



Rosario's development; interview with Miguel Lifschitz, mayor of Rosario, Argentina

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1. For more details, see the Editorial.
2. Hordijk, Michaela (2005), "Participatory governance in Peru: exercising citizenship", *Environment and Urbanization* Vol 17, No 1, April, pages 219-236.
3. Greater Rosario refers to the conurbation encompassing Rosario and 10 smaller urban centres. It constitutes the largest urban area in Santa Fe province and the third largest metropolitan area in Argentina. Of the total population of Greater Rosario, Rosario contains 78 per cent, while the second largest city, Villa Gobernador Gálvez, has just 6 per cent.

ABSTRACT This paper draws on an interview with Miguel Lifschitz, who is in his second term as mayor of Rosario, Argentina's third largest city. It describes the city's strategic planning and the support it provided for local economic development and for the large expansion of public space – with the city government working with private landowners to restore the riverbank area and create many new parks and other public spaces. It also describes the municipal government's social policies, including the modernization and expansion of health care and the introduction of a city police force, and its support for participatory budgeting and decentralization, including the role of municipal district centres that concentrate many public services and support community programmes in each of the city's six districts. The mayor also describes the difficulties his administration has faced – for instance, its limited capacity to reduce unemployment (although the city government has done much to support local economic development) and the difficulties of working with national and provincial governments and neighbouring municipalities controlled by different political parties.

KEYWORDS accountability/cities/citizen participation/governance/innovation/participatory budgeting / social policies / strategic planning

I. BACKGROUND

It is rare for mayors to write about their experience in office. Although many papers in *Environment and Urbanization* have discussed the work of innovative mayors,⁽¹⁾ to date only one has included an extended interview with a mayor.⁽²⁾ Yet, certainly in many Latin American nations, a new generation of elected mayors, often coming from outside the dominant political parties, have introduced innovations, especially in relation to social issues and systems of governance that are more accountable to citizens and more open to citizen participation. The core of this paper is from an interview with Miguel Lifschitz, who is in his second term as mayor of Rosario, Argentina's third largest city. This is complemented by the paper in this issue by Julio Dávila, drawing on interviews with four city mayors in Colombia.

Rosario is the third largest city in Argentina with a population of 1.1 million. It is located in Santa Fe province, 300 kilometres northwest of the capital city, Buenos Aires, on the Paraná River. It forms the core of Greater Rosario, which has a total population of approximately 1.5 million people (2007 estimate).⁽³⁾ Administratively, it is the head city of the

department of Rosario and also constitutes one of the 48 municipalities of Santa Fe province.⁽⁴⁾ Although the city (municipal) government exercises a high degree of autonomy over its own functions – such as setting various taxes, signing contracts and administering its assets – these depend on federal financial allocations to the provincial level, which the provincial government in turn distributes to municipalities.

Rosario’s government comprises an executive branch (represented by the mayor and the municipal secretariats) and a legislative branch (comprising the city council and councillors). The head of the city government, the mayor, is elected by popular vote. Each mayoral term lasts four years and mayors are able to stand for re-election for one further term only. The city council comprises 22 directly elected councillors, half of whom are renewed every two years. Since 1989, the Socialist Party has controlled the city government.

Rosario is one of the principal ports of the Argentinian pampas and, since the early 1980s, it has had a well-developed port infrastructure and railway system for the transport of Santa Fe’s agricultural produce.⁽⁵⁾ This infrastructure occupies 11 of its 16.7 kilometres of riverbank. The port forms part of an axis of ports along the River Paraná, which extends northwest from La Plata (Buenos Aires province) to Rosario.

In 2001, 14.7 per cent of the population of the department of Rosario had unmet basic needs (Figure 1). This figure is in line with the average for Santa Fe province, but is slightly below the national average.⁽⁶⁾

4. Santa Fe province is divided into 19 departments, which are further sub-divided into municipalities.

5. In 2006–2007, Santa Fe province produced around 11 million tonnes of oilseed and 6.5 million tonnes of cereals. This represents 20 per cent of national agricultural production, estimated at 85 million tonnes. In addition, Santa Fe currently has more than 7.5 million cattle, which amounts to 12.5 per cent of the total national stock. Santa Fe produced approximately 600,000 tonnes of beef in 2006, which constituted 20 per cent of national production.

6. National Index of Unmet Basic Needs: 17.7 per cent in 2001. See Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos (2001), Buenos Aires.

