geographical location. Regarding the first, municipalities on the outskirts of large agglomerations started seeing their population increase the most as early as 2000. For the second, medium-sized towns outside the pampas region are those that seem to be the most attractive and whose population are growing fastest.

Argentina's urbanization is thus marked by low population densities and the scattering of settlements relative to the pre-existing urban fabric. Thus, it is expected that, between 2000 and 2030, the urban population of cities of more than 100,000 inhabitants will increase by 72%, while the inhabited area will grow by 175%. With 862 cities of more than 2000 inhabitants, urban areas in Argentina can be divided into several categories: first, there is the international pole (to use the Federal Planning Ministry's expression) of Greater Buenos Aires and its 13 million inhabitants (40.3% of the urban population). This is followed by four large urban agglomerations that represent national nodes – Cordoba, Rosario, Mendoza and San Miguel de Tucuman (12.9% of the urban population). These are followed by regional nodes (18 cities with an average population of 280,000, representing 15.7% of the urban population), followed by sub-regional nodes (82 cities with a population of 52,000 inhabitants, representing 13.3% of the total urban population). Three additional categories of smaller-sized cities, which are active mainly at the regional level, can be added to this list (MPF 2011a).

The country's central region, of which the federal capital and the province of Buenos Aires are integral parts, is therefore the only one whose cities are represented at all levels of urban hierarchy. This is characterized by a high-density urban network and a clear distinction between the highest level (the Buenos Aires metropolitan area) and lower levels of the urban hierarchy, like La Plata (the capital of the Buenos Aires Province) as well as other agglomerations. These areas have a highly dense road and rail networks, active medium-sized towns and numerous small, generally well-equipped regional urban centers and are closely connected to one another (Fig. 6.2).



Fig. 6.2 Cities and transportation routes of the Buenos Aires province. (Reproduced from <https://www.sitiosargentina.com.ar/notas/2011/enero/mapa-rutas-provincia-buenos-aires.htm>. Accessed 21 May 2019)



Fig. 6.3 Satellite photo of the Greater Buenos Aires metropolitan area (Reproduced from https://www.esa.int/Our_Activities/Observing_the_Earth/Earth_from_Space_Buenos_Aires. Accessed 27 May 2019)

This population dynamic of medium-sized cities in Argentina brings new challenges in terms of development and investment in infrastructure and amenities. Since the 1990s, the infrastructure and public service supply no longer meet the needs of urban growth due to of the neo-liberal economic policies of successive governments. The state of the roads is deteriorating, as are the drinking water and wastewater evacuation networks. This is particularly obvious in the outskirts of large cities and the municipalities that comprise Greater Buenos Aires (Bolay et al. 2004a; Dubois Maury 1990). Corollary to this purely statistical analysis of urban areas in Argentina, a more sociological perspective shows us that this urban densification is also reflected in the increase in territorial fragmentation and social incongruence. Medium-sized cities are growing in size and in surface area, but speculation tends to “freeze” buildable areas in the urban periphery for future residential areas for high-income families. Few social measures exist to provide relief to the urban poor. Nueve de Julio’s approach is emblematic of assistencialisme, wherein the goal is to “help the poor” rather than actually improve urban planning in the poorest areas of the city.

As seen in Fig. 6.3, this urban expansion is specific to Argentina and is particularly obvious in the Buenos Aires metropolitan area and province.

In terms of urban planning, Dubois Maury (1990) explain that, until the late 1990s, there was no national planning laws or building code. Everything depended on the provinces, with a multitude of delegations at the municipal level.

In practice, the overlapping of local and provincial regulations gives rise to situations that are open to numerous derogations. And the often one-off nature of urban development operations – regardless of the sector – carries with it the risk of a lack of coherent, more global vision, thus deviating from more long-term planning.

In 2004, the national government created the Secretariat for Territorial Planning within the Ministry of Federal Planning (MPF 2011a), which establishes the State's planning role and promotes territorial development as a capacity-building process to ensure sustainable social and economic well-being for the communities living there. This involves consultation with civil actors and the granting of federal funds. From this was born the "Urban Argentina" Program in 2008, and later the concept for the Territorial Strategic Plan (PET) in 2016. The supervisory ministry's aim was to orient public policies so that they would not focus only on large metropolitan areas, but on medium-sized cities as well. Effectively, we lack information regarding the risks and opportunities of the latter, though it is the populations of these cities that are growing the fastest.

Following this blueprint, each small or medium-sized city is now better placed in a web of communications with other cities, while maintaining a functional relationship with the surrounding rural environment. In reality, their future is increasingly dependent on decisions made by a multitude of actors at different scales (local, provincial and national). As such, their regional and national integration largely depends on the link between existing and future infrastructures (roads, transportation systems, telecommunications/computer networks, etc.). This must also be considered in a context of urban-rural and interurban interplay characterized by increasing geographical mobility and complex residential and professional situations (e.g. working in Buenos Aires and regularly commuting to cities outside the metropolitan area, or working remotely via ICT for companies in the capital, but making periodic face-to-face visits). Such compromises help make a "provincial quality of life" and urban economic integration compatible.

Given the emergence and establishment of new business sectors such as tourism and high-tech enterprises, these small and medium-sized Argentinian cities are being pulled into dynamics that are sometimes quite integrative at the regional and national levels, but that also must deal with processes of social and/or economic exclusion. Lan, et al. (2018) remind us that intermediate cities' dynamics are also the result of the strategies of major industrial groups who tend set up their production units in intermediate cities, where land and labor costs are cheaper and profits higher. Thus, going forward, the focus must be not only on the city but on the entire rural-urban territory more generally, in order to identify the economic changes, new forms of production and the needs of the populations in question (MPF 2011b).

Coming back to the question of urban dynamics in Argentina and the changes taking place in the small and medium-sized cities that serve as intermediaries between rural hinterlands and urban networks, it appears that Argentina's recent urbanization resembles that of Western industrialized countries. This is largely due

to the fact that residential choices are no longer made based exclusively on job location. Communication and transportation networks have also greatly facilitated commuting. It is in this way, and based on the example of Nueve de Julio and other Latin American cities, that we can observe how regional urban centers – though somewhat modest at the national level – nonetheless serve as intermediate centers for their hinterlands and provinces (Bolay et al. 2004b; Bolay and Rabinovich 2004a). Such cities emphasize the quality of life, safety and lower cost of living lower they offer. This also applies to the province of Buenos Aires, one of the most densely populated regions of one of the most urbanized countries in the world, and a world leader in terms of advanced agricultural techniques and exportation (Gorenstein et al. 2007).

6.3 The Province of Buenos Aires: A Dense Territory Under Influence

The Buenos Aires Province is an immense territory of some 300,000 km², the equivalent of 11% of the national territory – the surface area of Italy! This largely endless plain, which encompasses most of the Argentinian pampas² (Pessoa 2016), is the country's most populated region. Its estimated population of 16.65 million in 2015 was spread over 109 municipalities³ and represented 39% of the national population. This, of course, includes much of Buenos Aires's metropolitan area, and 7.2% of the same national population within its administrative boundaries (INDEC 2012). The metropolitan area of Buenos Aires, often called Greater Buenos Aires, is comprised of the capital (2.89 million residents) and 24 peripheral municipalities located within the province of Buenos Aires. In 2010, this metropolitan area was home to an estimated 12.8 million people.⁴ The Buenos Aires province was responsible for contributing 36% of Argentina's gross domestic product (GDP) (Ministerio de Economía 2012). The main economic sectors are industry (26.9% of national production), transportation (17.3%), real estate (13.3%), trade (12%), tourism (7.8%) and construction (5.8%). Though the agricultural sector, which is essentially comprised of export crops that largely depend on the financial fluctuations of raw materials on the international market (notably soybean), accounts for only 4.3% of the province's output, it has been steadily strengthening since the early 2000s. Growing areas grew by 34.8% between 2003 and 2011, from 22.5 million acres to 52.6 million acres. Soybeans are the main crop, with close to 14.8 million acres, followed by wheat, maize and sunflower. The Buenos Aires Province's economy accounted for 33% of

²The Argentine pampas is a fertile, grass-covered, almost treeless plain and represents a fifth of the national territory (Wikipedia 2019).

