

National Urban Policies as Instruments for Global Urban Agendas Localization: Lessons From Argentina

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Abstract

This article examines how national urban policies (NUPs) function as instruments for localising global frameworks, including the New Urban Agenda and SDGs. Using Argentina’s NUP development (2017–2019) as the primary case and Neuquén’s provincial implementation as a comparative example, this analysis reveals how international sustainability frameworks are translated across governance levels. The research employs stakeholder interviews and documentary analysis to examine policy formulation and implementation processes. Findings reveal significant challenges limiting NUP effectiveness: governance coordination difficulties, limited policy innovation despite international technical support, insufficient implementation mechanisms, and vulnerability to political transitions. These challenges were exacerbated by Argentina’s recent political shift under President Milei’s administration, characterized by state retrenchment and multilateral framework rejection. Argentina’s experience demonstrates that although global frameworks function as “coalition magnets” during policy formulation, sustained implementation requires deeper institutional anchoring beyond international legitimacy alone. The contrast between national policy abandonment and Neuquén’s continued engagement illustrates how federal systems create institutional redundancy for policy resilience. The analysis contributes to policy localisation scholarship by revealing how institutional context, temporal dynamics, actor networks, and implementation mechanisms interact across governance scales. Despite limitations, NUPs remain valuable vehicles for SDGs localisation when developed with appropriate consideration of existing institutional arrangements and implementation pathways, offering lessons for post-2030 sustainability agenda design in multilevel governance systems experiencing political volatility. The Argentine case particularly highlights how federal structures can enable subnational continuity even when national support disappears, suggesting the importance of multi-scalar approaches to global framework implementation.

Keywords

Argentina; multilevel governance; national urban policy; New Urban Agenda; policy implementation; SDGs localisation; territorial planning

1. Introduction

In 2015–2016, the UN adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the New Urban Agenda (NUA), establishing universal frameworks for sustainable urban development. Translating these international commitments into meaningful local action requires effective “localisation”—the process of adapting, implementing, and monitoring global goals at national and subnational levels (Acuto et al., 2023; Caprotti et al., 2017; Croese et al., 2020; Parnell, 2016; Valencia et al., 2019; Watson, 2016).

National Urban Policies (NUPs) have emerged as key localisation instruments. International organizations define a NUP as “a coherent set of decisions through a deliberate government-led process of coordinating and rallying various actors toward a common vision that will promote more transformative, productive, inclusive and resilient urban development for the long term” (OECD et al., 2021, p. 20). Despite their potential, there is limited empirical evidence on how NUPs function as localisation instruments in practice, particularly in federal systems and Latin American contexts.

Argentina presents a compelling case study. Between 2017–2019, Argentina developed a NUP with the UN-Habitat support as part of its NUA implementation commitment within the country’s complex federal structure. However, the NUP was abandoned following the 2019 electoral transition when President Alberto Fernández’s administration dissolved the responsible sub-secretariat. Since December 2023, President Javier Milei’s administration has implemented radical state retrenchment policies, representing an even more dramatic departure from multilateral frameworks. Contrasting with these national political transitions, Neuquén province developed a comprehensive approach to implementing the NUA through a collaborative project with UN-Habitat, demonstrating how subnational governments can maintain engagement with global frameworks despite national policy discontinuity (UN-Habitat & Provincia del Neuquén, 2023).

This article investigates Argentina’s experience developing and implementing a NUP, examining the national policy formulation process (2017–2019) and contrasting it with Neuquén’s provincial implementation (initiated in 2017 but intensified from 2021–2023). Neuquén’s experience represents the sole concrete attempt to localise the NUA in Argentina, serving as the practical implementation experiment that the national NUP could not achieve at scale. The analysis addresses three central questions: (a) How did Argentina’s NUP incorporate NUA and SDG principles? (b) What coordination mechanisms were established between governance levels and stakeholders? And (c) what challenges arose and what lessons emerge for improving NUPs as localisation instruments, considering Argentina’s current political context?

This research contributes to emerging scholarship on SDG localisation mechanisms (Acuto et al., 2023; Croese et al., 2020; Watson, 2016) by providing empirical insights on policy implementation challenges in multilevel governance contexts experiencing political transitions. It argues that while NUPs offer promising potential as localisation tools, their effectiveness depends on appropriate institutional designs,

implementation pathways, and capacity to withstand domestic political shifts—factors that proved particularly challenging in the Argentinian case.

The study proceeds as follows: Section 2 develops a four-dimensional theoretical framework for analysing policy localisation, Section 3 outlines the qualitative methodology, Section 4 provides the empirical background on Argentina's territorial planning evolution and NUP development, Section 5 analyses the localisation process through the theoretical framework's four dimensions, Section 6 discusses broader implications for policy localisation theory, and Section 7 concludes with lessons for post-2030 sustainability agenda design.

2. Theoretical Framework: Localising Global Urban Agendas in the Argentinian Context

This article examines Argentina's NUP development through a four-dimensional policy localisation framework. Drawing on policy mobilities, institutional theory, and multilevel governance literature, I propose that localisation effectiveness depends on four interconnected dimensions: institutional context (path dependency), temporal dynamics (critical junctures), actor networks (coalition building), and implementation mechanisms (multilevel coordination).

Rather than treating localisation as a linear transfer, this framework recognizes it as a complex phenomenon where global frameworks undergo "assemblage, disassembly and reassembly" (McCann & Ward, 2012, p. 43) through these four dimensions operating simultaneously, creating distinct pathways varying significantly across national and subnational contexts.

