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REGULARIZATION OF INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS AS A GOVERNABILITY DEVICE: THE CASE OF ARGENTINA DURING THE GOVERNMENT OF MAURICIO MACRI (2015-2019)

LA REGULARIZACIÓN DE ASENTAMIENTOS INFORMALES COMO DISPOSITIVO DE GOBERNABILIDAD: EL CASO DE ARGENTINA DURANTE EL GOBIERNO DE MAURICIO MACRI (2015-2019)

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the policy-making process to regularize informal settlements in Latin America through a detailed study of the Argentine case during the government of Mauricio Macri (2015-2019). Its results come from qualitative research gathering primary (18 semi-structured interviews) and secondary (specialized academic literature) sources. It is essential to frame regularization policies in particular socio-political contexts. Since they represent governability devices, informal settlements acquires a privileged position in the agenda during periods characterized by a threat to the political system's stability and by its low legitimacy. This paper analyzes how the social organization of dwellers from informal settlements has evolved. Their conceptions about urban informality and regularization impact the policy-making process. By doing so from a socio-historical perspective, we enlighten the process behind the enactment in 2018 of a federal bill on socio-urban integration and its content.

KEY WORDS: regularization, informal settlements, governability, public policy, socio-urban integration.

RESUMEN

Este artículo examina el proceso de formulación de políticas públicas orientadas a la regularización de asentamientos informales en América Latina, a través de un estudio detallado del caso argentino durante el gobierno de Mauricio Macri (2015-2019). Los hallazgos se basan en una investigación cualitativa que combina fuentes primarias (18 entrevistas semiestructuradas) y secundarias (literatura académica especializada). Es fundamental enmarcar las políticas de regularización dentro de contextos sociopolíticos específicos, ya que, al funcionar como herramientas de gobernabilidad, la cuestión de los asentamientos informales adquiere relevancia en la agenda pública en momentos de inestabilidad o baja legitimidad del sistema político. Este artículo se centra en analizar la evolución de la organización social de los habitantes de asentamientos informales y cómo sus concepciones sobre la informalidad urbana y la regularización influyen en el proceso de formulación de políticas públicas. Al integrar una perspectiva sociohistórica, se esclarece el proceso que llevó en 2018 a la promulgación de una ley federal de integración socio-urbana, así como su contenido.

PALABRAS CLAVE: regularización, asentamientos informales, gobernabilidad, políticas públicas, integración socio-urbana

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In Latin America, informal settlements are a preferred objects of study among academics interested in urban issues. As Cravino (2012) points out, a series of topics have historically structured that field of research: processes of consolidation of these spaces in the urban fabric; informal land markets; and consequences of programs aimed at regularizing the legal tenure of dwellers' property.

Policies aimed at legalizing land tenure in informal settlements are based on several assumptions, as they should ideally contribute to the subsequent improvement of the living conditions of the dwellers. Among them, one that stands out is the one that considers property rights an indispensable tool for breaking the cycle of poverty in which these would be trapped. De Soto's (1989) paradigmatic work has reinforced such a conception within supranational institutional arenas. The definition of secure tenure as one of the fundamental objectives that governments should pursue during the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) in 1996 (Clichevsky, 2012; Cravino et al., 2008) is only an example of such reinforcement.

Academic discussions on these policies have focused on assessing their scope and impacts. Several authors have suggested deepening urban informality when dwellers obtain legal certainty (Cravino, 2012). Others have considered that its expected benefits, both in economic and social terms, have not unfolded (Calderón, 2006; Fernandes, 2008). The generalization of regularization programs in the region since the 1990s (Di Virgilio et al., 2010), encouraged by international organizations (Clichevsky, 2012), has translated into the emergence of other approaches to intervention in informal settlements other than the one focused on the legal dimension of property. First, those that emphasize a "physical regularization" through the construction of urban service infrastructures

such as drinking water networks, sewage, paved streets stand out. Then, it is the case of those that establish as a priority their "socio-urban integration" thanks to urban facilities such as schools, and health centers that supposedly strengthen the opportunities of dwellers (Ward, 1998). The mediatization of the assumed success of programs such as *Favela-Bairro*, in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), or the *Programa de Mejoramiento Barrial de Barrios Subnormales* (PRIMED), in Medellin (Colombia), has uprooted from decision-makers imaginary the need to focus such interventions on the issue of property rights.

This paper aims to analyze the policy-making process to regularize informal settlements at the national level in Latin America, specifically, in Argentina, through detailed qualitative research gathering primary (18 semi-structured interviews) and secondary (specialized academic literature) sources. There, a federal bill passed very recently, during the government of Mauricio Macri (2015-2019), obliging the different levels of the State to proceed with the socio-urban integration of informal settlements[1]. While the strong influence of recommendations from international organizations on national institutional arenas is undeniable, it becomes essential to frame the policy-making process to regularize informal settlements at the national level in particular socio-political contexts. In Argentina, such a bill passed several years after multilateral credit agencies, such as the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), had started promoting and financing slum-upgrading programs[2].