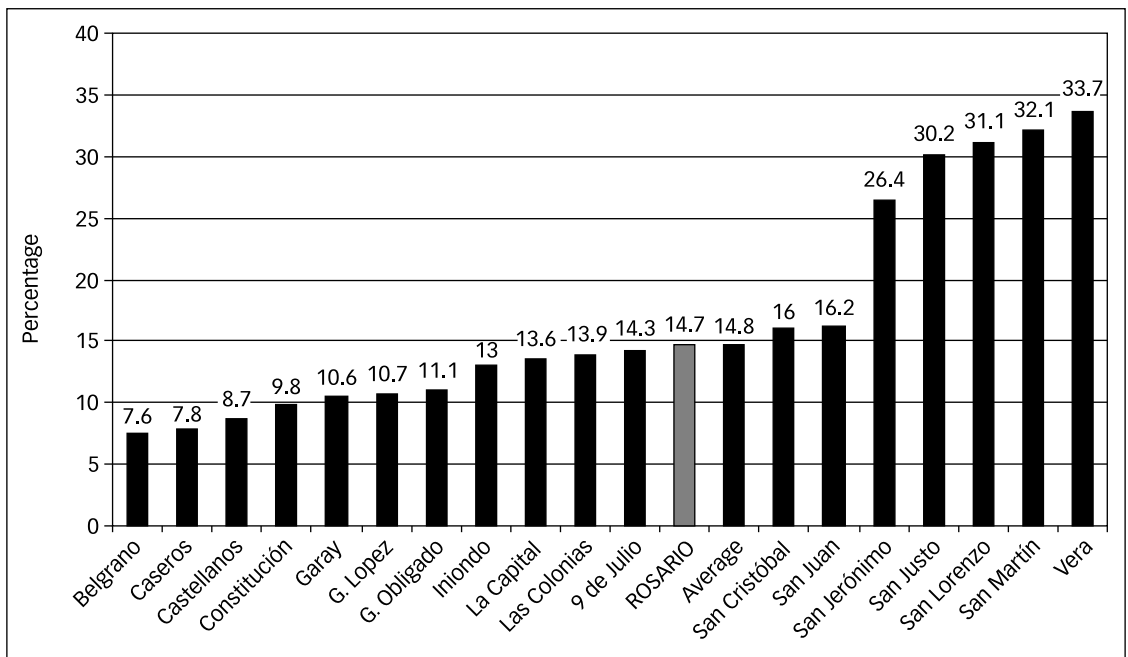


FIGURE 1
Percentage of the population with unmet basic needs by department, Santa Fe province, 2001

SOURCE: Instituto Provincial de Estadística y Censos, Santa Fe, 2001.

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7. Unemployment statistics are compiled through the continuous household survey, based on the economically active population (the number of people currently engaged in the labour market).

8. Greater Buenos Aires is the largest conurbation in Argentina, comprising Buenos Aires and 24 other urban centres.

9. Figures from the Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos, Santa Fe.

Unemployment in Greater Rosario stood at 11.2 per cent in late 2006, which was 1.2 percentage points lower than the same period in 2005.⁽⁷⁾ The unemployment rate was lower than that in Greater Buenos Aires,⁽⁸⁾ which stood at 11.3 per cent. The level of underemployment, at 8.3 per cent, had also decreased by a tenth of one per cent compared with the previous year, and was also lower than that in all other metropolitan areas in Argentina, including Greater Buenos Aires (12.1 per cent). In parallel, the percentage of the population in employment reached 47.3 per cent, which was the highest level in Rosario since 2003 and also one of the highest in Argentina.

Since 2004, the levels of poverty and extreme poverty in Greater Rosario have been below the national averages (Figures 2 and 3). According to official statistics, in the second half of 2003, the level of poverty across Argentina and in Greater Rosario increased to 48 per cent of the population.⁽⁹⁾ At least up to early 2006, the level of poverty decreased throughout Argentina, reaching as low as 26.9 per cent. However, Greater Rosario achieved a greater decrease, of four percentage points below the national average (22.9 per cent). The level of extreme poverty followed a similar trend, falling to 7.5 per cent in 2006, below the national average of 8.7 per cent. One factor that contributed to the falls in both poverty and extreme poverty was the gradual improvement in the employment situation in Greater Rosario from 2003.

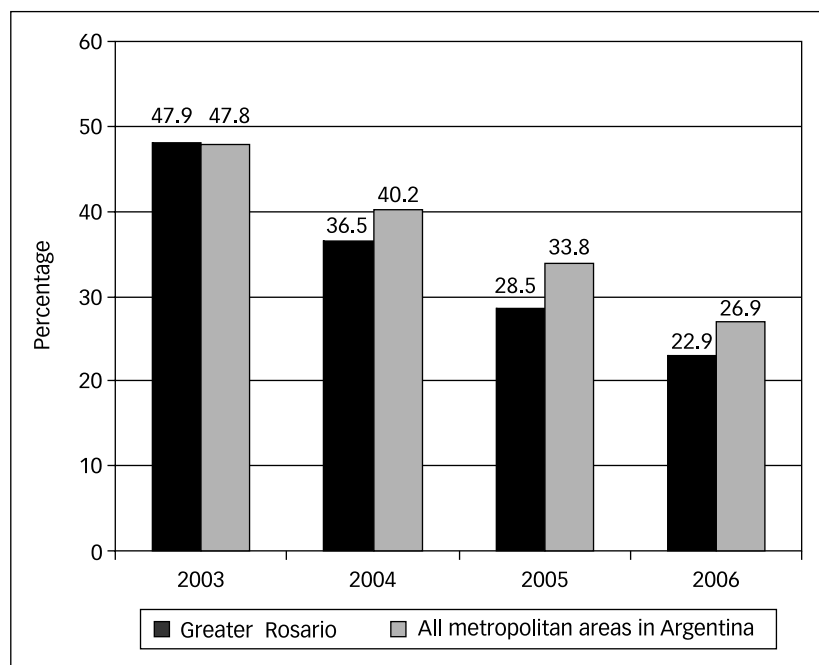
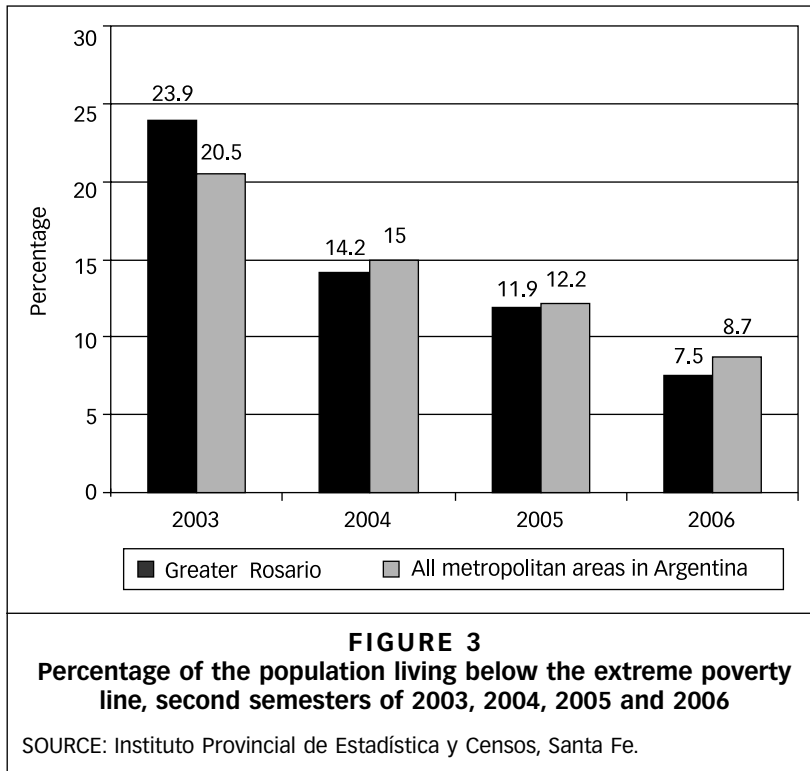


