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Local bureaucracies and the Ibero- American Charter for the Public Service: the case study of Bolivar

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Abstract

This study analyzes local bureaucracies in the ‘Cattle Cluster’ of Buenos Aires Province, Argentina in light of the concepts developed in the Ibero-American Charter for the Public Service. The Charter reflects the consensus of Latin American countries about the crucial role of public bureaucracies in development, as well as principles and functional requirements necessary in the public service in order to have a positive impact.

The research question that guides this work is: *to what extent have local bureaucracies implemented recommendations from the Charter? More specifically, how are local human resources appointed, managed and dismissed? What are the main drivers of such human resource management strategy? and What are the consequences for local bureaucracies?*

As understood by the Charter, the development of public services at any particular level is given by external constraints which are “the legal framework for implementation, the political system and the labour markets” and internal determinants. Consequently, the study analyzes both the general institutional framework and local elements that as drivers of their human resource strategy. The use of a single case study within the ‘cattle cluster’ allowed to analyze how municipalities manage public bureaucracies in detail, identifying how their human resource strategy impact in the characteristics of local public service.

In addition, the use of a historical institutionalist theoretical framework allows the consideration of how formal and informal institutions along with specific historical changes shape the path in which local bureaucracies develop today.

Through the study of Bolivar, a municipality in the Buenos Aires Province, the research concludes that local bureaucracies do not follow recommendations from the Charter. Appointments are based in patronage links and management strategies are reduced to salary negotiation with no training or professional career plan. The municipality lacks a human resource plan that links the needs of the organization with the quantity and the competence of the employees. The result is a bureaucracy with very low levels of autonomy and technical capacity.

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Introduction

There is a general consensus in the literature about the role of public bureaucracies in development. Bureaucracies are not only tools for policy implementation and service provision but an actor that might enhance democratic systems by guaranteeing the rule of law (Iacoviello and Zuvanic, 2010) and foster economic growth by promoting long term projects and reducing the likelihood of corrupt activities (Rauch and Evans, 1999 and Rauch, 1995). However, it is also understood that in order to fulfill this role, civil service employees need to be hired and managed following certain principles, such as transparency, nondiscrimination, merit and compliance with the law (IACPS, 2003).

These notions were adopted by the Ibero-American Charter for the Public Service, signed by 17 Latin American countries, as well as Spain and Portugal reflecting particularities of the Latin American context. The Charter represents a political consensus not only on the need for public service reform but also on the direction of the changes.

Argentina, one of the signatory countries, is characterized as an intermediate development civil service, showing large disparities between agencies and levels of the state (Iacoviello et al, 2010). While some sectors comply closely with the Charter's principles and provisions regarding the establishment and retaining of an efficient and professional public service, others do not show many signs of progress.

The study's main purpose is to answer the question *to what extent have local bureaucracies implemented recommendations from the Ibero-American Charter for the Public Service*. The focus in local bureaucracies was driven by the need to shed light on mechanisms that are relatively unexplored in the specialized literature. While research has traditionally focused on evaluations of national public administration and its comparison with other Latin American countries or, alternatively, in urban municipalities, the specific context in which rural municipalities in Buenos Aires province operate has not been thoroughly analyzed.

More specifically, the research intends to elucidate

- *How are local human resources appointed, managed and dismissed?*
- *What are the main drivers of such human resource management strategy?*
- *What are the consequences for local bureaucracies?*

In other words, what is the main human resource strategy; what are internal and external drivers of such strategy and how it impacts in local bureaucracies?

These questions are approached from an institutionalist theoretical frame, outlined in the first section. First, it describes historical institutionalism and why is it a relevant theory to analyze bureaucracies. Historical institutionalism is defined as “a body of perspectives that allows for a discussion of how rules of the game -institutions- emerge and are embedded over time in any particular environment and how they shape the incentives for individuals and organizations” (Grindle, 2012: 24). Unlike other institutionalist approaches, it has a distinctive historical perspective and analyzes cases as part of particular space and time structures. As part of historical institutionalist theory, the concept of path dependence is presented. Path dependence is defined, in short, as a situation in which increasing returns make it more likely that further movement in the same direction will be taken. This concept is particularly useful in explaining why local executives maintain in time certain appointment strategies.

The theory section continues presenting a conceptualization of bureaucracy and its effects on development. It describes the basic principles of the public service and requirements as detailed in the Charter and a characterization of different types of bureaucracy by its levels of autonomy and technical capacity. Emphasis is given in the relationship that public service establishes with politicians, as they are in charge of selecting personnel and establishing basic rules of human resource management that, in turn, affect levels of autonomy and capacity. Finally, there is a brief description of the particularities of bureaucracies in Latin America and its small local contexts.

The methodological approach is discussed in the second section. This paper is designed as an explanatory study, that looks into the human resource management strategies as well as the causes and consequences of such approaches. The use of a case study is based on the type of research question, and the focus on contemporary events as well as the theoretical framework. The case study is selected as a typical case within the ‘cattle cluster’. It is argued through this section how the municipality of Bolivar represents an excellent case to study how rural municipalities appoint and manage personnel and what are the consequences of such strategies for local bureaucracies.

The analysis of municipalities and the phenomena being studied represents a challenge in regard to data collection. Primary data about municipal employees is scarce and, although appointment strategies based on patronage are not illegal, they are usually questioned as an ethical behavior.

The use of interviews to key political figures allowed the study to shed light into human resource management practices and the place of municipal employees in policy formulation.

As described in the Charter, public bureaucracies are “influenced by conditions and variables within and outside the Government agency or agencies in which the service operates” (IACPS, 2003: 11). In consequence, the first part of the analysis focuses on clarifying the institutional framework in which these bureaucracies operate, while the analysis of Bolivar’s civil service sheds light on the local mechanisms that explain the characteristics of the public sector.

The first section of the analysis evaluates the place of municipalities and their bureaucracies in Argentina’s political system. It explains how municipalities are conceptualized in the National and Provincial Constitutions and their internal division of power, focusing on the role of the Mayor. Furthermore, it reviews how decentralization processes that started during the last military government but were fully implemented during the 1990’s generated a transfer of administrative responsibilities without financial and political resources to undertake them. This process not only compromised financially lower levels of the state but also accentuated characteristics of Argentinian political system such as clientelism, that local authorities reproduce in their environments.

Next, the institutional framework pertaining public administration is analyzed, as well as a brief mention of the quantitative data available for the public sector in Argentina and its importance in the country’s total employment. Altogether, the section summarizes constraints and problems specific to municipalities and their bureaucracies within the cattle cluster. External institutional framework has a great impact on local recruitment and human resources management.

The second part of the analysis is dedicated to the analysis of Bolivar and the strategies to appoint and retain municipal employees in light of the concepts developed in the Charter, explained in the theory section. The chapter examines in the first place how are local human resources appointed, managed and dismissed, looking at the same time to internal elements that help explain the election of using such human resource management strategy. Finally, this work examines the consequences of such strategy for local bureaucracies.

Theory

Historical institutionalism

This research will approach the topic of bureaucracy at the local level from a historical institutionalist perspective. Historical institutionalism, albeit not a unified school of thought, is one of the three approaches of the ‘new institutionalism’ that seek to explain what the role of institutions are in determining social and political outcomes (Hall and Taylor, 1996). However, institutionalist scholars developed different definitions of institutions, their origins, change, as well as explanations on how institutions shape behavior (Hall and Taylor, 1996). The three distinct approaches are historical institutionalism, rational choice and sociological institutionalism.

Historical institutionalism defines institutions “[...] as the formal or informal procedures, routines, norms and conventions embedded in the organization structure of the polity of political economy,” (Hall and Taylor, 1996: 938) and places special emphasis in examining how institutions create constraints and opportunities for political action, distribution of political power, and the shaping of political preferences over time (Fioretos et al, 2016: 5). Unlike rational choice institutionalism, which assumes that individuals behave instrumentally to maximize their preferences, engaging in a strategic calculus where they assess how others are likely to behave (Hall and Taylor, 1996), historical institutionalist “[...] argued that temporal processes may generate and reinforce actor preferences, power relations, and patterns of resource allocation” (Fioretos et al, 2016: 5).

Historical institutionalism developed a different view from rational choice institutionalism balancing between macro and micro level theories. Whether rational choice focuses on individual interests and preferences to explain institutions’ origins and change, historical institutionalism takes a macro approach, more attentive to the context of -space and time- to explain actor preferences (Fioretos et al, 2016). At the same time, for historical institutionalism, the source of these preferences is not just material like in rational choice, but ideas play an important role. In this approach, ideas shape how individuals and organizations understand the world and define their preferences (Fioretos et al, 2016). However, unlike sociological institutionalism the historical variant leaves some room for strategic behavior, which also seen as the product of cultural practices.

To sum up, historical institutionalism differentiates from the materialist and micro level rational choice analysis, explaining “[...] how configurations of institutions created in the past structure

politics in the present and in ways that often run counter to the interests or preferences of individuals (Fioretos et al, 2016: 7)”, but also from the sociological approach highlighting how material resources might affect institutions.

Fioretos et al explain that “Historical institutionalism is a research tradition that examines how temporal processes and events influence the origin and transformation of institutions that govern political and economic relations” (Fioretos et al, 2016: 2). Time and space become two central elements that explain political and economic outcomes. Rejecting rational choice notions that indicate that the same forces will generate the same results anywhere, historical institutionalism emphasizes the contextual features of a given situation (Hall and Taylor, 1996). At the same time, they open the door to unintended consequences of institutions, that is, rational choice explains origins of institutions as a voluntary agreement of the actors, serving particular interest. Historical institutionalism explains that over time, certain ‘paths’ might have unintended consequences in the future. P. Hall summarizes the implications of viewing politics structured in time and space as follows: “To take such an approach means embracing models of the polity that acknowledge the impact on political action of the social, economic, and political structures in which actors are embedded at a particular time or place and considering how events not only affect the immediate outcome of interest but also restructure the institutional or ideological setting in ways that condition outcomes in later periods of time. One of the principal contributions of historical institutionalism has been to draw our attention to the structural dimensions of political analysis (Hall, 2016: 2)”.