³In Argentina, localities officially recognized as administrative are called *partidos*, and numbered 109 in the Buenos Aires Province.

⁴<http://www.buenosaires.gob.ar/laciudad/ciudad> (Accessed 21 May 2019).

Argentina's exports to the world in 2015; versus 49% in 1997.⁵ There are 67 rural municipalities in the Buenos Aires Province with a population of approximately 1.3 million, representing 10% of the provincial population (27% excluding the metropolitan belt). The 42 urban municipalities are home to 3.5 million residents outside of the Buenos Aires metropolitan area. The fastest-growing municipalities in terms of population are those that are part of the Greater Buenos Aires metropolitan area and those along the coast.

According to the 2010 population census (INDEC 2012), the 109 municipalities in the Buenos Aires Province were comprised of: the capital (La Plata) with 649,613 residents, followed by 10 municipalities of more than 100,000 inhabitants, 17 municipalities of 50,000–99,999 inhabitants, 37 communes of 20,000–49,999 inhabitants, 30 communes of 10,000–19,999 inhabitants and the remainder comprised of smaller communes (Fig. 6.4).

Historically, the province's colonization has its roots in the quest to conquer the national territory in the early nineteenth century, with the aim of making the whole of Argentina developed and agriculturally cultivated. In keeping with Pesoa's analysis (2016), this strategy included numerous initiatives, ranging from the enactment of land ownership laws to regional immigration regulation, wars and peace treaties with indigenous populations, the founding of villages and cities, and even the creation of a national mapping institute (Fig. 6.5). For the leaders of the time, the objective was to "civilize" the country. What remains as a result of this process of territorial conquest are the more than 100 cities, most of which were founded between 1850 and 1916 in the Buenos Aires Province, making it quite exceptional at the global level for such a short historical period and over so vast a territory.

In keeping with an agrarian economy largely comprised of livestock and cereal crops, each new agglomeration's urban center was bordered by concentric growing areas⁶ (Pesoa 2014). Each urban plan was geometrically and rationally organized around a town square (local government buildings, church, school, bank, theater, etc.) and its purlieu into "*manzanas*," (Pesoa 2012). The specific organization of these new cities concretely conveys the priorities of these new settlements, which were gradually linked to one another and the national capital by rail and road. The province's proactive urbanization policy clearly reflects the will of a landowning oligarchy that was not affected by regional conflicts in a country emerging as a major exporter of raw materials of rural origin on the world market. Thus, the goal was to be an actor in the construction of modern Argentina and its institutions in a larger process of conquering exploitable lands (Segura 2009). The region's first foreign residents at that time were immigrants of Italian, Spanish, Basque and French origin, coinciding with the massive wave of immigration in the nineteenth century linked to the agro-export model of meat, milk and grains to Europe (Aliandri 2015).

⁵ <https://www.lanacion.com.ar/1936345-exportaciones-poco-federales-las-companias-de-tres-provincias-explican-el-71-del-comercio-exterior>. (Accessed 21 May 2019).

⁶ These production areas consisted of chacras and quintas (small suburban vegetable farms).

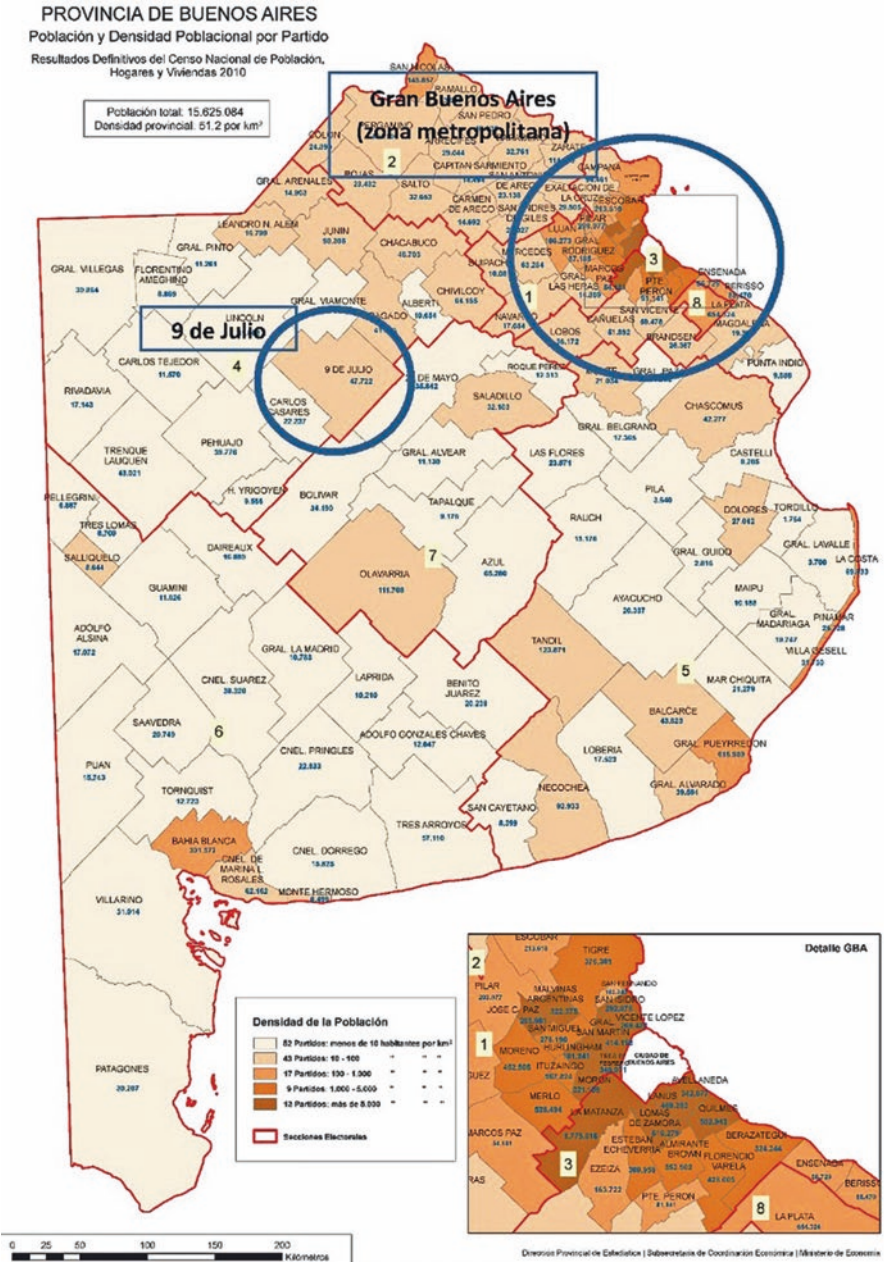


Fig. 6.4 Population density for the Buenos Aires Province, Argentina. (Reproduced from Provincia de Buenos Aires 2010. <http://www.estadistica.ec.gba.gov.ar/dpe/index.php/territorio/mapas-tematicos>. Accessed 27 May 2019)

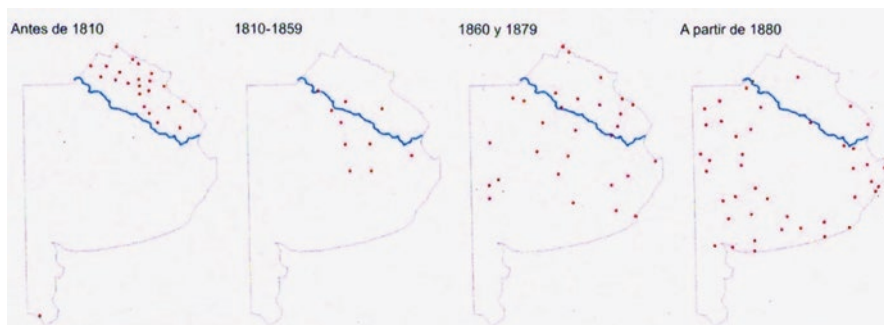


Fig. 6.5 Founding of cities in the Buenos Aires Province in the nineteenth century. (Reproduced from Pesoa 2012)

Closer to home historically, it appears that since the 1960s, the suburban municipalities of Greater Buenos Aires now represent the majority of the Province's population and is increasing. It accounted for 55.8% of the provincial population in 1960, and 63.5% in 2010, or two-thirds of the total population. Outside of this metropolitan area, medium-sized cities of more than 10,000 inhabitants have the fastest growing populations. Sixty nine such cities existed in 1991. In 2000, this figure rose to 76, including 21 cities of more than 50,000 inhabitants (Ministerio de Economía 2013).