2.1. Institutional Context and Path Dependency

The localisation of global urban agendas is fundamentally shaped by pre-existing institutional configurations, which create distinctive pathways for international frameworks. Policy mobilities literature recognizes that policies mutate as they travel, undergoing complex translation and adaptation processes (Stone, 2012, 2017). These processes are both constrained and enabled by path dependency, wherein historical arrangements create specific trajectories that influence policy adoption and implementation (Pierson, 2000; Sorensen, 2018).

In Argentina, the institutional legacy of alternating democratic and authoritarian regimes, centralized federal structures punctuated by decentralization periods, and cyclical economic crises creates a distinctive matrix conditioning NUA interpretation and implementation (Catenazzi & Reese, 2016). As Blanc and Cotella (2023a, p. 394) argue, "the localisation of global urban policy is shaped path dependently by the combination of timing and sequence that characterises the process." Argentina's federal structure adds particular complexity as provinces retain significant constitutional powers over urban development, creating multi-layered governance challenges differing markedly from unitary states (Catenazzi & Reese, 2016).

The regional context further influences interpretation within these constraints. Latin America has distinctive urban reform traditions predating current global frameworks, providing alternative urban imaginaries and practices (Blanc et al., 2022; Galland & Elinbaum, 2018; Silvestre & Jajamovich, 2020). The region pioneered the "right to the city" concept, later embedded in frameworks like the NUA (Wigle & Zárate, 2022) and

Argentina specifically has rich urban social movement and progressive housing policy histories constituting important interpretive lenses (Catenazzi et al., 2009). Contemporary scholarship recognizes Latin American cities as sources of innovations traveling globally (Porto de Oliveira et al., 2020), with programs like participatory budgeting exemplifying South-North policy mobility (Sintomer et al., 2012).

2.2. Temporal Dynamics and Critical Junctures

Policy adoption timing represents a crucial dimension in understanding global framework localisation. Policy transfer unfolds across different temporal phases, influenced by “critical junctures” where domestic and international policy windows align (Porto de Oliveira et al., 2020). For Argentina, the 2015 government change coinciding with SDGs and NUA adoption created a potential critical juncture for urban policy reorientation (Collier & Collier, 2015). However, effectiveness depends on establishing durable implementation mechanisms that survive beyond initial windows.

Blanc et al. (2023) distinguish between “fast-track institutionalization” and incremental approaches to localising urban frameworks. In Argentina, where institutional coherence is fragmented across scales, sequencing becomes particularly relevant. Electoral cycles create additional temporal pressures, as governments may rush initiatives before transitions, potentially compromising anchoring mechanisms.

Federal systems reveal how temporal dynamics operate differently across scales. While national governments face electoral pressures creating short-term horizons, provincial and municipal governments may have different political cycles, creating alternative implementation opportunities. This multi-temporal dimension means localisation processes unfold differently at various governance levels, enabling policy continuity even when national support disappears.

2.3. Actor Networks and Coalition Building

Global frameworks shape localisation through their capacity as “coalition magnets” (Blanc & Cotella, 2023b), bringing together divergent stakeholders. Global urban frameworks operate through “pasteurized urban narratives,” facilitating coalition building via relatively vague, consensus-oriented language, creating “overlapping consensus” (Barnett & Parnell, 2016; Blanc & Cotella, 2023a). In Argentina, where political polarization complicates policy continuity, this function serves both enabling and constraining roles, allowing selective implementation or “cherry-picking” (Forestier & Kim, 2020).

International actors significantly influence localisation through technical expertise, financial resources, and political legitimacy. International organizations, bilateral agencies, and transnational networks actively promote particular approaches, shaping adaptation (Acuto, 2016; Blanc & Cotella, 2023a). In Argentina, organizations like UN-Habitat, the Inter-American Development Bank, and the World Bank have historically shaped urban policies (Catenazzi & Reese, 2016). Blanc and Cotella (2023a) identify two key “leveraging factors”: access to international funding creates incentives for alignment, potentially influencing priorities based on funding rather than local needs; and international endorsement provides political legitimacy to domestic initiatives, enabling leaders to justify reforms by citing international best practices.

Different international actors impact localisation differently—development agencies tend toward flexibility while global urban agencies prioritize standardized frameworks (Blanc & Cotella, 2023b). Critical perspectives question whether frameworks adequately address fundamental challenges or merely promote “urban solutionism”—technical fixes failing to address structural causes (Montero, 2020). Questions arise about participation and whose knowledge counts as legitimate (Robin & Acuto, 2018), particularly relevant where tension exists between technical expertise and experiential knowledge of urban movements (Catenazzi et al., 2009).

2.4. Implementation Mechanisms and Multilevel Governance

Implementation challenges in multilevel governance systems present the most immediate dimension affecting translation into concrete outcomes. Effective localisation requires coordination across governance levels—particularly complex in federal systems where constitutional authority is distributed (Valencia et al., 2019). Argentina’s federal structure, with three government tiers plus inter-jurisdictional entities for metropolitan areas, creates formidable coordination challenges (Catenazzi & Reese, 2016). Urban boundary delimitation represents another challenge, particularly in metropolitan regions like Buenos Aires, spanning multiple jurisdictions where fragmentation impedes coherent implementation (Catenazzi et al., 2009).

Data gaps and monitoring challenges further complicate implementation. Many cities lack the technical capacity for comprehensive data collection needed to monitor commitments (Croese et al., 2020). In Argentina, where municipal governments often have limited resources, this challenge is particularly acute for smaller cities outside major metropolitan areas (Lanfranchi et al., 2018). These constraints create cascading effects where inadequate monitoring prevents evidence-based adjustments, leading to implementation drift.