To summarize, approaching the topic from a historical institutionalist point of view implies to acknowledge the importance of institutions in shaping political outcomes. However, how they explain the origin and change of institutions and how they shape actors’ preferences is what distinguishes historical institutionalism from other approaches. The historical institutionalist view has a distinctive historical perspective and analyzes cases as part of particular space and time structures. This helps explaining the unintended consequences and inefficiencies that could prevail in certain institutions. By the same token, historical institutionalists also seek to include other causal factors in their explanations like socioeconomic development or ideas and beliefs (Hall and Taylor, 1996: 92).

For this research, an historical institutional approach means that special emphasis will be given on the historical context and the particularities of the local background to explain local bureaucracies’

characteristics. The choice of the theory has also clear methodological implications that will be discussed in the methodology section.

Path dependence and institutional development

Path dependence is a critical concept in historical institutionalism (Fioretos et al, 2016: 9), although it is not unequivocal on its interpretation (Fioretos et al, 2016: 9; Rixen and Viola, 2014; Pierson, 2000a). According to Pierson (2000a) a broad version and a narrow version can be distinguished. A broad version of path dependence interprets that what happened at an earlier point in time will affect outcomes at a later point (Pierson, 2000a), while a narrow version, adopted by Pierson, explains that a path dependent process implies increasing returns. In his view, path dependence describes how preceding steps in a particular direction induce further movement in the same direction by augmenting the costs of exiting that path. In other words, “[...] the costs of switching from one alternative to another will, in certain social contexts, increase markedly over time” (Pierson, 2000a: 251).

Increasing returns, also described as self-reinforcing or positive feedback imply *multiple equilibria*, that is, under certain conditions different outcomes might be possible; *contingency*, that highlights the need to account for small events that might have lasting consequences and critical role for *timing and sequencing*: it is important to analyze when the event takes place. For example, in path dependent processes the introduction of a reform ‘too late’ might have no effect, although it could have been crucial if introduced in a different timing (Pierson, 2000a). This notion is linked to the concept of critical juncture. Although critical junctures are a widely discussed concept in the institutionalist literature, it is understood as the initial event of a path dependent process (Fioretos et al, 2016).

The idea of increasing returns has been used to explain, for example, the adoption of certain technology and clusters in economic geography. In the study of bureaucracy, certain paths might offer increasing returns, defined as ‘that the more a choice is made or an action is taken, the greater its benefit’ (Page, 2006: 88 in Rixen and Viola, 2014: 5). For example, the use of patronage appointments generates greater benefits, when at the same time the costs related to changing to a merit appointment are extremely high.

Following Pierson (2000a) there are three distinctive factors that hinder the reversal of increasing returns in political processes:

1. Absence of efficiency enhancing mechanisms of competitions and learning. Politics is essentially ambiguous: how do we measure effective politics? Even if a situation is undesirable there are many opinions on how to change it and learning cannot be assumed to occur.
2. Short time horizon of political actors. This is particularly important for this research. Even though when most of political choices have implications in the long run, politicians tend to focus on the short term, not being prone to risk political capital in a decision for which they might not see the results.
3. Strong status quo bias. As Pierson explains, “key features of political life -public policies and (especially) formal institutions- are change resistant” (Pierson, 2000a: 262). And they are designed this way to prevent a constant change on the ‘rules of the game’.

However, a path dependent process does not imply determinism or the impossibility of change, rather it “helps us understand why organizational and institutional practices are often extremely persistent -and this is crucial, because these continuities are a striking feature of the social world” (Pierson 2000a: 265)

In short, Pierson advocates the historical perspective, not to look for examples that illustrate a theoretical model, instead “We should turn to history because important aspects of social reality can best be comprehended as temporal processes. It is not the past per se but the unfolding of processes over time that is theoretically central” (Pierson 2000a: 264). Path dependence is in this sense a critical concept for historical institutionalism: “because it recognizes that political development must be understood as a process that unfolds over time. [and...] because it stresses that many of the contemporary political implications of these temporal processes are embedded in institutions -whether formal rules, policy structures, or norms” (Pierson, 2000a: 265).

Bureaucracy and development

Analysis of bureaucracy revolve around Weber’s notion of bureaucracy and its connection with the rational-legal domination type (Kieran, 2004 and Olsen, 2005). In Weber’s view, ruling over multiplicity of people requires a staff of administrators and “Bureaucracy is the modern manner of securing their orderly, routine, day-to-day execution” (Höpfl, 2006: 10). Weber’s notion of bureaucracy was developed along different writings (sometimes contradictory) and can be

summarized in the following points (Höpfl, 2006; Ejersbo and Svava, 2012, Oszlak, 2006, Meier and Hill, 2007):

- Strict hierarchy and internal division of labor
- Impersonal rules, meaning officials should treat ‘subjects’ equally, regardless of their status
- Technical qualifications and practical knowledge
- Officials selected by their superiors, not elected
- Remuneration is fixed and based on the status, not performance
- Record keeping, derived from the rationality and the efficiency of bureaucracy. Rationality is precisely what distinguished bureaucracy from earlier forms of administration that depended on customary practices and entitlements to office (Höpfl, 2006)
- Bureaucratic administration can be found in public spheres as well as in private or religious organizations, political parties, trade unions, etc.

Olsen broadens Weber’s notions of bureaucracy adding that motivation and capacity affected the willingness and ability of bureaucrats to follow the rules. Material incentives and socialization impacted the motivation, whether qualifications and the leader’s ability to manage and the availability of resources impacted the capabilities of bureaucrats to follow rules and ethical codes (Olsen, 2005: 4).

The relationship between ruler and administrative staff was of central importance for Weber (Kieran, 2004). Kieran (2004) explains that a bureaucratic system contrasts more directly with the administrative staff associated to a traditional authority, where the personnel had no defined areas being assigned at the master’s discretion and had no clear hierarchy or system of promotion. In a legal-rational form of authority, the bureaucracy operates according to defined rules, having well defined job descriptions, division of labor, hierarchies in the form of a pyramid, and a clear career structure through which bureaucrats can aspire to a promotion. Bureaucracy is also ‘domination through knowledge’, where the officials through the use of files and record keeping possess a special knowledge in the field. At the top of the pyramid there is, however, a leader whose rule has to be enforced. “Weber’s central argument, though, is that bureaucracy is the most efficient way of conducting this rule” (Kieran, 2004: 113). This efficiency, essential for the modern society, is only achieved at the price of alienation (Adler, 2012).

Weber’s ideal type was not intended to represent the reality of bureaucracies in his time nor a normative situation, i.e. explaining what characteristics bureaucracies should aim to develop

(Höpfl, 2006). However, the term spread in various ways becoming an analytical concept, an administrative form and a set of ideas about public administration and other institutions (Olsen, 2005).

Olsen explains that public bureaucracy¹ can be analyzed as an instrument or an institution. Bureaucracy as an instrument can be understood “[...] as a rational tool for executing the commands of elected leaders. In this perspective it is an organizational apparatus for getting things done, to be assessed on the basis of its effectiveness and efficiency in achieving predetermined purposes” (Olsen, 2005: 3). As an institution bureaucracy is an expression of values that the government pursues. Similarly, Oszlak interprets bureaucracy not as an ideal type of organization that performs a task, in his view “bureaucracy is what it does” (Oszlak 2006: 2). This means that bureaucracy is the concrete institutional expression of the answers that the state gives to pressing issues on the agenda at a given time.

Oszlak characterizes bureaucracy as a “[...] production system formally invested with the mission of satisfy certain goals, values, expectations and social demands” (Oszlak, 2006: 8). Bureaucracy is seen as the material expression of the abstract concept of the state, that combining of different resources (human, material, financial and technological) to provide different products e.g. goods, regulations, services or even symbols (Oszlak, 2006). Resources are essential for the production function; however, they are utilized based on specific norms and structures. Norms establish how resources are to be utilized to generate public value. These include legislation, culture, policies, and organizational rule. The structure that formally organizes and assigns resources influences the bureaucratic behavior as well, impacting later the productivity.

In this paper, the adopted definition of public bureaucracy is the one provided by Ejersbo and Svava (2012), who consider bureaucracy “[...] to be the institution in urban governance characterized by continuity in personnel, methods, structure, and values that plays a special role (along with elected officials and citizens) in formulating public policy and a central role in implementing public policy and delivering public services whatever its exact features and methods” (Ejersbo and Svava, 2012: 2).

Central features of these definitions are that bureaucracy is not only an instrument but an institution that is in turn conditioned by norms and the formal constitutional structures that reflects goals and

¹ Bureaucratic administration can be found outside public domains. This research focuses on public bureaucracies and the term ‘bureaucracy’ will be used instead of ‘public bureaucracy’.

values of the state. At the center of bureaucracy is the people that follows the rules and ethic codes and has specific technical qualifications and knowledge as well as their own set of values. Bureaucracy is in this view not an independent instrument that runs according to its own rules, resisting change but an institution that interacts with elected officials and the citizens it serves (Ejersbo and Svava, 2012: 2).

What is then the role that bureaucracies can partake in development? This research will analyze the role of the role of local bureaucracies in light of the notions described in the Ibero-American Charter for the Public Service, adopted by the fifth Ibero-American Conference of Ministers for Public Administration and State Reform that took place in Bolivia in 2003, and for which Argentina is a signatory country².

The Ibero-American Charter for the Public Service's intention (hereinafter referred to as 'the Charter') is to build political and social consensus on public service reform as a way of advancing in goals of sustainable development. It is the most important document signed by Ibero-American countries that sets up a reference point for relation to basic concepts and fundamentals of a professional and effective public service, taking into account the characteristics, cultures, history and traditions of each country. The document is non-binding for the signatory countries, but it established a general framework, to which individual cases can refer to. It was developed in accordance to the 'Latin American Center of Administration for Development's' (CLAD in Spanish) recommendations. CLAD is a regional organization that focuses on study public administration and state reform, working together with the United Nations Public Administration Network (UNPAN), which aims at helping developing countries reach their development goals. It is important to mention that goals and criteria for success or failure in public administration are subject to change over time. Olsen explains that "Politicians, judges, experts, organized groups, mass media, and individual citizens are likely to hold different and changing—not coherent and stable—concepts of 'good administration'" (Olsen, 2005: 7). The concepts outlined by the Charter represent the current goals and direction of change that public administrations should aim in Ibero-american countries, that reflect the challenges of the region as well as the ideas prevalent in that particular point in time. This can be illustrated by the use of the concept of 'public service' and

² Other signatory countries include Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Chile, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Portugal, Spain, Uruguay and Venezuela.

the avoidance of the term bureaucracy. In the Charter “The public service is composed of all the institutional arrangements through which public employment and public service employees are defined and managed in the context of a specific national reality. These arrangements encompass written or informal standards, structures, cultural patterns, explicit or implicit policies, processes and various practices and activities whose purpose is to ensure satisfactory human resources management in the context of a professional and effective public administration in the public interest” (IACPS, 2003). This definition and the description of a ‘professional and effective public service’ matches the previous characterization of public bureaucracy and its human resources. Bureaucracy is however, a word that takes a very negative connotation and public service or civil service becomes instead the preferred terminology³.