According to the nomenclature developed by the Ministry of Federal Planning (2011b), regional and provincial urban agglomerations can be divided into three categories, which indicate the major economic trends of each city: a production function, an intermediation function and a reproduction function.

Differences in terms of infrastructure and services also set the cities of the Buenos Aires Province apart, as does local public transportation. According to the 2001 census (MPF 2011a), it appears that cities in the lower strata of the urban hierarchy do not have local public transport services, whereas urban nodes and agglomerations of more than 50,000 inhabitants all do.

The medium-sized cities of the Buenos Aires's Pampean province undoubtedly serve an intermediate function at the regional level as businesses and services centers directly related to the rural population and the province's agro-industrial production. They are also logistic hubs administratively and governmentally, as well as investment places for certain agricultural incomes (real estate, land, commercial, etc.), not to mention a labor market for the province. Linking the Buenos Aires Province's territorial organization to its economic development, Gorenstein et al. (2007) put forward the concept of *neo-rurality*, which is useful in going beyond the rural/urban dichotomy, especially through the multifunctional nature of jobs held by rural dwellers and based on the increasingly intermediary role the province's urban centers play relative to the surrounding countryside, as in most South countries (Bolay and Rabinovich 2004b).

6.4 Nueve de Julio: Modernity and Development Issues

Like many small and medium-sized cities in South America, Nueve de Julio faces a double issue of size and resources. Nueve de Julio lacks both human and financial resources, as well as institutional capacities that would enable it to anticipate the urban impact of its rapidly-growing population and manage its impact on territorial occupation and organization.

6.4.1 *What Intermediate City for the Region?*

Let us recall that, in our analysis, intermediate cities are characterized as much by their functions as by their dimensions, be they territorial or demographic (Bolay and Kern 2019). In order to refine our analysis of Nueve de Julio and its roughly 50,000 inhabitants, we will evaluate its development potential based on the interactions between the city and its environment.

The creation of the city of Nueve de Julio on the shores of three lakes dates back to 1863 and was part of politicians and military leaders' strategy to conquer the Argentinian territory. The city is located in the central northeastern part of the Buenos Aires Province, at 76 m above sea level (35°27'S latitude and 60°53'W longitude), 262 km from the federal capital. Its surface area is 1,045,256 acres, 963,711 of which are dedicated to agricultural production and livestock.⁷ According to the most recent population census (2010), Nueve de Julio's population (the *partido*, meaning the municipality's urban center and the rural territory) reached 47,733 inhabitants in 2010, 36,494 of who lived in urban areas (Fig. 6.6). According to the municipal authorities (but with no official source of reference), the 2017 estimate was roughly 52,000. This indicates that the population has grown faster over the past decade, given that the city already had 45,998 residents in 2000 (with 34,350 in urban areas) and 44,021 in 1990 (with 30,356 in urban areas).

With a span of 20 years, between 1990 and 2010, the communal population grew by 8.43%. During this same period, Nueve de Julio's urban population increased by 20.22%. If one gives credence to the local councilors' estimates regarding the current population, this decade has been marked by a demographic upsurge that started in 2010 and reached 52,000 in 2017 (8.9% population growth between 2010 and 2017!) (Fig. 6.7).

This remains to be confirmed in the coming years and will be verified (or not) in the 2020 census. However, local informants' comments lend credibility to the theory of an increase in the municipality's population.

Given this, municipal urban planning leaders have identified several priority issues. The first is controlling the city's territorial expansion as a result of its ever-

⁷ <https://www.taringa.net/posts/info/1958302/Ciudad-de-9-de-julio%2D%2D-buenos-aires%2D%2Dargentina.html> (Accessed 23 May 2019).



Fig. 6.6 Aerial view of the city of Nueve de Julio. (Reproduced from Google Maps 2018)

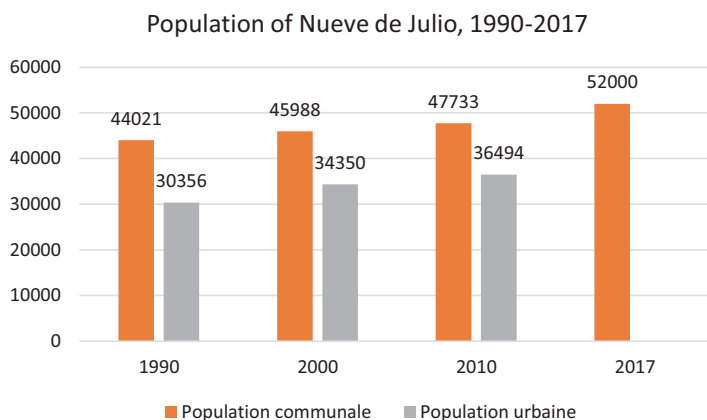


Fig. 6.7 Nueve de Julio (1990–2007), population censuses (INDEC) and estimations

growing population, with human settlements that are increasingly scattered and distant from the historical center. Doing so means reinforcing the urban network by creating areas that serve specific functions (housing, industry, nature reserves, etc.). The other is meeting the basic needs of the city's most destitute population. In this

case, the focus should be on the “Ciudad Nueva”⁸ area, the city’s most precarious neighborhood (12,000 inhabitants), and where infrastructures, housing, water supply and drainage networks (to fight against floods) must all be improved to avoid flooding.

6.4.2 *An Ordinary, Modern City in a Rural Landscape*

It is therefore less the idea of urban modernity confronted by the promotion of urban development – to use the words of Kern (2017) – that underpins our analysis of Nueve de Julio, than that of constitutive elements of urban identity. In many parts of the global South, urban economies are dominated by the informal sector. The example of Nueve de Julio puts us face to face with a completely different Argentinian reality, through planned cities built based on formal and legally-recognized systems of economic production whose prosperity largely depends on international connections of supply and the distribution of goods and raw materials. In this respect, urban sprawl in Argentina refers more specifically to the analysis of new cities created in the nineteenth century based on a European model and implemented in Latin American. Understood in terms of their similarities and differences, these “modern” cities are symptomatic of one just one kind of urbanization taking place in the Global South among others (Schuermans 2009; Robinson 2006). Understanding the role of an intermediate city like Nueve de Julio brings us back to Fraser’s observations (2006). For him, the concept of *ordinary city* “...provides readers with an invigorated call to develop a post-colonial urbanism that is cosmopolitan in the sense of conceiving all cities as sites of modernity. This does not diminish the stark differences between places that are differentially connected to networks across the globe, and it does not ignore the differential challenges cities face as a result of uneven development patterns and unequal resources.” (Fraser 2006:196). While it is certain that Nueve de Julio is not a global city by S. Sassen’s definition (2001, 2002), with functions of monitoring and control over the internationalized economy, it is a mixture of modernity and tradition, and is likewise a part of this globalized market economy (Robinson 2002). Nueve de Julio is but one piece on an international chessboard of flows of raw materials and services, in service of Argentinian agro-export.

In light of this, and with the goal of better understanding Nueve de Julio’s current situation, certain elements of “modernity” and “development” set this city apart while, at the same time, harmonizing its trajectory with that of the Buenos Aires Province’s pampas region.

Like many other cities in the Buenos Aires province, Nueve de Julio is the result of the then-federal government’s policy of territorial expansion in an effort to incorporate fertile lands (then occupied by indigenous dwellers) and increase livestock production (Ratto 2003). The strategy combined military incursions, peace treaties with indigenous populations and the creation of new towns.

