Motor clubs in the public arena: the Argentine Automobile Club, the Argentine Touring Club and the construction of a National Roads System (1910–43)

Melina Piglia Universidad Nacional de Mar del Plata

Abstract

The rapid spread of the automobile in the early twentieth century posed both challenges and promises to nation states. Before automobility became the object of public policies, this new mobility technology had to be socially perceived and constructed as belonging to the public sphere. Motorist associations played a decisive role in this process. This paper focuses on the Argentine Automobile Club (ACA) and the Argentine Touring Club (TCA), the two principal automobile clubs in the country and the largest ones in Latin America during the first half of the twentieth century. It argues that the ACA and TCA had a decisive influence during the 1920s in diagnosing and listing possible solutions to road and tourism challenges, and providing reference points for most of the road and tourism policies in the following decades. At the same time, both clubs actively helped to create a national network of roads through their participation in the planning agencies and made the new roadways accessible by signposting them and by providing petrol stations. Not least they formed and spread the new practices of road culture and automobility and, by organising sporting events, tours and rally drives and printing travel guides and maps, they contributed to the symbolic construction of the roads.

Key words Argentina, motorists associations, roads policy, automobility

Introduction

In Argentina, the car spread earlier and more rapidly than in most countries of the world, impacting upon social, cultural and economic life.[1] The challenges and promises of this new technological system had to be socially perceived and constructed as belonging to the public sphere before they became the object of public policies. Motorist associations played a decisive role in this process, since they presented the automobile and its related issues as public affairs, pressuring governments and affecting the development of relevant public policies. In order to understand how roads became a public policy in Argentina, this paper focuses on the Argentine Automobile

The Journal of Transport History, Volume 36, No. 2 (December 2015) © The Authors.
http://dx.doi.org/10.7227/TJTH.36.2.3

Club (ACA) and the Argentine Touring Club (TCA), the two principal automobile clubs in the country and the largest ones in Latin America during the first half of the twentieth century.

Clubs associated with automobiles and with car travel have become the object of scholarly study only in the last few decades, in the work of historians of the rise of the culture of mobility or of auto-mobility in the twentieth century. Clay McShane, for example, has dealt with the rise of automobile associations in the United States, their connection with the car industry and the defence of the interests of car owners facing conflicts with urban dwellers and local authorities over the use of roads.[2] As Peter Norton's study of the conflicts related to street use has also shown, these clubs, which had close links with the automobile industry, saw it as their business to defend motorists against the state, pedestrians and other means of transport, and succeeded in imposing their projects for traffic regulations in several districts.[3]

Although in Europe there were both Automobile Clubs and Touring Clubs, the latter have received greater scholarly attention. Inquiry has focused on the clubs' role as mediators in the building of a new leisure-time culture or on their contributions to the symbolic construction of national territoriality, by fostering travel and the development of a discourse on territory publicised through guides and magazines.[4] The European automobile clubs seem to have wanted to generate a positive public attitude to motor vehicles.[5] Like those in the United States, they do not seem to have made the building or maintenance of roads a central aspect of their public actions.[6] A notable exception, as Massimo Moraglio has shown, is the Italian Touring Club which, like the Argentine one, fostered its own project of modernising the Italian transport network.[7]

Although the history of civil associations in Latin America has become a subject of study in the last two decades, the focus of enquiry has not been motor clubs.[8] Most recently the relationship between motor clubs and the state in Argentina has been studied by Anahí Ballent in her history of national road policies and by Melina Piglia in relation to roads, tourism and civil associations.[9] This paper deepens the analysis by offering a wider understanding of the history of motor clubs in Argentina and their role in spreading the use of automobile and shaping automobility during the first half of the twentieth century. It also highlights the peculiarity of the Argentinean motor clubs in the international context by reconstructing how they promoted and shaped an 'automobile culture', transformed the automobile and roads into public questions and the foci of state policies, and they created the material conditions for the circulation of vehicles, for automobile tourism in particular.

The study is based on a systematic reading of the monthly publications of both clubs.[10] These sources have been complemented, where possible, by other sources, such as bulletins and annual records of the state petrol company and the National Highways administration, records of the debates in the National Congress, and magazines.

Within the Latin American context, Argentina is unusual. During the 1920s and 1930s it was the Latin American country with the highest number of cars, ranking between fourth and seventh in the world. Above all, its car-to-population ratio was the highest in Latin America and similar to that prevailing in Europe.[11] In 1910 there were 4800 automobiles in Argentina. In 1921 their number had risen to 75,000 and ten years later there were around 320,000 vehicles. Following a contraction during the worst years of the world economic crisis, the number of cars and trucks continued to grow after 1935 (Figure 2).[12] These statistics become more relevant if they are considered within the context of an extensive country with low population and a lack of regularly used roads.[13]

Together with the expansion of meat and grain export activities, the railroad network, built mostly with British capital, spread rapidly from mid nineteenth century onwards. It connected the ranches (*estancias*) in the pampas and the areas which produced goods for the domestic market (like sugar or wine) with the main port for exports and the greatest consumer of imported goods, namely, Buenos Aires. There were few roads complementing the railway network: most were largely unimproved dirt tracks, impassable after heavy rain. Anahí Ballent has determined that by 1932 there were only about 2000 km of permanent roads. Most roads suitable for automobiles were located in the vicinity of the big cities, where most of the automobiles were. However, rural use of automobiles also grew, especially with changes to vehicles throughout the 1920s and the coming of the tractor.

As in Brazil or Chile, automobiles arrived in Argentina thanks to urban social élites, but were soon adopted by broader social groups, their use spreading rapidly. This was connected with another characteristic that set Argentina apart from the rest of Latin America: the existence of a broad and dynamic group of professionals, merchants and small industrialists, mostly urban. They were a product of the marked rise in social mobility generated by the success of the agro-export economy.[14] Furthermore, civil society in Argentina in the first half of the twentieth century was particularly vibrant, due especially to the existence of a dense network of voluntary associations that successfully influenced the State and public opinion on a variety of public matters.