The Charter assigns a central role to public service in development. A professional, efficient and merit based public service is a prerequisite for the improvement of the State which, in turn, leads to countries’ development (IACPS, 2003). A public service with these characteristics is also “crucial to the democratic governance of modern societies and proper public administration” providing quality services to citizens, qualified, transparent and honest personal for policy implementation and stable and fair employment for those employed in the public service.

Literature in the topic agrees that bureaucracy is a key element on the democratic system and the oversight of the rule of law (Iacoviello et al, 2010). Bureaucracies ensure stability in public policies and might limit the discretionary power of elected officials or governments (Iacoviello et al, 2010). “Bureaucrats are expected to obey and guard constitutional principles, retaining the autonomy to apply the law impartially without the interference of politicians and other organized interests” (Olsen, 2005: 3).

Bureaucracy might also generate positive economic, social, and political results. Rauch and Evans highlight the impact of certain bureaucratic models in economic growth, explaining that stable career paths might increase the emergence of long term projects such as infrastructure, but also to reduce the likelihood of engaging in quick-return activities, e.g. corrupt arrangements (Rauch and Evans, 1999 and Rauch, 1995). In sum, bureaucratic agencies are not only the ‘face of the government’ or the ‘material expression of the state’, rather an actor that can determine the content of public policy and its implementation, impacting in this way local development.

³ Through this study the concepts of ‘civil service’, ‘public service’ and bureaucracy will be used interchangeably.

The Charter outlines several functional requirements of the public service, i.e. elements that should be present in a human resource management for an effective public administration at different levels of the state. These elements refer to all stages of employment: appointment of personnel; management during their time as employees and dismissal.

Appointment	Management	Dismissal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organization of work • Recruitment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance evaluation • Remuneration • Advancement/training • Workspace responsibility • Human and social relations • Organization of human resources functions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Separation

In the first place, public bureaucracies need to develop an ‘Organization of work’ that in the Charter is defined as an accurate description of the job positions and qualifications needed by individuals fulfilling those posts. Secondly, the Charter mentions recruitment. This process should aim to select “the best candidate on the basis of merit and ability” for which the job vacancy needs to be announced in a way all potential candidates are reached and a fair and transparent process granted. The Charter mentions interviews, knowledge tests or training periods among others as a fair procedure to select a candidate.

While the employee is working it is important to develop a system of performance evaluation where it can be assessed not only for when an employee may be deserving of a promotion or needs more training but also where employees can express concerns and disagreements.

Remuneration is also mentioned in the Charter. The document calls for internal and external equity as guiding principles, which means that they receive a fair pay compared to others in the same organization and a competitive salary to be “able to attract, motivate and retain employees with the necessary skills [...]”. Moreover, “Decisions concerning salary administration shall, in general, be taken in accordance with coherent criteria based on the merit and ability of employees”.

There is also a mention to the responsibility from the employer to provide a clear career path and training opportunities, and also from the employee, who should comply with workplace obligations such as attendance, completion of full working day, etc. Moreover, the relationship between employee and employer should be in accordance with national and local legislation, ensuring the right of employees to defend their interests. For this, organizations are advised to have a human resource office in charge of devising and executing the human resource plan.

Additionally, the termination of the employee's contract should only be based on objective measures of unsatisfactory performance or organizational reasons (e.g. economic, needed to reduce personnel). The Charter specifically points out that "A simple change of government or the concurrence of circumstances or purely discretionary decisions shall not, in themselves, be sufficient justification for dismissals or the termination of employment contracts".

Importantly, the document highlights the need for human resource planning, i.e. an overall understanding and link between the agency's strategy, the recruitment, and the management of personnel.

The Charter refers briefly to the relationship between bureaucracy and another important actor: elected officials. According to the document, bureaucracies need to achieve certain independence from politicians, i.e. managed and controlled but not dominated by elected politicians. Looking closely at the relation between politicians and democracy can be subject to debate. In addition to the positive role that can play in democratic systems, bureaucrats, by definition appointed and not elected, implement decisions and policies outlined by democratically elected representatives but in doing so they might shape the decision (Ejersbo and Svara, 2012: 9) and influence in different stages of public policy making (Knill and Tosun, 2012 and Oszlak, 2006).

Dasandi and Esteve (2017) outline four models of political-bureaucratic relations:

- *Integrated* bureaucracies appear to be the closest to the Weberian type and are associated with advanced democracies such as United Kingdom or United States.
- In the *collaborative* model there is also a coherent and meritocratic bureaucracy, and both bureaucratic and politic elites share values and objectives which make them really close. The distinctive characteristic is a high degree of influence of bureaucracy in the policy process. An example of this type are Singapore and China.
- In the *intrusive* model there is a large formal separation between bureaucratic and politician's roles, however, politicians interfere greatly in bureaucratic work mainly through recruitment and career advance. These types of bureaucracies are more common in former colonies, where bureaucracies were already established by the time of independence and new governments had to find ways of dealing with powerful bureaucratic bodies.

- Lastly, in *collusive* models, the recruitment is based almost exclusively on personal or political ties. The individual's employment contract is not with an institution but with the patron that provides the job, changing the essence of the goals that each bureaucrat aims to achieve, turning the main purpose to build political support instead of pursuing policy goals (Grindle; 2012). This is the model found on many developing countries, especially in Latin America (Dasandi and Esteve, 2017).

Government defines the formal and informal rules that guide recruitment and retention of public service employees affecting the ability and effectiveness of the bureaucracy to generate an impact on development (Iacoviello et al, 2010). As a result, the relationship between bureaucracy and elected officials is one of critical importance, because of the power that elected officials have in defining both autonomy and capacity of bureaucratic structures.

Consequently, it is important to explain briefly what the strategies of elected officials are to appoint their personnel. From a rational choice institutionalist point of view, B. Geddes introduced a key element for understanding appointment strategies. She explains that when designating personnel politicians face a dilemma: they can either appoint someone that can contribute to their personal or party's immediate support (a political investment) or they can hire an expert by his/her credentials who will contribute to the long-term success of any given policy. Of course, these choices are not mutually exclusive, but in most cases party loyalists or other political investments do not necessarily come with credentials. In this case, short term political considerations conflict long term policy goals (Geddes, 1994). The consequences of the appointment strategy are very important: "A president who, for example, appoints loyalists regardless of competence in order to maintain short-term viability may fatally cripple the government's ability to carry out policy of any kind. A president who, at the other extreme, appoints only technocrats may find that the legislature feels itself excluded from policy making and therefore obstructs all the president's policy initiatives" (Geddes, 1994: 131).

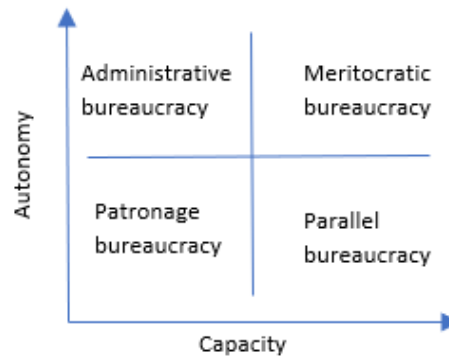
Geddes explains presidents have three main goals: one, surviving in office, and overcoming threats of the military to seize power⁴; second, governing effectively, providing a minimum of economic stability that will grant public support; third and finally, they must also build personal loyalties that might assure them political survival afterwards. However, these goals might conflict with each

⁴ Geddes wrote with relatively weak democracies in mind, only years after dictatorships left power in Latin America. In Argentina, although not clear from political instability, there is no threat of military coup.

other. The most evident is the goal of building personal political support, which may imply patronage appointments and the diverting of resources that might compromise the economic stability objective. The author explains how different political environments, e.g. presidents threatened by military coup, or presidents elected with an established party support, will lead to different appointment strategies (Geddes, 1994). She continues, “The dilemma that presidents face in choosing an appointment strategy is that most potential appointees cannot contribute equally to attaining all three of their goals (current survival, effective governance, and building up a loyal political organization). The appointees who can help gain the support of other political players and this bolster chances of survival are not, in general, the same appointees who can help most to implement programs or build a loyal political organization. Hence, the greater the president’s need to shore up current political standing by securing the cooperation of other political players, the fewer appointment resources available for personnel who can help attain longer-term goals” (Geddes, 1994: 142).

Self-interest explanations add up to the understanding of preferences and motives, although should be complemented with other sources of preferences such as values, interests and motivations (Dasandi and Esteve, 2017). The authors argue that there are several factors that can help developing a shared goal between politicians and bureaucrats on promoting development for their country.

The relation between bureaucracy and elected officials might affect autonomy, but different authors stressed the importance of analyzing bureaucracies looking at both autonomy and capacity (Iacoviello et al, 2010, Fukuyama, 2013 and Cingolani et al, 2015). Autonomy refers to the degree of isolation from political manipulation and from rent-seeking interests outside the state (Iacoviello et al, 2010: 162), which was described before as a critical element for bureaucracies. Technical capacity in turn relates to the competences of officials, reflecting the skills needed to solve efficiently the problems that arise during their work (Iacoviello et al; 2010, 163). Iacoviello et al (2010) identify four bureaucratic types according to the level of autonomy and capacity:



Source: Iacoviello et al, 2010

Each type of bureaucracy could play a different role in policymaking and implementation, having both administrative and patronage bureaucracy limited to no ability on policymaking. Bureaucratic units that fall into the administrative bureaucracy type do not have the technical capacity to influence in policy design or innovation. Although they have high autonomy and relatively low uncertainty, they are dedicated to standardized routine activities. In units where patronage bureaucracy prevails, individuals could lack technical capabilities (because they are not hired by their credentials or experience) nor have incentives to promote any policy outside the political patron that facilitated the job. Parallel bureaucracies are usually part of specific projects, they have high technical capacities but because of the nature of the contract and task are expected to have low long-term impact on policy development. Meritocratic bureaucracies are the closest type of a Weber’s ideal type, where personnel are recruited in a merit base having both the technical capacity and the relative autonomy to express opinions and contribute to policy development (Iacoviello et al, 2010).