⁸A city neighborhood recently renamed Barrios Unidos.

In its 150 years of existence, Nueve de Julio has been highly representative of the modern urban organisation that underpinned planning in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the fruit of the technological and social advances that have shaped both Europe and Latin America: human migration from Europe to Argentina, accelerated industrialization of primary and secondary production, financial gain from an export economy and human settlements that meet the most advanced standards of the times Velásquez (2015) confirms that, in the nineteenth century and more notably the twentieth, the Pampas region's medium-sized cities greatly benefited from this agro-export model (Europeanized urban society, generalized wages and social integration). Things started changing in the 1970s, with more marked socio-economic differences and social exclusion of large segments of the population. Nevertheless, Greater Buenos Aires and the Pampas region (and the province of Buenos Aires in particular) are still the areas where industry prevails, favoring urban growth. "Argentina is typical of a manufacturing country with a center in the metropolitan area of Buenos Aires, an inner belt formed by the most industrialized Pampas provinces and an outer belt with the rest of the country." (Platino and Pellegrini 2016:109).

6.4.3 Between Territorial Expansion and Social Inclusion

More recently, Nueve de Julio has faced problems similar to those found in most of the province's medium-sized cities. While its undeniable prosperity is reflected in the city's layout (e.g. the central square or General San Martín Park) (Fig. 6.8), its economic growth and stability are not guaranteed over time as its success largely depends on the vagaries of the agro-export sector and fluctuations in the global market for cereals and meat products. Moreover, given its continual population growth, many urban dwellers are becoming increasingly attracted to this type of medium-sized city, which many feel offers a viable alternative to the urban congestion of Greater Buenos Aires. These new residents have individual, family and social needs, be it in terms of professional integration, education or health. Yet, the government's response to the needs of Nueve de Julio's 50,000 or so inhabitants seem to fall short of the mark, or at least raise questions as to the priorities in terms of future urban projects.

Social and economic figures and data pertaining to Nueve de Julio are almost impossible to find either directly (in documents relative to these aspects of the city) or indirectly (via the Internet). It was for this reason that we chose to combine the information gathered from interviews and, later, a field study, surveys and the monitoring of public works.

What *is* accessible on the Municipality of Nueve de Julio's website is the municipal budget for recent years, with receipts and expenses, which provides an initial overview of local public action. The estimated budget for 2017 was 712.62 million



Fig. 6.8 General San Martín municipal park in 2018. (Reproduced with permission from Bolay)

pesos,⁹ the equivalent of roughly 35 million U.S. dollars.¹⁰ Over 323 million pesos were allocated to municipal staff, and 21 million to debt service. The main areas of expenditure were: core activities (supposedly related to municipal services) at 144 million; the maintenance of public roads at 127 million; the development of primary health care policies at 52 million; collaborative works with the CEYS cooperative at 45 million; the maintenance of municipal and provincial roads at 44 million and; urban and community hygiene services at 42 million. This was followed by budget allocations (20–30 million) for items such as education and youth services, safety, buildings and public spaces, reforestation, green spaces and insect control. In fact, according to municipal information provided in 2018, the actual budget was somewhat lower; according to them, national, provincial and communal funding totaled 570 million pesos.

Browsing Nueve de Julio's online press, several insights provide additional information regarding the region's economic situation, albeit in a piecemeal way. According to the head of the Chamber of Commerce, the local economy is stable but lacks real growth, and is entirely dependent the revenues from the 2016 to 2017 agricultural harvest. Inflation, which is still poorly controlled at the national level, weighs heavily on local entrepreneurs. To his mind, the often evoked idea of an industrial park would energize the city and region's economy.¹¹ According to another private source quoted by the same newspaper, new jobs in Nueve de Julio in 2017 increased by 30% relative to 2016, mainly in the areas of services, business, administration and sales, and mainly benefit higher education professionals.¹² And since 2018, the devaluation of the Argentinian peso can also felt (positively by large landowners, who sell their crops and livestock abroad in dollars, and negatively by employees and owners of small companies whose business charges are constantly increasing).

The picture would not be complete were we not to highlighting one of Nueve de Julio's particularities which, like other cities in the Buenos Aires Province, organizes community services in joint-management with the "Cooperativa Eléctrica y de Servicios Mariano Moreno Ltda." The latter currently has 21,000 partners for the distribution of electricity, 12,900 for natural gas and 8300 in mobile telephony and internet access. According to its manager,¹³ all of Nueve de Julio's households are affiliated with the cooperative, thus giving him extremely detailed knowledge of the local population and its needs. The origins of the cooperative date back to the 1920s, when Nueve de Julio's inhabitants, faced with the poor quality and exorbitant cost of electricity, decided to produce their own energy. Hence, the first popular electric

⁹http://www.9julio.mun.gba.gov.ar/sit_eco_fin.php. (Accessed 22 May 2019).

¹⁰On April 23, 2018, when the webpage was consulted, \$1 U.S. was equivalent to 20.18 Argentinian pesos.

¹¹<http://elregionaldigital.com.ar/desde-camara-de-comercio-sostienen-que-la-economia-9-de-julio-esta-estable-pero-no-crece/> (Accessed 22 May 2019).

¹²<http://elregionaldigital.com.ar/en-9-de-julio-durante-el-2017-hubo-demanda-de-nuevos-puestos-de-trabajo-en-un-30-por-ciento-mas-que-el-2016/> (Accessed 23 May 2019).

¹³Two interviews were done with Federico Rainari, manager of the CEyS, in 2016 and 2018.

plant was built in 1949. With the years came other services to complete the offer: street paving in 1972, natural gas in 1989, running water in suburban localities, ambulance services, health insurance, funeral and burials, consumer loans (since 2007), and in 2010, Internet and mobile phone connections.

A collaborative agreement exists between the municipality of Nueve de Julio and the Cooperative. However, it goes without saying that relations have fluctuated over time and according to political affiliations. Over the past 3 years, the election of a new political majority and a new mayor (from the presidential majority party, the PRO, the Republican Proposal, and likewise the majority in the Buenos Aires province) has put strain on relations with the Cooperative, which traditionally has been radically obedient. In 2018, after 13 years of unopposed cooperative management, elections were held to renew the CEyS's board of directors. Victory went to the "democratic transparency" list,¹⁴ making negotiations between the Cooperative and the municipality inevitable. Though unable to prove it for lack of access to information but based on the comments from the field, an unusual competition exists between the two institutions; the CEyS is generally seen as an historically-rooted organization that manages large swathes of urban development and works in service of the municipality's residents. It is recognized for its administrative and financial rigor, as well as its efficiency in the production of goods and services, but is criticized by some for its monopolistic tendency to manage all profitable utilities. Municipal services, on the other hand, are mentioned first and foremost for their poor management of civil servants, their material/logistical shortcomings as well as relative to political changes and their impact on priorities. What characterizes municipal action largely depends on the political affiliation of its leaders from one election to another. With neither the means to fulfill their ambitions nor a long-term vision for the city and region's future, the mayor and his team are primarily concerned with being re-elected, and thus focus on short-term investments that make them more visible and popular. One must, however, see this collaboration between the municipality and the Cooperative in its historical perspective, bearing in mind that cooperatives have had a strong presence in Argentina since the nineteenth century, and that the province of Buenos Aires is, by far, the region with the greatest number of them: according to Montes and Ressel (2003), in 2003, 4498 of the country's 16,000 existing cooperatives were active in the province. Of these, 624 were provided services to the community. According to "Centro Cultural de la Cooperación", at the national level, the cooperative sector generates 10% of the GDP and 500,000 jobs. In terms of services to the community, cooperatives supply water and gas, produce energy (often renewable), and distribute it to consumers in over 1500 municipalities of various sizes throughout the country.¹⁵ Thus are we facing a recurring phenomenon that is relatively little studied in terms of its social and institutional impact. Through the case of Nueve de Julio, we discover that the association between the municipality and the Cooperative confers on the latter a crucial

¹⁴<http://www.diarioel9dejulio.com.ar/noticia/88693>. (Accessed 25 April 2018).