The implementation dimension reveals how other framework dimensions interact in practice. Path-dependent arrangements influence feasible mechanisms, temporal dynamics affect political sustainability across cycles, actor networks determine stakeholder engagement and conflict resolution, while global framework content shapes specific challenges. This multi-dimensional challenge requires coordination, addressing technical, administrative, political, fiscal, and institutional dimensions across Argentina’s complex federal landscape.

3. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to examine Argentina’s NUP development process (2017–2019) and its subsequent implementation dynamics. The research design incorporated a comparative dimension through analysis of Neuquén’s provincial implementation experience and consideration of policy discontinuities under the Milei administration (2023–present). The methodological framework was structured to comprehensively operationalize the four theoretical dimensions: institutional context, temporal dynamics, actor networks, and implementation mechanisms.

Primary data consisted of five in-depth, semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders directly involved in Argentina’s NUP development process. The purposive sample included national government officials from the Ministry of Interior, Public Works and Housing, UN-Habitat technical consultants who provided advisory

support, and urban planning experts who participated in policy formulation activities. Interview participants were identified through institutional mapping and snowball sampling techniques. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and was conducted in Spanish between 2019 and 2024. The interview protocol addressed each theoretical dimension through targeted questions examining: (a) the influence of existing planning frameworks, particularly the Plan Estratégico Territorial (PET; in English, Strategic Territorial Plan), on NUP development; (b) temporal factors including electoral cycle timing and critical junctures; (c) stakeholder participation processes and international agency involvement; and (d) coordination mechanisms and implementation challenges across governance levels. All interviews were audio-recorded with participant consent, transcribed verbatim, and subsequently translated into English for analysis.

Secondary data analysis encompassed a comprehensive examination of official documents selected to capture dynamics across the four theoretical dimensions. The documentary corpus included: government planning documents comprising all PET iterations (Consejo Federal de Planificación, 2018; Ministerio de Planificación Federal, Inversión Pública y Servicios, 2008, 2011, 2015; Ministerio del Interior, Obras Públicas y Vivienda & Secretaría de Planificación Territorial y Coordinación de Obra Pública, 2018). National Urban Forum proceedings, and the final NUP document; international framework documents (UN-Habitat & Provincia del Neuquén, 2023; UN-Habitat & República Argentina, 2016) establishing the policy development process and Neuquén's implementation report; and provincial implementation documents (Gobierno de Neuquén, 2021) focusing on regulatory instruments implementing sustainability frameworks. Recent government documents from the Milei administration were analyzed to understand policy discontinuities, including presidential decrees on state restructuring, official communications regarding international framework withdrawal, and budget documents eliminating urban development programs (Milei, 2023; República Argentina, 2023a, 2023b, 2024; Sigal, 2024).

Data analysis proceeded through a four-stage process examining different localisation dimensions. First, a detailed chronology identified critical junctures, policy windows, and temporal dynamics, mapping electoral cycles, international agenda adoption timelines, and institutional changes. Second, content analysis of the NUP and related instruments examined how global principles were translated into national policy, identifying institutional path dependencies and adaptation mechanisms. Third, coordination mechanisms and governance arrangements at national and provincial levels were analyzed to understand multilevel implementation dynamics, including formal structures, resource allocation, and stakeholder engagement. Fourth, recent political changes and their effects on policy instruments were examined to assess the interaction between temporal dynamics and institutional resilience during political transitions.

Interview transcripts and documentary materials were coded using a deductive approach based on the four theoretical dimensions, with additional inductive coding capturing emergent themes. Data triangulation was achieved through the comparison of interview accounts with documentary evidence and cross-validation between different stakeholder perspectives.

4. Argentina's Path Toward a National Urban Policy

This section provides the empirical background necessary to understand Argentina's experience with NUP development and implementation. It traces the institutional and political context that shaped how global urban frameworks were received and adapted in Argentina's federal system, examining the historical evolution of

territorial planning, the specific process through which the NUP was developed between 2017–2019, and the subsequent localisation experiment in Neuquén province. This contextual foundation establishes the factual basis for the theoretical analysis that follows, demonstrating how Argentina’s complex institutional landscape, political transitions, and federal governance structure created specific conditions for policy localisation that varied significantly between national and provincial levels.

4.1. Territorial Planning in Argentina

Argentina has a federal governance structure where planning authority is distributed across national, provincial, and municipal levels. As established in the National Constitution (República Argentina, 1994, art. 121, 124), provinces maintain significant autonomy and hold primary responsibility for land use planning, while municipalities are granted varying degrees of authority depending on provincial legislation (República Argentina, 1994, art. 123). This fragmentation of planning authority has historically complicated efforts to establish coherent national approaches to territorial development. As Reese (2006) describes, this has created a heterogeneous landscape of urban legislation across the country’s 24 provinces.

The fragmentation of territorial planning in Argentina stems from multiple interconnected factors. The diversity of actors involved creates conflicting expectations and power asymmetries, resulting in a complex institutional landscape where divergent interests shape the evolution of urban and territorial policies. These policies have been characterized by advances and setbacks, directly reflecting the conjunctural variation of power relations throughout Argentina’s political history.

The federal organization of planning across national, provincial, and municipal government levels presents significant challenges, as each operates with different types of regulatory capacity. Despite the National Constitution’s promotion of territorially balanced development, Argentina still lacks a comprehensive National Law on Territorial Planning to articulate these efforts cohesively. While specific responsibilities exist at each level, provinces and municipalities retain primary legislative authority and responsibility for land use planning.