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1. Ley 27.453, 2018

2. Programs such as the *Programa de Mejoramiento de Barrios* (Promeba), at the national level, and the *Programa Integral de Recuperación de Asentamientos Irregulares (Rosario Hábitat)*, at the municipal level, were formulated and implemented in Argentina. Only some informal settlements prioritized by

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"Urban informality is in vogue in the Anglo-Saxon academic world, partly because it is one of the favorite topics in the emerging field of postcolonial urban studies [...] [which] offers universalist conclusions about informality [...] even though they are almost always based on the experiences of Indian and southern African cities" (Varley, 2014, p. 1). At such a time, analyzing the policy-making process to regularize informal settlements in a Latin American country vindicates the role that scholars from the region continue to play concerning this study object. Besides, by maintaining academic debates on urban informality based on policy-making processes, the paper questions considerations about them as symbols of transgression and resistance. In short, it assumes a perspective from which such urban spaces are molded by mechanisms of confrontation and power struggles within different actors, just like what happens with other urban spaces. It is a perspective that scholars like Varley (1985; 1993; 1994; 1996) have adopted while they analyzed the regularization policies in Mexico in the 1970s and 1980s[3]. Her works particularly studied the establishment of federal agencies such as the *Comisión para la Regularización de la Tenencia de la Tierra* (CORETT) and its activities based on the political system's variables.

In Argentina, few works have systematically framed the evolution of regularization policies within political contexts. Given the scarce literature that addresses the policy-making process leading to the regularization of informal settlements in Argentina from this perspective, we recognize the exploratory nature of the study of the different dynamics between social and governmental actors behind the federal bill on socio-urban integration. Some recent publications, such as that of Fainstein and Palombi (2019), analyze local statist interventions during the eight years of Mauricio Macri as Head of Government in the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires (CABA) as a function of governability challenges. Since many of those who served at the local level are part of the national government, this paper considers it necessary to explore such local governance dynamics, especially to understand how officials might conceive (or not) public policies as governability tools.

Nevertheless, as we will observe, there has been no continuity in the conception of statist interventions in informal settlements as a governability device during Mauricio Macri's governments in the CABA and at the federal level. The enactment of a federal bill on socio-urban integration in 2018 has little to do with the different struggles previously occurring in the CABA, but rather with the consolidation of the political profile of social organizations present in those spaces. Therefore, we should also study their origins and the role they played since the return to democracy. Such an initiative is essential to contextualize the first regularization programs.

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provincial and local governments could benefit from them.

3. These works have led the author of this paper to explore the contributions of comparative strategies when studying the evolution of public policies leading to the regularization of informal settlements in Latin America, based on the cases of Mexico and Argentina (Bosch, 2020). When founded on the concepts of governance and governability, such strategies can overcome certain caveats to the different cases' comparison, especially those that allude to their differences in terms of urban informality nature and magnitude.

1. FROM THE LAST MILITARY DICTATORSHIP TO THE GOVERNMENT OF MAURICIO MACRI, THE LONG ROAD TOWARD A FEDERAL REGULARIZATION BILL

 The 1976 coup d'état marked a turning point in the approach to eradication plans. Initially conceived as measures to relocate dwellers and support their social readaptation, these plans were transformed into mechanisms of "urban terrorism" (Blaunstein, 2001), characterized by forced expulsions that reached unprecedented levels in the country's history. With the return of democracy, under the presidency of Raúl Alfonsín (1983-1989), the principle of settlement in informal settlements is sustained (Ochsensius et al., 2016). The *Programa de Radicación y Solución Integral de Villas y Núcleos Habitacionales Transitorios* in Buenos Aires city through a municipal ordinance stands out. Despite not being implemented, its guidelines recognize the eradication's failures, considered as aggravating the housing conditions in the capital (Martínez, 2003)

Regularization of informal settlements truly became part of the political agenda for the first time during the period of neoliberal reforms under the presidency of Carlos Saúl Menem (1989-1999). Several bills and decrees were enacted at the federal level, enabling the transfer and regularization of land ownership mechanisms. It is the case of the *Ley de Emergencia Económica* of 1989 that gives faculties to the State to transfer property rights to private agents over public lands whose public utility has been declared unnecessary (Di Virgilio et al., 2010). Such a bill generates the institutional framework required for launching the *Comisión Nacional de Tierras Fiscales*, better known as *Programa Arraigo*. The program aims to transfer ownership to those who settled illegally on state lands, mostly unoc-cupied because of the unconcluded expansion of railway and road networks (Relli, 2018).

In 1994, another bill, the *Ley Nacional de Titula-rización de Inmuebles*, passed. It aimed to regularize those settlements whose irregularity was based, above all, on unconcluded sales in popular divided lots (p. 92). Yet, few Argentine provinces adhered to the bill during the 1990s. The implementation of Promeba in 1997 was not only proof of the will of the government to deepen its intervention in informal settlements but also indicated a paradigm shifts in such an intervention's approach. First and foremost, it was conceived as a tool to "improve quality of life and contribute to the social inclusion and integration of Argentine households from the poorest segments of the population, residing in *villas* and *asentamientos irregulares*, as formally defined in the official gazette and multiple legal texts. However, its components go far beyond titling, only representing 1% of its investment. Among them, the provision of infrastructure and social equipment, environmental sanitation, and community development stand out. Financed by the IDB, through a 25-year Credit Line, of which US$ 200 million are specific to the program, informal settlements benefiting from Promeba's actions are selected based on a series of criteria (*ibid*, pp. 30-34): socioeconomic (for instance, at least 75% of the population must have their basic needs (NBI) unsatisfied); legal (titling and feasibility studies for the provision of services must have already initiated; environmental and urban).

The implementation of Promeba takes place through provincial and municipal authorities and includes the concept of *integración*. However, since the end of the 1990s, the term *urbanización* has become preferred. This shift is evident in legislative and programmatic documents, such as the Pro-grama de Urbanización de Villas y Asentamientos

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in the Province of Buenos Aires, launched in 2005. The proliferation of urbanización reflects a series of interventions carried out at the municipal level. When it refers to comprehensive intervention processes in informal settlements, the term is, in some cases, part of the vindicatory discourses of dwellers. Rodríguez (2017) acknowledges how grassroots organizations claim more and more the concept of *re-urbanización*, "as a way to recognize previous social production processes of habitat carried out by dwellers from informal settlements" (p. 18).