¹⁵<http://www.centrocultural.coop/blogs/cooperativismo/2017/07/08/cooperativismo-argentino-incidencia-economica-y-social> (Accessed 26 April 2018).

role in regional planning that falls outside the usual channels of public action. The CEyS is proving to be a dominant urban player, both technically and financially. It is therefore not surprising that this economic and planning primacy, which escapes the services of the local administration, generates power struggles and other conflicts of interest.

6.4.4 Daily Disturbances: How to Manage Better the Expansion?

During our interviews with the mayor and Nueve de Julio's director of urban planning, the big question was that of urban planning, or more specifically the lack thereof. What notably was missing was data that would allow for "status report," making it possible to trace the city's evolution in its various territorial and societal dimensions in order to develop a realistic, tangible masterplan. The question may seem surprising coming from the authorities of a medium-sized town that, at first glance, seems relatively well-organized and esteemed by its inhabitants. But facts have confirmed these shortcomings of the planning, leading us to make an initial diagnosis with regard to urban planning, and to define the various stages of a procedure to collect, archive and process useful data in an organized way in order to establish develop planning based on actual figures and the use of data in space via a Geographic Information System (GIS).

The first observation was that existing data are not shared between the CEyS Cooperative and the Municipality, even less so as the cooperative subcontracts the harvesting and processing of data to a private company that archives the information and produces summaries. Secondly, the Buenos Aires Province's administration, like the competent national departments, also manages statistical data relating to the city of Nueve de Julio as it does for all of the province's other municipalities. However, they are not available in open access. Moreover, the many requests made by the Municipality have remained unanswered! Here one can clearly appreciate the importance and utility of collaborative efforts to be made by the Municipality and the Cooperative. The Cooperative indeed has ample data on its customers. Moreover, its customer base, whose electricity, natural gas and other utilities it supplies, is close to that of the municipal population. If made available to the City, this information could provide a solid base for sound and dependable planning. But the risk that this alliance will never see the light of day is high, as the Cooperative does not really want to share its "business" with soon to be re-elected public bodies.

This does not mean that communal departments have no data, but rather that there is no coherent, organized way of sharing information internally among the different departments, or between the State administration and its outside partners, which are mainly cooperatives.



Fig. 6.9 An outlying neighborhood of Nueve de Julio (Reproduced from Vexina Wilkinson 2017)

What has been acquired and is managed by Nueve de Julio's Secretariat of Housing and Urbanism is the city code and the resulting zoning, which integrates parcels of land. In this way, it determines city's the lines of growth as well as priority actions depending on the neighbourhood, including the services and infrastructures the city wants to bring to the various districts. The top priority is the historical center and nearby residential area (R1), followed by the more recently-built concentric residential areas (R2). The second priority in terms of public intervention is the residential growth areas located southeast and northeast of the city (R3 and R4). In third position comes the rehabilitation of the "Barrios Unidos" neighborhood (formerly Ciudad Nueva) (R5), the poorest part of the city as mentioned earlier, and the less densely populated outlying areas (R6). Concretely, this means that solving the problems of the poorest 25% of the Municipality's population is not a priority in the city's social and spatial layout (Figs. 6.9 and 6.10).

The cadastral and special works department, which is part of the Secretariat of Urbanism, also has vital information regarding existing parcels of land, public properties, buildings and building permits. The problem is that this data still only exists in paper version. Much more data exists and would be highly useful for establishing a geo-referenced information system (clinics, hospitals, schools, public spaces, green areas, industrial zones, etc.). This data is collected and managed by various municipal administration departments that do not communicate with each other and rarely update the information in their possession. Other data relative to water networks, drainage, wastewater, gas and electricity (all managed by the CeyS) are inaccessible.

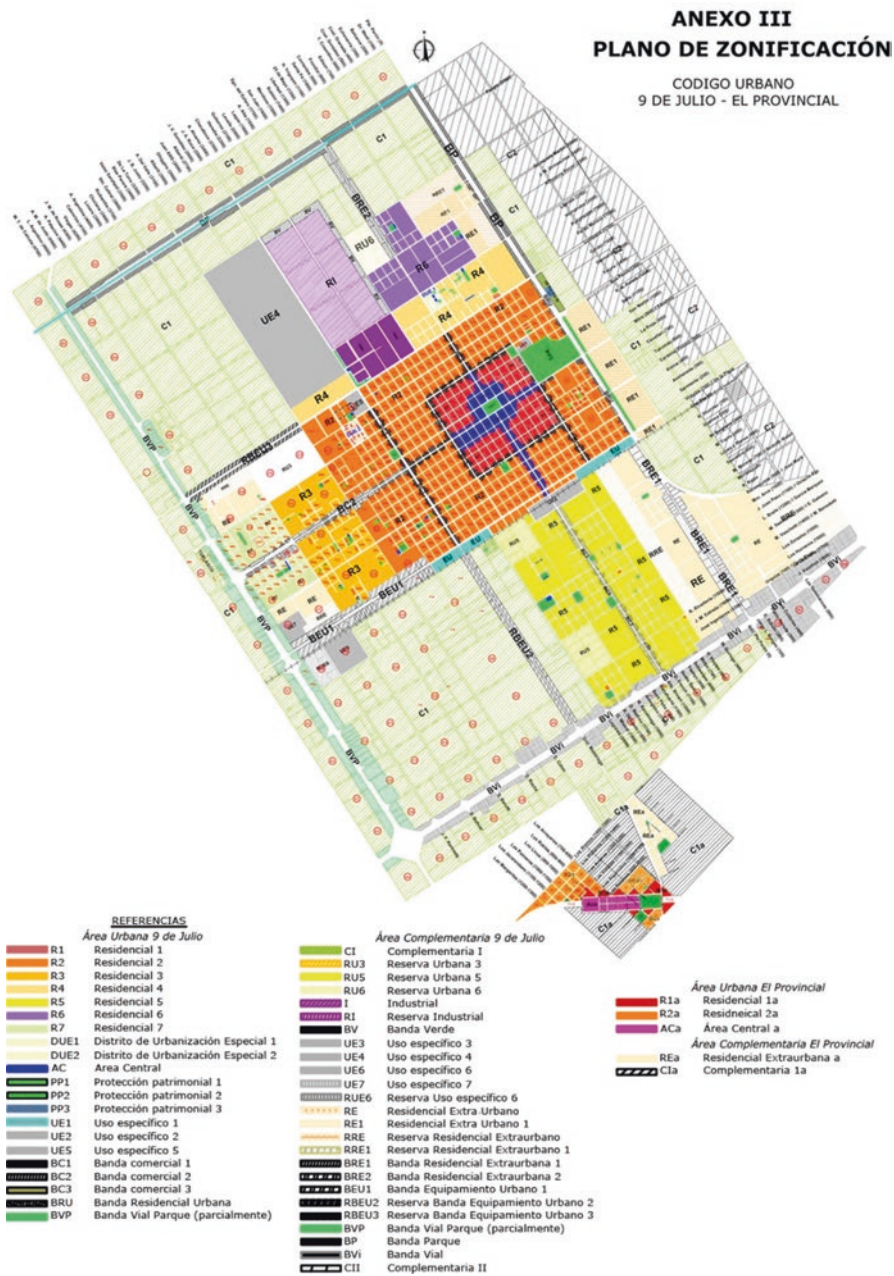


Fig. 6.10 Area map of Nueve de Julio. (Reproduced from Municipalidad de Nueve de Julio)

The information is scattered and completely disconnected from each other. Due to a lack of time and human and financial resources, the Municipality, though aware of its obligation at both the national and provincial levels to look more closely into the plight of the poor (Fig. 6.9), manages urban problems on a day to day basis, more in the reaction to events and to satisfy pressing social demands than to prevent and plan.