Further destabilizing planning efforts is the volatile political-economic environment in which these policies operate. Drastic shifts in political leadership and policy orientation, coupled with the state’s diminished intervention capacity due to limited public funds, create an unstable foundation. This instability stems from Argentina’s political culture of “continuous national refounding,” which inhibits the establishment and achievement of long-term social goals (Suárez-Cao, 2011), alongside macroeconomic cycles of currency fluctuations exacerbated by the national central bank’s reserve limitations.

The PET has served as the primary national instrument for guiding strategic infrastructure investments since 2008 until 2018, undergoing four iterations (in 2008, 2011, 2015, and 2018) under different administrations and gradually expanding from infrastructure focus to broader territorial planning dimensions (Ministerio de Planificación Federal, Inversión Pública y Servicios, 2008, 2011, 2015; Ministerio del Interior, Obras Públicas y Vivienda & Secretaría de Planificación Territorial y Coordinación de Obra Pública, 2018).

4.2. The Historical Evolution of Urban Agendas in Argentina

Argentina's national urban agenda has evolved through two primary cycles over the past two decades. The first (2003–2015) marked the institutionalization of territorial planning after several years where market forces dominated development processes. The second cycle (2015–2019) reflected significant changes in political leadership alongside innovations in territorial planning approaches.

The 2003–2015 period saw the Argentine state reassert its central role in territorial planning as a development tool. This was formalized in 2004 with the creation of the Ministry of Federal Planning, Public Investment, and Services, followed in 2008 by the establishment of the Consejo Federal de Planificación (in English, Federal Council for Territorial and Land-Use Planning). This national agency—comprising the federal government, all provinces, and the city of Buenos Aires—received a mandate to issue planning guidelines and address institutional bottlenecks across provincial frameworks.

Under the Peronist governments of Néstor Kirchner (2003–2007) and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2007–2015), Argentina developed three versions of the PET. The first PET (2008) represented two significant innovations: the return to state planning for allocating public investment and territorial development and an inclusive methodology that incorporated input from provincial expert teams.

The subsequent period from 2015 to 2019 under President Mauricio Macri's administration marked a substantial reorientation in Argentina's approach to territorial planning. While maintaining some planning continuity, the government adopted elements of neoliberal policy approaches, reducing public service subsidies while preserving the extractivist economic model. A major institutional change was the creation of the Ministry of the Interior, Public Works, and Housing, which attempted to centralize territorial planning coordination.

In this new political context, Macri's administration developed the fourth PET (2018), explicitly linking infrastructure with production based on the premise that territorial development could be achieved through job creation. This version proposed public works portfolios prioritized by both social needs and productive potential. Concurrent with this effort, between 2016 and 2018, Argentina worked with UN-Habitat to develop its NUP. This initiative represented an opportunity to adopt the NUA following Habitat III and create a framework to guide the country's urbanization process. This created a period of overlap where two national planning instruments coexisted: the fourth PET (validated by Federal Council for Territorial and Land-Use Planning) and the NUP, which was ultimately abandoned after the 2019 change in government when President Alberto Fernández's administration dissolved the sub-secretariat responsible for the NUP and established no comparable entity for continuation, reflecting the typical institutional discontinuity that accompanies political transitions in Argentina's presidential system. This 2019 abandonment due to institutional reorganization preceded the more radical ideological dismantling of urban policy infrastructure under President Milei's administration beginning in 2023.

4.3. From National Planning to Global Framework Adoption

Argentina's engagement with global urban frameworks evolved significantly over time. Between 2007 and 2011, the country participated in the localisation of the Millennium Development Goals, adapting national

targets and indicators through collaboration with the UN Development Programme and the National Council for the Coordination of Social Policies. This early localisation experience established initial pathways for translating international frameworks into national policies, though with limited focus on urban dimensions.

The election of Mauricio Macri as president in 2015 marked a shift in Argentina's approach to international engagement (Malamud, 2017). The new administration sought to position Argentina more prominently on the global stage, emphasizing integration into global markets and international frameworks. This coincided with the global adoption of the 2030 Agenda and the NUA, creating an opportunity for Argentina to demonstrate its commitment to these frameworks through the development of a NUP. The NUP initiative was conceived as a way for Argentina to align with international best practices and frameworks for urban development (Ministerio del Interior, Obras Públicas y Vivienda, 2018).

In 2016, Argentina signed a technical collaboration agreement with UN-Habitat for the development of a Plan Nacional Urbano y del Hábitat (in English, National Urban and Habitat Plan; UN-Habitat & República Argentina, 2016). This agreement marked the beginning of the NUA implementation process in Argentina and represented a strategic move by the Macri government to internationalize the country's political agenda, coinciding with Argentina's hosting of the G20 summit in 2018 and negotiations with the International Monetary Fund.

The development of Argentina's NUP followed a structured process with technical support from UN-Habitat. The work began with the National Urban Forum held in Mendoza in June 2017, which brought together 357 participants representing 18 provinces and 75 municipalities (Ministerio del Interior, Obras Públicas y Vivienda, 2018). The forum established multi-stakeholder working groups focused on four thematic areas: territorial governance of habitat, territorial development and urban planning, land and housing policies, and urban economy and municipal financing.

