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Introduction

In Argentina, in just ten years, waste pickers have gone from being a veritable example of informal and precarious work, to developing a model of co-management of recyclable waste between worker cooperatives and municipal governments. This means integrating worker cooperatives into public waste management systems, and providing them with an income, in cash or in kind, for the tasks of recovering and sorting recyclables. This model largely derives from the struggles for recognition and demands for the formalization of the activity developed by waste pickers in the City of Buenos Aires (CABA). Drawing on this experience, the Argentine federation of waste pickers (Federación Argentina de Cartoneros, Carreros y Recicladores or FACCyR) is promoting the replication of this model, colloquially known as the "Buenos Aires System", on a national scale, in municipalities that display evident asymmetries in relation to CABA. Such is the case of the bordering municipality Lomas de Zamora, which is part of the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area¹ (AMBA, its Spanish acronym) along with another 39 municipalities in the Province of Buenos Aires (See Image 1). This article analyzes the replication of the model in the said district as it allows for suggestive analytical insights considering its political and territorial particularities.



Image 1. Location of the City of Buenos Aires y the Municipality of Lomas de Zamora in the Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires

2 Although these districts are part of a single urban agglomeration, they display a marked contrast (see table below). CABA occupies just over twice the surface area of Lomas de Zamora, but has five times as many inhabitants. This asymmetry is also reflected in the same proportion in relation to per capita spending: CABA's spending is double the average for the municipalities of the AMBA, while Lomas de Zamora is below the average. Regarding the budget allocated to Solid Waste Management (SWM), CABA allocates thirty times more resources than Lomas de Zamora. This gap widens when we consider the budget allocated to the collection of recyclables carried out by the waste picker cooperatives, where the spending in CABA exceeds that of Lomas de Zamora by more than 200%. These quantitative asymmetries are linked to qualitative asymmetries that are just as relevant. For example, CABA is the district of the AMBA that generates the most solid waste, but the only one that does not carry out final disposal within its jurisdiction, as is the case in the municipalities of the Province of Buenos Aires.

Basic Indicators	САВА	Lomas de Zamora
Population	2.891.082****	616.279 inhabitants*****
Area	203 km ² ****	89 km ² *****
Total budget	190.477.000.000**	4.327.000.000**

Table 1: Basic Indicators for selected jurisdictions: Demographics, budget and SWM - Year 2017.

Own resources as percentage of budget	70%*	60%*
Per capita spending	\$ 47.139,1 (€ 523,40)****	\$ 8613,65 (€ 95,64)***
Spending allocated to SWM	\$ 15.332.000.000 (€ 170.235.948,92)**	\$ 510.000.000 (€ 5.662.688,1)**
SW generated (Tn/día)	6.000**	581**
Spending allocated to management of SW recycling	\$ 1.069.000.000 (€ 11.869.438,39)**	\$ 2.400.000 (€ 26.647,94) *****

Source: Our chart based on data from CEEU, 2019*; Lozupone, 2019**; BAA, 2017***; CEM, 2018****; INDEC, 2010*****; SMALZ, 2020*****

- ³ The evident structural and circumstantial asymmetries oblige us to problematize the effective viability of replicating the "Buenos Aires System" in any other jurisdiction, such as Lomas de Zamora, which cannot guarantee the same objective conditions as CABA. However, the co-management model promoted by waste picker organizations based on the experience of CABA, has grown sharply in several municipal jurisdictions throughout the country located both in densely populated metropolitan areas and in intermediate cities in the provinces. Although some experiences manage to obtain technical and financial support from local governments, no case can be equated with the operating conditions of the "Buenos Aires System". How, then, can this dynamic of expansion and replication be explained in such different, and even adverse, conditions?
- ⁴ In this article, we apply a perspective centered on a political ecology of waste, conscious of the politicization and territoriality of the waste picking practice. From this approach, we seek to gauge the impact of aspects often not considered in the dominant analyses in this field (based on economic indicators and/or the legal-regulatory framework), such as the ability of grassroots organizations to infiltrate, re-signify and redesign public policies, as well as to elaborate and share specific techno-cognitive repertoires from which to dispute the legitimacy of "expert" knowledge. By considering these issues, we intend to make waste picking practice visible as a creative exercise in political experimentation that far exceeds the miserly and instrumental views which propose to "formalize" this population in exchange for their subordinate integration into municipal management systems designed in linear and top-down terms.
- ⁵ Based on this perspective, the article is organized in four sections. The first section presents a brief characterization of the conceptual and methodological approach applied in the research from which this article stems. The second section contextualizes and reconstructs the process of implementation (and adaptation) of the Integrated Solid Waste Management (ISWM) model in our country, while providing the framework in which the model of co-management promoted by cooperatives in CABA was developed. In the third section, we focus on the process carried out by waste picker organizations to expand the "Buenos Aires System" to the municipality of Lomas de Zamora. Based on a reconstruction of the trajectory of the *Jóvenes en Progreso* cooperative, we analyze the actions of the grassroots organizations in terms of resignifying and redesigning public policy in the municipality. Finally, in the conclusions

we revisit some key insights to analyze the politicization and territorialization of the waste picking practice in terms of the re-signification and redesign of public policy.