6.4.5 The Example of Ciudad Nueva, a Low-Income Housing Area

It is astonishing to think that, in 1996, in anticipation of the World Habitat Conference in Istanbul, we published a comparative book to recap the traveling seminars we had organized with our Latin American colleagues, with the support of the Leopold Foundation Mayer for Human Progress (Bolay et al. 1996), and in which David Kullock and his colleagues at the Faculty of Architecture and Urban Design of the University of Buenos Aires reported on the training urban actors in Nueve de Julio had participated in 2 years prior (Kullock et al. 1996) (Fig. 6.11). Of the three Argentinian cities investigated at that time – Resistencia, San Juan and Nueve de Julio – the latter had 30,000 inhabitants, and the study area, “Ciudad Nueva,” was comprised of 371 acres in the southeastern part of the city, between the historic Sarmiento railway line and the national road No. 5.

Railway workers had originally settled on the site. The population grew in number, building on plots of available land along the urban-rural boundaries. One characteristic of the urban planning is that land use is disparate and sparse, combining housing and artisanal production units and isolating it from the historic city center due to the train tracks. Infrastructures and public facilities included water and electricity networks, natural gas in one of the zone’s four areas, and a public school. The streets were unpaved and without sidewalks. The majority of the houses were small and rudimentarily equipped. The recommendations that came out of the 10-day seminar focused on six elements to improve the area’s urban integration. These conclusions are still valid today, 25 years later. They included job creation, urban integration of neighborhoods, improving school and health services, rehabilitating existing housing, implementing building standards, and improving infrastructure and communication networks.

A diagnosis of the same part of Ciudad Nueva done in 2017 allows us to compare the nature of the problems and the solutions envisaged.

Now more commonly referred to as “Barrios Unidos,” this area still hangs on the outskirts of the historic city, without the city having taken any real urban planning or management measures to reduce the physical breach created the railroad, which is still used for transporting goods (Figs. 6.12 and 6.13).

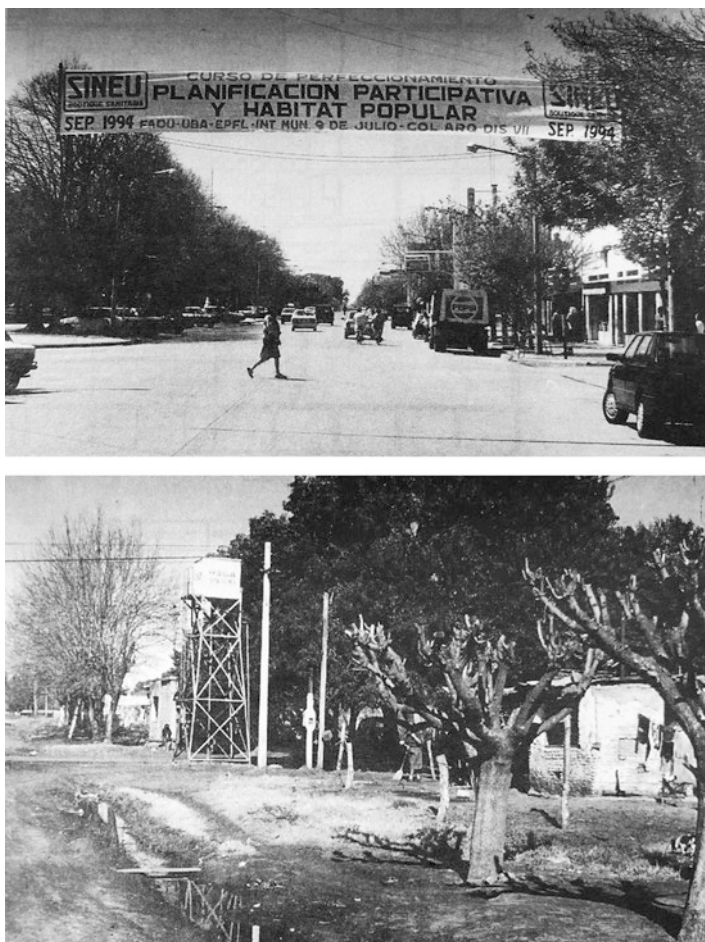


Fig. 6.11 Nueve de Julio 1994: workshop on participative planning and popular habitat. (Reproduced with permission from Bolay)

Surveys done in two of the area's neighborhoods in 2017 and interviews with public officials reveal two crucial points: as in 1994, the people interviewed spoke out against unemployment, underemployment and the difficulty of find a job. Many work sporadically, and usually undeclared. In terms of health, Nueve de Julio's existing services no longer sufficiently respond to social demands. The area lacks a health center as well as a 24-h, on-call pharmacy. In terms of education, the dropout rate had increased; children could be seen wandering the streets, although the area's only school functions normally (one public school for 10,000 inhabitants!). With regard to infrastructure and urban planning, respondents criticized the flooding and lack of wastewater drainage, the source of the former. At the residential level, respondents made mention of the makeshift nature of many houses in terms of their construction. In addition to all of this, there was a feeling of insecurity, as the area is notorious for the traffic and consumption of narcotics.



Fig. 6.12 Aerial view of the Barrios Unidos area. (Reproduced from Google Maps 2017)

This finding explains why the Community Development Secretariat has implemented a distribution plan for building materials for at-risk families. However, the demand is high, and the procedures long and complex.

More specifically, we conducted a building census in two blocks of houses, one a social housing estate with 28 family houses built in the 1990s, and the other with 50 private, self-built homes (Vexina Wilkinson 2017).

The social housing development had changed very little in terms of number of houses.¹⁶ All of the homes had access to water, electricity and natural gas networks,¹⁷ though only one street had a sewage system. The other houses were equipped with septic tanks that were emptied twice a month by a private company. The perceptible changes described by the owners depended on how the family's economic resources had changed, and mainly concerned extension of the living space, changes in the internal layout of the living space and the acquisition of household electrical appliances (Fig. 6.14). Given the poor quality of the construction and its age, the owners complained above all of the lack of insulation and resulting humidity.

¹⁶Each house has a kitchen that opens onto a living room, a bathroom and two bedrooms, all facing an outdoor patio.

¹⁷The natural gas connection is seldom used by the owners of the houses due to the out-of-pocket installation costs, which amount to roughly \$2000 US, and thus prefer to use bottles of gas.

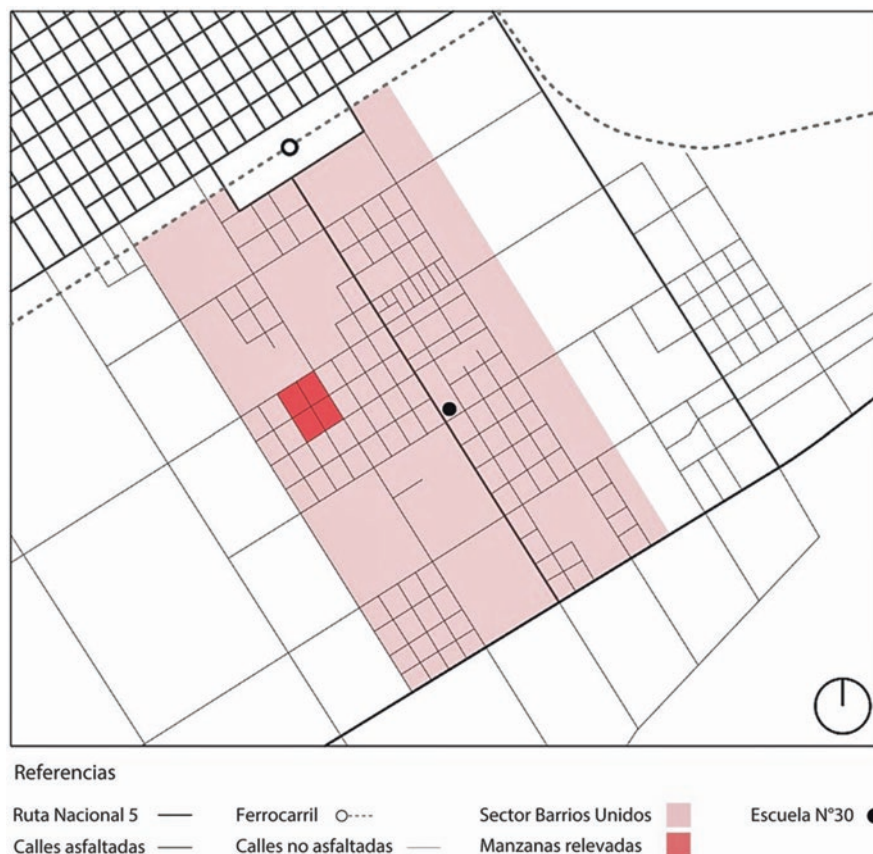


Fig. 6.13 Map of the Barrios Unidos, Nueve de Julio, Argentina. (Reproduced from Vexina Wilkinson 2017)

The changes in the other block were more substantial. In 20 years, the number of houses had increased from 5 to 50. The constructions were more heterogeneous, though several makeshift homes (made of low-quality materials and with minimal implementation) were observed. The walls were made of bare brick, the roofs of polystyrene and cardboard boxes, and unprotected electrical wires were seen in the bathrooms. The differences from one dwelling to another reflect the financial capacities of each family over the years, bearing in mind that, according to their statements, none had received building materials from the municipality. In addition to these self-built plots (Fig. 6.15), several vacant plots remained, along with a few plots with houses of significantly higher quality that were in excellent condition and supplied by the public gas network.