The resulting NUP document, published in 2018, proposed a vision for 2040 of "balanced territory and liveable, safe, resilient, and sustainable cities based on adequate and solid institutional, regulatory, and financing frameworks" (Ministerio del Interior, Obras Públicas y Vivienda & Secretaría de Planificación Territorial y Coordinación de Obra Pública, 2018, p. 15, translation by the author). It established six principles: equity in accessing the city, territorial balance between urban and rural systems, completeness in fighting poverty and inequality, care for the environment and resilience to climate change, economic opportunities, and democratic governance and social participation.

4.4. Provincial Localisation of the National Urban Agenda: The Neuquén Case

Neuquén's experience represents the sole concrete attempt to localise the NUA and related urban policy frameworks in Argentina, serving as the practical implementation experiment that the national NUP could not achieve at scale. In 2017, Neuquén formalized its commitment to the 2030 Agenda by designating the Consejo de Planificación y Acción para el Desarrollo (COPADE; in English, Provincial Planning and Development Action Secretariat) as the focal point for SDGs implementation. This institutional choice was significant, as COPADE has a 55-year history of contributing to provincial development planning and coordinates with national, provincial, and municipal bodies.

The province's approach to SDGs localisation involved reviewing existing provincial plans and subsequently revising SDG targets and indicators to align with local priorities. COPADE organized the provincial territory into five micro-regions based on geographic, social, and economic characteristics, allowing for more context-specific planning approaches. This regionalization proved particularly valuable during the Covid-19 pandemic, enabling the province to adjust policies according to territorial conditions. The province integrated SDG indicators into its existing data collection processes through the Provincial Statistics and Census Directorate, which had previously achieved the International Organization for Standardization 37120 certification for sustainable development indicators.

Building on this foundation, Neuquén developed a comprehensive approach to implementing the NUA through a collaborative project with UN-Habitat and other international partners. This initiative, titled Sustainable Cities—New Urban Agenda, focused on strengthening inclusive and integrated urban planning and sustainable public works management with gender equity criteria (UN-Habitat & Provincia del Neuquén, 2023). The program achieved remarkable scope, reaching the entire province with sustainability and gender perspective approaches, involving 35 local governments in territorial planning methodologies and training more than 1,200 people across 42 municipalities, 39 provincial state organisms, 22 private companies, and 18 civil society organizations (UN-Habitat & Provincia del Neuquén, 2023). The implementation included concrete deliverables such as four participatively developed municipal plans (in El Huecú, Las Lajas, Plaza Huincul, and Aluminé), three public space preliminary projects, and 13 local costings of care infrastructures.

The Neuquén experience demonstrates systematic policy localisation far beyond basic national framework adaptation, developing specific tools including a sustainability indicators matrix with 75 indicators across five infrastructure types, guides for incorporating sustainability criteria in public tender processes, and comprehensive training programs analyzing 220 works from the 2024 provincial public works plan (UN-Habitat & Provincia del Neuquén, 2023). This involved implementing Provincial Decree 1320/21 for sustainable public works promotion (Gobierno de Neuquén, 2021), establishing standardization guides and evaluation tools for public space quality across six dimensions: accessibility, uses and users, security and comfort, equipment, and environment, plus gender mainstreaming through 10 specialized training sessions reaching 260 people across public, private, and civil society sectors (UN-Habitat & Provincia del Neuquén, 2023), demonstrating policy integration and implementation depth absent from the national NUP process.

5. NUP Localisation in Argentina: A Multi-Dimensional Analysis

This section analyzes Argentina's NUP development through the four proposed theoretical dimensions: institutional context shaped by path dependency; temporal dynamics including critical junctures; actor networks involving coalition building and international agency; and implementation mechanisms across multilevel governance systems, drawing on interview insights and documentary evidence.

5.1. Institutional Legacies and Policy Innovation

Argentina's fragmented urban policy approach demonstrates how path-dependent institutional arrangements limited the NUP's effectiveness. The country's historical oscillation between centralization and decentralization created institutional inertia, limiting how international frameworks could be domestically implemented. The institutional legacy of territorial planning—characterized by fragmentation

across federal, provincial, and municipal levels—significantly constrained the NUP’s effectiveness despite its alignment with NUA principles.

The most evident manifestation was the parallel development of the NUP and PET without integration mechanisms, creating competing rather than complementary planning instruments. The Secretary of Urban Infrastructure led the NUP process while the Secretary of Territorial Planning simultaneously developed the PET, creating siloed processes that undermined policy coherence. Official documentation shows limited cross-referencing between instruments despite overlapping scope. Consequently, government stakeholders consistently noted that the lack of coordination led to confusion and duplicated efforts.

The legal standing of these planning instruments further reinforced path dependency. While the PET was developed through legal and administrative acts dating to 2004, the NUP remained a technical document without similar anchoring. This imbalance meant that despite NUP’s alignment with international frameworks, existing planning patterns continued to privilege the PET. From a vertical perspective, the federal structure complicated efforts to establish coherent frameworks across governance levels. While provincial and municipal representatives participated in initial consultations, the NUP lacked specific mechanisms ensuring their ownership and implementation.

In contrast, Neuquén’s alternative approach illustrates the importance of working with existing institutional structures. The province built on COPADE’s 55-year institutional history and established planning systems, integrating SDG targets within frameworks that already possessed legitimacy and operational capacity. As revealed through interviews, provincial officials emphasized that they viewed the SDGs and NUA not as replacements for existing planning systems, but rather as complementary frameworks that could strengthen ongoing efforts. This incremental approach demonstrated greater resilience than the national attempt to introduce parallel planning frameworks.

5.2. Timing, Continuity, and Disruption

Argentina’s NUP development timing created a potential critical juncture when domestic and international policy windows aligned. The 2015 Macri election coincided with SDGs and NUA adoption, creating policy innovation opportunities. Moreover, the administration’s emphasis on positioning Argentina globally created political momentum for engaging international frameworks.