Towards a Political Ecology of Waste in the Global South: conceptual and methodological orientations

- 6 We begin by considering SWM in a framework of relationships that exceeds its reductionist definition as a sanitary engineering problem, insofar as it involves aspects of a socio-economic, cultural and environmental nature. In this sense, we draw on Zsuzsa Gille's (2007) proposal to differentiate between different waste regimes understood as particular ways of recovering discarded material and disciplining the individuals who interact with it. This approach distinguishes three analytical dimensions (production, representation, and waste policy), the latter being of particular relevance to our analysis. Thus, the political dimension focuses on the way in which public discourse about waste is developed, and therefore, how it legitimizes the actors, knowledge and practices that intervene in this field. The two analytical starting points that we propose for addressing the experience of waste picker organizations become relevant in the light of this approach. On the one hand, the politicization of their practices, understood as the "effectiveness of dissent" (Rancière, 2007: 23), allows us to analyze their multiple and simultaneous influences in processes of implementation, response and re-elaboration of ISWM as the dominant waste regime. On the other hand, in order to consider the territoriality of these practices, we must take into account the spatial activity of agents that is carried out in tangible and intangible areas (Haesbaert, 2013). In this case, specifically, it is linked to the production, appropriation and dispute of physical and institutional territories that are configured in (and against) the ISWM as a specific waste regime.
- 7 Considering the political ecology of waste perspective developed by Solíz Torres (2017) and other colleagues, we understand the management of discarded material in terms of broader distributive conflicts. These involve both the appropriation/dispossession of waste as a resource and the asymmetric distribution of the negative effects of its urban management (Donoso, 2017), as well as the exclusion of the so-called "informal" actors from the processes of designing the policies that organize their management (Lohmann, 2017). Within this framework, we position the dominant waste regime, configured around the ISWM model developed in industrialized countries, to then circulate in the global arena as universal solutions potentially replicable in any context. However, its effective territorialization in the context of the countries of the global South implied a process of vernacularization in which waste pickers also participated, both in terms of their reproduction and resistance (Sorroche, 2016). The growing impact of waste picker organizations in the public agendas linked to ISWM as a waste regime enabled a broadening of the terms of the problem by evidencing the overlap of social and environmental issues. But it also contributed to de-fetishizing our relationship with discarded material, highlighting the centrality of the work that is socially necessary to realize its degradation (Carenzo, 2011).
- In a deeper dive along these lines, we draw on Zapata Campos and Zapata's (2017) 8 proposal regarding the way in which grassroots organizations that demand to participate in the discussion about the environment and sustainability develop infiltration actions within the public agencies responsible for managing them. These

groups, organized in regional and global networks (as is the case with RedLACRE and GlobalRec² waste pickers), horizontally circulate knowledge, technologies and strategies for negotiation and direct action, disputing the implementation of a "green deep democracy from below" (Zapata Campos et.al., 2020). This article seeks to contribute to this line by reconstructing the trajectory of a co-management model, elaborated from actions of waste picker organizations in negotiations and disputes with government authorities, that has managed to transcend territory borders and the circumstances that generated it, projecting itself in terms of a representative model of management for the sector as a whole, even at regional scale.

In terms of methodology, it should be noted that our research is part of a larger 9 initiative, the Recycling Networks & Waste Governance international action-research projects which have focused on grassroots innovations developed by waste picker organizations and networks in Managua (Nicaragua), Dar es Salaam (Tanzania), Buenos Aires (Argentina) and São Paulo (Brazil) and Kisumu (Kenya)³. In each of these cities, a local research team, including waste pickers and scholars, conducted the data collection via participant observation and in-depth interviews with members of waste picker organizations, networks and local government officials. In our case, this work was framed within fieldwork done with the cooperative *Jóvenes en Progreso*, initiated in 2016. We agreed with the members of this cooperative to reconstruct the organization's trajectory, focusing on strategies to influence local public policy, in order to analyze it in terms of grassroots innovations (Smith, Fressoli & Thomas, 2013). Between June 2017 and March 2018, we carried out specific fieldwork that included observation, some twenty unstructured interviews with cooperative leaders, municipal officials and policy makers, and bimonthly workshops at the cooperative to discuss preliminary results. In addition, we systematized the collection of secondary documentation regarding the regulatory framework and public policies developed around the implementation of the ISWM model in the AMBA.

Politicization y territoriality of the waste picking practice in the vernacularization of the ISWM model

The ISWM model developed in industrialized countries since the 1990s represented a shift from the dominant sanitary management paradigm based on the centralization of final disposal in dumpsites and sanitary landfills (Wilson, 2007). "Integrated" management proposed systemic changes in the consumption-disposal relationship based on establishing a hierarchy of the actions prior to final disposal, which included encouraging the reduction of generation, promoting reuse, as well as recovery through the recycling of different waste streams (Marshall & Khosrow, 2013). A decade later, boosted by multilateral credit agencies, the ISWM model was deployed in Latin American countries such as Colombia (Rúa-Restrepo et.al., 2019); Uruguay (Chabalgoity, 2004); Brazil and Argentina (Brandão & Gutiérrez, 2018). The implementation of the ISWM model in these contexts can be understood in terms of a process of vernacularization of the ISWM model that implied its adaptation to specific conditions, such as the overlap of jurisdictional powers, the absence of a specific normative framework, and the presence of populations dedicated to the so-called "informal recycling" (Sorroche, 2016).

In Argentina, its implementation began in 1999 with the plan for integrated 11 management of SW (Plan de Gestión Integral de RSU or PGIRSU) and later with the launch of the national strategy for integral management of SW (Estrategia Nacional de Gestión Integral de RSU or ENGIRSU) in 2006, both promoted by the National Secretariat of Environment and Sustainable Development, based on technical and financial assistance provided by the World Bank. The PGIRSU focused on improving municipalities' management through planning, centralization and regionalization of final disposal sites and the eradication of open-air dumpsites (Levín, 2013). ENGIRSU reinforced these initiatives, but also introduced a previously absent objective: the social inclusion of informal workers and the promotion of recycling policies (SAyDS, 2006). In this way, the implementation of the ISWM model was also linked to policies promoting cooperative work by the National Ministry of Social Development. This convergence gave rise to specific programmes, both at the provincial and municipal level, aimed at reorganizing existing waste management systems with both an "integrated" and "inclusive" perspective (López, 2015). It also implied transformations in the existing legal and regulatory framework, incorporating both the new hierarchy for SW treatment (from reduction to recovery), as well as recognition of informal recyclers as part of local management systems (Gutiérrez, 2017). This process also had a specific material correlation, through the provision of infrastructure called waste sorting plants⁴. These became key technological devices, not only in terms of waste recovery, but also for the "formalization" of the populations that made a living through waste recovery (Carenzo, 2016).