FIGURE 2
Percentage of the population living below the poverty line, second semesters of 2003, 2004, 2005 and 2006

SOURCE: Instituto Provincial de Estadística y Censos, Santa Fe.



II. INTERVIEW WITH MAYOR MIGUEL LIFSCHITZ

Roberto Miguel Lifschitz is a civil engineer specializing in strategic planning and management. He has held a number of senior positions in Rosario: Dean of the Faculty of Exact Sciences, Engineering and Surveying of the National University of Rosario (1986–1989); Director General of Rosario's Public Housing Service (1990–1992); Municipal Under-Secretary of Public Works (1992–1993); Municipal General Secretary (1995–2001); General Coordinator of the Strategic Plan for Rosario (1996–2001); Member of the Governing Boards of the Rosario Port Authority and the Rosario Tourism Board (2000–2001); coordinator of the Network for the Control and Management of Urbanization for the European Union's Urb-AI Regional Aid Programme (2000–2003); Vice-President of the Rosario Technology Cluster (2001–2003); and Municipal Secretary of Public Services (2001–2003). He is currently serving his second consecutive term as mayor of Rosario (2003–2011).

Can you outline the political history of Rosario since Argentina's transition to democracy, and the trajectory of the Socialist Party there?

After the return to democracy following the military dictatorship, Horacio Usandizaga, the candidate of the Radical Civic Union, became the first democratically elected mayor of Rosario in 1983.¹⁰ He served his first term of

10. In 1983, Argentina underwent a transition to democracy following the country's final military dictatorship that lasted seven years (1976–1983).

11. In 1983, Raúl Alfonsín of the Radical Civic Union became president of the first democratic national government (1983–1989). At the time, Argentina was in the middle of a severe economic crisis, exacerbated by inflation, uncertainty and speculation. In addition to its foreign debt, Argentina had a significant fiscal deficit and a stagnant economy that was vulnerable to external economic events. Alfonsín's government initially responded with a confrontational stance towards its foreign debt, but when this failed, it introduced a new economic plan that included devaluation, price and wage controls and a new national currency in mid-1985. By April 1988, the economic plan had almost collapsed, giving rise to a deeper economic crisis in 1989 and leading to Alfonsín being deposed in favour of President Carlos Menem (1995–1999) of the Justicialist Party. As Usandizaga was also from the Radical Civic Union, he resigned as mayor of Rosario.

12. Cavallero served the remainder of Usandizaga's term (1989–1991) and was re-elected to serve a further term (1991–1995).

13. Rosario has always been an important city for the Socialist Party, as it is the birthplace of some of its most important members, and it was here that the party underwent one of its many and most recent divisions.

14. The Justicialist Party is a Peronist political party.

15. In 2007, the Socialist Party candidate, Hermes Binner (a former mayor of Rosario), was elected as governor of the province of Santa Fe for the first time.

16. Binner was the second mayor of the Socialist Party in Rosario since the transition to democracy in 1983, serving two consecutive terms (1995–2003).

four years, but then, not far into his second term in 1989, he was forced to leave office due to the economic crisis that Argentina underwent during the presidency of Raúl Alfonsín.⁽¹¹⁾ Nevertheless, during his time as mayor, Usandizaga had initiated important changes to urban planning in Rosario, upon which the Socialists later built by strengthening its social dimension.

Upon Usandizaga's resignation, an election was called outside the usual electoral timetable. As a result, the traditional political parties were not prepared for the elections. This played to the advantage of the Socialists because the outstanding service of one city councillor from the Socialist Party, Héctor Cavallero, led to him winning the popular vote and being elected mayor in 1989.⁽¹²⁾ Cavallero was thus the first Socialist mayor of Rosario.⁽¹³⁾ From then on, the Socialists have maintained control of Rosario's city government over an unbroken period of at least 18 years: six under Cavallero, eight under Hermes Binner, four years under my first administration and now I have just started my second term in office.

Under Cavallero's administration, the city government placed greater emphasis on formulating social policies and reforming urban planning, both of which have been continued by subsequent Socialist mayors. By adopting the principles of efficient organization and honesty in their administrations, Rosarinos (inhabitants of Rosario) began to consider the Socialists as a viable option for leading the city government, unlike the succession of provincial governments led by the Justicialist Party,⁽¹⁴⁾ and national governments also led by the Justicialists and, occasionally, the Radical Civic Union.

Has the relationship between the city government and the successive provincial governments been characterized by constant confrontation?