It is important to briefly describe patronage and its consequences for the function of the bureaucracy given its importance in Latin America. Patronage is here defined by Oliveros “as the exchange of public sector jobs for political support” (Oliveros, 2013: 13). Patronage is a form of clientelism, although with specific features⁵. In the first place, it is only available to the party in government, which has great consequences on democracy with economic and developmental

⁵ As Oliveros (2013) reports, the concept of patronage is not unequivocal. Some authors use clientelism as interchangeable terms. Both terms imply a patron (politician) and client and the exchange of a benefit for political support. However, patronage involves a specific type of benefit (a job) in exchange for a wider political support than just voting for the candidate. Patronage also implies a longer relationship between patron and client (current or future employee), than the transaction of material goods occurring at election time (Oliveros, 2013).

results. Economic consequences are easy to spot, for example, “If employees hired are unqualified for the job, with the same number of employees the output in terms of production is lower than it would have been in the case with qualified individuals. Moreover, if political appointees devote part of their working hours to the provision of political services, less time is devoted to ordinary day-to-day working tasks” (Oliveros, 2013: 16). Additionally, the enlarged number of employees becomes a burden to local budgets and a missed opportunity to invest in other urgent areas: when resources are spent on salaries of employees hired in essence to provide political support for their patrons, they are not being spent in other areas that might require investment.

Political consequences are also vast. The use of patronage represents a large advantage for the incumbent party that can use state resources to increase their support, reducing the chances of non-incumbent parties to get elected, and damaging in this way, democracy (Oliveros, 2013). This lies at the core of the path-dependency argument: patronage is a practice that involves increasing returns to those executives providing jobs. They increase their political support and the chances of their parties staying in power. Correspondingly, the costs of exiting these practices are extremely high and it would involve an administration that voluntarily renounces the chance of financing supporters through state resources and having key supporters distributed through the bureaucratic apparatus that can help the government and its supporters.

A patronage strategy results in a bureaucratic staff that lacks autonomy, responding only to the patron that provided the job, and might lack technical capacity. As Oliveros writes, “Since in patronage contracts the criteria for selecting new employees is their willingness or capacity to deliver political services instead of their skills for the job, education or merit, there is no mechanism to prevent unqualified citizens from getting hired, leading to poor public administration” (Oliveros, 2013: 16). The appointment or promotion of patronage positions leads often to the deficient provision of services and could lead to impartiality in relation to citizens (Oliveros, 2013: 22), giving the impression that personal relations are vital for getting things done (Oliveros, 2016). The appointment of employees that respond to the incumbent party might imply an open or subtle bias to provide services to supporters of the same party, in all levels of services provided.

Merit recruitment, on the other side, is at the core of the discussions about bureaucracy. The assumption is that the best way to recruit the most qualified personnel is to base the selection on credentials or experience for the position rather than criteria such as race, class, language or

political affiliation, as described above (Peters, 2001). Dasandi and Esteve (2017) are categorical on their affirmation that “The absence of meritocratic recruitment in the bureaucracy is associated with producing public administrations that are inflated, inefficient, corrupt, and lacking in autonomy from political leaders. It is the absence of meritocratic recruitment in many developing countries that is the most prominent feature of a collusive model of political–administrative relations” (Dasandi and Esteve, 2017: 239). Merit is highlighted not only as an important characteristic in recruitment but also throughout the bureaucratic career, for example, as a guideline for promotions and employment termination (Dasandi and Esteve, 2017 and Iacoviello et al, 2010).

In spite of the benefits merit recruitment could have potential inefficiencies. One of them has already been mentioned, i.e. merit recruitment could potentially lead to an autonomous bureaucracy that becomes hostile to implementing policies of elected officials, which is a problem for a democratic system. Other caveats are related to representativeness of the bureaucratic sector (Dasandi and Esteve, 2017 and Peters, 2001). Some recruitment systems can, for example, introduce a class bias favoring, in a more open or subtle way, representatives from classes that are in conditions of achieving degrees. Ethnic representativeness is also a crucial issue, where in general we observe “[...] the same sort of pattern as was found with respect to class, with the dominant community having disproportionate share of the members of the civil service, especially in elite positions” (Peters, 2001: 120). The issue of gender, on the other hand, focuses on the type of positions that women occupy rather than the number. As in the private sector, “Women often comprise a large proportion of the public sector employment, and over half in some, but they are concentrated in lower level positions. The majority of women in the civil service of almost every country are employed in lower-level jobs, such as clerks and typists, rather than in the higher civil service” (Peters, 2001: 124).

To summarize, bureaucracies are considered important actors in development by Latin American governments. The role that these bureaucracies play in development is conditioned by their capacity and autonomy. One of the central actors that determine the capacity and autonomy are elected officials, because they can manipulate bureaucratic organization’s characteristics through human resource strategies that focus on merit or patronage recruitment, or are more or less successful in retaining qualified personnel.

Local bureaucracies in Latin America

What has been so far a general conceptualization of bureaucracies, their role in development and factors that might impact the ability of bureaucracies to achieve this role needs to be contrasted with the reality of local governments in developing countries. From an institutional perspective the size of the community is of crucial importance: in smaller groups collective action problems are easier to resolve (for example Olson, 1965 and Ostrom, 1998). Within bureaucratic structures, there are several elements that differentiate national bureaucratic models from local experiences. In the first place, the proximity of elected officials and administrators. In small cities, the interaction with public service employees in other areas of life reduces the isolation of bureaucrats with the environment where policies and services are implemented but it also includes more interaction with politicians (Ejersbo and Svara, 2012). Recruitment and retention of personnel is also subject to other dynamics. For example, the pool of experts on certain areas might not be large, and higher education degrees might not be available locally.

Additionally, this research pertains not only to local governments but specifically to Latin American countries. How are the general notions of bureaucracy viewed from a Latin American stand point? Bureaucracy studies, and the crucial relationship between politics-bureaucracy have focused almost exclusively in the study of developed democracies (Dasandi and Esteve, 2017). “The lack of attention to this issue has meant that much of our understanding of the politics–bureaucracy relationship in these countries is based on the relationship observed in advanced democracies” (Dasandi and Esteve, 2017). For example, Olsen (2005) explains that public administration has been criticized for not being bureaucratic enough and for being excessively bureaucratic. Whether in the first case bureaucracies are accused of lacking professionalism and accountability, being corrupt, unreliable, and misusing the position of power, in the second case rules are followed too closely and because of the lack of flexibility the use of public servants is questioned all together. The author clarifies that “Recent criticism of public administration has elements of both types, but the latter has been predominant” (Olsen, 2005: 6). The reality of Latin American countries shows, in contrast, that the first appreciation is actually prevalent (Iacoviello et al, 2010).

Bureaucracies in developing countries have, in general terms, lower autonomy (Dasandi and Esteve, 2017), although the differences are not only among countries but also between agencies and ministries within the same country (Bersch, K. et al, 2017 and Iacoviello et al, 2010). In Latin America, Iacoviello et al (2010), highlighting the role of the capacity and professionalization in addition to the autonomy variable, distinguish three groups of countries: Brazil, Chile and, to a lesser extent, Costa Rica are examples of a more advanced level of recruitment and retention. Argentina and Uruguay are in the intermediate group with some 'isles' of meritocratic bureaucracies but presence of patronage and administrative types, therefore showing large disparities between agencies and levels of the state. Within the weakest bureaucracies we find countries like Bolivia, Paraguay, Dominican Republic or El Salvador, where the widespread use of patronage and low institutionalization set up their bureaucracies far away from the model presented in the Charter. To sum up, developing states, especially Latin American countries, experience other type of problems and different levels of formal development of their bureaucracies related to political, economic and social variables.

Latin American countries have not always taken into consideration their specific environments and have adopted bureaucratic models that were designed for entirely different contexts. For the CLAD the irresponsible adoption of models of public administration, that do not take in consideration the specificities of Latin America, is in fact one of the negative elements in which the region bases its current development of the public service. The other elements that shape a historical legacy are:

- Patronage referred as political or private interests that co-opt bureaucracies. This feature affected not only the transparency of the decisions taken by the bureaucracy but also its technical capacity. As a result, the Weberian model of bureaucracy including a meritocratic recruitment is never implemented in full, only in specific areas.
- Bureaucratic formalism. Patronage evolves in hand with a large bureaucratic formalism, that increased the number of bureaucratic procedures and norms or 'red tape', only to create the 'illusion' that bureaucratic structures were implementing impartial rules.
- Modernization through the implementation of isolated technical elites. This situation generated low levels of efficiency and efficacy that were countered with the implementation (and isolation) of highly technical elites. These technical elites were

implemented primarily in areas related to economy, in contrast social ministries were understood as purely clientelistic.

- Excessive centralization is another negative element, not only within bureaucratic structures giving little autonomy to lower or street-level bureaucracy but within subnational units and the national government.
- Unquestioned adoption of theories and reforms from developed countries and international organizations. The document refers to ‘the adoption of solutions looking for a problem’, since Latin America implemented models of public administration that were conceived in other politic, economic, social and cultural environments (CLAD, 2010).

Public administration in Latin America consists of a series of overlapping models that have not developed in full (Merlo Rodriguez, 2014). ‘New public management’ (NPM) was the neoliberal response to the classical ‘weberian’ model that was never implemented thoroughly. NPM’s starting point is the critic of the classical model, assuming that bureaucracies are too rigid, inefficient and invasive which were not the main or only problem of Latin American bureaucracies.

After the crisis of the neoliberal state, new bureaucratic models were proposed including network models that emphasize ideas of open government and citizen participation. Consequently, the ‘incomplete’ Weberian model was then added to another incomplete NPM model and is in this context that ideas of open government tried to be implemented (Merlo Rodriguez, 2014).