Examination of the vernacularized ISWM

- 12 Despite the above mentioned, the vernacularization of ISWM through the implementation of sorting plants managed by cooperatives integrated by former informal recyclers displayed significant differences in terms of territorial dynamics linked to waste management (Whitson, 2011).
- ¹³ The greatest incidence was found in small and medium size cities with low population density and waste generation, as part of the actions to close open-air dumps. In these small-scale contexts, the plants were able to treat practically all of the waste generated and formalize all of the informal recyclers (D'hers & Shammah, 2015). Additionally, they included actions to improve the disposal site (perimeter fencing, pest and vector control) or to implement sanitary landfills (Schejtman & Irurita, 2012).
- 14 In contrast, in the dense metropolitan agglomerates such as Buenos Aires, the volume of waste to be treated (some 15 thousand tons per day), as well as the number of informal recyclers who actively participate in the streets (an estimated 250,000), presented a greater socio-environmental challenge (Reynals, 2002). The plants were set up inside transfer and final disposal sites. They involved, in their management, waste picker cooperatives dedicated to street collection (Maldovan Bonelli, 2012) or, more frequently, to recovery within sanitary landfills (Cross, 2015). In this way, its implementation addressed not only environmental policy objectives (minimizing final disposal), but also a rhetoric of urban public space management, insofar as it meant deterritorializing its work in public space, and then re-territorializing it within the limited and controlled space provided by sorting plants (Sternberg, 2013). This entailed a series of contradictory actions that included both their persecution and harassment,

as well as their recognition and formalization through official records and campaigns promoting recycling (Carré, 2015).

- However, the vernacularization process of ISWM cannot be understood outside of the growing organization and advocacy of waste picker organizations. CABA was the focal point of this process, where the cooperatives were able to have discussions with and make their demands to state agencies, private companies, and NGOs. Following the studies carried out by other colleagues (Maldovan Bonelli, 2012; Cutina, 2011; Bouldaín, 2011 and Lupi, 2016) it is possible to clearly differentiate two moments in the process of vernacularization of ISWM in this jurisdiction.
- Between 2006 and 2008, a technocratic approach prevailed, promoted by the Dirección 16 General de Reciclado of the Buenos Aires city government⁵. Although it established a zoning of areas of operation for the five cooperatives recognized at that time6, it actually aimed to transfer progressively the collection of recyclables to private companies that provided the traditional collection service. In this way, the municipal executive not only advanced by disputing control over access to public space, but also discouraged the incorporation (and recognition) of new cohorts of waste pickers who would be excluded from the established agreements. Both aspects generated friction between the organizations and the municipal government, since they were not willing to give up control "of the street", nor the possibility of integrating the large waste picker population that was not included in the "formalized" cooperatives. But this initiative also opened up a new front of demands, this time around the asymmetric distribution of public resources allocated to financing the waste collection in the hands of large private companies (wet waste circuit), and those allocated to the recyclables collection (dry waste circuit) which the cooperatives were in charge of.
- ¹⁷ The following period (2008-2010) was characterized by the growth and increased organizational complexity of the waste picker sector, based on the alliance of cooperatives with social movements, progressive sectors of the Catholic Church, political parties, and labour unions. Along with the lessons learned by the cooperatives in negotiating with officials, these ties provided the means to apply pressure through the power of mass mobilization. At the same time, it allowed the various actors to align based on a clear definition of the sector's interests around the recognition of their work as a public socio-environmental service that should be financed through public funds, as was the case with the traditional collection service. Additionally, it meant having technical support (mainly legal and economic) provided by professionals and university activists associated with the social movements who would translate the sector's demands into economic, legal and urban environmental policy.
- ¹⁸ Under these conditions of a more balanced correlation of forces, the waste picker sector was able to secure many of its demands. Thus, by the beginning of 2008, the programme agreed upon by the cooperatives and the government of CABA (GCBA) included loaning the sorting plants, providing logistical means for the transportation of members and recovered materials, distributing uniforms and work supplies, and paying a monetary incentive complementary to self-generated income. In 2010, the new scheme was stabilized through a public tender for cooperatives to award them the management of recyclables in the city. Since then, 12 cooperatives of waste pickers, including some 5000 workers, have been formally integrated into the city's public management system, representing a milestone in terms of the impact of the sector in the design and implementation of ISWM public policies in the country.