We believe that the situation of constant confrontation with Santa Fe province has actually been an advantage for the city government. The Socialist city governments in Rosario have never received support from either the provincial or the national governments. Now that the provincial government is led by the Socialists, we will see over the next four years whether managing the city government independently of higher levels of government has been beneficial or not.⁽¹⁵⁾ Our key challenge at present is to continue strengthening our management of the city, without the same tensions with the provincial government.

Our approach to urban management, which is based on the principles of efficient organization and honesty and which places significant emphasis on social policies and urban planning reform, has consolidated our position as the Rosarinos' choice to lead the city government, irrespective of tensions with the provincial and national governments over all these years.

How has your career developed in the Socialist Party and in local government in Rosario?

I started out as a civil servant during Cavallero's administration, during which I served as Director of Housing and Under-Secretary of Public Works. Then, during Hermes Binner's administration,⁽¹⁶⁾ I was General Secretary

and after that Secretary of Public Services, until I declared myself as candidate for mayor and was elected. So I have lengthy and varied experience in city government. I have also been in municipal government throughout the time that it has been controlled by Socialist mayors, that is, since 1989.

Even though your term as mayor continues the 18-year period of Socialist control of Rosario city government, what challenges did you face during your first term of office (2003–2007)?

There are always new challenges, even within a continuous and cumulative process of policy development in the city. My first term as mayor coincided with Néstor Kirchner's⁽¹⁷⁾ presidency, during which Argentina's economy had started to recover from the economic crisis. This was reflected in the strong development of the agricultural sector in Santa Fe, which was favourable not so much because it increased public funds but rather because it brought significant economic mobility, boosted business activity and, above all, contributed to the growth in tourism, which until then had not been significant in Rosario.

At the start of Binner's term of office, I had the opportunity to lead the development of the strategic plan for Rosario, which became a highly successful urban planning strategy and subsequently gained international recognition. Although it was one of the first strategic plans developed in Argentina, it was predicated upon continuous and long-term initiatives, which today are still ongoing. In 1996, we canvassed feedback from all areas of the city and, in 1998, we approved the strategic plan (which marked its tenth anniversary in 2008). The plan comprised 72 projects, of which more than four-fifths have now been completed. It was a fundamental tool for achieving coherent development and growth in the city. During my first term of office, we also started to develop the foundations for the tourist industry and created a significant number of public-private institutions to support private enterprise, such as the Regional Development Agency and the hi-tech Rosario Technology Cluster (Box 1), which develops partnership between the private sector, universities and the city government.⁽¹⁸⁾

One of the cornerstones of the city government's approach is the ongoing integration of a social dimension into processes of urban planning and (re)development, such as the restoration of the riverbank area, the provision of infrastructure in peri-urban areas and the creation of public space. We see urban transformation as a crucial part of the development of a model of urban democracy, in which public space is envisaged as a place for social activities and integration. The challenge for my administration in this regard is to further build on the progress made by my predecessors.

It is important to note, however, that we are not concerned only with social welfare issues, which are often seen as intricately linked to socialism. Indeed, under my administration the city government is committed to local economic development policies that draw upon the specific advantages and potential of Rosario. In this way, we never had a strategy to attract international investment, but instead remained committed to the development of local businesses. The Rosario Technology Cluster is an example of exactly that: it was established with three small software companies from

17. The presidency of Néstor Kirchner of the Justicialist Party (2003–2007) marked the start of a new political era following the economic crisis of 2001, which precipitated the fall of the previous government and saw a number of emergency governments appointed by the legislature (2001–2003).

18. For further information, see <http://www.polotecnologico.net> (in Spanish and English).

BOX 1

The Rosario Technology Cluster

The Rosario Technology Cluster was created in 2000 with the aim of establishing Rosario and its region as an internationally recognized centre of scientific development and technological innovation. The cluster aims to foster collaboration between the public, private and scientific spheres. It started with the development of collaborative projects involving a group of leading software companies for the certification of CMMI quality standards. The quality laboratory was subsequently established, which set out to provide certification of quality standards to new groups of businesses. In the run-up to 2005, the strategic decision was taken to incorporate new technological sectors that had the potential to form synergies with software, such as telecommunications and bio-industry (bio-engineering and bio-technology). These were gradually incorporated and have enhanced the multi-sectoral profile of the cluster.

Rosario, the city government and the National University of Rosario, yet today it involves 70 local businesses, all the universities in Rosario and some other research institutions.

The regeneration of public space in Rosario has completely transformed the cityscape, but this process has been radically different from other urban planning and development processes in Argentina, such as the regeneration of Puerto Madero in Buenos Aires.⁽¹⁹⁾ What are the key differences between Rosario's strategy as compared with other cities?

The restoration of the riverbank in Rosario (Box 2 and Photos 1a and 1b) was undertaken at the same time as the regeneration of Puerto Madero in Buenos Aires, but the process was totally different. The area that was regenerated in Puerto Madero – the disused port area – comprised public land that was fully privatized as part of the process. In contrast, the restoration of Rosario's riverbank mostly took place on private land, on which planning conditions and restrictions were imposed so that the land could be dedicated to public use; this has resulted in the creation of a large area of public space in Rosario.⁽²⁰⁾

Has the fact that, historically, Rosario has never had large-scale property investors who have influenced the property market also been a factor?

Only recently have large property companies started to invest in Rosario. Some of these are national companies and others are local firms that have grown and have become important players. However, all are tightly controlled by regulatory mechanisms put in place by the city government. For example, we have introduced capital gains tax, controls on building height, and measures for the preservation of important architectural features. These mechanisms, however, have brought us into confrontation with the Colegio de Arquitectos and the Cámara Inmobiliaria (chamber of commerce for property), both of which are small players in the market;

19. Puerto Madero was the abandoned port area of Buenos Aires, which underwent a process of regeneration during the 1990s, with substantial private investment, and which subsequently became a focus of property speculation.