I argue that, within this social, economic, political and cultural context, Argentinean motor clubs (unlike other Latin American clubs), became political actors and participated in the public arena. They were impelled not only by the modernist elites but, fundamentally, by the demands of the rising middle classes that embraced technical modernisation and whose access to automobiles was increasing. Moreover, unlike the United States or Europe, Argentinean motor clubs had to replace or complement inadequate state initiatives.

The opening years

Founded in Buenos Aires at the start of the twentieth century by members of a city élite interested in sports and modern means of transport, the ACA

and the TCA were part of the hierarchical framework of élite social and sports clubs. Although they had different profiles and aims during their first decade, they converged in their appreciation of automobiles and their participation in car and motorcycle competitions.

The goal of the Argentine Automobile Club, founded in 1904, was to promote automobilism, defined by the Club as a sport which included the use of cars in long-distance or speed races as well as in excursions and tourism. Although some rhetoric of general interest is recorded in the creation of its statutes,[15] the activities of the club up to the 1920s were geared to promoting its members' practical and recreational interests: supplying technical information about vehicles, organising sports competitions and promoting sociability among social peers who shared a modern culture symbolised by the automobile.

In 1907, some members of the management committee of the ACA founded the TCA. Inspired by similar European associations founded a few years previously, the TCA aimed, from its inception, to campaign in favour of certain 'public causes': the development of tourism in Argentina and road improvement as a precondition for tourism.[16] The TCA distanced itself from clubs like the ACA, centred on the car and car sports; it pursued broader and 'higher' aims. It also set itself apart from the European Touring clubs which could devote their efforts solely to promoting tourism: in Argentina, the TCA argued, the immense territorial extension and the lack of government action, meant that tourism could not yet become a source of wealth.[17] These divergent goals gave the two clubs different institutional profiles. Whereas the TCA was a voluntary association that focused on public action and sought to increase its membership throughout the country in order to support the road cause, the ACA, during its first two decades, was mainly a *porteño* social and sports club, small in size and slow in growth (Figure 1).[18]

The public policy that the Argentine Touring Club proposed was, firstly, to educate and publicise. From this perspective, the Club magazine, first published in January 1909, had a central role in providing arguments in favour of reforming traffic regulations to improve car circulation, and in gathering and providing information on touring circuits in the vicinity of the city.

This action, however, had a more tangible dimension: the TCA persuaded the State, which lacked a technical bureaucracy for road building, to allow it to plan some roads, to coordinate both publicly and privately funded road works, or to prepare the guidelines for traffic regulations. The club also drew up and published the first maps of roads around Buenos Aires city and the main seaside resort, Mar del Plata.[19] The ability of the TCA to directly affect the planning and construction of roadways was very much a product of the network of social and political relationships of the club managers and members, many of whom belonged to prominent families or were important officials in the city of Buenos Aires or in the provincial governments. Thanks to these connections, in 1910 the TCA was able to obtain from the Minister of Public Works of the Province of Buenos

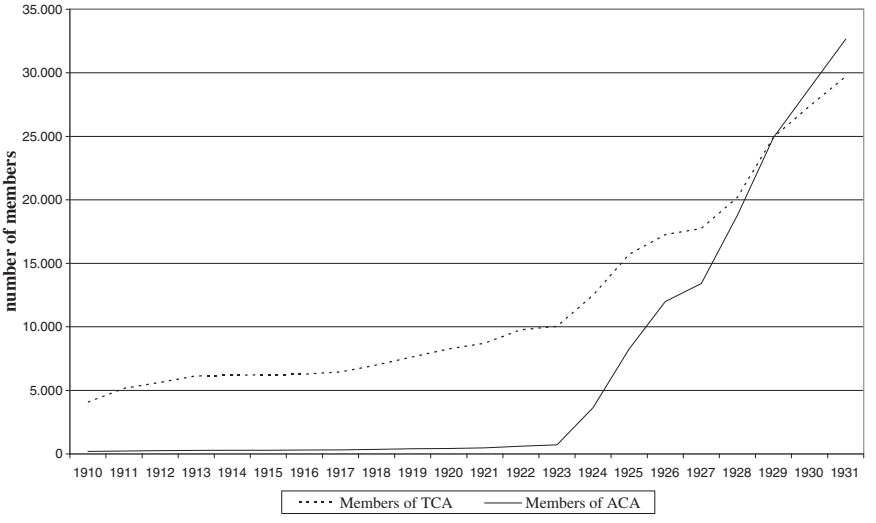

Figure 1 Annual membership growth in the ACA and TCA. Source: compiled from ACA and TCA magazines and ACA Annual Reports. TCA membership numbers for 1931–43 are not available.

Aires (who was a club member), the role of creating the General Roadworks Administration of the Province; the Vice-President of the TCA became the first President of its Board of Directors.[20]

The 1920s: road administration as a public cause

After the crisis of the Great War, the Argentine economy began to show signs of recovery. This was quickly reflected by the sustained growth of imported automobiles (Figure 2). The spread and technical development of automobiles made it increasingly necessary to have firm roads, whose construction was costly and complex and exceeded the reach of the clubs.

The spread of automobiles also stimulated the appearance of a field of interests centred on the automobile and the roads. Key interest groups were local businesses connected with cars (ranging from vehicle importers to manufacturers of cement and pavements), car owners, professionals with relevant interests (civil engineers, for example), and an increasingly specialised press. These sectors turned diverse interests into public matters and pressurised the State, both through their corporative organisations and through voluntary associations like the TCA and the ACA.

The growth of voluntary associations and corporations in Argentina in the 1920s was directly linked to major political changes. Principally, between 1912 and 1930 there was mass political democratisation, associated with the granting of universal male suffrage and the secret and compulsory ballot (1912). In addition, the growth of the Radical Party, which replaced the Conservative Party in office between 1916 and 1930, displaced some

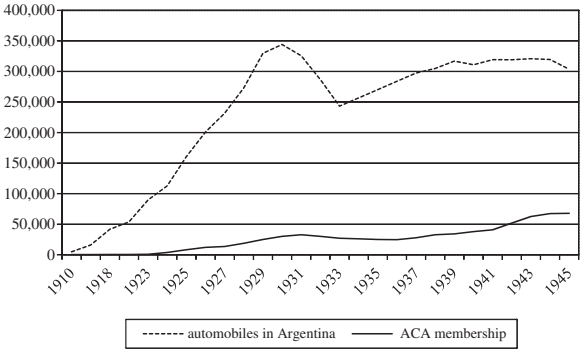

Figure 2 Growth in automobile registration in Argentina and ACA membership. Source: compiled from World Automobile Statistics, Annual Reports of the National Highway Administration of 1940 and 1942, ACA Magazine and ACA Annual Report.

sectors of the élites, detaching them from the decision-making process concerning public policies.[21] These changes strengthened Argentine civil society as a sphere capable of influencing and pressuring the State, this as an alternative to or complementary to the strictly political circuit of the political parties and the Congress.