- Lastly, CLAD mentions a lack of democratic mindset, that not only refers to dictatorship periods but to the difficulties that the region has to implement models that increase citizen participation (CLAD, 2010).

To summarize, this theory section highlighted the need of analyzing bureaucracies as an institution that is conditioned by formal and informal rules that reflect goals and values of the state. Bureaucracy is not only an instrument but a product of a specific context.

Bureaucracies are considered important actors in development by Latin American governments. The role that these bureaucracies play are conditioned by their technical capacity and autonomy. In turn, one of the central variables that influences the capacity and autonomy of bureaucracies are the elected officials, owing to their ability to pursue different human resources strategies that might

focus on merit or patronage recruitment or are more or less successful in retaining qualified personnel. The section provided a short review of some of the appointment strategies that the heads of executive power might pursue when appointing personnel.

In addition, this section discussed that historical institutionalism can be used as a great tool to study bureaucracies, focusing on specific contexts to explain certain political outcomes. Each country and within them, each level of state has varying political, social, cultural, and economic characteristics that might drastically change the accepted role of its bureaucracy (Olsen, 2005: 18), and the avenues for change aspects that might appear as problematic. Latin America has specific legacies in which current bureaucracies operate. Some practices, like patronage appointment, might be path dependent, meaning they show increasing returns for the executive and become extremely hard to change.

Methodology

This study is structured as a flexible research design. Flexible designs follow closely a qualitative paradigm, although data collection might include qualitative or quantitative methods.

The use of a fixed or a flexible research design is related to the purpose of the research, the conceptual structure, the type of research question, the methods of data collection and the sampling strategy used (Robson, 2011: 131). I will review each of these aspects in this research:

Purpose of the research. The purpose of the research is to explain how are local public service personnel appointed, managed and dismissed, in light with the concepts presented in the Ibero-American Charter for the Public Service, as well as the reasons that explain such strategy and the consequences for local bureaucracies. The focus on processes rather than outcomes is more congruent with a flexible design, that will allow to understand key structural elements endogenous and exogenous to the municipal environment that explain characteristics and role of the local bureaucracies.

Conceptual framework. The use of historical institutionalism has implications for the research design. Amenta et al (2012) highlight how in general terms, historical institutionalism involves the selection of a single or few cases, for which the research develops a deep understanding. The explanation of political outcomes usually involves a wide range of institutions such as executives, bureaucracies, legislators and courts (Amenta, 2012: 52). The emphasis on process tracing leads to the use of historical analysis rather than statistical analysis or natural experiments, which are used in a fixed design. In the same line, Fioretos et al explain that even though historical institutional research has evolved to include a wider array of methods, the approach has a “[...] particular affinity for qualitative methods associated with historiography and process-tracing” (Fioretos et al, 2016: 16).

Pierson, on the other hand, highlights the methodological difficulty of testing hypothesis in path dependent arguments, that requires to evaluate several variables over time (Pierson, 2000a: 265). That is why the empirical tools to study path dependent situations are primarily case studies, focusing on a detailed and holistic analysis of sequences over time and process tracing, which allows to study interaction effects among other variables that might have an impact.

Research question. According to Robson, the key to selecting a research design is the type of research question. Research can aim to explore, describe and/or explain a particular phenomenon and each of these types of questions will call for a different research design (Robson, 2011: 39). The question that the present study aims to answer is: **to what extent have local bureaucracies implemented recommendations from the Ibero-American Charter for the Public Service? More specifically, How are local human resources appointed, managed and dismissed? What are the main drivers of such human resource management strategy? and What are the consequences for local bureaucracies?**

According to Yin (1994) these types of explanatory questions are likely to rely on case studies. “This is because such questions deal with operational links needing to be traced over time, rather than mere frequencies or incidence” (Yin, 1994: 6). In addition, Yin explains that the use of case studies is also related to the control over behavioral events and the degree of focus on contemporary or historical events. In his view “The case study is preferred in examining contemporary events, but when the relevant behaviors cannot be manipulated” (Yin, 1994: 8). Case studies deal with a variety of evidence but, unlike the historical research has access to interviews and observations of the current situation, critical for understanding the phenomenon being studied. Moreover, case studies are also an option when the investigator has no control, i.e. a natural experiment is not possible.

Amenta et al explain that “Typically social scientists choose cases on the basis of their being a part of some larger theoretical population, either typical of a larger group or atypical and thus extra worthy of explanation. Historical institutionalist scholars can refine understandings of these more general populations and situate cases more precisely with respect to others deemed as otherwise similar” (Amenta et al, 2012: 55). In this case, the case study is based on a typical case within the ‘cattle cluster’. Yin (1994) explains the choice of single case studies are related to the nature of the phenomena being studied i.e. critical, extreme or unique cases in testing a theory, but also with the time and resources available to the researcher. In this case, the selection of a single case study is linked to the research question focused on processes, rather than comparative elements between other municipalities. Multiple case studies can also yield valuable information but would not have been suitable for this research question and the resources available.

Buenos Aires is a very heterogenous province in term of geography, population distribution and economic activities. Consequently, very diverse situations at the municipal level can be observed,

which is relevant when we look at the process of designing and implementing public policies, especially those aimed at reducing the disparities between different municipalities (Aramburú and Cadelli, 2012: 4). In the Buenos Aires province, each administrative agency utilizes a distinctive way of dividing municipalities. For example, The National Institute of Statistics and Censuses divides the districts according to its closeness to Buenos Aires city, capital city of the country; electoral law establishes eight electoral sections and there are 25 school districts in the whole province, among other divisions. Outside the administrative environment divisions focus on Buenos Aires and its metropolitan area vs rural areas, agricultural and cattle rising based economies or geographical regions (Aramburú and Cadelli, 2012), the innovative classification of districts among clusters groups municipalities based on a variety of variables, namely, geographical, demographical (population density), social ('unsatisfied basic needs') and economic (area available for agricultural uses, number of cattle, industries and hotels, etc.), and this this study utilizes this classification instead more traditional ones.

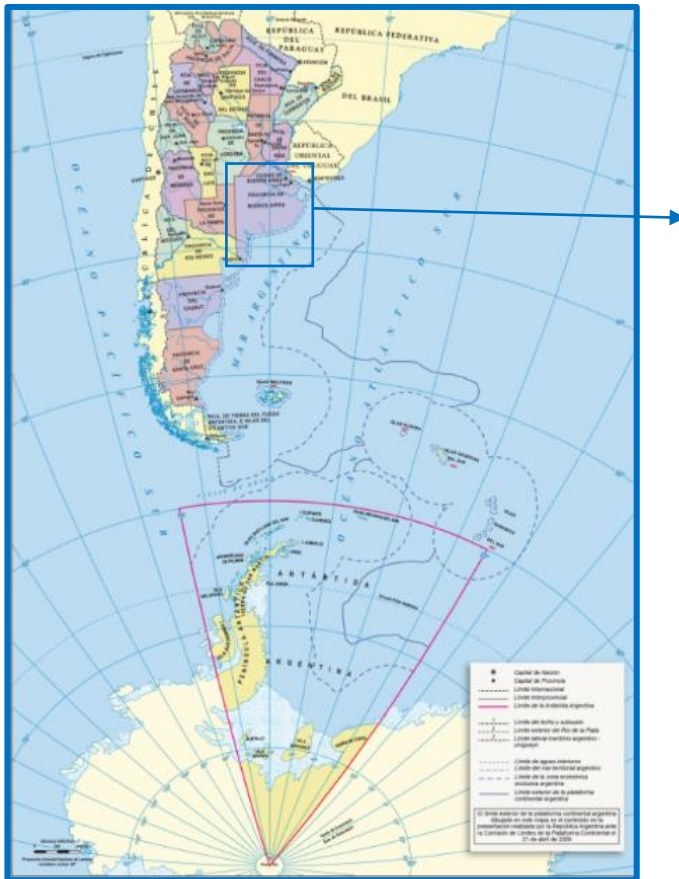
The cattle cluster is comprised by 34 municipalities⁶. As shown in map No. 2 in green color, geographically, they extend over the central and part of the south area. In general terms, the predominant economic activity is cattle rising, therefore its name. The cattle cluster has nearly 50% of the stock in the province, with an average of 22.1 animals per habitant, followed by the cereal cluster with only 8.5 animals per habitant (Aramburú and Cadelli, 2012). In addition, there is also a significant agriculture activity, primarily crops like soybeans and wheat. Overall, the region relies heavily on the primary sector, which contributes to 76% of the added value, the highest in the province. Conversely, the weight of the industry is also the smallest: 13.6%.

The cluster is also the least populated with only 5.2 habitants per km². On the other end, the industrial cluster shows 6,366.1 habitants per km². In the social aspect, the percentage of population with 'unsatisfied basic needs' is 10.9%, lower than the mean of 12.4% (Aramburú and Cadelli, 2012: 16).

⁶ Ayacucho; Azul; Balcarce; Benito Juárez; Bolívar; Carlos Tejedor; Castelli; Daireaux; Dolores; General Alvear; General Belgrano; General Guido; General Juan Madariaga; General La Madrid; General Lavalle; General Paz; Guaminí; Laprida; Las Flores; Magdalena; Maipú; Mar Chiquita; Monte; Patagones; Pellegrini; Pila; Puán; Punta Indio; Rauch; Tapalqué; Tordillo; Tornquist; Veinticinco de Mayo y Villarino.