20. Urban regeneration in Rosario has also led to the creation of a large number of open spaces, pedestrian zones, public beaches along the riverbank and islands, 11 public parks and five themed educational parks for children.

BOX 2**The Puerto Norte urban regeneration project in Rosario**

Over the last few years, a large proportion of the port zone has been regenerated, as set out by the city plan and the strategic plan. By either terminating or not renewing private concessions over the land, this space has been restored as part of the public riverbank and now forms one of the city's parks. One of the most interesting examples of this recuperation of public space is the Puerto Norte project. This aims to regenerate progressively an area of around 100 hectares near the city centre, which includes land owned by the federal government as well as private landlords. Given the diversity and complexity of land ownership, the area was divided into seven smaller units, each of which will be managed under a specific development plan. As the project represents a complex urban planning initiative, it involves a variety of social actors and raises a range of management challenges. Therefore, the institutional framework of the project includes not only the traditional government agencies and procedures but also a variety of agreements between the public and private actors involved, namely the city government of Rosario, the federal government, landowners, urban planners and developers, local businesses and services (that are still operating), and civil society representatives who participated in the development of the project, such as the Colegio de Arquitectos (national professional body of chartered architects).*

The city government insulated the Puerto Norte project from property speculators who had identified this zone as a location for new high-rise buildings. Instead, Rosario's city plan envisages the conversion of Puerto Norte into green space. The director of the spatial planning section of the Urban Planning Secretariat pointed out that "... *this programme is about protecting certain urban values, not so much related to the zone's historical role in the city but, rather, those of quality of life in a residential area comprising low-rise buildings, which all of a sudden started to be impacted as high-rise developments started to go up.*"**

*Cuenya, B (2006), "Grandes proyectos como herramientas de creación y captación de plusvalías urbanas, Rosario", in *Medio Ambiente y Urbanización* 65, pages 81-108.

***Diario Rosario*, "Cuando los edificios afectan la calidad de vida de los barrios", <http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/suplementos/rosario/9-4747-2006-08-06>.

**PHOTOS 1A & 1B**

Recovery of public space along the riverbank in the Puerto Norte area
© www.rosario.com.ar (Photo 1A) and © GuiaFe 2006 (Photo 1B).

but when they get together they are a formidable force of opposition, in this case to the regulatory mechanism put in place.

Some larger property developers have also emerged, especially in the last few years, but they have not yet posed a threat. What I think is most important is that the government is strong, that its actions are based on consensus and that it has the capacity to handle the private sector. We have both the capacity and the support to set the boundaries and define the rules of the game and a clear and coherent spatial planning policy. But the most important factor is that we do not have vested interests in the private sector. Connections between public service and private business are all too common in Argentina, and are a frequent source of corruption. We endeavour to reduce corruption through transparency and by adopting open channels of communication. However, the real solution is working towards change in political organizations and in society more broadly. The Socialist Party is a political organization that has always maintained a strong code of ethics among its members, and this is very important.

Another interesting process underway in Rosario, but not in other Argentinian cities, is decentralization at the city government level. Can you describe this process?

The successive Socialist city governments have been working progressively towards restructuring urban governance in Rosario through two key processes: decentralization and public participation.

Decentralization was initiated in 1996 and comprised the division of the city into six districts (Figure 4 and Table 1). By 2008, the process was almost complete, pending the inauguration of the sixth municipal district centre.⁽²¹⁾

Each district has a municipal district centre (Box 3). These are emblematic buildings designed by leading international architects, including Cesar Pelli and Mario Corea, as well as architectural firms from Rosario, which have won awards and have been featured in international architecture publications. They are undoubtedly the best public architecture produced in Argentina over the last 30 years. The investment in the municipal district centres generated a huge debate in the city because these expensive projects were commissioned at the time of the 2000–2001 economic crisis. The public discussion centred on whether paying the fees of an international architect represented value for money, or whether it was an extravagance that the city could ill afford in the economic climate of the time. Despite the controversy, we believe that it was very important for the city to have proceeded with this project.

Participatory budgeting was initiated through various pilot initiatives at the neighbourhood level, which sought to test out different methodologies. Then, during the economic crisis in 2001, participatory budgeting was scaled up, based on the model from Porto Alegre.⁽²²⁾ Thereafter it has progressively been revised and adapted to the specific social context of Rosario. Participatory budgeting has now been through six annual cycles. At present, around 35 million Argentinian pesos (approximately US\$ 11 million) are allocated to each cycle. This is not a significant proportion of the **total** municipal budget (about 5 per cent) but this is because most of the budget is spent on fixed costs; however, it is a significant part – nearly 30 per cent – of the **discretionary** budget, that is, the money that is available for the city government to allocate to other projects.

21. Centralization was implemented in Rosario by dividing the city into six districts, with the aim of making local government more effective, more efficient and of bringing it closer to the citizens. Each of the six new districts has a municipal district centre that works within the boundaries of the district to organize the delegation of municipal services to the district level, coordinate district level services such as health care, social welfare and cultural amenities, and promote community organization.