After a period of financial crisis associated with the economic consequences of the First World War, the Touring Club redefined its public role, now detached from the technical state offices which dealt with road policies: henceforth it offered guidance in matters of road administration and sought to consolidate the public will to pressure the State to that effect. The TCA considered that roads were a public issue: they were a key to economic prosperity and to the country's modernisation. They were also considered a central tool against the so-called 'desert', the economic and spiritual isolation of hinterland communities that Argentine cultural élites had been denouncing since the nineteenth century. For the TCA, roads transported civilisation and progress to backward communities, brought the countryside closer to the cities, and reduced the gap between Buenos Aires and the rest of the country. Patriotic feelings were strengthened by travel by car and thus the discovery of the homeland that roads made possible.

As had happened in the USA and other 'new' nations, from the last decades of the nineteenth-century a series of scientific, literary and political writings focused the national identity of Argentineans on the beauties and 'natural' wealth of the country, providing the 'roots' for the construction of a common national identity in a country of immigrants.

Roads were seen as a central public issue that had consequences for the welfare of the nation as a whole. The TCA considered that the state had to plan and co-ordinate the solution to these problems. They also considered that, in the face of limited state action, it was their patriotic duty to supplement it with public interventions which would be more effective if several forces joined together to achieve the same goals.[22] Within this context, the

TCA developed a strategy focused on articulating the support of those interested in the road issue while keeping control of the initiative. Simultaneously, the club pushed the State to fulfill its regulatory role, presenting bills and technical studies and precedents for road legislation, holding meetings, exhibitions and parades. The TCA aimed to set the agenda by bringing together those interested in road improvements into one unified project.

To further this aim, from 1918 the TCA organised the First National Road Congress (1922), modelled on the Road Congresses which had been taking place in Paris since 1908.[23] It was attended by representatives from different government agencies, and from development, business and technical associations. The participants agreed on some essential questions: the importance of centralised and systematic road planning, the assignment of roles to central, provincial and local governments in the building, maintenance and regulation of the road network and, finally, the need for an autonomous administrative body which would manage funds, and plan and construct roadways. Participants at the Congress agreed that funding the roads should be undertaken by the automobile owners through tariffs on the importation of cars and spare parts, taxes on liquid fuels and car license plate charges. Other proposals considered taxing more direct beneficiaries such as rural owners of land adjacent to the roads. Tolls were rejected as a source of national road funding since they were considered a limit on the freedom of circulation and were therefore unconstitutional. The consensus reached at the Congress was decisive in defining the norms which guided the diagnosis of road problems and their solutions over the next ten years. A body of so-called 'certainties', actively advertised by automobile clubs, the press and the business associations, gradually came to form part of the common sense concerning roads. The conclusions of the Congress were also crucial in the drafting of two official projects for the road administration bill presented to the National Congress (a failed attempt in 1925 and a successful one in 1932).[24]

During the closing ceremony, there was a parade of vehicles in downtown Buenos Aires, and the proposals and conclusions of the Road Congress were formally delivered to the National Congress. The picturesque parade of old and new vehicles was repeated in 1923. In 1924 it was replaced by an exhibition in which the Argentine president, Marcelo T. de Alvear, expressed his commitment to solving the road problem and highlighted the need for private action (by 'men of good will') to cooperate with the State.[25]

The new situation, in the aftermath of the First World War, had a greater impact on the ACA than the TCA. The association was fully identified with the automobile and, from 1913 on, it attracted representatives of the automobile trade, especially automobile importers. These close ties between the ACA and car-related businesses, already common in the rest of the world, increased in the 1920s. Between 1919 and 1930 the president of the club was on four occasions a businessman with links to the automobile trade. Concern for roadworks was a consequence of this initial interest in the spread of cars. Around 1922, while the TCA was organising its successful

Roadworks Congress, the ACA decided to launch a campaign in favour of road building and the development of the automobile, turning these issues into public causes.

This change was quickly expressed by the Club's magazine which had first been published around mid-1918. The ACA, which had been 'a refuge of exquisite sociability' led by the aristocratic élite, had now incorporated a new leadership of 'business men and industrialists' whose mission was to guide the state and to cooperate, to the best of their possibilities, in improving roads.[26]

The Club's new public mission had an educational side. It was necessary to convince the public and the state of the collective benefits to be had from the spread of the automobile and the improvement of the road network. The magazine played a highly relevant role in this project, and articles associating cars and roads with cultural modernity, economic progress and even national unity multiplied. The magazine also helped to define a 'collective' (which the Argentine Automobile Club aspired to represent), made up of people (car owners) interested not only in the direct betterment of conditions for drivers, but also in patriotic ends, associating the automobile with national progress. The magazine also contributed to the construction of a common identity for this collective, hinging on a set of values which constituted an incipient 'automobile culture' in which road development, automobile associations, auto-mobility and touring the country by car were central themes.[27] The Automobile Salon, an annual exhibition of vehicles, car parts and accessories, organised to highlight improvements in the automobile industry and create a public conscience favourable to motor vehicles, was another aspect of this campaign.

The ACA framed the question in much the same way as the TCA: roads were responsible for unifying the national territory, just like railroads in the nineteenth century, and their role was paramount in promoting progress, ushering in modernity and fostering national integrity. However, while the TCA affirmed itself to be concerned with the common good and appealed to all citizens patriotically concerned with the question of the roads, the ACA had a different approach in its public action. On the one hand, it stressed the automobile itself as an agent of modernity and identified itself much more directly as the representative of a sector, the individual consumers of cars, affirming at the same time that these sectorial interests coincided with those of the nation. On the other hand, it did not believe that the problem of the roads was an affair for the State alone, but considered that its responsibility was to cooperate directly with the State, a position which its leaders characterised as 'practical patriotism'.