The "Buenos Aires System": towards a co-managed ISWM

- On the one hand, the configuration of a waste regime linked to the vernacularization of the ISWM made it possible to formalize the waste picker population after an initial attempt to repress it and make it invisible. But, on the other hand, it defined a topdown approach to the way-of-working and the scope of their participation in the waste management system. However, the growing ability of the sector to organize and mobilize helped to politicize its practice, developing new forms of territoriality, not only in terms of reaffirming its right to use public space, but also by demonstrating its ability to appropriate and redefine the urban environmental agenda that until then had been controlled by NGOs and academic experts. This advocacy work in shaping public policy can be explained around three themes that organized the actions of negotiation and dispute between waste picker organizations and the municipal government: access and control of public space; funding of collection of recyclables; and the exhaustiveness of the scheme with respect to the universe of the waste picker population.
- 20 The issue of access and control of public space is closely related to the previously mentioned de-fetishization of the relationship with discarded material, in that the work of waste pickers in the streets demonstrated the impossibility of ensuring reuse and/or recycling without involving the social organization of human work (Carenzo, 2017). Thus, even as the implementation of collection of recyclables with cooperatives progressed, other sectors linked to Public Works within the local government pressured to reverse this decision. This implied resisting government initiatives that would damage their working conditions. Such was the case in early 2008 when the local government attempted to implement the use of containers in the recyclables circuit⁷ thereby displacing waste pickers from the collection in public spaces. In response to this, the waste picker organizations organized massive mobilization in front of the seat of government, blocking collection routes and burning containers in downtown Buenos Aires, after which they not only stopped the initiative but also managed to open a space for redefining the policy by working together with the authorities (O'Hare and Sorroche, 2019).
- Regarding the funding of collection of recyclables, the discussion was organized around the 21 framework of waste picking work. The organizations held that it should follow the traditional collection system (public tender process for services), while government agencies and NGOs considered the work of the cooperatives to be social entrepreneurship, and to be funded basically through the commercialization of the materials collected. In this case, the negotiation resulted in an intermediate scheme that, nevertheless, materialized to some extent this historical demand of the sector. Thus, each waste picker forming part of a cooperative incorporated in the system receives a monthly complementary income, based on two differential schemes. On the one hand, 2,443 waste pickers work as "recuperadores ambientales", collecting materials and taking them to sorting plants where materials are commercialized collectively. This category receives a personal income of 189.87 euros, plus a bonus for productivity⁸. Another 2,417 waste pickers act as "recuperadores urbanos", using the logistics provided by the city government to transport the materials to their homes, where they classify and commercialize them on their own. These workers receive a subsidy of 94.38 euros and do not get a productivity bonus. In theory, this last group would move into the first category as new green centers are set up. However, delays in

making this process effective mean that organizations must constantly put pressure on this point. In both cases, the cooperatives distribute their members according to fixed collection routes agreed upon with the GCBA (Sorroche, 2019). In return, the cooperatives must comply with attendance standards, maintain the cleanliness of the area in which they operate, and not involve child labour in their activity (Gutiérrez, 2017).

- ²² The issue of the *exhaustiveness of the scheme* in relation to the entire waste picker population proved to be the most difficult to agree on, with more modest but no less relevant achievements. The payrolls of the 12 cooperatives registered in CABA crystallized given the refusal to allocate larger budgets. However, as of 2014, a programme of "Promotoras Ambientales" (environmental promoters) was launched, which allowed the integration of a new cohort of 40 women workers. The initiative was based on the experience of the waste picker women themselves on the collection routes of recyclables; their versatility in talking to neighbours and merchants gave them a special ability to modify habits regarding the separation of recyclables. Thus, the *promotoras ambientales* receive uniforms and a subsidy equivalent to the second category (*recuperadores urbanos*), dedicated to informing neighbours about separation at the source and contacting those who are interested in separating their waste with the collectors on that route. They also participate in courses and workshops given by the GCBA on recycling and waste management (Puricelli, 2020).
- This co-management scheme was stabilized as a result of a joint effort between the waste picker cooperatives (mainly *El Amanecer de los Cartoneros*), together with social movements (*Movimiento de Trabajadores Excluidos*, MTE, which is a member of *Unión de Trabajadores de la Economía Popular*, UTEP) and NGOs such as AVINA, among other actors (Maldovan Bonelli, 2012 and Lupi, 2016). As part of a strategy to strengthen the sector, the MTE promoted the formation of the FACCyR⁹ in 2011, as a union tool capable of articulating the demands of the sector and providing technical assistance to the cooperatives that make up the federation on a federal scale (O'Hare & Sorroche, 2019). In this context, the experience derived from the process in the city of Buenos Aires was the main precedent for the "social management" of recyclables within an official system. It had massive scale (almost 5,000 member waste pickers) and had managed to sustain itself over time, guaranteeing a complementary income for its members, and even expanding the scope of their participation in the system, as had happened with the *promotoras ambientales*.
- This experience shows the way in which waste picker organizations challenged the scope and implementation of the vernacularized ISWM as a waste regime. In terms of their politicization and territoriality, they display ample ability to appropriate and resignify the process, even constituting a key element for the subsequent construction of a federation at the national level such as FACCyR. This work was carried out by members of the cooperatives that worked in the city of Buenos Aires and were members of the MTE, such as Sergio Sánchez (*El Amanecer de los Cartoneros* cooperative) or Jaquelina Flores (*Anuillán* cooperative). In the exchange with groups of waste pickers or dumpsite workers located in the provinces, the story of what happened in the CABA provided a powerful narrative of success that contrasted with their harsh working conditions, as well as the meager results obtained in their demands to the local public authorities¹⁰. The "Buenos Aires System", as the waste pickers from other places began to call it, acquired unusual significance. It provided a guide for action in the

relationship with public officials and represented a powerful image of a future that incorporated the local groups in a broader totality, built on its recognition as a "branch of activity" (waste picking /recycling) in the framework of a new trade identity based on the notion of Popular Economy¹¹. In the next section, we will dive deeper into this process by revisiting the trajectory of the *Jóvenes en Progreso* cooperative of Lomas de Zamora in one of the first attempts to extend the scope of the "system" beyond the limits of the City of Buenos Aires.