22. Participatory budgeting has been underway in the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre since the early 1990s. See Menegat, Rualdo (2002), "Participatory democracy and sustainable development: integrated urban environmental management in Porto Alegre, Brazil", *Environment and Urbanization* Vol 14, No 2, October, pages 181–206;

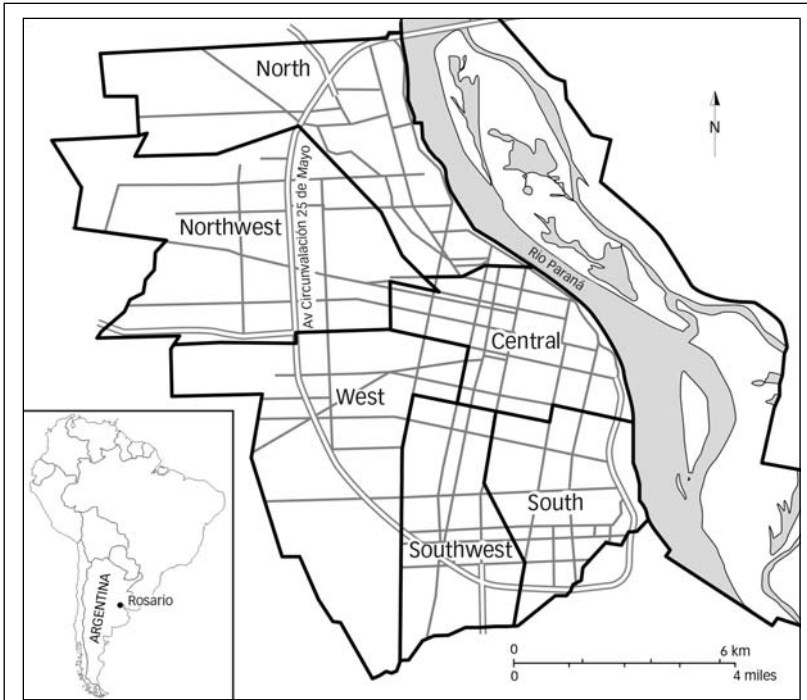


FIGURE 4
The six districts of Rosario

SOURCE: Adapted from Rosario city government map.

TABLE 1
Key data on the municipal districts of Rosario

District	Population (number of inhabitants)	Population density (inhabitants per hectare)	Housing (number of dwellings)
Central	261,047	128.15	110,152
North	131,495	37.44	40,492
Northeast	144,461	32.73	41,740
East	106,356	26.45	31,625
Southeast	103,446	51.23	28,284
South	160,771	85.69	48,541

SOURCE: Drawn from datasets held by the municipal district centres.

also Souza, Celina (2001), "Participatory budgeting in Brazilian cities: limits and possibilities in building democratic institutions", *Environment and Urbanization* Vol 13, No 1, April, pages 159–184; and Cabannes, Yves (2004), "Participatory budgeting: a significant contribution to participatory democracy", *Environment and Urbanization* Vol 16, No 1, April, pages 27–46.

BOX 3
The municipal district centres

The city government's policy of decentralization was based partly on the observation that the majority of Rosario's commercial, administrative and cultural activities took place within an area of just five of the city's 180 square kilometres. While administrative, cultural and recreational facilities were situated only a few blocks away from residents of the city centre, people living in other neighbourhoods had to travel much further to access them. So, municipal district centres were established in order to foster transformation in two respects: first, to balance the provision of facilities and access to services throughout the city; and second, to reform and modernize public administration in order to reduce the bureaucracy and increase the efficiency of the state and thus bring the state closer to the people.

Rosario is divided into six districts (Figure 4), each of which has a municipal district centre. The centre is a community space for a wide range of programmes and activities, and each has sections for administrative services, urban development and sociocultural and health services. The centres also have bank branches, registry offices, provincial tax offices and customer service outlets for the electricity, gas and water companies.

of money at stake but, rather, the process of participation itself, which strengthens both citizenship and democracy. That, after all, is the over-riding objective of the process.

Who participates in participatory budgeting? Has it led to citizens making demands that had not previously been considered by the city government?

Participatory budgeting comprises an equal participation of men and women (evenness of representation based on gender is something that we pay attention to). It also includes young people and in fact, a portion of the budget is set aside specifically for young people aged between 14 and 18. The participatory budgeting process for the youth budget is carried out in conjunction with high schools and comprises discussion about projects targeted at young people.

A current challenge for us is to expand participation. Even though people participate in the process as individuals, most of those involved are linked to an institution. So, we have found that it is not necessarily through participation itself that new demands are raised, because these are generally channelled through the city government independently. However, we have observed great differences in the prioritization of problems, which is carried out as part of the participatory budgeting process. This has led to some rather surprising issues being identified as priorities, for example, one neighbourhood considered the provision of vocational training as more important than getting its streets paved, and another ranked cultural activities higher than the installation of infrastructure. Furthermore, the process has revealed large differences between the priorities of different neighbourhoods and districts.

Another important observation from participatory budgeting is that people are generally more committed to social projects, even travelling to

other places in order to participate in them. This is not the case with infrastructure projects, which seem to attract a much lower level of interest and engagement among local people.

One last point is that participatory budgeting is also an important process in the sense that it produces new leaders who may go on to stand for election as councillors.

How does the city government address the issue of poverty in Rosario? What policies have you put in place for reducing poverty in the city?

I don't know if we have had that much influence on poverty reduction in the sense of raising people's actual incomes, since these are very much linked to the ups and downs of the national economy. However, where the city government has certainly been effective is in the implementation of measures to alleviate the effects of poverty and in transforming the social climate in the city.

The level of poverty in Rosario is similar to that in most Argentinian cities and to the national average.⁽²³⁾ While unemployment rates here have declined enormously over the last few years, they are still slightly above those of other metropolitan areas in the country and above the national average. However, despite that, it is important to note that Rosario's crime rate is the lowest in the country among the major cities in Argentina. For example, in Rosario there are six murders per 100,000 inhabitants each year, whereas in the nearby city of Santa Fe (the capital of the province) there are 24, which is not only the highest rate in the country but is also comparable with some cities in Brazil and Colombia.