From 1922, the Club's new Technical Topography Office surveyed thousands of kilometres of roads, set up sign posts and produced dozens of charts and maps. In a further step, in 1926 the Roads Division was created, absorbing and extending the activities of the Technical Topography Office while also taking over the maintenance of some roads.[28] This practical cooperation with the state marked an important difference between ACA and

similar clubs in the rest of the world, because it had a greater scope and was part of a broader project, at a time when the central issue, the building of roads, had already been dealt with in the USA and in Europe.

The ACA's funds and legitimacy in the eyes of the State, depended largely on extending its membership, so club management actively sought to increase it. The Club's membership rose from 470 in 1921 to 32,652 in 1931 (Figure 1). The road project, that benefited the automobile drivers and legitimised the role of the Club in the eyes of public opinion and the State, was frequently-used as an argument to attract new members in the club's annual recruitment campaigns.[29]

Attracting and satisfying new members meant offering them not only the possibility of supporting a patriotic cause but also direct benefits. In order to do this the ACA gradually re-positioned itself. It expanded services essential to making automobile trips practical: it set up petrol stations on the main roads, organised group travel along difficult roads, surveyed and sign-posted roads, printed and distributed guide maps, and supplied relatively up-to-date information on the state of roads (via a network of club delegations across the country).

In addition, the ACA gained prestige and popularity for its role in developing motor sports, particularly the long-distance road races, which were considered partly a form of road advertising. The ACA gained control over motor sports (organising or inspecting the races included in the national championship), especially after being incorporated into the Recognized Automobile Clubs Federation, in 1929.

In all, the public activities of the ACA in the 1920s, its role in sporting activities and its practical co-operation with the State in improving conditions for the circulation of automobiles, contributed to its identification as a representative of motorists' interests. This identification, with an albeit restricted interest (that of consumers), would be highly important in the following decade in its dealings with the state and public opinion.

As a result of these changes of profile, the ACA and TCA, which had been complementary clubs, began to compete, both for the attention of the State and of public opinion, and to capture the growing number of new car owners as members. We do not have sources which give us certain knowledge of the differences between the members of the two clubs, but it seems likely that they appealed to different fractions of the middle class. It is possible that the TCA, which had a reputation for greater refinement, was more attractive to liberal professionals who aspired to a certain social distinction, while traders and businessmen were associated with the ACA.

The 1930s: coordinating with the State

The global and local economic crisis affected the ACA's finances. Thousands of members left the association: between 1931 and 1936 it lost almost twenty-five per cent of its membership.[30] Arrears accumulated and the provincial delegations became disorganised. The official links between

the ACA and vehicle importers came to an end and many Club leaders that belonged to automobile trade left the ACA. The Club's management committees became populated by people of a more varied professional background: the military, government administrators and even some politicians.

The reduction in resources made it essential for the Club to reinforce its appeal (and thus its benefits) to actual and possible members. The new management adapted the services offered to the demands of the new members who were now the target of the Club's recruitment campaigns. Notably, the targets were small and medium producers and merchants who had become automobile owners due to the fall in vehicle prices and to the system of sale by instalments offered by the US car companies which moved into the country after World War I.[31] The ACA's offer in the 1930s expanded on three fronts: free mechanical assistance, acquisition and improvement of camping sites, and the building of and providing equipment for petrol stations and road assistance points.

The new period was also characterised by increasing ties to the state, partly due to the history of practical co-operation the Club had built, partly because of the political relationships between the new management and the conservative government. These changes were also connected to the expansion of the State into the economic and social spheres as a result of the deep international economic crisis. The transformation was carried out by governments which had little political legitimacy: in 1930 a combined military and civilian coup deposed President Hipólito Yrigoyen. The succeeding constitutional governments, of a conservative disposition, were characterised by systematic electoral fraud. In the eyes of these governments, public works offered not only a solution to economic difficulties but also an alternative strategy of legitimation.[32]

Public works grew rapidly and new state agencies were created to regulate and promote previously neglected economic and social activities. These new agencies were open to participation by representatives of private interests. Road policies, particularly, received a boost. Building a national network of roads was considered a solution both to unemployment and to reduced agrarian profitability resulting from the reduction of exports (both in price and volume) and the increase in railroad freight costs. The road policy also seemed to offer solutions to the lack of territorial integration, a problem which the new government considered crucial.[33] Although there was agreement on the role of roads as agents of economic and cultural modernisation and of national unification (arguments present in the failed projects of the 1920s), the state only decided to tackle the building of roadways in a systematic way when the international economic crisis posed challenges to the viability of the economy.[34] On the other hand, the coup had removed one of the obstacles that in the previous decade had stopped projects for a national law on roads, by ensuring, by means of fraud, a compliant Congress.

Argentina's National Roadways Act of 1932, followed the criteria outlined in the National Roads Congress in 1922: it centralised national roadwork policies in a new autonomous agency endowed with new and greater

resources. A tax on liquid fuel and lubricants was levied to fund the planning, building and maintenance of a national network of main roads, complemented by secondary roads, built by the provinces with the aid of resources from the federal roads fund.[35] As in the case of the project which the TCA had defended in the 1920s, the new National Highways Administration [Dirección Nacional de Vialidad, or DNV] was to be headed by a Board of Directors which included representatives of sector-based interests: transport companies, rural associations and tourism and motoring associations.[36] This inclusion did not cause conflict: both socialists and conservatives, although on wholly different grounds, regarded functional representation as a guarantee that the agency would move away from local politics and electioneering, would abide by 'technical' criteria and would prevent state inefficiency.[37] The ACA had taken part in the drafting of the Bill: one of the Club's leaders, deputy Carlos A. Pueyrredón, had a key role in the Chamber of Deputees Transport Committee that studied the project, and some Club's representatives were consulted by the Commission.