Map No. 1

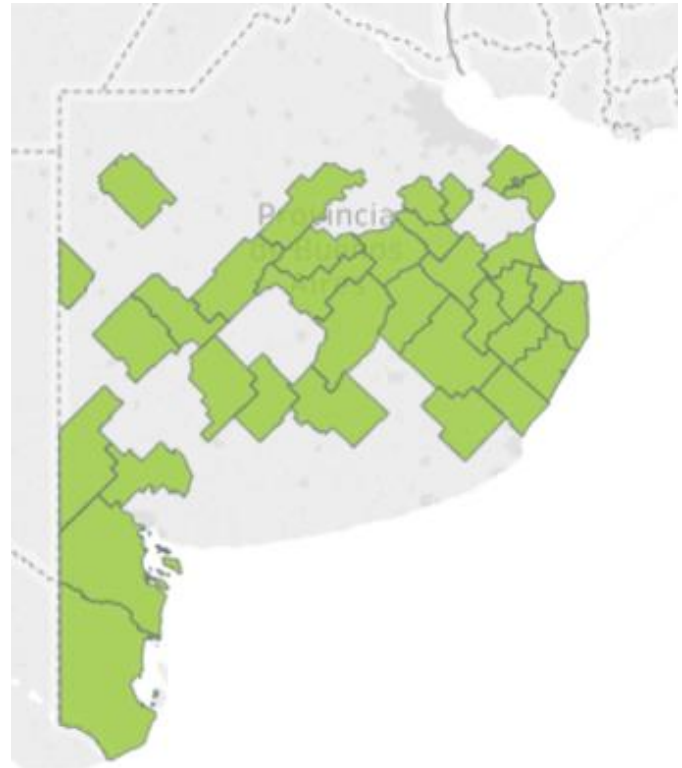
Argentina – Division by Provinces



Source: Instituto Geografico Nacional

Map No. 2

Buenos Aires Province – Cattle Cluster



Map available at datos.gba.gob.ar

The municipality of Bolivar, within this cluster is used as a typical case study. That is, within the agglomeration Bolivar:

- Shows a similar economic development to other districts. In Bolivar, industry contributes to 6.9% to the gross added value of the municipality (DPE, 2003), situated very close to the mean value for the cattle cluster that is 6%. As described, the municipalities in this group rely significantly on cattle rising and agricultural activities. These economic activities contribute on average 38.12% of the gross added value. In turn, Bolivar's primary sector contributes 29.12%.
- The municipalities in the cluster share a similar financial situation. In general terms, they are more dependent on external funding and have a more rigid income structure. The expenses scheme is also similar: in the rural municipalities the portion of the budget

allocated to wages for public servants is larger than the average (SCE, 2014). For example, in 2013, the average expense in wages for all municipalities was of 54%. The average figure for the cattle cluster is 60.65% and Bolivar has spent 65% in wages for public employees.

Due to a low population density, the expenses in public salaries per habitant are also higher in the cattle cluster than the average for all the municipalities. Whether the consolidated figure for 135 municipalities is 1,286 pesos per capita (2013), the average for the cluster is 3,785 pesos. Bolivar in turn, disbursed 3,372 per habitant in salaries for public servants.

- Shows a population density close to the average for the cluster. The average number of habitants/km² in the cattle cluster is 5.1 and Bolivar, according to the population census 2010, shows 7 habitants/km². However, in total population, Bolivar has a higher population than the mean of 18,032 habitants. The municipality ranks 4th within the cluster, with a total of 34,190 habitants. In the province, Bolivar occupies the 66th place in a total of 135 municipalities in terms of total population, located very near the median of 32,707 habitants. This highlights how small in number of habitants are the municipalities grouped in the cattle cluster.
- Geographically, Bolivar is also located close to the mean distance to the capital⁷. The average distance of the capital of each municipality of the cluster to the city of Buenos Aires is 346.21 km, and the distance of Bolivar from Buenos Aires is 334km. Although this specific variable does not take part of the cluster formation methodology utilized by Aramburú and Cadelli (2012), the number is important as a reference given that transportation in the province relies exclusively on motor vehicles (cars, vans, semi-trucks) and a shorter distance might impact, for example, the economy and the possibilities for training of public servants.

The choice of a typical case is not intended to minimize the complex and diverse realities of the municipalities in Buenos Aires province. Even within the cattle cluster we can find very diverse characteristics: from 1,764 to 65,280 habitants; from small districts close to Buenos Aires city to large and remote areas. Bolivar represents a good point of reference, situated very close to the mean on the selected variables.

⁷ Distance calculated between each municipality's capital city and Buenos Aires city using google maps. When more than one route is available, the shortest way is taken.

Methods of data collection. The data collection will be based on semi-structured interviews and primary and secondary data and analysis available from government institutions, organizations dedicated to the study of public administration, local and national newspapers, and others.

Semi-structured interviews are broadly used in flexible designs (Robson, 2011: 285). Unlike structured interviews which are more similar to a survey, with fixed questions and difficulty to extract information from open-ended questions, the use of semi-structured interviews helps the researcher to obtain critical information about current processes and points of view. The interviewer has a list of topics and questions to be asked but can change the order, the wording or the approach if appropriate.

The use of interviews relates also to the nature of the phenomenon being studied and the availability of data. Fioretos et al, for instance, explains that the idea of historical institutionalism of explaining political institutions and preferences based on formal institutions, i.e. written and enforceable rules, and informal institutions (unwritten understandings and practices) is especially useful for studying developing countries where formal institutions are weaker or cannot provide a full picture (Fioretos et al, 2016: 16). This attention to informal institutions has an impact on methods of collecting data, in which semi-interviews and open-ended questions have better chances to capture informal rules of the game that might not come clear with other methods.

The questionnaire had two main parts: firstly, respondents were asked about the context of municipalities and public administration in Buenos Aires Province; secondly; questions were then asked pertaining to Bolivar's specific case such as 'What is the process of selecting candidates?'; 'How does the administration make sure that no discrimination (based on political views, gender, age) takes place?' or 'How do you evaluate performance?'. It is important to note that Bolivar's questions were emphasized for respondents that were more involved in the local environment.

Other primary data used, e.g. statistical data is obtained through public statistics institutions, e.g. National Institute of Statistics and Censuses (INDEC), Buenos Aires Provincial Statistics Office and data available through Bolivar's municipality. It is important to mention that figures of the public administration are not widely available in Argentina. Even though National and Provincial governments are taking steps to assure the availability of certain type of data, information regarding public employees is scarce and sometimes non-existent. The literature consulted for this research widely agrees on this point. This is why other sources of data and analysis available are

also used, for example, research papers from government institutions, organizations dedicated to the study of public administration and local and national newspapers.

Due to the topic and case study selected, a great number of the bibliographic resources are in Spanish. All cites, and interviews are translated into English by the author of this thesis.

Sampling strategy. Interviews were conducted to seven key players in the municipal environment in Bolivar. Following the theory framework presented, the focus is on municipal Executive power to provide an insight of the hiring process and overview of the challenges they faced. Other stakeholders also help providing an understanding from different points of view, highlighting different dimensions and aspects of local bureaucracies.

The seven cases interviewed are representative of the Bolivar political environment. Succinctly, in Argentina there are two main parties that have prevailed in the electoral competition for the last 60 years: Justicialista Party (Peronist or PJ), and Union Civica Radical (UCR) (Oliveros, 2013: 26). Although PJ won presidential elections five times (1989, 1995, 2003, 2007 and 2011) and UCR only in 1983 and 1999 (as part of a coalition named ‘Alianza’), Bolivar’s political environment has been dominated, after the return of democracy in 1983, by the UCR. With the exception of one period of 4 years from 1991 to 1994, where the municipality had been governed by the UCR party, including 16 years under the rule of Juan Carlos Simón (1995-2011).

In 2009 Simón was elected as a Provincial Senator, leaving his seat to José Gabriel Erreca, who finished his mandate. In 2011, Erreca ran as a candidate for Mayor but was defeated by Eduardo Bucca, a young politician from the Peronist Party. Bucca was reelected in the 2015 elections with 55% of the votes. He utilized the success of his municipality to advertise his candidacy as a National Congressman, a position for which he was elected in 2017. In this year, he left the office in Bolivar, leaving his political ally Marcos Pisano, to be the residing and current mayor of Bolivar. For this research, high officials from Simon and Bucca’s periods were interviewed, as well as members from the Legislative Body. With the goal of capturing characteristics of the local bureaucracy from different points of view, representatives from organizations from the civil society, namely, the Road Commission and journalists covering local political developments were interviewed.

Limitations

Firstly, some study design limitations need to be specified. A large portion of the studies in bureaucracies and patronage focus as well on institutional change. Specifically, they outline certain characteristics of bureaucracies and the avenues for reform of the civil service in Latin America (for example Grindle, 2012 and Iacoviello et al, 2003). It is outside the scope of the present study to include an analysis on reform and improvement of local bureaucracies.

Furthermore, literature highlights the consequences brought about by certain types of bureaucracy to development. Indeed, many studies show the relation of bureaucracy and state capacity (see for example Bersch et al, 2017 and Iacoviello and Chudnovsky, 2015) and governance (Fukuyama, 2010). However, the present research does not intent to highlight a causal link, rather focus on explaining the human resource management strategy and the reasons why it is the prevalent strategy, as well as analyzing what is the type of bureaucracy that results from that approach.

The case study has been selected to reduce the impact limitation of the study, being able to generalize the findings to a larger group of municipalities. However, the theoretical approach, that emphasizes the specific historical, economic, political and demographic context might limit the external validity of the research.

In addition, it is necessary to once again point out data limitations. Both the country and the nature of the phenomena being studied entail serious limitations to data access. In the first place, Argentina does not count with data about public employees collected in a periodical manner, that covers basic attributes such as gender, age, education. Instead, the only sources are the national census that are completed every 10 years. Apart from the census information, the data collected and published as well as the methodology used varies between governments and their goals. The current government (M. Macri 2015-2019) has made available more material about public employment through the Labor Ministry, although it only covers Macri's period (after 2015) and it does not offer detailed information about municipalities.

Analysis

The analysis section is divided in two parts. First, there is a definition of the external situational factors (i.e. legal framework, political system and labour markets) mentioned in the Charter as an element that has great impact in the recruitment and human resource management (IACPS, 2003: 11). In line with this document and the theoretical framework that places special importance to the historical context, this section outlines the legal foundations of the municipal state in Argentina, its definition in the context of Buenos Aires Province and the limits and constraints of its autonomy. This section describes the formal institutions that outline the frame in which municipalities operate, but also informal ‘rules of the game’ in which these local governments function namely clientelism and discretion on the allocation of state resources.

Secondly, there is an overview of the legal framework that regulates relations between employers and employees in the public sector and some general characteristics of bureaucracies in Argentina. These two sections describe the structure that partially drives the development of local bureaucracies.

The second part of the analysis presents the case of the municipality of Bolivar. This section studies in detail the local public service and elaborates on the elements, now at the local level, that impact on the definition of the human resource management strategy.