These statistics illustrate the effectiveness of strong social policies and citizen participation, even when poverty levels are similar to those across the country. Poverty rates in Rosario have generally followed national trends; during the height of the economic crisis, in 2001, 55 per cent of the city's population were below the poverty line, which illustrates the close link between poverty levels and macroeconomic conditions. So, I am not sure how far the city government can actually reduce absolute poverty levels within the city.

Moreover, it is important not to forget that Rosario attracts a large number of migrants from northern Argentina, which is the poorest region in the country. As Rosario makes improvements to its health care services and housing provision, this has the adverse effect of attracting even more migrants in search of opportunities that do not exist in northern cities. Of course, this is the other face of the city's economic growth and reflects the dynamics of immigration at the international level.

Nevertheless, how to deal with the influx of internal migrants is the great challenge facing Rosario. At present, Argentina does not have a national policy on internal migration, but it is clear that one is needed to respond to situations in which in-migration surpasses an urban centre's capacity to manage such growth. However, such a policy should be directed at supporting the city to accommodate migrants rather than turning them away, by helping new families to integrate into the city, although this is an expensive process. For example, a Toba⁽²⁴⁾ family that moves to Rosario imposes a very high cost on the city in terms of demand for urban

23. According to data from the continuous household survey, in 2006 the population below the poverty line in Rosario was 22.9 per cent, which was below the national average of 26.9 per cent.

24. The Toba are an indigenous people who lived in the provinces of northern Argentina before European colonization.

services, due to their health status, their housing situation and their need for social integration, all of which the city is obliged to provide.

Have the city government’s policies been compatible with those of the national and provincial governments?

The provincial and national governments have never invested significant financial resources in Rosario, and so the city has always had to find its own ways of financing its activities. The Rosario Habitat Programme,⁽²⁵⁾ for example, was funded with international finance (from the Inter-American Development Bank) and managed directly by the city. Even so, around 95 per cent of the city’s initiatives are undertaken with municipal resources, which is much higher than in most other cities, where around 90 per cent of finance is obtained from external resources. Furthermore, the provincial and national governments have not provided Rosario with either infrastructure or social policies.

Rosario is by far the largest city in Greater Rosario. What is the relationship between Rosario and the other cities?

We have always endeavoured to integrate Rosario into the wider metropolitan area, with a view to developing coherent policies across the whole conurbation. However, as yet, this has not yielded significant results, partly because these efforts have always become politicized and also because Rosario is the largest city in the region and is governed by a Socialist administration. The other cities are much smaller and most are governed by the Justicialist Party or, in a few cases, the Radical Civic Union. Local political differences have always caused difficulties within the metropolitan region, but the fact that Rosario is the largest city has exacerbated this because it totally dominates the region (in contrast, the situation in the Mendoza metropolitan area is different because the cities within it are more equal in size).

What influence do civil society organizations have on the city government and on its activities?

There are many NGOs working on social issues (Box 4 and Table 2) – in relation to consumer rights, human rights, culture and health – yet few specialize in housing issues.⁽²⁶⁾ Nevertheless, NGOs in Rosario benefit from direct engagement with the city government, as they participate in municipal programmes and initiatives.

What factors have facilitated the city government’s administration of Rosario?

First, it is important to note that Rosario has a long history of urban planning since the 1950s and through the 1970s (with the engineers Monfel and Montes), when the first town plans for Rosario were drawn up. This tradition lives on, partly through Rosario’s School of Town Planning, which even stayed open during the military regimes. In addition, cultural

25. This included urban upgrading, public service provision and land tenure regularization for informal settlements in Rosario.

26. The scope of social issues addressed by civil society is broad, with most of the existing organizations focusing on environmental issues, health, culture, sport and consumer rights. However, one exception is housing, meaning that there is little organized representation for communities in this area.

BOX 4 Civil society activities in Rosario

Rosario, as in other cities in Argentina and South America, has seen a rapid growth in civil society organizations over the last few years. According to databases from the municipal district centres, 1,842 non-governmental organizations were registered in Rosario in 2001, which included (in order of total number): clubs, parent–teacher associations, friendly societies and unions, plus a wide range of other organizations such as business and professional associations, consumer associations, charitable foundations, a range of NGOs and cooperatives.

From the city government’s perspective, the expansion of civil society organizations is encouraging because it forms an important network of social solidarity. The fact that Rosario has a large number and wide range of organizations represents an opportunity for the city government to stimulate participation in democracy and strengthen a model of urban management based on public–private cooperation. Indeed, many civil society organizations are involved in participatory budgeting and the strategic plan, and also participate directly with the city government in implementing its programmes. Various other organizations also participate, but against the city government, through denunciations, confrontation and by closely monitoring the city government’s actions.

One interesting example of an activity undertaken by civil society organizations in Rosario is that of “ecoclubs”, which focus on participatory environmental management. These originally emerged from action groups formed by schoolchildren, who participated in the plan for the re-use of household solid waste implemented jointly by the Fundación del Sur (a charitable foundation), the Centro de Estudio y Acción Ambiental and the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences at the National University of Rosario. The members of ecoclubs are mostly children and teenagers, but they are open to anyone who wants to join, in accordance with their membership statutes. The ecoclubs prioritize links with government authorities (municipal, provincial and national levels) to undertake activities that will have effective results, as was the case with the plan for the re-use of household solid waste.

TABLE 2
Types of civil society organization in Rosario

Institution	Number	%
Associations	188	10.2
Community centres, consumer associations and issue-based NGOs ^a	171	9.3
Senior citizen centres	103	5.6
Clubs	293	15.9
Parent–teacher associations	272	14.8
Cooperatives (based around housing, employment and construction)	134	7.3
Culture	185	10.0
Charitable foundations and NGOs	133	7.2
Friendly associations and unions	218	11.8
Community-based organizations	103	5.6
Other	42	2.3
Total	1,842	100.0

^a This category includes the distribution of milk and groups that mend used clothes.