The ACA was chosen by the government to represent motoring associations in the DNV. It was not the only possible candidate for that position and, as has been pointed out, the TCA had a longer record in relation to campaigning for a National Highways Act. By choosing the ACA, which had become identified in the 1920s with the interests of motorists, the government' approach seemed to exclude the technical expertise and the 'common good' that the TCA purported to represent. Rather, the government preferred one that would include the different sectorial interests involved, as long as they did not go against the development the government was encouraging,[38] so that the State would later opt for the choice that satisfied the general interests.[39]

The road works carried out by the State were considerable: the 2000 km of permanent roads which existed in 1932 had become more than 73,000 by 1946, although only ten per cent consisted of paved roads (two thirds of which were made using cheap materials).[40] In the context of an extensive country with low traffic density and limited resources to devote to road building, the DNV prioritised the construction of the greatest number of roads, although these were of inferior quality. It was hoped that once the network was built, it would be improved gradually.[41] This implied, by the end of the period, increasing expenditure on road maintenance, which reduced funds for upgrading or building new routes (Figure 3).

There are no available sources allowing detailed examination of decision-making processes within the DNV, or of the role played by the ACA as a member of the Board of Directors. However, there are signs that the Club's role was more than simply ornamental. In principle, the participation of the ACA in the DNV gave it the drive to boost several projects of relevance for the association. One such was the road between Buenos Aires and Mar del Plata (RN 2) which owed its existence to the survey, signposting, maintenance and assistance operations undertaken by the ACA in the 1920s.[42] Another was the Panamerican Highway project, which had been adopted

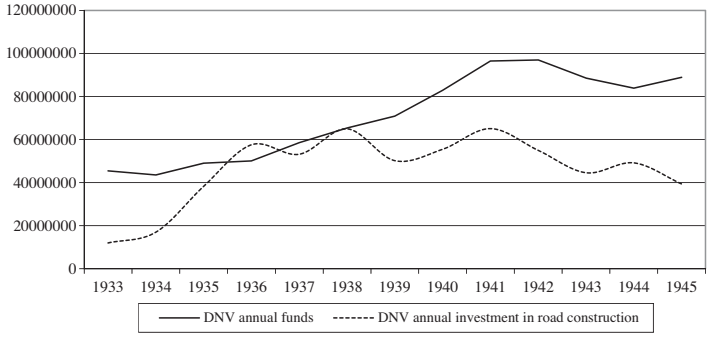

Figure 3 DNV resources and investments in road construction. Source: López Airaghi, *Ley Nacional de Vialidad*, 42. DNV funds were increased by a reform in the Law in 1939. They decreased between 1943–45 due to the fuel scarcity caused by the Second World War.

by the Club in the 1930s one of their 'public causes'. The ACA had organised motoring competitions to promote the projected international road,[43] and the Panamerican Highway became a powerful symbol for the Club. The ideal of international brothership was reproduced in the institution's magazines and even on the walls of the ACA's central building.[44]

The ACA representative in the DNV had a role in the development of each of these projects, as recorded in the administration's Annual Reports. During the building of the last stage of RN 2, the ACA representative was given the task of inspecting the road and of advising on the best detours while construction was in progress. As a private entity, the ACA was responsible for signposting the road linking the city of Dolores with the 'Coastal Roadway', an alternative route to Mar del Plata during the construction of RN2.[45] Similarly, in 1940 the ACA was given the task of surveying connections between the Argentine stretch of the Panamerican Highway System and those of Perú and Bolivia, and setting up contacts with Peruvian and Bolivian technicians.

The ACA director travelled with the technical advisor of the Club's Roads Division. Aside from his official functions, he was responsible for the final preparations of the Buenos Aires-Lima Grand Prix held in 1940.[46] Evidently, DNV board members performed two roles. On the one hand they were paid government officials with a link to their associations of origin, whose resources and public support were also used to benefit the government agency. On the other hand they enabled the Club to foster and promote its own projects, and allow further collaborations with the state.

The most fruitful bond between the ACA and the state was the relation with Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales (YPF), the state oil company. In August 1936 an agreement was signed between YPF and ACA, by which the club was committed to selling YPF products exclusively. In return the ACA received credit on products with which to carry forward an unprecedented plan for building a national network of service stations.[47]

The oil policy of the 1930s moved away from both the nationalisation projects of deposed president Yrigoyen, and free trade in oil. The policy

involved national control of oil reserves, self-sufficiency as a long-term goal, and regulation of oil production and commercialisation. YPF was a central pillar of this arrangement. From 1935 onwards, the government had countered the price war of the foreign oil companies (Standard Oil and Royal Dutch), against YPF with a series of official policies, including banning exports of oil and petroleum-derived products and regulating the domestic fuel market through a system of market quotas benefitting YPF. The agreements also created an Arbitration Court to solve issues between the signatory parties.[48]

In this context, YPF and ACA negotiated the commercialisation agreement. Horacio Morixe (who had played a central role in the design of the new petroleum policy and became a member of the Court of Arbitration and then YPF director), joined the ACA Management Commission soon after that and lobbied for the Club to obtain the agreement.[49] The first stage of the plan involved works in the main cities (where monumental buildings would serve both as social headquarters to the Club's delegations and as petrol stations), and also the building of petrol stations along the main roads. The pace of construction was rapid: between 1938 and 1943 more than eighty stations were inaugurated (Figure 4).

The Club absorbed only a small proportion of the petrol produced by YPF, but in individual terms it became YPF's main retailer.[50] On the other hand, the ACA sold petrol to its members at a discount price, which implied a large and potentially growing body of customers, made up in 1942 of approximately one out of every eight vehicle drivers. Finally, although the Club had to confront the growing costs of its expanding structure, the fact that it was a non-profit organisation allowed it to operate with margins which were lower than those of other retailers.[51]

According to the ACA, the stations were operating at a loss which had to be covered with the member fees.[52] However, the agreement was beneficial to the Club from the point of view of increasing the strength of the institution: it became one of the power groups in cities and towns and an agent of the 'Argentinisation' of roads, while at the same time increasing its capacity to provide other services, which won it even more members.