Vernaculization of the "Buenos Aires System" in unlikely scenarios

- ²⁵ With an area of only 89 km2 and a population of 616,279 inhabitants, Lomas de Zamora is the second most densely populated municipality in the Buenos Aires metropolitan area, reaching 6,925 inhabitants per km2 (INDEC, 2010). It lies southwest of the CABA, with which it borders, forming a highly segregated urban agglomeration that includes vast informal settlements along with residential areas of high purchasing power. Its historical industrial profile, while still in place, has been giving way to commercial activities and services, in close connection with the rise in the value of urban land throughout the district.
- 26 The municipality is integrated as part of the centralized final disposal system for AMBA operated by the state enterprise Coordinación Ecológica Área Metropolitana Sociedad del Estado (CEAMSE)¹². As other jurisdictions do, Lomas de Zamora contracts the service of private companies that collect the waste and then send it to the Norte III sanitary landfill, located about 40 km away, paying the costs of burying almost 300,000 tons of waste per year. It therefore became part of the ISWM scheme promoted by the provincial government since 2005, aligned with the directives issued by ENGIRSU at a national level. The enactment of Law 13.592/06 on "Integrated SWM" and the implementation of specific public policies through the programmes "Sin Desperdicio" (2005), "Generación 3R" (2008) and "Tu Manzana Recicla" (2011) defined an agenda that sought to materialize the notion of hierarchy as the guiding principle in waste management, establishing goals for minimizing the shipment to final disposal in landfills, promoting separation at the source and recognising informal recycling workers (MAyDS, 2012). Since AMBA had a high population density and a shortage of vacant spaces, 8 sorting plants were set up outside of municipal jurisdictions. More precisely, they were established within the Norte III landfill that CEAMSE operates in the municipality of San Martín, ceding their management to local work cooperatives (Carré and Fernandez, 2013). In addition, it was defined that Lomas de Zamora, along with another 23 municipalities closer to CABA, should send their waste to these sorting plants prior to final disposal (MAyDS, 2012).
- 27 Thus, the implementation of ISWM in Lomas de Zamora did not really lead to a structural change in its waste management system, as it continued to operate under practically the same conditions; and that was not exactly a territory with an absence of waste pickers. In fact, the neighbourhoods of Villa Fiorito, Budge and Villa Albertina display a concentration of large populations of waste pickers¹³; however, the vast majority of them are dedicated to collecting in the neighbouring jurisdiction of CABA¹⁴. This was also an advantage for the municipal authorities , since it resulted in weak local pressure for being integrated into the local management system. This differentiated

Lomas de Zamora from other municipalities more distant from CABA, where local waste pickers began to organize themselves to demand recognition by municipal authorities (Sorroche, 2016; Pastore, 2010). However, as we will demonstrate below, this exceptional situation did not last over time. The very limitations of the formalization process in CABA, as well as temporary situations in this jurisdiction, helped the waste pickers of this district to achieve growing visibility and prominence.

A stone in the shoe: vernacularizing the ISWM in Lomas de Zamora

- It was only in 2015 that the municipality implemented a policy specifically aimed at the 28 population that made a living off the recovery of recyclable materials. When it finally did so, it was not precisely oriented towards the inclusion of "informal recycling workers" as indicated by vernacularized ISWM regulations. The initiative was a response to pressure from protectionist associations that promoted campaigns to ban horse-drawn carts. In Lomas de Zamora, as in other municipalities with large populations of "carreros"¹⁵, animal rights organizations exerted constant pressure to sanction punitive regulations against them, accusing them - without strong grounds of abuse and exploitation of horses (Carman, 2017). In 2015, the municipality banned horse-drawn carts and implemented the "MotoCarros" programme, through which it provided a motor vehicle to all those carreros who handed over their horses voluntarily¹⁶. Additionally, they were granted a small monthly subsidy for fuel costs (38 euros) and were linked to the "Escuelas Verdes" (green schools) programme, so that they would collect their recyclables. This specific policy, focused on the situation of carreros, highlighted more strongly the absence of a policy for a still large and increasingly organized population of waste pickers who did not have horse-drawn carts, and who soon began to demand an inclusive policy from the municipal authorities.
- Towards 2012, the first cooperatives of waste pickers began forming in this district, promoted by waste pickers who lived in the neighbourhoods of Lomas de Zamora and Lanús and were members of the cooperative *El Amanecer de los Cartoneros* that was formalized in CABA. In fact, it was the freezing of the quotas to enter the "Buenos Aires System" that constituted the main incentive to project the organization of the sector in the bordering municipalities. Both the MTE and the FACCyR promoted this territorial expansion of the co-management model, extending the "conquest of recognition and rights" achieved in CABA to the entire sector. As a result, five cooperatives began to operate in this district, although the municipality's responses to their initial demands were vague and inconclusive. Unlike what happened in CABA, in Lomas de Zamora the issue of waste management did not have the same weight on the political agenda.
- ³⁰ In fact, these cooperatives found greater dialogue in provincial organizations such as the Provincial Organization for Sustainable Development (OPDS), and regional organizations such as the Matanza-Riachuelo Basin Authority (ACUMAR). Thus, in 2013 and after an arduous struggle, the *Jóvenes en Progreso* cooperative obtained authorization from the municipal executive to use a sector within the property designated for the municipal "Eco Point". This space, funded by ACUMAR, was originally intended to operate as a plant for the chipping of plant waste from urban tree pruning and as a site for the transfer of waste from clandestine micro-basins cleaned up by the municipality. When Lomas de Zamora became part of the circuit that

fed the sorting plants located in CEAMSE, there were no plans to install any facilities for waste pickers within the "Eco Point". However, as we will see below, the model of territorial ordering linked to the waste regime in the metropolitan area, would be again answered and re-signified by the waste picker organizations, widening in territorial and conceptual terms the narrow spectrum of recognition and formalization of their activity that the vernacularized ISWM had crystallized.