However, empirical evidence reveals Argentina’s NUP process failed to establish durable implementation mechanisms withstanding political transitions. The case reveals three critical weaknesses. First, the NUP lacked legislative anchoring, remaining a technical document without formal legal status. In contrast to Chile’s Urban Development Policy, formally adopted through presidential decree, Argentina’s NUP had no similar formalization. Second, the process established a few institutional mechanisms ensuring implementation continuity beyond initial development. Multi-stakeholder working groups guiding formulation weren’t transformed into permanent implementation bodies with clear mandates and resources. Third, the timing of development so close to electoral cycles left insufficient time for institutionalization before political change.

As revealed through interviews, former ministerial officials emphasized the temporal pressures they faced, noting that the rush to complete the policy before the administration's end prevented proper embedding within governmental structures. The timing of the NUP development process coincided with the electoral cycle, with the policy being finalized shortly before the national elections. Consequently, when Alberto Fernández was elected in 2019, representing Macri's opposition coalition, the NUP lost institutional support entirely. The new administration's organizational changes led to the dissolution of the sub-secretariat that designed the NUP, with no comparable entity established for continuation.

In stark contrast, the difference between national policy discontinuity and Neuquén's institutional stability emphasizes the importance of timing and political continuity. The province's continuous governance under the Movimiento Popular Neuquino party since 1963 created conditions more conducive to long-term planning, allowing for gradual adaptation of global frameworks to local contexts (Favaro, 2015). This stability enabled sustained engagement with global frameworks across different political cycles, demonstrating how temporal dynamics operate differently across governance scales.

5.3. Building Coalitions Across Governance Levels

Argentina's NUP development demonstrates how global frameworks function as "coalition magnets" (Blanc & Cotella, 2023a) through broad narrative appeal. The inclusive development process—bringing together representatives from 18 provinces and 75 municipalities at the National Urban Forum—reflected attempts to build broad-based support around NUA-derived principles. These principles' relatively abstract nature (inclusion, sustainability, and integration) made initial consensus generation possible across diverse stakeholders.

Interview participants from the National Urban Forum emphasized that the broad nature of NUA principles allowed diverse stakeholders to find common ground, facilitating initial discussions. Furthermore, the participatory mechanisms employed during formulation—including regional forums, thematic working groups, and stakeholder consultations—successfully engaged a wide range of actors in the policy development process.

However, this consensus-building proved superficial without addressing underlying governance tensions. Multi-stakeholder working groups dissolved after development without clear pathways for continued implementation participation. The case illustrates coalition-building limitations without addressing underlying power dynamics. Argentina's NUP development process avoided directly addressing fundamental federal system tensions, such as resource allocation powers and land use decision-making authority. As highlighted in interviews, provincial officials noted that the NUP emphasized integration and coordination without specifying how power would be redistributed or how conflicts between levels of government would be resolved.

Consequently, this avoidance of contentious issues meant that while Argentina's NUP successfully engaged diverse stakeholders during formulation, it failed to translate this engagement into durable implementation coalitions. Without addressing these fundamental governance questions, the initial consensus dissolved when moving from abstract principles to concrete implementation.

Regarding underlying motivations, the research uncovered two primary drivers for Argentina's engagement with global frameworks: international legitimacy and positioning within global systems. The Macri administration explicitly positioned the NUP development as part of Argentina's reintegration into global networks, coinciding with the country's G20 presidency and negotiations with the International Monetary Fund. As revealed through interviews, multiple stakeholders identified the potential for accessing international financing as a key motivation for engaging with global urban frameworks. This external orientation may explain why the localisation process remained superficial—when the primary goal is international legitimacy rather than domestic transformation, policy development tends to prioritize symbolic compliance over substantive institutional change, resulting in frameworks that satisfy international audiences but lack the deep domestic anchoring necessary for effective implementation.

5.4. From Policy Design to Implementation

The translation from policy design to implementation revealed fundamental coordination challenges in Argentina's multilevel governance system. The NUP lacked specificity regarding the governmental agency responsible for its development, sources of funding for implementation, and regulatory instruments to institutionalize it. Documentation from the Ministry of Interior, Public Works, and Housing reveals no follow-up legislation or regulations to formalize the NUP within Argentina's legal framework. The document itself acknowledged that without legislative backing, the policy would remain vulnerable to changes in administration but provided no concrete strategy to address this vulnerability.

The federal structure complicated efforts to establish coherent implementation frameworks, with the NUP lacking specific mechanisms to ensure provincial and municipal ownership despite their participation in initial consultations. The policy maintained a traditional hierarchical approach that contrasted with the relational nature of urban governance. This disconnect between planning approach and urban reality was particularly problematic in the Argentine context, where institutional capacities to implement top-down planning were limited.

Neuquén's implementation experience demonstrates both the potential and limitations of provincial-level localisation. While COPADE coordinated SDGs localisation, the provincial NUP development remained disconnected from this process, and technical capacity for monitoring and evaluation varied significantly across government departments and municipalities. Data gaps and monitoring challenges further complicated implementation, with many cities lacking the technical capacity for comprehensive data collection needed to monitor progress on global commitments.

Despite these challenges, Neuquén's systematic approach demonstrates the potential for effective implementation when appropriate institutional conditions exist. The province's comprehensive training programs, technical tools development, and integration across multiple government levels achieved concrete results that contrasted with the national experience. However, external motivations proved insufficient without building genuine domestic ownership. The rapid abandonment of the NUP under changing political leadership indicates that the policy never developed the deep institutional roots necessary to withstand political transitions.