1. Institutional framework: the place of municipalities and their bureaucracies in Argentina’s political system

A. Municipalities: autonomy and changing responsibilities

Argentina is a federal state organized in three levels of government: national, with its seat in the city of Buenos Aires; provincial, comprised by 23 provinces and the autonomous city of Buenos Aires; and municipal, i.e. the internal division of each province. The concept of municipality, however, is not uniform across the country.

The National Constitution, in its article No.5, assigns each province the responsibility to dictate a municipal regime in their own constitutions. It is therefore understood that in Argentina there is not a unique definition of municipality or municipal regime, rather 24 different understandings of it (Acosta, 2015 and Arraiza, 2016a: 25).

Article No. 5 is complemented by article No. 123, which was added in the last constitutional reform in 1994. This article establishes that “Each province dictates its own constitution, in accordance with the provisions of Article 5, ensuring municipal autonomy and the regulation of its institutional, political, administrative, economic and financial scope and content” (Constitution of Argentina, article 5). Article 123 introduces the concept of municipal autonomy that was heavily debated during the twentieth century, allowing, through the use of the wording ‘institutional scope and content’, municipalities are allowed to dictate their own municipal codes (Arraiza, 2016a: 26). In Buenos Aires, however, the provincial constitution does not reflect this change and municipalities do not have the right to dictate their own codes. Even though Buenos Aires reformed its constitution in 1994, in tandem with the national constitutional reform, the change did not bring any variation in the section related to municipalities. In the Provincial Constitution the Congress has the responsibility to delegate the certain faculties to municipalities (Botassi, 2010). The Provincial Constitution is complemented by the “Organic Law of Municipalities of the Province of Buenos Aires”, Law No. 6,769, which specifies competence, attributions and obligations of municipal Executive and Legislative power, financial resources, sanctions, and other rights.

Buenos Aires province does not have a clear definition of municipality (Arraiza, 2016a). In its Constitution, article 190 states that “The administration of local interests and services in the capital and each of the districts that constitute the Province are in charge of a Municipality, consisting of a single-person executive and a legislative [...]” (Constitution of Buenos Aires Province, article 190), avoiding a precise definition of the nature of the municipality, only clarifying its functions (Arraiza, 2016a: 27). The division of the territory follows a ‘municipality-county’ principle, in which different rural and urban areas are integrated into one county, assigning a ‘capital city’ to each county (Botassi, 2010: 78). Under this division, the totality of the provincial territory is divided into municipalities and there are no spaces without a specific municipal jurisdiction (Arraiza, 2016c:101). The theory has been criticized by those that identify the concept of municipality with the city and urban environment. In practice, by including rural territories, municipalities count with increased revenues, although of course, imply the responsibility to provide services to communities such as rural roads maintenance. Unlike other provinces in Argentina, Buenos Aires does not differentiate its counties into categories (e.g. different categories based on number of population or surface area), and all the districts have the same powers and responsibilities (Arraiza, 2016a: 31).

Municipalities have only two branches, namely, Executive, and Legislative. The Legislative branch, also called ‘Deliberative Council’, is tasked with creating the local ordinances, which have to be ratified by the Executive. In the Buenos Aires Province, the number of members of the Legislative is established by the number of habitants of the district (Constitution of Buenos Aires Province, article 191).

Buenos Aires Province establishes a presidential system for municipalities, in contrast with other provinces that recognize parliamentary regimes or commissions⁸ (Arraiza, 2016b). The head of the Executive is the mayor or “Intendente” in Spanish, and were able, until 2015, to be successively reelected without any limits⁹. The Executive has the responsibility to administer or manage the municipality and execute the ordinances, therefore all the municipal bureaucracy depends on the Executive (Arraiza, 2016b). The number of secretariats, goals and people employed by each one can be assigned by an ordinance, and therefore involving the legislative branch, or by a decree of the executive. In any case, the legislative has a veto power over the approval budget that can exert pressure for negotiation about the size and specific positions in the local administration.

The mayor is a crucial figure in the municipal environment and also the link between provincial and national levels. He or she sets up his cabinet and aligns party resources towards preferred policies also establishing relations with local elites and main groups but, importantly given the limited level of autonomy, establishes links to provincial and national authorities that provide with crucial economic resources to the municipality. In this sense, it can be said that the level of success of municipal governments has a link with the leadership skills of mayors (Paoletta, 2016: 118).

The role of the mayor became even more pronounced after the decentralization process that culminated in the reforms that took place during the 1990’s (Iturburu, 2000: 45). These reforms changed the role of municipal governments, adding new functions in addition to its traditional role, as well as the resources that these governments counted on. According to Iturburu (2000: 36) within the traditional role of municipalities can be mentioned:

- Administrative management that includes planning, management of personnel and control of results.

⁸ Commissions are usually established in small communities. Under this form, residents elect a commission that works both as executive and legislative (Arraiza, 2016b).

⁹ In 2015 the Provincial Congress passed a Law modifying the Organic Law that previously allowed the indefinite re-election of the mayors, legislators, and school counselors.

- Urban development: urban planning, public works and infrastructure (construction of natural gas and water networks, sewage and storm drains, pavement, road lighting, bridges, etc.)
- Provision of public services: drinking water, sewage, waste collection and rural roads maintenance are the main services.
- Regulation of community life: control of urban traffic, regulation of local businesses, sports and events, etc.

Within the new functions municipalities are expected to have a role in:

- Economic development. Specifically, they became the crucial player in designing and implementing local development strategies by promoting and marketing their image to attract investments and fostering the formation of clusters. Moreover, the municipalities work as a promoter of opportunities for local businesses and entrepreneurs, through business coordination and innovation, providing adequate physical space for productive activities and linking local education opportunities to the productive system.
- Social development. Municipalities are now in charge of formulating and implementing social policies related to their local environments, strengthening integration of underprivileged groups. Municipalities are also expected to have a prominent role in modernize education and training.
- Environmental preservation
- Regulations. New areas where the municipality is expected to exercise regulatory power are, for example, consumer rights protection, quality of services provided, etc.
- Security and Crime
- Health. Formulation and implementation of policies in the health sector (e.g. management of local hospitals and health facilities, policies targeting specific groups)

The new functions were part of an integral reformulation of the role of the state that, in Argentina, began in the 1970s under the military government, and was crystalized in the 1990s with the reforms sponsored by C. Menem's government (1989-1999) (Cao, 2008). The reforms transferred previous state's functions "to the market (through privatization policies and economic deregulation), to the regional level (with the creation of regional organizations such as Mercosur), within the state apparatus (through administrative reform and reduction of public bureaucracies), towards society itself (transferring activities to local and neighborhood organizations and NGOs)

and especially, towards municipalities through the *formal and informal* transfer of functions and competences that were previously in the hands of national and provincial levels” [emphasis added] (Iturburu, 2000: 30)¹⁰.

Decentralization was a strategy intended to reduce the large public deficit but also to consolidate democracy, transferring power to local authorities that have a closer contact with citizens (Falleti, 2005) and improve efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery (Nickson, 2011). Decentralization policies in Argentina did not result in empowered local governments but set up the context of current struggles for municipal governments.

The process of decentralization, understood as “[...] a process of state reform composed by a set of public policies that transfer responsibilities, resources, or authority from higher to lower levels of government in the context of a specific type of state” (Falleti, 2005: 328), is the starting point to explain in which circumstances municipalities assumed the mentioned ‘new functions’.

T. Falleti (2005), from a historical institutionalist point of view, explains why the decentralization process in Argentina decreased the power of subnational governments, instead of increasing them, as the word ‘decentralization’ would suggest. Falleti distinguishes among:

- Administrative decentralization: which “comprises the set of policies that transfer the administration and delivery of social services such as education, health, social welfare, or housing to subnational governments” (Falleti, 2005: 329), it might or might not be accompanied by the political authority to define these policies or the funds to perform these tasks, in which case it is funded or unfunded administrative decentralization.
- Fiscal decentralization: refers to the policies “[...] designed to increase the revenues or fiscal autonomy of subnational governments” (Falleti, 2005: 329),
- Political decentralization: policies that devolve political authority or electoral capacities to subnational actors.

The author demonstrates that not all decentralization processes result in an increased power to subnational governments. In Falleti’s model, the type of decentralization, the interests that prevail in the negotiations and the sequence of the reforms explain why subnational governments gain

¹⁰ Not all the new functions were formally transferred. In fact, some authors admit that the legal framework is outdated, placing the municipality as a mere service provided and not focusing on current problems such as environmental issues (Reca, 2015). The informal transfer of functions can also be seen as a consequence of the 2001 crisis, where local governments became the first recipients of increasing demands of the citizens (Fernández Arroyo, 2009 in Maceira et al., 2010)

more or less power after the decentralization process. That is, administrative decentralization can be positive “If administrative decentralization improves local and state bureaucracies, fosters training of local officials, or facilitates learning through the practice of delivering new responsibilities, it will increase the organizational capacities of subnational governments” (Falleti, 2005: 329). In contrast, if decentralization is not accompanied by the transfer of funds, subnational governments become “[...] more dependent on subsequent national fiscal transfers or subnational debt for the delivery of public social services” (Falleti, 2005” 329). Fiscal decentralization increases the autonomy if the subnational government has the bureaucratic capacity to collect the funds, or if they receive funding without any cost (as in a transfers of funds). If they do not have the capacity, fiscal decentralization will actually reduce the autonomy of local governments. Similarly, political decentralization will almost invariably increase the power of subnational officials, except in the case where both governments confront each other.

In this scheme, national executives will prefer to have administrative decentralization first, followed by fiscal decentralization as a way of transferring responsibilities without reducing their budget. Subnational governments, in turn, favor political autonomy, then decentralization of the resources available to perform new functions and lastly responsibilities. The final result depends on which actor is strong enough to make their interest prevail, and in which order the reforms are introduced.

In the case of Argentina, national interests prevailed, and administrative reform preceded the fiscal reform resulting in a decreased power of subnational governments. This meant that new responsibilities, like education, health and social security programs, were transferred to the provinces and some of them to municipalities without the resources to afford them. Falleti (2005) explains that this type of decentralization occurred first in an authoritarian regime where subnational governments did not have large saying in the decisions taken by the military junta acting as national executive. Second, provinces were undergoing a favorable economic tide, which made slightly easier to take over these functions, increasing expenditures. The same situation, i.e. favorable economic environment, was present during the 1990s when further reforms were established.