Established in the academic and political fields since the launch, in 2003, of the *Subprograma* -then *Programa- de Urbanización de Villas y Barrios Precarios* at the federal level, the term *urbanización* reaches the public agenda with the election of Mauricio Macri as CABA's Chief of Government in 2007. During the campaign, he declares himself in favor of informal settlements' eradication, particularly that of Villa 31, close to the historic center and central business district. These initial statements translate into a progressive dismantling of the *Programa de Radicación, Integración y Transformación de Villas* (PRIT), which was launched in 2001 but very erratic in its implementation (Cravino, 2016a). Nevertheless, several local laws stipulating *urbanización* got approved during his term of office. If the first one passes in 2009[4], the programmatic interventions of the Government of the City of Buenos Aires (GCBA) were not built until 2010, after some years of small-scale works. Such works have been categorized as "urban makeup" (Cravino and Palombi, 2015; Fainstein and Palombi, 2019), as involving, above all, the improvement of facades and public spaces through the distribution of resources to neighborhood cooperatives.

At a later stage, deepened interventions in public spaces and regarding community equipment have been encompassed within a new term, that of "urban acupuncture" (Brikman, 2016; Fainstein and Palombi, 2019). They do represent a "better quality of life, but far from the standards of the rest of the city" (Cravino 2018b, p. 77), and their scope is wider than what was carried out until then by previous administrations (Cravino and Palombi, 2015). At least from a discursive point of view, the interventions are paralleled with those in countries such as Colombia and Brazil. It is a strategy that seeks to frame them in the territorial marketing of the CABA (Cravino, 2016b), as evidenced by its strong presence in the media (Cravino, 2018b).

The election of Mauricio Macri as president in the 2015 federal election ensures conditions for a bill unanimously passed obliging the State to regularize all informal settlements for their socio-urban integration. A series of grassroots organizations and NGOs carry out a national census of those informal settlements, the *Registro Nacional de Barrios Populares* (Renabap), coordinated by the *Jefatura de Gobierno*. The main novelty behind such a bill is its recognition, at the federal level, of the need for private land expropriation and, thus, its generalization of a practice carried out until then at sub-national levels.

Nevertheless, regularization in terms of property rights has been resolved insofar with the delivery of 150,000 housing certificates (*Certificados de Vivienda*), rather than by expropriation and the subsequent titling. It aims to allow, above all, families to demand different public services (water, electricity) from the providers, ask for a loan, and register in the tax system. A National Roundtable (*Mesa Nacional*) of *Barrios Populares* is formed after the bill passes in 2018. Civil society organizations having participated in the Renabap are part of it, to

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4. Ley 3343 CABA, 2009

conceive master plans ensuring the formulation and implementation of what the bill stipulates. During Mauricio Macri's government, that objective was however not attained.

2. REGULARIZATION AS A RESPONSE TO GOVERNABILITY CHALLENGES

Before reflecting on the policy-making process to regularize informal settlements in Argentina based on different socio-political contextual variables, an analysis of political science concepts is essential. The idea of governability, intertwined with governance, is a fundamental theoretical tool for studying how informal settlements' social actors might influence such a policy-making process. The governance perspective "implies understanding how the system of institutionalized norms is transformed and how socio-economic and governmental actors respond to these changes and create a new dynamic of practices in a dialectical relationship that transforms the way of governing to contribute to social stability and maintain the political regime" (Salazar, 2018, p. 545). Thus, the dynamics behind such coordination of multiple actors represent, for the government, challenges for maintaining levels of governability of the political system, determined by the "capacity of institutions and movements to move towards defined objectives by their activity" (Rial, 1988, cited in Camou, 2011, p. 32). Maintaining these levels of governance does not imply, however, assuming the eradication of conflicts arising in society.

Besides social stability, two other main variables impact levels of governability of the political system: effectiveness of responses to those demands structuring conflict; and legitimacy of alternatives chosen to solve the issue these demands claim.

Therefore, a public policy might be effective to channel demands arising from particular actors, whether from civil society or other statist institutions, while perceived at the same time as owning little legitimacy. The consequences of the loss of legitimacy are not usually immediate. Adopting a specific alternative to an issue because of its short-term effectiveness for maintaining levels of governability may carry a long-term opposite effect by reinforcing a decrease in the political system's legitimacy. As a response to demands arising from informal settlements' social actors, policies aimed at regularizing such spaces affect future conditions of its formulation. In other words, existing levels of governability determine policy-making processes. These, in turn, create and/or reproduce conditions for greater or lesser levels of governability in the future.

Regularization becomes a tool for enhancing controls of political order and maintaining institutional stability because it allows "incorporating, restricting or accommodating individuals and groups that seek to influence the political game according to institutionalized guidelines" (Camou, 2001, p. 39). Relations between statist and social actors determine the capacity of the latter to represent a threat to the political system's stability, thus influencing the type of responses delivered to the demands of the most vulnerable. Such responses' effectiveness increases not only while converging with what social actors demand but also when instrumentalized to guide relations between them and statist institutions (Le Galès and Lascoumes, 2017, p. 7). An instrumentalization approach "can supplement the classic views that focus on organization or on the interplay of actors and representations, which nowadays largely dominate public policy analysis" (*ibid.*, p. 14) and is adopted in this work.