From the point of view of the State, petrol stations were a necessary complement to the national and provincial road network because they allowed travel along the new roads, especially in stretches of land (such as Patagonia) where population was scarce and therefore not attractive to private petrol retailers.[53] Once the system of ACA-YPF petrol stations was set up they became an instrument for other public policies. For example, when in 1942 the worsening of Word War II caused a rationing of rubber, the State allowed car owners to purchase new tires conditional on customers proving their need through a certificate granted by the ACA; if a local ACA office was not available in the locality, a certificate signed by the police and YPF would suffice.[54]

The scale reached by the ACA in the 1930s almost completely eclipsed the public influence of the TCA. While the ACA strengthened its economic capacity, its links to the state and its popularity and prestige, the TCA

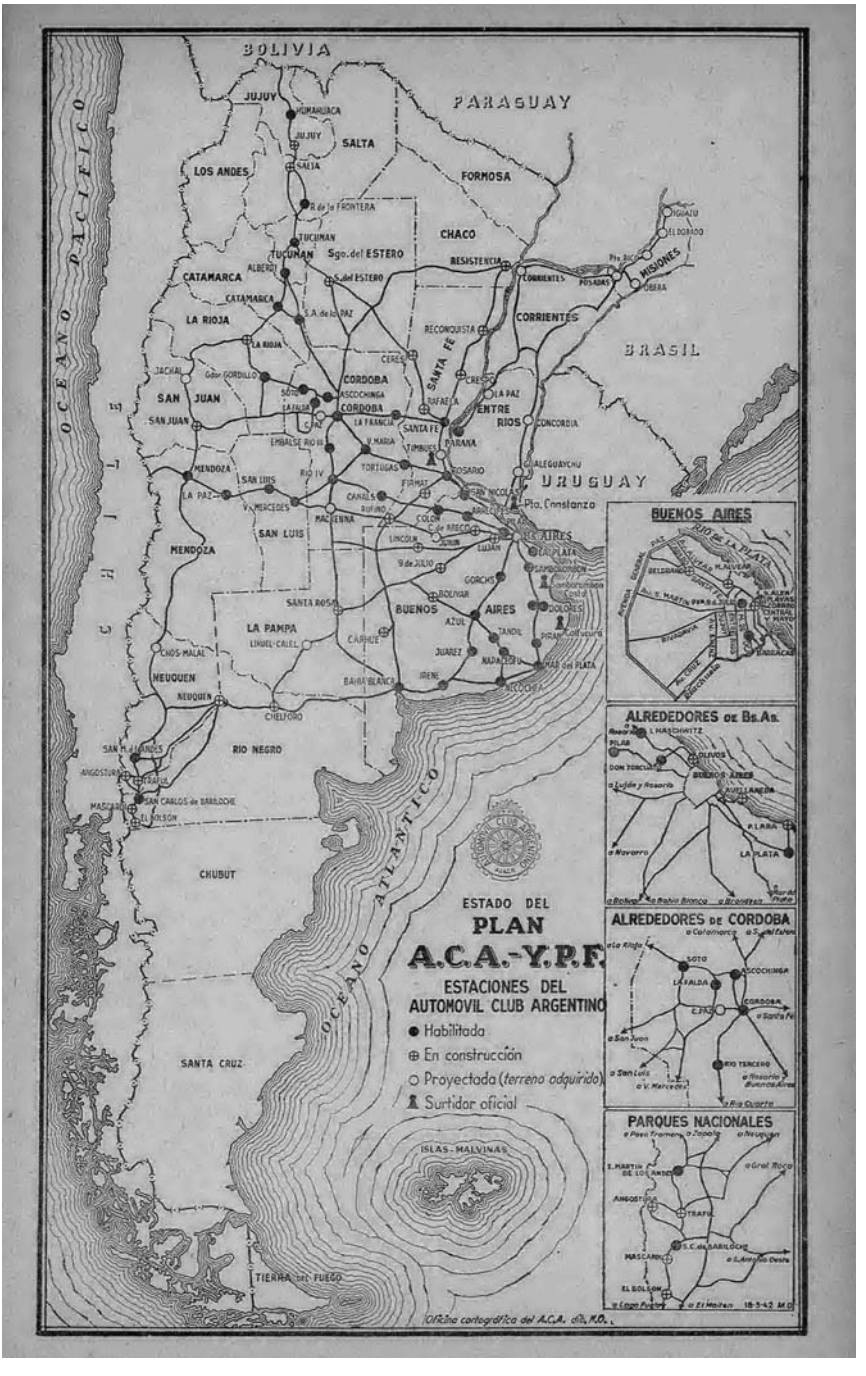

Figure 4 ACA-YPF petrol stations, December 1942. The map symbols refer to petrol stations that are open, under construction and projected, and to official petrol pumps. Source: ACA, *Guía de viaje. Zona centro*, Buenos Aires, 1943.

attempted to apply the same formula which had been proved successful by the ACA and aimed to provide its members with increased benefits. From 1933 onwards, the increasing benefits included one that would be long lasting, namely, automobile insurance. This was handled at first through the Franco Argentina company and from 1939 through TCA's own insurance company, a co-operative attached to the Club.

Conclusion

The rapid expansion of the automobile and of the culture of 'automobility' in Argentina created, among other things, a wide field of interests around automobiles and road building, which emerged in the 1910s and was consolidated after World War I. Between 1910 and 1943 the ACA and the TCA became an important node in this web of interests. The two clubs turned themselves into the representatives of legitimate interests, mobilising public opinion, transforming their private interests into public matters, and successfully influencing the state to promote these interests.

As founded, the two automobile clubs had complementary functions. The ACA was devoted to the social interaction of car lovers living in the city of Buenos Aires and the TCA was devoted to public action. The TCA evolved through its increasing membership and offices, and through strategies of public intervention when the Radical Party came to power. In the 1920s, removed from direct access to road policy decision-making, the TCA focused most of its activity on public action supporting the passing of a highway bill and the construction of a national road network. Its main strategy centred on bringing together all those interested in the project, under the Club's leadership, at congresses, exhibitions and public meetings, to reach agreement on the diagnosis and listing of possible solutions, and to push the State to adopt them.