In most cases, the work done on the houses was done by the occupants themselves, without official authorization, which is formally granted by the public authorities after verification and application of norms.



Fig. 6.14 Barrios Unidos: rehabilitation of a house in a social housing development Argentina. (Reproduced from Vexina Wilkinson 2017)



Fig. 6.15 Barrios Unidos: informally-constructed, self-built home. (Reproduced from Vexina Wilkinson 2017)

The “Ciudad Nueva/Barrios Unidos” area has evolved in a very heterogeneous way over the years, according to the district and the occupants’ means. In terms of housing, the changes that have taken place are the result of individual, private means, as few are eligible for loans. It seems that the municipal authorities’ only contribution to date has been a construction materials allocation program whose scale, beneficiaries, selection criteria, funding and debt collection processes are impossible to know.

At the infrastructural level, the situation has been better handled as basic needs (water, electricity and gas) are covered by collective networks and in partially by public facilities (school). “Ciudad Nueva” is still a stigmatized area whose standards as well as the reputation of the neighborhoods and its inhabitants are well below those of Nueve de Julio. The changes in the past 25 years are imperceptible. Generally speaking, it is those who are most in need that suffer most from Nueve de Julio’s lack of public transportation system.

The issue remains understanding how a city, its population, authorities, pressure groups and professionals can be aware of this grim reality of urban poverty, acknowledge the fact that more than 20% of the city’s population live in conditions of material instability and create measures to rectify this...without any change taking place. There is no clear policy, strategy or master plan for the entire urban agglomeration. Nor is there an inclusive vision of the city – from a socio-economical or planning perspective – that focuses on the most disadvantaged populations and neighborhoods. This brings us to a final thought which concerns the uniqueness of Nueve de Julio as both exemplary of a contemporary intermediate Argentinian city and “ordinary” in its reproduction of nineteenth-century model of urban modernism. The challenge for it today is overcoming its inability to acquire the right urban management tools for understanding the urban reality today and projecting itself in a medium- and long-term future in order to decide on the priority actions to take, in dialogue with urban actors.

6.5 What Direction for Nueve de Julio’s Urban Planning?

Beyond Nueve de Julio’s specific characteristics, an issue raised in other research works reemerges (Bolay 2015, 2016): that of urban planning and the institutional and social practices upon which they are based.

The study of Nueve de Julio raises a fundamental question: does urban planning make sense for an “ordinary” nineteenth-century, intermediate city that is (1) more or less representative of the settlements of the pampas region built during the nineteenth century (2) whose development was based on agro-industrial and beef export production for exportation, and (3) that acts as a regional service and business center for rural and urban populations?

Looking back at the city’s history, two things appear to be at odds:

To begin, Nueve de Julio, like the hundred other medium-sized towns in the Buenos Aires Province, is a pure product of urban planning as conceived and executed at the highest levels of Argentinian power in the nineteenth century, as part of the strategy to conquer the national territory (or at least the pampas region) and turn to it into agrarian growing areas. To do so, it was necessary to eliminate the indigenous populations and create cities able to accommodate an immigrant population, mainly of European origin. These new cities were reproduced at a calculated distance to serve as local and regional hubs, to facilitate communication between the national capital and major urban centers (like La Plata, the provincial capital) via

modern transportation modes (road and rail). This opened up to the exportation of agricultural products and importation of manufactured goods, making Argentina the country so-called “the breadbasket of the world” (Pessoa and Sabaté 2016).

Secondly, and much more recently, this “top down” territorial development strategy and its materialization in terms of urban planning seem to have disappeared. Urban planning seems to have given way to local activism, partisan struggles and the domination of economic forces. That is why the failure of urban planning in Nueve de Julio was as easily recognized by successive municipal governments and professionals in 1994 as it is today. Lacking a future vision, the aimlessness of the medium- and long-term programming of works has had an adverse effect on the authorities' control over the urban and regional territory (environmental degradation, sprawl and increased cost of infrastructure, among others). Attempts to organize urban and peri-urban areas in a more coherent way are occasionally initiated but without bringing about any real change in the way of things are perceived or undertaken.

That is why, as early as 1995, after an initial training seminar on participatory habitat planning for professionals working in the urban sector in Nueve de Julio,¹⁸ the Faculty of Architecture and Urban Design of the University of Buenos Aires was mandated by the city's mayor to develop a master plan with the local authorities and their partners that ultimately had no real impact. In 2015, during a field visit to Nueve de Julio, the mayor proposed a collaborative agreement between the Municipality of the City and the EPFL's Center for Cooperation and Development. Today, in 2019, with a new city government majority, the agreement is still in effect and an exchange seminar between medium-sized cities of the Buenos Aires' Province's pampas region was organized. Although an initial diagnosis was made and practical problems were detected, the procedure for establishing an ad hoc geographical information system for urban planning is still pending within the local administration. And no one, it seems, can explain these delays. Some hypothetically propose that it simply “is not a priority for the current mayor!”

How to explain this decline in action, this discrepancy between “good” intentions and their actual implementation? To answer this in a systematical way and draw all possible lessons, using the example of Nueve de Julio, we will attempt to highlight that which is a consequence of its own historical trajectory and current dynamics versus that which has resulted due to more global phenomena. At the very least, this concerns such cities in Argentina, and even Latin America more widely, and perhaps holds true for all medium-sized and intermediate cities in the Global South.

The reference to Robinson's (2006) concept of the ordinary city to discuss South cities without comparing them to Western-type models, in this iteration between modernity and tradition, allows us to question things in a context totally different from that of southern Africa (Robinson's privileged study field for explaining this concept). Indeed, Argentina is emblematic of a “tradition of modernity” strongly

¹⁸The training workshop included representatives of the local administration, private enterprises, as banks and architectural studios, NGOs etc.

linked to the Western city as conceived in the nineteenth century, in the light of changes in society, now resolutely industrial and increasingly urban. This school of thought considers that the occupation of space is for the common good, and that it is up to the State to organize and monitor “realistic applied urbanism” that considers the constraints of a resolutely industrial, capitalist society (Chaline 1985). The idea of cities in the countryside and a checkerboard layout (Menétrey 2013) were undoubtedly sources of inspiration specific to Europe at that time that we see reproduced simultaneously across the “new continent.” However, what makes the organized settlement of Argentina’s pampas region so unique and exceptional is the combination of an extremely orderly urban planning doctrine for the new city and the desire to conquer new territory, to extend the boundaries of “(Western) civilization” and to control them (Cacopardo 2007).

In the case of Argentina, it is not a question of opening up the urban concept to “other” realities forged on economic informality and illegal land use, as we have done on other occasions (Bolay 2012). Rather, we are simply retracing the process of global Westernization (to not say Europeanization) that, in the 19th and early twentieth century, made Argentina one of the world’s economic powers. A city like Nueve de Julio, a modernist artifact of urbanity transposed to South America, is but one cog in this vast machinery that served to create a country and an international power.