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Relations between statist and social actors representing the most vulnerable also impact the political system's legitimacy. Such an impact tends to vary between the most vulnerable and affluent middle sectors, particularly in Argentina. The latter tend to question the alleged manipulation from ruling political parties of the former through co-optation and/or clientelist mechanisms. We should not essentialize a univocal relationship between informal settlements' social actors and such mechanisms. Nevertheless, this paper recognizes that policies aimed at providing an answer to urban informality may erode the political system's legitimacy among affluent middle sectors because of its association with such a relationship. By doing so, despite its short-term contribution to strengthening legitimacy among the most vulnerable, a counterproductive reconfiguration of the political system's variables might arise.

The social organization of informal settlements dwellers has been studied since the 1970s by scholars whose main achievement has been to demystify their supposed "culture of poverty" (Lewis, 1967). Initially analyzed as the expression of "new social movements" in the context of the growing democratization of Latin American societies, such a social organization has been perceived later as a failure, particularly in the face of the "co-optation of its leaders by the machinery of political clientelism" (Merklen, 1997, p. 14). This paper recognizes that "the approach of new social movements ignores the instrumentality of popular organizations […] and that they simply cannot ignore the political game." However, it also sees thoughts of clientelist relationships as a complete manipulation of the citizenry's will as an "oversimplification" (*ibid.,* pp. 15-16).

3. FROM SOCIAL ORGANIZATION IN INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS TO THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE POPULAR ECONOMY SECTOR (1983-2015)

The return to democracy in Argentina, after the last military dictatorship, it is translated into the (re)emergence of social organization territorially implanted in informal settlements. Merklen (1997) describes it as those informal settlements consolidated through land occupation, where organization models replicate that of factories: neighborhood organizations are composed of the directive and special commissions, and a body of delegates; and a discourse defending autonomy concerning political and party competition arises. Initially, these neighborhood organizations generate an impact on public opinion about their demands' legitimacy, those that claim the right to decent housing that the State is supposed to guarantee. Cravino (1998) describes a similar organization in the villas of CABA, whose leaders are usually migrant workers with political experience within trade unions. The *Movimiento de Villas y Barrios de Emergencia de Capital Federal* (MVBC), launched in 1987 and bringing together different organizations, describes itself as "pluralist and non-partisan". Its main objective is to seek "a broad base of consensus" (*ibid*.: 7). However, at this first stage, the social organization of informal settlements dwellers in Argentina does not threaten the incipient democratic political system's stability. Its limits with the latter are clearly defined.

With the arrival of the Partido Justicialista (PJ) to the government of the Province of Buenos Aires in 1987, new relationships between neighborhood organizations and the political system arose through the inclusion of different leaders in the latter (Merklen, 1997). It generated, as also happened in

the *villas* of the capital (Cravino, 1998), a rupture of unity in informal settlements (Merklen, 1997) and thus difficulties for organizations to generalize their different demands and represent a real threat to such stability.

In this context, "the creation of the *Programa Arraigo* in 1991 can be read both as a response to international organizations' recommendations, as well as from the exploitation of a specific circumstance by political actors who managed to sneak into public management a claim of social organizations in the general course of politics towards an opposite direction" (Relli, 2018, p. 88). Its conception as a governability device is then not entirely clear. This is indicated not only by the "very meager [...] results in terms of titling in the Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires and null in the villas of the City of Buenos Aires" (Cravino, 2009, p. 61), but also by the existence of other tools, of an aid assistance nature, to ensure governability during the implementation of controversial neo-liberal reforms.

Deterioration of socio-economic conditions because of deregulation and privatization measures during *menemismo* has a considerable impact on the most vulnerable. It resulted in a noteworthy evolution of their social organization, in general, and in informal settlements, in particular, from the end of the 1990s. Such a social organization began to represent a threat to the political system's stability. In Argentina, trade unions historically guaranteed social conquests. Economic liberalization initially promoted throughout the last military dictatorship strengthens the role of neighborhood organizations as intermediaries between statist institutions and dwellers from informal settlements. The emergence of *acción piquetera* deepens such a role.

During the *Mesa de Diálogo Social* that took place in 2002, actors from the Catholic Church, NGOs, trade unions, and organizations *piqueteras* discussed not only responses to unemployment but also the *Programa de Emergencia Habitacional* (PEH), better known as *Techo y Trabajo*. They also negotiated the implementation of Promeba in the municipalities of the *Conurbano bonaerense*[5] (Ferraudi Curto, 2011), that was excluded initially in 1999 from its universe of action because of the ecological fallacies on which it was built. The 2001 crisis not only implied new tools among neighborhood organizations, such as the *acción piquetera*, which allowed, for instance, Promeba's universe of action to expand, but also resulted in the construction of a more articulated and coordinated social organization regarding the issue of unemployment.

As a result of the 2001 crisis, demands on responses for unemployment acquired greater visibility compared to the work of different neighborhood organizations in charge of managing community spaces (Bruno et al., 2017). Initially promoted by these neighborhood organizations, demands on titling lose importance compared to the social organization mostly articulated around unemployment and whose presence in informal settlements increased considerably. When Néstor Kirchner was elected president in 2003, he launched the PEH. Cooperatives from these social organizations described above overseeing the carrying out of the housing construction works through articulation with municipal authorities. Such a job creation through these organizations' cooperatives expresses the initial desire of kirchnerismo to distance

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5. Municipalities from the Province of Buenos Aires that coupled with the CABA constitute the Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires.