The ACA, on the other hand, underwent a profound change in its institutional profile, partly linked to the change in leadership, which in the 1920s saw the emergence of members connected to car-related businesses. First, the ACA embraced public action in favour of roads. It did so inside the framework with which the TCA had defined the 'road problem', but with a particular difference: it co-operated directly with the State in road matters. Second, the Club evolved a series of strategies leading to an astonishing expansion of its membership and its geographical reach. These strategies were based on the identification of the institution as the motorist's representative. In this process it was aided by its increasing authority in motor racing, which was very popular in those years. The ACA acquired a new character, further removed from the English social and sporting club model of the late nineteenth century, and closer to the mass culture and to the middle-sector automobile consumers.

The divergent profiles of the ACA and the TCA led to different performances during the 1930s when the State intervened in the economy and society with new forms of incorporating private interests into the creation

of public policies. The ACA achieved a greater articulation with the State, as it was represented on the Boards of Directors of the DNV, of YPF and also, later, of the National Parks Administration. Conversely, the public influence of TCA diminished throughout the decade, although it retained some of its influence in the sphere of tourism.

The turning point in the history of Argentina's two automobile clubs was the agreement between ACA and YPF. From then on, the ACA's public influence and financial capacity placed it at a level unattainable by the TCA. By the early 1940s the ACA had become a large service company and, indeed, almost a para-statal institution, as the State delegated public functions to the Club. The TCA belatedly and not very successfully, attempted to imitate some of the strategies which had made the ACA so popular. Eventually, it created a new profile as a provider of automobile insurance.

The ACA and TCA had a decisive influence during the 1920s. They played a role in diagnosing and listing possible solutions to road and tourism challenges, and provided reference points for most of the road and tourism policies in the following decades. At the same time, both clubs actively helped to create a national network of roads through their participation in the planning agencies. Above all, they made the new roadways accessible by signposting them and by establishing petrol stations. The network of petrol stations also provided a quasi-state presence in remote locations where the national state's presence was very weak: petrol stations were used as a base for the deployment of other *national* functions, such as monitoring the weather and condition of the roads, or rationing rubber or fuel during the war. At the same time, the clubs' actions of organising sporting events, tours and rally drives and printing travel guides and maps became educational tools in the symbolic construction of the road. Not least Argentina's two automobile clubs formed and spread new practices of road culture and automobility.

Notes

1 A civilisation marked by the individual in motion, automobility and speed. See Guillermo Giucci, *La Vida Cultural del Automóvil. Rutas de la Modernidad Cinética* (Bernal, Universidad Nacional de Quilmes Editorial y Prometeo, 2007), pp. 15–24; John Urry, *Sociology Beyond Societies: Mobility for the Twenty-First Century* (London and New York, Routledge, 2000).

2 See Clay McShane, *Down the Asphalt Path: The Automobile and the American City* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 100–21.

3 See Peter Norton, *Fighting Traffic* (Boston, MIT, 2008), p. 190.

4 See Ellen Furlough, 'Une Leçon des Choses: Tourism, Empire and the Nation in Interwar France', *French Historical Studies*, 25:3 (Summer 2002).

5 See 'El Automóvil Club de Francia', *Revista del TCA* (July 1909), 413–14.

6 As in the Americas, in Europe the Automobile Clubs played a remarkable role in shaping the automobility culture. See Craig Horner, '"Modest Motoring" and the Emergence of Automobility in the United Kingdom', *Transfers*, 2:3 (2012).

7 See Massimo Moraglio, 'Per Una Storia Delle Autostrade Italiane: Il Periodo Tra Le Due Guerre Mondiali', *Storia Urbana,* 100 (2002).

8 Motor clubs are incidentally analysed by Renato, 'Redes de Mobilidade e Urbanismo em São Paulo: das Radiais/Perimetrais do Plano de Avenidas à Malha Direcional PUB', *Arquitextos* 082 (Marzo 2007), http://www.vitruvius.com.br/arquitextos/arq082/arq082_00.asp (accessed 5 September 2013); Rodrigo Booth, 'Automóviles y Carreteras. Movilidad, Modernización y Transformación Territorial en Chile, 1913–31' (PhD, diss., Pontificia

Universidad de Chile, 2009), http://doctoradofadeu.uc.cl/publicaciones/publicacion/ver_tesis?id=4 (accessed 21 September 2013); Giucci, *La vida cultural del automóvil*.

9 See Anahí Ballent, 'Kilómetro Cero: la Construcción del Universo Simbólico del Camino en la Argentina de los Años Treinta', *Boletín del Instituto de Historia Argentina y Americana 'Dr. Emilio Ravignani'*, 27 (1st Semester 2005), http://www.scielo.org.ar/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0524-97672005000100004&lng=es&nrm=iso&tlng=es (accessed 2 June 2011); Melina Piglia, *Autos, Rutas y Turismo. El Automóvil Club Argentino y el Estado* (Buenos Aires, siglo XXI, 2014).

10 The TCA archives were lost following its liquidation in the 1990s, and I have not been allowed access to those of the ACA.

11 Argentina had 74 inhabitants per car in 1923, France had 73.

12 Until the late 1950s Argentina imported almost all its motor vehicles, although there was local production of some spare parts.

13 The total area of the country is 2,800,000 km^2. The population was 8,000,000 in 1914 and 15,000,000 in 1947. Mexico, with 70 per cent of Argentina's area, had a population of 15,000,000 inhabitants in 1910.

14 See Roberto Russel (ed.), *Argentina 1910–2010, Balance del Siglo* (Buenos Aires, Taurus, 2010), pp. 103–66.

15 See 'Acta de Fundación del ACA', *Autoclub* (Junio de 1964).

16 See editorial, 'Nuestra Revista', *Revista del TCA* (January 1909), 1.

17 'El TCA y sus similares europeos', en *Revista del TCA* (July 1918), 2300.

18 'La obra del TCA', *Revista del TCA* (January 1909), 3.

19 *Ibid*., 2.

20 See *Guía del TCA*, 278–89.

21 For more on Argentine political history see Luis Alberto Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), pp. 27–90.

22 See 'La Acción del Estado y la Acción Privada. La Obra del TCA', *Revista del TCA* (January 1922), 4274.

23 Since no evidence has been found of links with the Brazilian clubs until 1922, it is unlikely that it received its inspiration in the *congressos da strada* organised at Rio de Janeiro in 1916 and in 1922.