Infiltration and design of public policy "from below"

- ³¹ We focus here on the trajectory followed by the *Jóvenes en Progreso* cooperative (MTE-FACCyR), as it stands out - among the five existing cooperatives in the district - in relation to its ability to infiltrate, question and reconfigure the municipal policy on waste within the framework of the vernacularized ISWM model.
- 32 From being authorized to operate in the Eco Point site, the cooperative was able to strengthen the material recovery circuit that it had been implementing since 2012 in stores, factories, community organizations, and schools. The increased storage space allowed them to increase the volume of waste recovered and the scale of operation of the cooperative. However, the new location lacked the basic infrastructure required to carry out the activity, since neither the municipality nor ACUMAR guaranteed resources to be able to afford these onerous public works. The cooperative had to build the warehouse, offices and bathrooms, and provide connections for access to electricity and potable water, using funds and resources that they were able to collect through contacts with national and provincial government agencies, church organizations and unions, provided by MTE-FACCyR. At the same time, they were qualified as a "Sustainable Destination" by the OPDS¹⁷ in 2014, which enabled them to offer waste management services to large companies. This meant a qualitative and quantitative leap in their operations, increasing the volume of recovered recyclables by 50% (in relation to the 40 Tn/month that they recovered on average previously), as well as the incorporation of 25 new members, reaching a total of 36.
- A second milestone in the growing strength of the cooperative occurred in 2016, within 33 the framework of the sanction and implementation of the Ley de Emergencia Social that had been promoted by the CTEP in view of the drastic deterioration of living conditions as a result of the adjustment and devaluation policies implemented by president Macri's administration since 2015. In particular, because the law enabled the "Salario Social Complementario" (SSC)¹⁸ (complementary social income), a fixed monetary allowance designed to complement the self-generated income of those workers who have occupations outside the formal labor market, such as waste pickers, street vendors and artisans. In this way, Jóvenes en Progreso, as well as more than a hundred FACCyR cooperatives of waste pickers, gained access to the SSC from the beginning. However, the members of the cooperative decided to take advantage of the quotas of SSC beneficiaries to increase the number of members, rather than to reinforce the income of those who were already members. Thanks to this, they were able to incorporate 100 new members who previously worked as "independent" waste pickers in marginal neighbourhoods of the municipality, in order to launch new routes of differentiated collection in the central and residential areas of the main localities of the municipality such as Banfield, Lomas de Zamora and Temperley.

- ³⁴ Towards the end of 2016, *Jóvenes en Progreso* comprised 136 waste pickers and processed 150 Tn/month of recyclable materials, representing a not insignificant performance in terms of reaching the objectives of the ISWM in this jurisdiction. However, paradoxically, it was not formally integrated into the waste management system, nor did it receive technical or financial support from the municipality. Its members, with the support of the MTE-FACCyR, began an advocacy effort to change this situation, which they considered structurally unjust. Following the notion of citizen infiltration proposed by Zapata Campos and Zapata (2017), we can see how, in addition to their usual demands on the municipal government, they also incorporated contacts with representatives of the local city council to whom they had access by virtue of broader political ties.
- ³⁵ Following the experience of CABA, the advocacy strategy of *Jóvenes en Progreso* included both instances of negotiation and the pressure exerted by massive mobilizations in the commune's offices. This succeeded in establishing direct communication with the mayor's team, as it not only placed demands related to waste management at the level of the public agenda (replicated by the local media), but also proposed a comanagement model to address them, based on an environmentally sustainable and socially inclusive perspective. In terms of politics, its actions gained prominence by highlighting the absence of a coherent environmental policy by the municipality, while also emphasizing the limitations derived from its subordinate integration in the vernacularized ISWM model. The experience in Lomas also replicated the three themes that organized the demands made by the CABA representatives: access to and control of public space, funding of the collection of recyclables, and the exhaustiveness of the scheme with respect to the entire waste picker population.
- Regarding control and access to public space, the precedent of the prohibition of horsedrawn carts and its negative effects on *carreros* reinforced the centrality of obtaining institutional recognition of the work carried out by the cooperatives. In view of the initial lack of interest of the municipal government, the strategy of moving forward in the more politically heterogeneous space of the city council proved relevant. Towards the end of 2016, the city council implemented mandatory separation at the source within its jurisdiction in order to supply the cooperative with segregated recyclables. A few months later, they passed the municipal regulation for Large Generators of Waste (No. 16161/17), which was based on the OPDS regulations in order to register them territorially in the municipal jurisdiction, explicitly prioritizing the participation of waste picker cooperatives (Sorroche, 2019). Later, in July of the same year, they managed to materialize a second achievement by formalizing, through municipal regulation №16566/17, the Mesa de Gestión Sustentable de Lomas de Zamora, (a participatory board for sustainable management) composed of all the waste picker cooperatives and representatives from different areas of the municipal government. In April 2019, as a result of the joint work in the Mesa de Gestión Sustentable, the "Eco Lomas" programme was designed and implemented. This initiative formally recognizes the cooperatives as part of the municipal management system, establishing "Door to Door", "Recycling Stations" and "Green Points"¹⁹ collection circuits, under their management throughout the municipality. Free circulation and access to public space for waste pickers is guaranteed through the creation of the Registro Único de Cooperativas de Recuperadores Urbanos Recuperadores Urbanos Independientes (RUCRUeI) (a kind of waste picker census) through Decree No. 871/19. This instrument allowed for a census

of the waste picker population (reaching 565 in its first systematization) and the distribution of personalized ID, which specifies the membership of each waste picker both in the Eco Lomas Programme, as well as in the cooperative where they work.