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itself from the *vieja política menemista* favoring social policies based on assistentialism[6]

Nevertheless, the first years of housing policy during *kirchnerismo* ends structured around the *Programa Federal de Construcción de Viviendas*, of which the *Subprograma de Urbanización de Villas y Asentamientos Precarios* is part. Private construction companies were in charge of the work. Most social organizations do not express an interest in maintaining the PEH, given the creation of other programs in which they conduct managerial activities. However, *Techo y Trabajo* translates into a growing structuring of some organizations, particularly the Movimiento Evita[7], through their cooperatives. In 2009, the *Programa Argentina Potenciar Trabajo* further consolidated this particularity since it stipulated such cooperatives in charge of works, especially those aimed at improving infrastructure in informal settlements (Larsen and Hindi, 2013). The *Confederación de los Trabajadores de la Economía Popular* (CTEP)[8], which played a leading role during the government of Mauricio Macri, as we will see later, emerged in 2011 as a "political bet of leaders and militants of the *Movimiento Evita*" (*ibid*., p. 11). As demands on the popular economy arise, an initial disarticulation with those related

to living conditions in informal settlements is to be noted. The reflection that articulates both, as a leader from the *Movimiento Evita* recognizes, occurs later: "the families who suffer from lack of jobs, or who work in the popular economy, are those who live in those neighborhoods [....] where there is no adequate infrastructure. That is where the slogans come together because it is the same punished subject (F. Ugo, personal communication, March 4, 2020)."

Since the return to democracy in Argentina, social actors have carried out interventions in informal settlements. However, these actions have not translated into the promotion of unified policies at the national level within the political system. With the 2001 crisis, the social organization of the most vulnerable, initially built around neighborhood organizations, emphasizes the issue of unemployment. It is impossible to analyze the processes behind the socio-urban integration bill unanimously passed during the government of Mauricio Macri (2015-2019) without considering this distinctive element of this part of Argentine social organization, the one that represents a considerable threat to the political system's stability after 2015.

As we will see, the social organization around *economía popular*[9] expresses new ways of conceiving its ties to the political system during the government of Mauricio Macri. Such conceptions cannot be studied without first understanding how a political party such as Propuesta Republicana (Pro), born in 2002, reads politics, especially those aimed at the most vulnerable. Pro symbolizes a novelty for

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6. Expression of the evolution of social policy's conception within the neo-liberal restructuring.

7. As LONGA (2015, p. 6) points out, and as we have seen, "the origins of the Movimiento Evita go back to the fight against the neoliberal model's implementation in Argentina during the 1990s" (p. 6). It is part of the universe of kirchnerist social organizations, despite maintaining a critical view of some actions of its governments.

8. The CTEP emerges in August 2011 from the confluence of cooperatives from the Movimiento Evita and the Movimiento de Trabajadores Excluidos (MTE), the textile cooperative La Alameda and the Movimiento Nacional de Empresas Recuperadas por los Trabajadores (National Movement of Companies Recovered by Workers). It was later strengthened with the incorporation of other movements, such as the Movimiento Popular la Dignidad (Popular Movement for Dignity).

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9. The concept of "popular economy" claims many particularities that must be differentiated from the theoretical constructs that international organizations promote under the terms of "social economy" or "social and solidarity economy" (Larsen and Hindi, 2017; Bruno et al., 2017)

the Argentine political system, which until then had been characterized by bipartisanship. (PJ/ Unión Cívica Radical, UCR). A study of how state interventions in informal settlements took place in the CABA during Mauricio Macri's administration (2007-2015) might be enlightening.

4. AN INTRODUCTION TO PRO'S POLICIES AIMED AT THE MOST VULNERABLE: THE CASE OF INTERVENTIONS IN CABA'S INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS (2007-2015)

In 2007, during the election campaign in which Mauricio Macri was elected Head of Government of CABA for the first time, he committed himself to eradicate the most emblematic informal settlement in the capital, *Villa 31*, located near the historic center and the CBD. Such initiatives and discourses contribute to forming a certain consensus within the social sciences that defines Pro as a right-wing party. Nevertheless, as Cravino and Palombi (2015, p. 42) consider, such an adjective "does not fully express what happens with its urban interventions." Its differential practices proper of a pragmatic party require analyzing "its nuances and changes throughout its two administrations".

The party evolves from a managerial profile favoring administrative efficiency to a much more political one. When these management capacities prove insufficient, "recruitment of leaders with political experience coming from *Radicalismo*, the PJ or, failing that, from NGOs" (*ibid.*, p. 44) is favored. Similarly, a learning process regarding informal settlements occurs (Fainstein and Palombi, 2019). Such a process responds to governability challenges "after moments of high conflict". For instance, land

occupation in a southern park of the city, the *Parque Indoamericano*, in 2010 encouraged interventions of "urban makeup" (*ibid.*, p. 235).

The social organization of informal settlements dwellers in CABA is fragmented. There is a lack of coordination of demands arising from different neighborhoods. Therefore, dwellers solve their conflicts with the GCBA through judiciary mechanisms, at least until 2013 (Delamata, 2016). New judicial activism regarding Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights contributes to materializing infrastructure works and urban facilities as part of the "urban acupuncture" approach promoted since 2013. However, these interventions are not part of comprehensive plans to improve dwellers' living conditions. Different state agencies with competencies in those spaces oversee such interventions (Birkman, 2016). Such a fragmentation responds to the need to demonstrate concrete action based on the different provisions of the CABA Justice, as underlined by Bárbara Bonelli, current Deputy Ombudsman of the city:

> "At the beginning of Macri's government [...], you have, on the one hand, a diversification of all the agencies working on housing issues, which is chaos. And in some way, they throw the ball among themselves to see who effectively deals with the problem. There are no effective social integration processes but rather emergency interventions and partial improvements, and people continue to live in harsh conditions. And this starts to happen because, as I was telling you before, normativity granted many rights. Mechanisms of judicialization, many interventions of civil society organizations demanding the fulfillment of certain rights emerged. So, in that context, the Executive had to deliver policies, but they were not initiatives from the executive branch" (B. Bonelli, personal communication, March 19, 2020).