The “harsh reality of the South city” is much more recent. According to the information collected orally, the “Ciudad Nueva” neighborhoods date back to the late 1980s and early 1990s, and are symptomatic of this deviation from the historical planning by unregulated, largely individualistic, unplanned social practices in the municipality’s less valued areas. The urban model that has been in place for more than a century no longer works for three reasons: the major economic recession of a country competing in terms of agro-industrial exports, a sharp rise in poverty and migration from Buenos Aires and other major cities to regional urban centers like Nueve de Julio that are less affected by the crisis. The lack of a coherent response from the local government to this deteriorating situation raises questions about the city’s governance.

Can we speak of governance when looking critically at the city of Nueve de Julio? We can begin by recognizing that it is a difficult time to judge the urban policy led by the current authorities. Like Argentina itself, with the election of President Mauricio Macri (supported by the PRO, Propuesta Republicana, a new partisan support group that is now part of a majority coalition in both houses of Congress) in November 2015, Nueve de Julio is also keeping up with the changes with its new political majority (also elected in 2015 and reelected by majority in 2017) and at the provincial level. In other words, at both the Municipality and the municipal administration levels, the political and technical leaders are essentially novices. So what can be said of these past 2.5 years?

Mariano Barroso, the current *intendente*,¹⁹ took the helm after his predecessor’s 10-year reign. His main goal is making this new political majority (which is in power in the city for the first time) popular. Urban planning, as such, is not suffi-

¹⁹In Argentina, *intendente* is the title held by the mayor.

ciently convincing to enthuse the electorate, as it is a lengthy process, all the more so as it is a question of creating it almost from scratch. Which brings us to the second issue; the local government is still poorly equipped in terms of human resources, both in terms of the number of personnel and their skills in urban fields). Only recently did the Planning Secretariat's staff increase and declare urban planning and the development of a GIS its priorities (though nothing has been implemented to date). Another obstacle to participatory urban governance (Devas et al. 2004) is the fact that relations between the current municipality and its partner, the Cooperativa de Electricidad y Servicios (CEyS), the community's main service provider, remain distant, and are built more on mistrust and competition than on complementarity and collaboration. Even if things were to progress with the new political direction of the cooperative's leaders, the competition between two major forces in the local urban dynamic is counterproductive. Their active collaboration in shared urban governance would be the catalyst for spatial planning that takes into account the population's expectations, and hence a foundation for effective, rational planning (Brown 2015). The autumn 2019 elections will in one way or another sanction urban management as it is carried out in the city.

This lack of true urban governance in Nueve de Julio has repercussions on the capacity to integrate the poor. As is obvious from the analysis in this chapter, the "Ciudad Nueva/Barrios Unidos" area is emblematic of the government's inability to grasp the meaning of an inclusive city, the benefits of identifying the problems and of making their resolution the priority of public action. In the conclusion of *From Unustainable to Inclusive Cities* (2004), Westendorff rightly states that inclusion is both economic (through work, sociability and participation in community life) and urbanistic (through access to basic networks such as water and electricity). It is also political, in a more subtle way, and thus links urban governance and the inclusive city. It is true that the term "inclusive city" is a catch-all concept that was widely used by international organizations in the late-twentieth century. However, it remains intelligible as exclusion's virtuous counterpart (Clément and Valegeas 2017). Aiming to address various but universally-recognized problems such as poverty, unemployment, the segmenting of labor markets, gender inequalities, the democratization of public life and social participation, the "inclusive city" should translate into public policy, as well as values and ethics.

The inclusive city concept attempts to "incorporate inhabitants in the public sphere, where collective decisions are made to ensure that all preferences and interests are taken into account, and that public services are accessible to all" (Van der Wusten 2016). Accessibility (and thus the "right to the city") and participation – hence the need for methods and tools that foster this social and political integration. And that's the rub, because nothing substantial has really been done in Nueve de Julio to improve the development of the famous "Ciudad Nueva" area, almost as though any excuse were a good excuse to not do things seriously...for 25 years. This is somewhat incredible given the needs expressed by inhabitants.

But the situation is even more serious and, in this regard, denotes a lack of decision on the part municipal authorities, both past and present, on this subject. Once again, we come back to the foundations of participatory planning (Bolay et al. 2016).

Not diagnosing the reality that existed in the early 1990s, much like that which prevails today, thus frees the political authorities from any liability, be it in Nueve de Julio or any other medium-sized Argentinian city. More than 20% of Nueve de Julio's population lives below the norms adopted by the city itself. Sporadic popular demonstrations remind us that improving development in these neighborhoods is a necessity. Faced with this pressure, the rare initiatives that the city *does* undertake do not take into account the full scope of the problems. The main excuse for this is physical and material; this largely informal residential area has expanded in a completely illegal way, and is cut off from the historic center by the train tracks. As though it were the only city in the world with train tracks running through it and development were technically unfeasible!

More fundamentally, there is a denial of the reality in Nueve de Julio, as in many cities around the globe facing similar issues of poverty and informality (Bolay et al. 2016). For many local governments, it is easier to neglect urban instability, or even deny it, than to actually face it due to the complexity of its causes and multi-faceted consequences, which require a long-term approach, substantial investments and technical, social and economic skills. All this for short-term, random political gain.

It is likely that Nueve de Julio's municipal authorities are of this mind. Yet, they forget that the fight against poverty and slum upgrading have integrative effects on neighborhoods and families, as well as a unifying effect on the entire community, as the Cities Alliance recalls through its "Cities without slums" program.²⁰ For people – who, let us not forget, are citizens – living in unstable conditions, expecting to live in decent conditions is first and foremost a question of dignity. The spread of slums is conducive to environmental contamination, the spread of disease and increased violence and insecurity. Slum upgrading is more affordable because it costs less and is more effective than relocation to public housing. Developing land with basic services costs even less.

At a more global level, it is also an advantage economically and fiscally. Reintegration through jobs allows people to invest in their land and homes. It is also recognized that the more secure the habitat is, the more families will become integrated in their neighborhoods and cities. Studies show that the poor can and are willing to pay for improved services and homes. This increases safety and security for the community as well as tax revenues for the city.

Like many medium-sized cities in Argentina and Latin America faced with growing populations, expanding peripheries and ever-increasing social disparities, Nueve de Julio is facing major challenges. Understanding such a city and other medium-sized cities that act as intermediate hubs affords us the opportunity to rethink the city and its dynamics at different scales, and to integrate urban and regional planning that takes into account its strengths and weaknesses in order to increase the

²⁰<http://www.citiesalliance.org/About-slum-upgrading> (Accessed 20 May 2019).

city's attractiveness and combat social inequalities and territorial fragmentation. Given its geographical location and population size, Nueve de Julio has a strong influence on the territory, maintaining trade relations with comparable or smaller urban hubs but in obvious connection with the upper echelons of the urban framework, which we think of as being in La Plata, the province's capital, and Buenos Aires, the national capital (roughly 4 h away by public transport).

Though we know that most planning is done within municipal boundaries in order to better control the communal space, strategic economic and financial interests extend beyond these borders and can affect other municipalities. Urban planning therefore cannot ignore these regional issues, which implies arrangements between communes and the provincial government.

Nueve de Julio is an ordinary city. Historically speaking, it is part of a group of cities that was created to ensure Argentina's "productivity" in the global economy. Like the others, it was built on simple and functional urban principles in one of the country's most dynamic provinces. Nueve de Julio plays an intermediate role as a regional pole both residentially and commercially, is perfectly integrated politically at the provincial and national levels as part of the governing national majority and maintains links with the network near and far. Yet, in the past 20 years, it is its marked territory fragmentation due to the scattering individual habitats and the extension of a spatially marginalized and socially stigmatized low-income housing area that has brought it notoriety. This is due to its inability (as yet) to develop a system of territorial planning that can solve these problems in partnership with local stakeholders, and namely the cooperative. The lack of tools and/or their application in spatial planning clearly shows that planning issues in Nueve de Julio are not only of a technical nature, but are likewise a political and social challenge driven by power struggles and local democracy.

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