- 37 Regarding the *funding of collection of recyclables*, in contrast to the experience at CABA, the Eco-Lomas programme does not include the payment of a complementary income for the provision of the service, nor does it include a public tender. However, it does guarantee resources in kind to subsidize operating costs (logistical costs of transporting materials and workers), and thus improves the profitability of the cooperatives. The programme facilitates the use of municipal trucks for those cooperatives that lack their own mobility, or covers the fuel costs of those that do. In addition, it provides a "free pass" for transportation so that cooperative members can travel free of charge within the municipal jurisdiction, using public transportation.
- 38 Finally, regarding the exhaustiveness of the scheme with respect to the entire waste picker population, it should be noted that a high percentage of this population of Lomas is a member of a cooperative, within the nine that currently make up Eco Lomas. considering However, the structural problems of unemployment and underemployment, especially among single mothers, the cooperative Jóvenes en Progreso permanently promotes new productive units. By mid 2019, they had succeeded in getting the municipality to install 7 recycling stations in squares and parks, to be operated by the cooperatives' promotoras ambientales. As in CABA's pioneering initiative, the promotoras ambientales receive a monetary income (53 euros) supplied by the municipality, and are responsible for receiving the recyclables produced by neighbours and participating in awareness-generating campaigns about recycling and the contributions of the cooperatives.
- ³⁹ Finally, in November 2019, Regulation No. 17403 was issued. It gradually promotes the implementation of the separation at source of recyclable materials throughout the jurisdiction through the deployment of the collection of recyclables by cooperatives that until now had been limited to predetermined routes. To this end, the municipal government started negotiations with provincial and national agencies to finance the establishment of recyclable sorting and storage centres in two localities with high concentrations of waste pickers: San José (to the southeast) and Villa Fiorito (to the northwest). They also optimized the logistics of the "door to door" circuits (transport, uniforms, carts) and the provision of machinery to add value to the recyclables through transformation. However, the implementation of these actions to move towards a single co-managed recycling system between the municipality and the cooperatives, scheduled for May 2020, was delayed in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Final thoughts

- 40 The analysis sheds light on the role of waste picker organizations in the vernacularization of the SWM model, an aspect scarcely problematized in the literature. Depicted as passive recipients of public policies designed and implemented in a top-down manner, it hides their ability to not only respond to or resist the negative effects of the waste regime configured around the ISWM model, but also to resignify or redesign them by incorporating their perspectives, knowledge, and interests.
- In this sense, the reconstruction of the experience developed by CABA's waste picker cooperatives allows us to recover the socio-genesis of a co-management model

developed and promoted "from below". But, above all, it provides clues to think about its projection and adaptability in terms of the politicization and territoriality of a trade and political representation of the sector framed in the FACCyR. In this sense, this model of co-management "from below" goes far beyond the narrow framework of objective conditions for its realization outside of the exceptional conditions that gave rise to it in the CABA.

- In fact, its replication in the context of the municipality of Lomas de Zamora simultaneously displays the reproduction and re-elaboration, through a dynamic of adaptation to the existing local conditions. In fact, the most salient difference between one process and the other is given by the impossibility of realizing the remuneration for the public service provided in Lomas. Of course, this is a significant difference, not only because of the objective differences in budget terms, but also because recognition, both social and economic, represents one of the historical demands of the sector. However, this does not prevent the "Buenos Aires System" from being configured as a powerful narrative around which to shape demands and strategies that are situated and adapted to local conditions, which in turn help to reinforce a sense of belonging to a sector of activity.
- We began our analysis by setting out to answer the question about the conditions of the possibility of replicating the co-management model in scenarios radically different from the one that gave rise to it. Our contributions sought to shift both from miserly readings, blind to the creative practices and political experimentation developed by popular organizations, and from reductionist views, which circumscribe public policy analysis to available budgets and existing regulatory frameworks. We believe that the substantial value of the experiences derived from both CABA and Lomas de Zamora lies in realizing the right to exercise active citizenship in the design and daily management of a key urban environmental policy issue, such as waste management. In this sense, this affirmative action keeps the field of possibilities open, defending the thousand ways in which waste pickers can intervene as experts in this field. At the same time, however, it outlines the clear limits of the impossible: never again without us.

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NOTES

1. AMBA is the largest urban agglomeration in Argentina, with an area of 13,285 $\rm km^2$ and 14.800.000 inhabitants (INDEC, 2010) which represent 37% of the Argentine population.

2. The network of recyclers La Red Latinoamericana y del Caribe de Recicladores (Red LACRE) founded in the Latin American waste picker congress of 2008 in Bogota, is made up of 17 national member delegations. The alliance Global de Recicladores (GlobalRec) comprises 26 organizations from countries in Latin America, Africa and Asia.

3. This report for this project is available here: http://www.wiego.org/sites/default/files/ reports/files/

First%20report%20Recycling%20Networks%20&%20Waste%20Governance%20Recycling%20Networks.pdf **4.** The infrastructure of the "*Plantas de Clasificación de Residuos*" consists of an elevated conveyor belt where waste circulates, allowing operators – positioned along the conveyor belt- to select material to be recycled. There are currently 150 such plants in 21 of the 24 provincial jurisdictions, which on average recover 17.7% of the solid waste managed by the municipalities (Savino and de Titto, 2020). **5.** It was created by Decree 2075/07 and is under the ministry *Ministerio de Espacios Públicos e Higiene Urbana*. As an entity under Law 992/02 it must coordinate the collection of recyclables with waste picker cooperatives. Later, under the scope of the Law 1854/06 (known as "*Basura Cero*"), they were required to increase levels of recovery and recycling in the city.

6. This meant that the local government loaned a sorting plant and four Green Points (operational units for storage and logistics) to the cooperatives.

7. This system involved transferring the management of the new circuit to private companies that already operated the logistics of the wet waste collection circuit. In this way, the recyclables would be transported to the Green Centers where they would be classified and conditioned by the cooperatives, but losing control over direct access to the resource in the public space.

8. If they recover more than 600 kg / month, they receive an additional 0.011 euros per kg. I.e. above that limit, they receive an additional 6.66 euros per kg.

9. The Federación Argentina de Cartoneros, Carreros y Recicladores (FACCyR) is part of the Central de Trabajadores de la Economía Popular (CTEP).It was created in 2011 and unites 140 cooperatives in 17 provinces in Argentina and in the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires. They gather approximately 15,000 workers and collect 30,000 tons of recyclable materials per month.