5.5. Neuquén as Implementation Laboratory

Neuquén's experience represents the only concrete example of national urban policy localisation in Argentina, shaped by the specific temporal sequence of policy development and unique institutional conditions that enabled implementation. The national NUP development occurred during a political window that closed before systematic localisation could occur elsewhere, while Neuquén's engagement with UN-Habitat and commitment to implementing the 2030 Agenda created conditions for sustained policy translation.

The contrast between national policy discontinuity and provincial institutional continuity demonstrates how four analytical dimensions interact differently across governance levels. While the national level experienced institutional fragmentation, temporal disruption, coalition dissolution, and implementation abandonment, Neuquén's political continuity, institutional capacity, and systematic planning approach enabled sustained engagement with policy principles even when national support disappeared.

This dramatic shift reveals that without deep domestic ownership and institutional anchoring, localisation efforts based primarily on international legitimacy remain highly vulnerable to changing political orientations. When domestic political priorities fundamentally question the assumptions underlying global frameworks, localisation efforts require deeper institutional anchoring than international endorsement alone can provide. Moreover, the limited replication elsewhere reflects broader structural challenges in Argentina's federal system, including institutional fragmentation, policy discontinuity across electoral cycles, and varying technical capacities across subnational governments. This demonstrates that effective localisation requires not only appropriate policy content but also institutional stability, sustained political commitment, and systematic implementation capacity.

6. Discussion

The analysis of Argentina's NUP experience demonstrates how the four-dimensional framework effectively illuminates the complex dynamics of policy localisation in multilevel governance systems. This section examines how the theoretical framework performed in understanding Argentina's case identifies the novel insights that emerged and assesses the contributions to policy localisation scholarship. The Argentine case reveals that localisation is not a linear process but rather involves simultaneous interactions between institutional legacies, temporal opportunities, coalition dynamics, and implementation capacities across multiple governance scales.

6.1. Interactive Dimensions Across Governance Scales

The four-dimensional framework effectively illuminated policy localisation dynamics in Argentina's federal system, revealing important interactions between dimensions that single-lens analyses might overlook. The framework's analytical power lies in capturing how institutional context, temporal dynamics, actor networks, and implementation mechanisms operate simultaneously rather than sequentially, creating distinct localisation pathways across governance levels.

The analysis revealed significant interactions between dimensions that extend existing theoretical understanding. Institutional path dependencies shaped which temporal opportunities could be effectively utilized—Argentina’s federal fragmentation meant that even favourable policy windows could not overcome structural coordination challenges. Coalition-building processes were fundamentally constrained by existing power distributions embedded in institutional arrangements, while implementation challenges reflected the cumulative effects of institutional fragmentation, temporal pressures, and coalition instability.

The contrast between national and provincial experiences demonstrates how the same dimensions operate differently across governance scales. While national-level analysis revealed institutional fragmentation constraining policy innovation, Neuquén’s provincial experience showed how similar institutional factors can enable rather than constrain localisation when new policies align with established planning trajectories. This finding extends path dependency theory by demonstrating that institutional effects are not predetermined but depend on the fit between new policy requirements and existing institutional capacities.

The framework revealed temporal dynamics extending beyond traditional critical juncture theory. While the 2015 election created a potential policy window aligned with global agenda adoption, the analysis shows that federal systems contain multiple, potentially asynchronous temporal dynamics across governance levels. Electoral pressures that drove rapid national policy development undermined the institutionalization necessary for sustainability, while Neuquén’s different political timeline enabled more gradual adaptation.

The actor network dimension illuminated how global frameworks function as “coalition magnets” while revealing important limitations to this capacity. Argentina’s initial consensus around broad NUP principles proved superficial when confronted with concrete implementation challenges that required power redistribution between governance levels. This finding contributes to understanding how coalition-building around abstract principles differs fundamentally from sustaining coalitions through implementation phases involving contested governance arrangements.

6.2. Multiple Pathways and Institutional Redundancy in Federal Systems

Argentina’s experience contributes to policy localisation scholarship in several areas: federal system dynamics, temporal sequencing effects, and the complex role of international agencies in domestic policy adaptation.

The analysis reveals how federal governance structures create distinctive localisation challenges that differ fundamentally from those in unitary states. Most existing literature treats federalism as a complicating factor rather than a fundamental structural characteristic shaping localisation processes. Argentina’s case demonstrates that federal systems contain multiple, potentially competing localisation pathways operating simultaneously across governance scales. The finding that subnational governments may provide more stable implementation platforms challenges policy transfer literature assumptions treating national governments as primary localisation agents. Neuquén’s continued engagement with global frameworks despite national abandonment suggests federal systems create policy resilience through institutional redundancy—a theoretical insight with implications for understanding sustainability commitment durability.

The analysis extends critical juncture theory by demonstrating that the sequencing of activities within policy windows significantly affects institutionalization outcomes. Argentina’s rushed policy development, driven

by electoral timing pressures, created a temporal trap where urgency to complete policies before political transitions undermined the institutionalization necessary for continuity. This finding reveals temporal dynamics in policy localisation that existing literature has insufficiently examined.