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Evolution of statist interventions in informal settlements in the CABA during Mauricio Macri's government responds to the need to "guarantee governability […] applying an almost business criterion that takes into account the relation between cost, efficiency and problem solving, that is, few resources to generate a governance network" (Fainstein and Palombi, 2019, p. 239). However, the limited organizational capacity of local social actors explains the absence of comprehensive policies. As Benítez (2019) points out, "despite the organization of meetings and exchange spaces […], familiarity and mutual knowledge among leaders and containment actions they undertake, […] they have not been able to build common diagnoses, prognoses and motivational languages with which to articulate unified actions and demands towards the GCBA" (p. 22).

5. THE CONVERGENCE OF MULTIPLE ACTORS' INTERESTS DURING MAURICIO MACRI'S GOVERNMENT (2015-2019)

Mauricio Macri's victory in the 2015 federal elections implies reconfiguring the Argentine political system. We could hardly explain the arrival to the presidency of an outsider party to the bipartisan tradition[10] solely by the vote of the affluent middle sectors. Nevertheless, the presentation of a federal bill on informal settlements' socio-urban integration by the ruling coalition surprises because of the low legitimacy of policies aimed at

the most vulnerable that such a victory expressed from Argentine society. We have seen that Pro has shown a capacity for responding to governability challenges by intervening in informal settlements. However, during its national administration, in coalition with the UCR and the Coalición Cívica, named Cambiemos, governability challenges have much more to do with the increased capacity of social actors, whose origins we have studied, to represent a threat to the political system's stability. Their organizational features and convergence with other civil society organizations, such as some NGOs, explain it. It is then essential to analyze how these different actors interact within them and with members of the Cambiemos government in greater depth.

5.1 Governability challenges arise from a mature social organization.

As recognized by the theoretical perspective adopted in this paper, the importance of social organization in the policy-making process leading to the regularization of informal settlements is undeniable. "The capacity of the excluded to obtain certain concessions" (Grabois, 2018, p. 175), which emerged in Argentina with greater force since the late 1990s and ended up essentially articulated around issues of unemployment, is particularly challenging and disturbing during the Cambiemos government, practically the only declared "enemy" in the actions of the CTEP in 2017 (Muñoz and Villar, 2017). Besides conflictive action, the CTEP consolidates its political profile by developing a capacity to propose public policies. Co-optation mechanisms are no longer sufficient governability devices to channel their demands, as could have been the case before.

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10. Within the coalition that wins the 2015 federal elections, led by Pro, there is the UCR, a historical adversary of the PJ in the Argentine political system. Although it is well-known that the party has made several reproaches to Pro regarding the scarce place granted to it during the administration of Mauricio Macri, we should take it into account in the analysis.

The maturity of this part of the social organization results from several years of reflection. Organizational innovations occur within organizations such as the MTE or the *Movimiento Evita*, promoting, for instance, the "political formation of workers from the popular economy" (Bruno et al., 2017, p. 105). Such a maturity must be framed within the construction process of the *Unión de Trabajadores de la Economía Popular* (UTEP). It is more than a simple union that defends workers' labor rights from the popular economy. As the Movimiento Popular La Dignidad[11] leader points out, he assumes his union *and* political representation: "For our [popular economy] sector, having rights implies public policies, then we necessarily need a political formation, not only a union. It is a new mediation with the State (Klejzer, personal communication, March 12, 2020)."

The creation of such a Union expresses the unity of the different forces that constitute this part of the social organization, thus consolidating its capacity to represent a threat to the political system's stability during Mauricio Macri's government. As a representative from *Movimiento Evita* points out, that unity comes from a series of conflictive collective actions in the public space demanding Congress to pass the Ley 27.345 de emergencia social, alimentaria y de las organizaciones de la economía popular (F. Ugo, personal communication, March 4, 2020)[12]. These actions began in August 2016 with "a 'caravan of dignity', a massive mobilization through thirteen kilometers in the City of Buenos Aires that summoned more than 100.000 people" (Fernández Álvarez, 2018, p. 26). Unity with other sectors of the social organization is achieved, such as those represented by *Barrios de Pie* and the *Corriente Combativa y Clasista* (CCC)[13] As part of this maturation process, initial demands on the popular economy start articulating with those related to living conditions in informal settlements. It is a suggestive fact that social leaders incorporate the notion of "habitat" in their discourses, something essential to discuss life reproduction in the popular economy. The interviewees recognize the leadership of individuals, such as Juan Grabois, not only in the consolidation process of the social organization's capacity to represent a threat to the political system's stability but also concerning such incorporation. The MTE's significant role in bringing this sector of the social organization closer to some NGOs working in informal settlements, such as Techo[14], stands out.

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11. It was founded in 1998 under the name of Movimiento Casa del Pueblo (People's House Movement) in the Villa Crespo neighborhood of the CABA. Its work focuses on creating community spaces in the CABA and organizing conflictive actions to negotiate resources for these spaces.