10. As they are far from the large urban agglomerations, in small and intermediate cities waste pickers' work is less visible and is subject to worse conditions of subordination and marginalization. In this sense, many local administrations do not integrate any policies to include their work in waste management. In addition, other factors such as the distance to large buyers and storage facilities have a strong impact which can result in prices as low as half those of Buenos Aires.

11. Popular economy is the way that the different organizations that take part in CTEP define their work. In other places, this is commonly called the informal economy: the distinction is political and is related to the demands of the organization, in recognizing all these people as workers, and to show that they are not separate from the broader labour force (Fernández Álvarez, 2016).

12. CEAMSE was created in 1978 during the last military dictatorship and manages approximately 17,000 tons of waste per day, generated in CABA and 40 municipalities of the province of Buenos Aires that make up AMBA.

13. The MTE representative of Lomas de Zamora, Damián Barbarito, points out that just the waste pickers that integrate this organization add up to 4,000 people. (Personal conversation, 6 Feb 2018.)

14. CABA not only offers a better quality and larger quantity of recyclables using shorter routes, but it is also more easily accessible. E.g. Villa Fiorito, which is separated from Buenos Aires by the Riachuelo, has three direct bus routes; while there is only one bus route to the centre of Lomas and it requires walking 600 meters.

15. "Carreros" is the name used to describe waste pickers who collect recyclables in horse-drawn carts. This activity has deep roots in municipalities that until relatively recently included periurban areas with large vacant green spaces.

16. The elimination of animal-drawn carts has been one of the lines of action in waste management in cities in the provinces. As in the pioneer case of the city of Río Cuarto, Córdoba, where animal-drawn carts were banned in 2012, more than 30 municipalities have replicated the scheme.

17. OPDS resolutions 137, 138 and 139 define as Large Generators of waste, any commercial or industrial location that generates more than 1 Tn/month. Those in this category must present plans for the management of their recyclable waste and must contract third party services for its transfer and treatment. The regulations recommend contracting cooperatives, enabling them to issue official certificates that establish the type and quantity of materials recovered and reinserted in the production circuit.

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18. The emergency social provision law was sanctioned in November 2016 and stipulated that all workers of the popular economy, as the CTEP call the workers that they represent, will receive a complementary wage (SSC)-half the minimum wage, which is currently set in Argentina at around \in 187,37-. Having obtained that wage, the cooperatives complement that income with the money they earn selling the materials collected in the street or through the agreements they have made with large generators – in some cases, apart from the materials they also receive a payment for the recollection and treatment services-.

19. The "Door to Door" circuit is organized on fixed routes where each collector regularly visits the same homes and businesses to remove previously segregated recyclables. The "Recycling Stations" are managed by members of the cooperatives and receive materials brought by the neighbours according to a pre-established schedule. Finally, the "Green Points" are containers, without assistants, generally located in civil society organizations where recyclables can be dropped-off autonomously. In all cases, the cooperatives are in charge of recovering the recyclable materials.

ABSTRACTS

In Argentina, the organization of waste picker cooperatives has enabled these organizations to impose their approach and point of view in the system of waste management derived from the Integrated Solid Waste Management (ISWM) model. In this context, the experience of the cooperatives of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires (CABA) stands out, as it paved the way for a co-management model that was unprecedented in the country. Since then, the "Buenos Aires System" has been promoted by the Argentine federation of waste pickers (*FACCyR*), as the model to be implemented throughout the country. The differences between the CABA and other jurisdictions raises significant questions regarding the adaptability of this model. Based on a Political Ecology of Waste, we address this question by analyzing the process of expansion of this model following the *Jóvenes en Progreso* cooperative in the municipality of Lomas de Zamora (Province of Buenos Aires).

En Argentine, l'organisation des coopératives de récupérateurs de déchets a été capable d'imposer dans le régime de gestion des déchets en place (modèle de gestion intégrée des déchets solides-GIDS) promu par des agences d'État et les organisations multilatérales, l'intégration de leurs approche, voix et perspectives. A ce titre, l'expérience des coopératives de récupération de déchets de la ville autonome de Buenos Aires retient notre attention pour introduire un modèle de gestion sociale des matières recyclables. Ce que l'on peut appeler le « système de Buenos Aires » a été promu par la fédération argentine des récupérateurs de déchets (Federación Argentina de Cartoneros, Carreros y Recicladores - FACCyR), en vue de son introduction dans les autres municipalités du pays. La ville de Buenos Aires affiche cependant de grandes inégalités sur le plan démographique, budgétaires et des infrastructures par rapport aux autres juridictions. Ces différences soulèvent des questions importantes quant aux possibilités d'adaptation dans d'autres municipalités. Sur la base d'une écologie politique des déchets, nous abordons cette question en analysant le processus de mise en œuvre de ce modèle dans la commune de Lomas de Zamora (Province de Buenos Aires) qui, malgré des frontières partagées avec la ville de Buenos Aires, présente des indicateurs sociodémographiques et budgétaires très contrastés. En suivant la trajectoire de la coopérative Jóvenes en Progreso, nous montrons comment le « système de Buenos Aires » constitue un cadre à la fois symbolique et politique pour ancrer leurs demandes un tant que secteur unifié tout en adaptant le modèle au contexte local. L'analyse de ce cas contribue à rendre compte des processus de politisation et territorialisation de la récupération des déchets, en mettant en évidence une pratique éloignée de l'image misérabiliste la réduisant à une activité de survie.

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Mots-clés: récupérateurs de déchets, GIDS, congestion, évolutivité, politization, territorialité **Keywords:** waste pickers, ISWM, co-management, adaptability, politicization, territoriality

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