SOURCE: Drawn from data held by the municipal district centres.

and social factors have also contributed to this planning tradition being sustained over such a long time.

In Rosario, the period from the 1970s through to the early 1990s was a difficult time due to the collapse of a large number of small and medium-sized businesses that had made a large contribution to the city's economy. As a result, informal settlements expanded significantly, unemployment and poverty rates soared, and Rosario was the first city where looting took place in 1989,⁽²⁷⁾ all of which lowered the morale of Rosarinos. Since then, we have worked hard on developing a culture of citizenship, which is something intangible yet very important.

In my opinion, the turning point was the choice of Rosario to host the Third International Congress of the Spanish Language in November 2004, which boosted the city's profile and greatly enhanced its external visibility. Following the event, Rosario formed partnerships with other cities around the world – Barcelona (Spain), Porto Alegre (Brazil) and Montevideo (Uruguay) – and participated in forums and movements promoted by cities with left-wing municipal governments or progressive NGOs. As a result, Rosario started to participate in these new urban agendas.

These partnerships with other cities have enabled the city government to replicate innovative experiences. For example, we implemented the process of decentralization by working with colleagues from Barcelona, and we developed participatory budgeting in conjunction with our counterparts from Porto Alegre. Today, Rosario's city government plays a leading role at the international level: it is on the governing board of the Mercociudades Network⁽²⁸⁾ and it has a large international relations office, to which I myself dedicate a lot of time.

What are the effects of all these changes on the city?

Rosario today is nothing like it was 14 years ago. The things that existed previously have been transformed beyond recognition: the health care system has been modernized, the city has now adopted social policies, it places emphasis on culture, and it has established the municipal district centres and the city police.⁽²⁹⁾

A current priority is to try out new ways of working across the different secretariats within the city government. This is because public administration naturally leans towards the sectoral division of its areas of work, and so it takes great effort to produce cross-cutting policies as well as an overarching management plan. We are still working on these issues.

We also have an integrated geographical information system (GIS) that contains a large amount of data, which is shared between different government bodies (thus bucking the general trend of compartmentalizing information rather than consolidating it). The database took several years to develop and is still undergoing improvements.

Each week, the city government holds a general meeting (which can include political issues) and five sector-specific meetings: social affairs, urban planning, economic development, public sector reform and public highways (Box 5). The sectoral meetings bring together all secretariats involved in each sector, which means that some are involved in all the sectoral meetings.

27. The economic crisis of 1989 led to a serious breakdown in national social control, which was characterized by the widespread looting of supermarkets in Argentina's main cities.

28. Mercociudades is a network of municipalities from member countries of the Mercosur economic bloc (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela). For more information, see <http://www.mercociudades.org/> (in Spanish and Portuguese only).

29. The city police (*guardia urbana*) is a special unarmed patrol force for the city focusing on traffic duties, and operates alongside the regular (provincial) police.

BOX 5
New infrastructure in Rosario

Infrastructure developments provided by the city government are mostly focused on improving road networks that connect Rosario with the principal national outlets for its agricultural produce, such as the highway bridge between Rosario and Victoria and the motorway from Rosario to Córdoba. A new highway bridge, also known as the Mercosur bridge, crosses the Paraná River, connecting Rosario with the rest of Argentina and also with neighbouring countries, as it links with the new road corridor that connects the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. By improving transport links, the bridge has boosted economic development. It has benefited the cattle ranching, agricultural and port industries of the region around Rosario, not only by enabling inputs and final products to be transported much faster than previously, but also by opening up new markets. The new bridge has also helped to increase tourism in Rosario.

III. COMMENTARY ON THE INTERVIEW

In the interview, Mayor Lifschitz clearly sets out the cornerstones of Rosario's Socialist city government. Rosario still has many deficiencies that need to be addressed – above all those related to poverty, which affects around one-third of the city's population – and what is interesting is that the mayor does not ignore these in any way, but instead puts forward the difficulties that the city government faces in addressing them.

Reducing social hierarchy among Rosarinos as the basis for improving equity and social inclusion is one of the most important principles that cuts across all the city government's policies, from the design of public space to the expansion of health services, and from public participation in the municipal budget to the weight given to public architecture through the municipal district centres.

The key characteristics of the city government's approach can be summarized as follows:

- The city government is led by the Socialist Party, which not only has a historical trajectory in Argentina but also a particularly strong presence in Rosario. It is interesting to note that during the interview, Mayor Lifschitz speaks as a representative of the Socialist administration rather than from a personal perspective.
- As a result of the above, Rosario's city government policies have had continuity and consistency, although constantly revised over the course of 18 years.
- The city government's policies are strongly underpinned by urban planning reforms and a commitment to social equity.
- The city government's approach integrates social policy into local economic policy, rather than treating it as an add-on to economic strategies.
- The government makes an explicit commitment to local economic development and so has confidence in the capacity of local businesses to generate dynamism in the local economy.
- The city government is clear about the limitations that it faces; for example, making progress towards reducing poverty in the current context of a national economic situation that is inconsistent with its own political position.

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- The city government has struck a balance between policies aimed at local economic development (through the local private sector) and social inclusion. Examples include the regeneration of privately owned public space, investment in programmes for urban upgrading and land tenure regularization in informal settlements, and participatory budgeting.

The overriding impression of Mayor Lifschitz's administration is that it has not merely applied "recipes", but has instead adopted and adapted successful experiences from other cities and has designed its own policies based on the particular strengths, limitations and potential of Rosario.

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