24 The projects were not approved, largely because the prevailing political conflicts (within radicalism and between the radicals and conservatives) kept Congress paralysed. In addition, until the 1930 crisis, the agricultural export economy still had high profit margins and generalised road construction requiring a massive budgetary effort, did not seem urgent. See Romero, *A History of Argentina*, pp. 27–58.

25 See 'La Primera Exposición Nacional de Vialidad', *Revista del TCA* (May 1924), 5692.

26 See 'Automovilismo sin Caminos', *Revista del ACA* (October 1923), 11.

27 See Ballent, 'Kilómetro Cero', 111.

28 The Association of Automobile and Annexes Importers, and the associations of importers of fuels and lubricants also had representatives in the Roads Division, and contributed to the 'road fund' which paid for road works.

29 See the sixth campaign for the recruitment of members of ACA, *Transportes y Comunicaciones*, 11 (June 1930).

30 The Club lost more than 8,000 members between 1931 and 1936, but its membership recovered after that date; by 1940 it had almost 14,000 new members.

31 Studebaker came to Argentina in 1918, Ford Motors in 1922 and General Motors in 1925. The setting up of assembly plants in Argentina allowed US automobile companies to offer more competitive prices and to ensure the supply of spare parts and accessories.

32 See Romero, *A History of Argentina*, pp. 59–72.

33 The Highway Bill was complemented by the building of grain elevators (both were needed to lower costs in the agro export business) and also by the creation of the National Parks (1934) aimed at strengthening national identity and the affirmation of sovereignty in the borderline regions .

34 On this issue see Ballent, 'Kilómetro Cero', 115.

35 See the debate on the National Roadworks Law in *Honorable Cámara de Diputados de la Nación* (26, 27 September 1932), 645–6.

36 See the debate on the National Roadworks Law, 646.

37 See Ballent, 'Kilómetro Cero', 115.

38 The DNV did not include the British railways, since the new roads competed directly against them.

39 The Argentine state seems to have been weaker vis-a-vis civil society than others in the region, such as Brazil. However, compared with its own evolution, in the 1930s it acquired a greater capacity to intervene in and regulate social and economic life. In areas such as highway administration, technical autonomy was strengthened, and while the consultation of sectoral interests was formally incorporated into the elaboration of policies, the state reserved to itself the role of arbitration. In other areas, such as financial policy, however, the state ended up at the mercy of corporations. See Plotkin, Mariano y Zimmermann Eduardo (comp.), *Las Prácticas del Estado. Política, Sociedad y Elites Estatales en la Argentina del Siglo XX* (Buenos Aires, Edhasa, 2012), pp. 67–130; Skocpol, Theda and Weir, Margaret, 'Las Estructuras del Estado: una Respuesta "Keynesiana" a la Gran Depresión', *Zona Abierta*, 63–4, 1993.
40 See Antonio López Airaghi, *Ley Nacional de Vialidad. Necesidad de Aumentar sus Recursos y Perfeccionar su Aplicación* (Tucumán, 1946), 22.
41 In 1933 the cost of building 1 km of concrete road ($51,000) was equivalent to that of 12.6 km of gravel road. See *Memoria de la DNV 1933* (Buenos Aires, Ministerio de Obras Públicas, 1934), 253.
42 In the 1920s the club had surveyed and signposted the road. It had also built a provisional bridge to cross the Samborombón River and built posts which supplied fuel and offered a resting place to travellers.
43 Melina Piglia, 'Viaje Deportivo, Nación y Territorio. El Automóvil Club Argentino y los Orígenes del Turismo Carretera. Argentina, 1924–38', *Nuevomundo Mundos Nuevos*, 2008, http://nuevomundo.revues.org/41033?lang=es (accessed 23 June 2015).
44 One of the main promoters was Carlos P. Anesi, Vice-President and later President of the ACA. The Panamerican Highway project was intimately related to the parallel construction of the Panamericana Federation of Automobile Clubs, founded in Buenos Aires and presided by Anesi between 1940 and 1948.
45 See *Memoria de la DNV 1937* (Buenos Aires, Ministerio de Obras Públicas, 1938), 44–5.
46 See *Memoria de la DNV, 1940* (Buenos Aires, Ministerio de Obras Públicas, 1941), 50.
47 See Intervención del Ministro de Agricultura en la Interpelación sobre YPF, *Diario de la Honorable Cámara de Diputados de la Nación* (19 June 1940), 669. The agreement was similar to others that YPF had with resellers, although the profit margins were higher.
48 See Nicolás Gadano, *Historia del Petróleo en la Argentina. 1907–1955: Desde los Inicios Hasta la Caída de Perón* (Buenos Aires, Edhasa, 2007), p. 398.
49 See 'El Plan ACA-YPF para la Construcción de Estaciones de Servicio', *Automovilismo* (August 1937).
50 See 'Dictamen del Sr Agente Fiscal Dr Laureano Landaburu (h). YPF y los Convenios con el ACA y las Empresas Petroleras Privadas', in *Boletín de Informaciones Petroleras,* 223 (Marzo de 1943), 25.
51 See Villafañe, Benjamín, *Las Relaciones Entre YPF y el Automóvil Club Argentino. Un Convenio al Servicio del País. En Plena Lucha por la Emancipación Nacional* (Buenos Aires, YPF, 5 de Noviembre de 1942), 11.
52 See 'Funciones del ACA', *Boletín de Informaciones Petroleras,* no. 221 (January 1943), 13.
53 See Villafañe, 11; 'Dictamen del Sr Agente Fiscal', 25.
54 The ACA was also responsible for distributing petrol rationing coupons between 1943 and 1946.

Contributor

Melina Piglia has a degree and a Doctorate in History from Universidad de Buenos Aires (Argentina) and is a professor at Universidad de Mar del Plata (Argentina). She is currently an adjunct researcher at Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas (CONICET). She has investigated topics connected with tourism and mobility history in Argentina during the twentieth century, paying special attention to the relation between the State and civil society associations regarding transport public policies, the spreading of auto-mobility culture, the origins of commercial aviation, and the changes of middle class leisure habits. *E-mail*: pigliamelina@gmail.com