12. This bill is enacted in December of the same year and stipulates a Complementary Social Wage for informal workers whose income is below the minimum wage.

13. The unity among the CTEP, Barrios de Pie, and the CCC is often considered under the name of the "'triumvirate' of the workers of the popular economy (compared to the CGT triumvirate born in 2016)" (Muñoz and Villar, 2017, p. 24). As we have seen, the CCC was born in 1994. It is a grouping with a stronger union and workers' profile, as it has representation in all the unions, which have been an opponent of the government of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner. Barrios de Pie is another of the social movements that emerged in the context of the 2001 crisis. Initially integrated into the government of Néstor Kirchner, it is part of the opposition -after a period in which it represents a critical ally- to the government of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner.

14. Techo is an NGO whose origins date back to the late 1990s. It emerged in Chile from the initiative of a group of young people, guided by a Jesuit priest, who began to work on community development and housing construction projects in informal settlements. With the exportation of the organizational model to several Latin American countries, the NGO becomes known as "Un Techo para mi país". As part of an institutional redefinition, it was renamed "Techo" in 2012. As recognized by its members interviewed in Argentina, a typical characteristic of the NGO is the participation of young people from the middle-income sectors.

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Social organizations consider Techo's work as essential in consolidating their theoretical knowledge about urban informality. However, such an approach should be interpreted as a tool to extend their capacity to influence policy arenas. Social organizations recognize their need to incorporate actors "with an external origin from informal settlements" to impact "public policies' formulation" (Klejzer, personal communication, March 12, 2021). The way social organizations conceive this kind of NGO evolves until overcoming an initial distrust. We should not forget that Mauricio Macri's party delineates its physiognomy as that "of those who get into politics, coming from the world of business and NGOs" (Vommaro and Armesto, 2015, p. 114). A similar evolution occurs within NGOs such as Techo, characterized by its apolitical nature of how they conceive social organizations. "Rather than 'how is it that social movements opened up to work with an NGO such as Techo?', I would ask 'how did an NGO like Techo open up to work with social movements?'" points out a kirchnerist representative at Congress close to Grabois (Hagman, personal communication, March 24, 2020).

As indicated by the NGO, this process is part of a regional redefinition of the Techo brand, looking for generating some incidence in policy arenas, similarly as social organizations grouped under the CTEP. In addition to the traditional community work, characteristic of Techo, new strategies require "a strong work at the institutional level to identify which networks or who were working on the same issue."

Curiously, besides the institutional work, there is also a theoretical training one. Techo partners with specific organizations: Habitar and Madre Tierra, who do not participate in the draft of the bill after they claim disagreements with some contents of it. The actors that allow consolidating the technical profile of Techo, valued by the organizations that constitute the triumvirate of the popular economy, maintain a tense relationship with the latter. For the triumvirate, implementing the normative proposals of such actors is pragmatically impossible[15]. These organizations are much more linked to the world of academia. Their main aim is to reflect theoretically on the social production of habitat, by partnering with organizations rooted territorially in informal settlements but whose capacity to represent a threat to the political system's stability has been weakened. Besides, such disputes are part of a broader conflictive context among the different social organization actors. For instance, working closely with members of Mauricio Macri government causes reproaches towards the CTEP, *Barrios de Pie*, and the CCC, from other organizations in the piquetero sector.

The initiative-taking action of CTEP's organizations, which feeds both from unity with other social organizations and from alliances with NGOs, expresses their capacity to negotiate resources with a government they consider an enemy. They even decide to face such a government embodying from their point of view neoliberalism in the federal elections of 2019 by integrating the Peronist coalition, *Frente de Todos*.

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15. A representative from the MTE points out that the work of social actors such as Habitar "is good. They have excellent theoretical wording -it is true-. They have been useful in stopping evictions at some moments, but for us, they are not very operative (G. Storch, personal communication, March 11, 2020)." In a similar sense, a representative from the Movimiento Evita considers that "those organizations are partner organizations, have important visions and values even in ideological terms, in terms of [knowledge] about land. Then you put them in a place of management, and they can't develop it (F. Ugo, personal communication, March 4, 2020)".

5.2 Regularization as a governmental response to governability challenges

Some sectors of Pro claim that dialogue is an indispensable tool for maintaining political agreements that facilitate governability. In some cases, dialoguing with social organizations implies overcoming ideological reticence, as indicated by a senior official from the housing sector between 2015 and 2019, according to whom some organizations are difficult to recognize "because they carry a really strong ideology" (I. Kerr, personal communication, March 6, 2020).

Such ideological differences do not necessarily translate within the housing area into an abandonment of the need to articulate actions with these organizations, given the challenge they represent for governability. However, within the habitat area, the one that normatively responds to informal settlements, dialogue with the different social actors is scarce. Techo points out the impossibility of presenting proposals to this sector of the Ministry of the Interior, Public Works, and Housing, where many of the projects "were left truncated" (D. Field, personal communication, March 10, 2020).

Because of these divergences within the government regarding promotion of dialogue with social actors, expressing divergent conceptions of politics within the coalition, in general, and Pro, in particular, the "capacity of Juan [Grabois] […] to find interlocutors, within Macrismo, who could have some sense of social sensitivity, enough to push that policy" and framed, in the same way as any social policy, in a "political calculation" is recognized (Hagman, 2020, personal communication, 24 March 24). Among them, Mario Quintana, a representative of Pro's business profile and one of the three members of the *Jefatura de Gabinete*, a central

governmental unit at the beginning of Mauricio Macri's government, stands out (Vommaro and Gené, 2017). Different interlocutors with greater or lesser capacity to negotiate and dialogue with social organizations lead to political internals. As indicated by the same senior official in the housing area, the fact that the habitat area is not in charge of programmatically elaborating what the federal bill stipulates is symptomatic.