The case provides nuanced insights into how international technical assistance shapes localisation processes. UN-Habitat's support enabled policy development while potentially constraining innovation in addressing Argentina's specific federal coordination challenges. The close adherence to standardized frameworks rather than federal-specific solutions illustrates tensions between international legitimacy and domestic adaptation that existing literature has not adequately theorized. The rapid policy abandonment under political transition reveals vulnerabilities in localisation efforts relying primarily on international legitimacy rather than domestic institutional anchoring. This finding contributes to understanding policy sustainability by highlighting the conditional nature of international support as a foundation for domestic policy continuity.

Argentina's experience illuminates how regional urban traditions interact with global frameworks in ways that both complement and potentially compete with global prescriptions. Latin America's distinctive urban reform traditions created a receptive context for certain NUA elements while potentially generating resistance to others. This finding contributes to the "Southern turn" urban theory (Robinson, 2006; Roy, 2009; Watson, 2009) by demonstrating how global-local interactions involve negotiations between different urban imaginaries rather than simple global model adoption.

6.3. Localisation as Negotiation: Institutions, Coalitions, and International Interface

The theoretical insights emerging from Argentina's case advance understanding of how global urban agendas are localised in complex governance contexts, revealing mechanisms and dynamics with implications for localisation theory more broadly.

The analysis reveals that localisation occurs through multiple, simultaneous pathways within federal systems rather than hierarchical implementation from national to local levels. These findings challenge linear assumptions in much policy transfer literature and suggests that effective localisation theory must account for divergent implementation trajectories across governance scales within the same national context.

The theoretical framework illuminated fundamental tensions between adapting global frameworks to existing institutions versus imposing new institutional arrangements. Argentina's attempt to overlay new planning frameworks without addressing existing institutional arrangements proved less effective than Neuquén's integration of global commitments within established planning systems. This finding suggests that localisation theory should distinguish between adaptive and impositive approaches to institutional change.

The analysis contributes to understanding coalition dynamics in policy implementation by revealing how consensus around abstract principles differs from coalitions capable of sustaining contested implementation processes. The dissolution of Argentina's multi-stakeholder working groups after policy formulation illustrates theoretical insights about conditions necessary for coalition maintenance across policy phases.

The case advances theoretical understanding of how international agency involvement shapes domestic policy innovation. The standardization pressures accompanying international technical assistance can both

enable policy development and constrain context-specific innovation, creating theoretical tensions that existing literature has not fully explored. This finding suggests the need for more nuanced theoretical frameworks accounting for the conditional effects of international involvement on domestic policy adaptation processes.

7. Conclusion and Future Directions

The analysis of Argentina's experience with NUP development and implementation offers valuable insights into the complex dynamics of localising global urban frameworks in multilevel governance systems, with important implications for post-2030 sustainability agenda design. When viewed through the theoretical lenses of institutional context, temporal dynamics, actor networks, and implementation mechanisms, this case illustrates both the potential of NUPs as localisation instruments and the significant challenges they face in contexts of institutional fragmentation and policy discontinuity.

Four primary lessons emerge with direct implications for post-2030 sustainability agenda development. First, the path-dependent nature of policy localisation reveals that future global frameworks must accommodate diverse institutional configurations rather than imposing standardized models, explicitly recognizing multiple implementation pathways within existing arrangements. Second, while critical junctures create policy windows, sustaining momentum requires institutional anchoring mechanisms extending beyond electoral cycles—as demonstrated by Neuquén's experience, suggesting subnational governments may offer more stable platforms when building on established planning traditions. Third, the "pasteurized" nature of global framework narratives (Blanc & Cotella, 2023b) enables initial coalition-building but proves insufficient without addressing underlying power dynamics and governance contradictions. Post-2030 agendas must establish concrete mechanisms for ongoing stakeholder participation, particularly from marginalized communities, aligning with Latin American traditions of urban social movements. Finally, effective localisation depends on domestic ownership rather than international legitimacy alone—the Argentinian case reveals tensions between standardized global models and context-specific innovation needs, suggesting frameworks should support domestic adaptation rather than imposing uniform approaches.

These findings have particular significance within the broader Latin American context, where distinctive urban governance traditions create both resources and challenges for global framework localisation. The current rise of far-right governments across the region—exemplified by Argentina's dramatic policy reversal under Milei—reveals challenges extending beyond implementation capacity to fundamental questions about state roles in development planning. Argentina's urban policy landscape has undergone a radical transformation since December 2023, with aggressive state retrenchment policies dismantling existing coordination mechanisms and explicitly rejecting planning approaches advocated in global frameworks. The administration's market-fundamentalist position, dramatic budget cuts to urban programs, and skepticism toward international agreements demonstrate how quickly decades of institutional development can be reversed when political leadership fundamentally rejects global sustainability premises.

The Milei administration's approach reveals fundamental vulnerabilities in current global sustainability governance when confronted with ideologically hostile governments. Nevertheless, subnational persistence in maintaining sustainability commitments despite reduced national support demonstrates how federal systems provide institutional redundancy, enabling continued engagement with global frameworks. This

experience raises questions about embedded assumptions regarding state roles in sustainable development and suggests the need for post-2030 frameworks operating across diverse ideological contexts, potentially emphasizing market-based mechanisms, civil society engagement, and subnational implementation pathways functioning independently of national government support.

The rise of far-right governments explicitly rejecting international cooperation represents a fundamental challenge to global sustainability governance, extending beyond technical implementation to core issues of political legitimacy and state sovereignty. The Argentinian case offers valuable lessons about both vulnerabilities and unexpected resilience mechanisms in global sustainability governance, highlighting the need for approaches acknowledging not only institutional contexts and temporal dynamics but also the contested nature of sustainability politics in an increasingly polarized world.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

Data Availability

The datasets used in this study are not publicly available due to institutional restrictions.

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