The federal bill of socio-urban integration ended up being presented, after a series of negotiations and pressures. It was approved unanimously in both chambers of Congress, but with some modifications. Presented by the ruling party, all the deputies and senators of the Cambiemos coalition voted for it. However, as recognized by a representative at Congress from the ruling coalition, there is a diversity of actors within it, with a different position in terms of the need to promote the bill: a Catholic nucleus, with a social-Christian discourse that defends the need to "overcome the problem of the indignity of urban informality", a nucleus that pictures itself as socio-democrat, from the UCR, "that based on other reflections also believes that there has to be an implicit role of redistribution within urban policy" and another nucleus "that neither accompanied nor opposed" (Quetglas, personal communication, March 29, 2020).

First, a convergence of representations and interests between a government's sector and the social organization concerning the bill on socio-urban integration is based on the Catholic faith. The role played by Pope Francis for the recognition of social organizations' vindications is recognized by the interviewees, since "the popular movements have been proposing a line of land, roof, and work, which later became widespread with the Pope's proposals, at some point. It even went viral when the Pope took that banner. So that also helped to install the

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discussion (Ugo, personal communication, March 4, 2020)". Criticism from social organizations to assistentialism, characteristic of *menemismo* in the 1990s, might constitute a convergence element with the supposedly socio-democratic sector of the coalition. Grabois' (2018, p. 45) critical conception of *kirchnerismo*, one of "the Latin American popular political processes of the twenty-first century [that] have had a lot of 1990s politics with a 1970s discourse" coincides in a certain way with the reproaches of those who claim the banners of social democracy.

The mid-term legislative elections in October 2017, contributing to delegitimizing dialogue with social actors might explain difficulties around the bill's presentation. The nationwide victory of the ruling coalition demonstrates how Argentine society shares its most anti-popular discourse. In such conditions, "the part that came with a more social change intention [lost] against the other that came to a cultural battle of representation of a sector of society" (D. Field, personal communication, March 10, 2020), a staunch critic of a "statist populism with which it identified kirchnerismo" (Vommaro and Gené, 2017, p. 233). Although the bill is finally presented and approved, its scarce mediatization is suggestive, based on the eventual negative impact in terms of legitimacy among the affluent middle sectors (Cravino, 2018a), that were the bulk of the government's electorate in those elections. It is pointed out by Bárbara Bonelli, at that time Parliamentary Secretary of a faction of legislators from the UCR who, originally dissidents from the ruling coalition, integrated it towards the end of the government: "Access to housing, especially more and more within the middle class, is more difficult. Therefore, all these regularization processes generally awaken a certain feeling of social resentment within the middle sectors. […] That is why I think that the federal bill went unnoticed. It

was not an axis of public discussion. It was more or less debated, fairly quickly (B. Bonelli, personal communication, March 19, 2020)."

Besides, there is little follow-up on formulating and programmatically implementing what the bill stipulates, such as recognized by a senior official from the housing area: "I would give the bill on the Socio-Urban Inclusion [sic] less entity than it has. […] Sebastián Welisiejko [the Secretary of Socio-Urban Integration] did not have resources. So you go, and you generate an expectation in the neighborhood. The truth is that he did not have the money to intervene, or the budget to intervene. So, it is also a bit empty if you don't have the resources (Kerr, personal communication, March 6, 2020)."

6. CONCLUSION

To sum up, during the government of Mauricio Macri, there was a convergence of different actors' interests in a context of open confrontation with social actors, whose internal maturation process we have analyzed. Ties between social organizations from the triumvirate of the popular economy and NGOs stand out. The propositional profile of the former in terms of regularization policies strengthens. Initially articulated through the *Jefatura de Gabinete* as governability devices, various sectors from the governing coalition perceive these policies as legitimate through diverse mechanisms. The convergence of the triumvirate of the popular economy, NGOs, and the government of Mauricio Macri resulted in the Renabap, carried out in 2016, the drafting and subsequent enactment of the bill, and the formation of a National Roundtable of Popular Neighborhoods, despite the existence of objections from independent organizations from the piquetero sector and actors from academia; the latter having been, however, fundamental for

consolidating the internal maturing process of NGOs such as Techo.

As governability devices, regularization policies' effectiveness depends on how the social conflict arising from informal settlements is channeled. The way their dwellers and their social organization conceive of the issue impacts the policy-making process and approaches. The initial demands regarding access to land by an incipient social organization lose importance considering the increase in unemployment among the most vulnerable sectors because of the deregulation and economic liberalization of the 1990s. In this context, a good part of the social organization with a presence in informal settlements consolidates a particular profile that ends up materializing with its articulation around the notion of "popular economy" and its organization in workers cooperatives. The enactment of a federal bill on socio-urban integration during *macrismo* makes more sense when the analysis integrates such distinctive elements: these same cooperatives are in charge of part of the works of infrastructure and collective equipment.

With the victory of the peronist coalition in the 2019 federal elections, an activist from the MTE, Fernanda Miño, became head of the Secretariat of Socio-Urban Integration. If the new government stipulates larger amount of funds for the Secretariat, incorporation of social organizations into the State becomes a challenge. With the economic crisis reinforced by COVID-19, socio-urban integration in Argentina may lose its position on the agenda. The same social actors who have managed to position it faced much more urgent concerns.

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