The unfunded administrative transfer put governors in a situation of permanent bargain for funds with the federal governments. To clarify, in Argentina the fiscal federal regime establishes that certain duties can be collected directly by the Provincial governments, while the most important

ones are collected by the Federal government and then shared with the provinces. This makes up a system that, in general terms, decentralizes expenses but centralizes the resources through federal tax collection (Sotelo, 2009). For example, in the year 2015, the National Government collected 76.5% of the total tax obligations but represented 57.8% of total expenditures, while the provinces and municipalities collected taxes that amounted to 23.5% of the national resources, performing 42.2% of total spending (Agosto, 2017: 2). In order to solve this vertical imbalance, National government then transfers funds to subnational governments.

The foundation of the revenue-sharing structure is the so called ‘Ley de coparticipacion’ in Spanish, that regulates what percentage of taxes collected by the federal government should go to provinces¹¹. The law was passed as a provisional distribution regime after Argentina reestablished its democratic system, in 1988 and has not been modified since then, although it has been attempted to modify since the 1990s. The funds received through ‘Coparticipacion’ are complemented by other type of transfers, that can be automatic or ‘not-automatic’, which are of discretionary use of the National Executive power (Agosto, 2017). For example, in 2009 C. Fernandez government established the “Federal Solidarity Fund”, funded with export taxes on soybeans and other agricultural products, distributing these resources in the same percentages to each province as those established in the ‘Coparticipacion Law’ (Agosto, 2017: 2). The Fund was established using a National Executive decree, i.e. not part as a law approved by both Chambers in the Congress. Other transfers are discretionary and therefore subject to no federal regime¹². These transfers amounted 23% of resources transferred to provinces and 17% in 2016, noticing a downward trend (Agosto, 2017). The system suffers from a structural weakness, i.e. resources transferred by the ‘Coparticipacion Law’ are not enough to finance province’s expenses and other transfers are subject to permanent political renegotiation, making difficult for provinces to operate a balanced budget. Walter Agosto reports that “The most important source of financing for the provinces was constituted by the massive issuance of external debt (in US dollars) which amounted to USD 7,960

¹¹ The ‘temporary’ regime of distribution between Nation and Provinces, Law No. 23,548, establishes that, from the resources subject to distribution, 42,34% are allocated to the National state and 56,66% to the Provinces. Within this amount, each Province is assigned a specific percentage.

¹² For example, in 1992 a “Historical Reparation Fund for the Buenos Aires Great Buenos Aires area” established a portion of funds of the ‘Revenue tax’ transferred directly to the Buenos Aires Province given the relative disproportion of funds in relation to population. In 1996 the Fund was capped at a nominal rate of 650 million of pesos and was not updated according to the inflationary rate. The Fund represented 9,6% of the tax in 1996 but 0,1% in 2018. The national government covers this deficit with discretionary transfers that vary greatly according to federal budget and political connections between Buenos Aires’ governors and National Executives (Agosto, 2017).

million in 2016 and accumulates USD 3,970 million in the first half of the current year [2017]” (Agosto, 2017: 4), in addition to debt contracted in the local market.

In a similar way to the Province, municipalities have three ways of financing their expenses: municipal resources; transfers from superior levels of government; and debt (Sotelo, 2009). Municipal resources come primarily from tariffs charged for local services provided by the municipality such as lighting, road maintenance, veterinary inspections, etc.¹³ (SCE, 2014). The ability of getting debt is regulated by the Provincial Constitution and a law requires the Bank of the Buenos Aires Province to lend money to municipalities, becoming one of the main source of external financing for municipalities (Sotelo, 2009). The transfers from other levels of governments are, as in the case from Federal to Provincial level, regulated by a Provincial ‘Coparticipacion law’, while subsidies and transfers originate from national as well as provincial levels. Municipalities in Buenos Aires Province rely to a great extent on transfers from other jurisdictions to afford expenses. From 2007-2013 on average, resources transferred to the municipalities accounted for 55% of their total income (SCE, 2014), highlighting how dependent these governments are on external funding.

The ‘Coparticipation Law’ in Buenos Aires Province is different from its federal homonym. It establishes that 16,14% of all from the resources subject to distribution go to the Municipalities. These resources are in turn distributed according to population, ability to collect taxes and total area covered by the municipality (Sotelo, 2009).

While these resources depend on tax collection, they naturally vary with the level of economic activity, i.e. more tax collection will increase the funds transferred in turn to municipalities. The provincial and federal governments can also establish different funds or programs that increase available funding. For example, after 2008 the “Fund for the Strengthening of Municipal Resources”, the “Municipal Fund for Social Inclusion”, the “Provincial Solidarity Fund” and the “Educational Funding Fund” were created. All of them increased funding to municipalities by about 20% (SCE, 2014). Transfers from federal level contributed as well to reduce the municipal debt, indicating after 2007 a slight surplus (SCE, 2014). This is of course, good news for the municipalities that see an overall improved situation but the fact that the transfers are based on

¹³ Municipalities do not collect taxes, only tariffs that are a fee for a service that was effectively provided. Taxes are collected by Provincial and National Governments. Economic resources of municipalities are listed in article 226 of the Organic Law.

programs and funds that are implemented outside, the ‘Coparticipacion Law’ makes them subject to economic and political swings, thus not solving the structural problems that result in a low financial municipal autonomy (SCE, 2014: 39). Funding acquired through these programs are in essence discretionary and depend to a great extent, in the political connections and bargaining power of the elected mayor. It is in this sense that, the decentralization process in Argentina reduced the power of subnational governments (Falleti, 2005), but in parallel increased the preeminence of the figure of the mayor, now in charge of political bargains for chronically underfunded municipalities.

To summarize, decentralization process in Argentina started with an unfunded administrative decentralization, followed by fiscal decentralization that assigns funds to subnational levels in an insufficient manner, generating chronic financial problems and exacerbating clientelistic features of the system. When political decentralization took place with the constitutional reform, federal government’s interests prevailed again, and the contents of the reform did not grant a great level of decentralization (like higher share of subnational revenues, provincial control of natural resources) (Falleti, 2005). Instead, as described above, the new Constitution acknowledged municipal autonomy, leaving to each province to incorporate the principle to their Constitutions, which not all of them did. Falleti concludes “Despite the introduction of decentralization policies that transferred responsibilities, resources, and authority to subnational governments, the sequence in which the reforms took place meant that the intergovernmental balance of power remained unchanged in Argentina. Compared to their situation prior to 1976, governors had acquired more responsibilities and fewer fiscal resources, with no change in their political authority” (Falleti, 2005: 343). Provinces in turn, replicate their own circumstances with municipalities, which are transferred functions and responsibilities without a clear fiscal and political decentralization, as is the case of Buenos Aires Province.

These circumstances are shared by all municipalities in Buenos Aires Province, however, districts in the cattle cluster, show some particularities.

Within the total income, these municipalities rely more on transfers from other jurisdictions. For the year 2013, the cattle cluster municipalities had on average 61% provided by other jurisdictions, while in districts in the greater Buenos Aires area these transfers amounted an average of 47% (SCE, 2014: 28).

Within their own resources, municipalities in this cluster have a higher percentage of income coming from road maintenance, compared to municipalities in industrial counties where the majority of the resources come from safety inspections to industries. This impacts the financial autonomy of the districts. A publication from the Buenos Aires Ministry of Economy, (SCE, 2014: 30) shows that there is a negative correlation coefficient of -0,61 between the income in road maintenance and financial autonomy. There are two main reasons, first, the road maintenance tariff is a fixed amount, compared to safety inspections that generally increase with the level of economic activity. Secondly, an increase of tariffs can only be done with the approval of the municipal Legislative power, resulting in a more rigid income scheme for these municipalities (SCE, 2014: 30).

To highlight the discretion on the transfer of funds table 1 shows the top ten of municipalities for which the percentage of their budgets¹⁴ was comprised to a greater extent of national transfers¹⁵. All of them belonged to the same party of the President for the period 2007-2011, Cristina Fernandez and her party “Frente para la Victoria” (FpV)¹⁶. In 2011 presidential elections Fernandez is reelected for the period 10/12/2011 to 10/12/2015. The elections are held simultaneously for national, provincial and municipal executives, with the result of some of the municipalities electing parties that aligned with the national. The cases of Bolivar and Punta Indio are representative: these parties were not aligned in the period 2007-2011 and received almost no resources from the national government. In the 2011 elections there were elected candidates from FpV and these municipalities skyrocketed their budgets, where national transfers peaked at 47.9% (Bolivar, in 2015) and 29.43% (Punta Indio, 2016).

Table number 3 and 4 show those that rely the least on national transfers for periods 2007-2001 and 2012-2015 respectively. It is clear that those municipalities whose mayors were not aligned, i.e. belonged to the same party, to the national government did not receive substantial support.

It is also interesting to see that in the next elections held in 2015, where an alliance of parties called “Cambiamos” won national elections, 13 municipalities of the cattle cluster reelected FpV

¹⁴ The percentage of their budgets was selected as an indicator over total transfer in pesos because of the mentioned disparity among municipalities. For smaller municipalities smaller transfers can signify great changes, because their overall budget is smaller.

¹⁵ Government period was 2007-2011. The table shows an average of the percentages for the years 2010-2011 because the data available did not include the entire government period.

¹⁶ “Frente para la Victoria” is a Branch of the Peronist party created in 2003. Peronists parties and their multiple branches are traditionally characterized as a center-left wing party although during their history vary across different ideologies.

candidates. 7 of them were on the top receiving municipalities, suggesting that transfers could be a variable influencing municipal voting preferences¹⁷.

Table 1

Municipalities that rely the most on national transfers (period 2007-2011)

	Aligned 2007-2011	Average 2010-2011
GENERAL PAZ	yes	50.5
MAR CHIQUITA	yes	35
PILA	yes	30
LAS FLORES	yes	23
GENERAL JUAN MADARIAGA	yes	22
PATAGONES	yes	20
GENERAL LA MADRID	yes	20
TORDILLO	yes	19.5
BALCARCE	yes	18
TORNQUIST	yes	16.5

Table 2

Municipalities that rely the most on national transfers (period 2012-2015)

	Aligned 2012-2015	Average 2012-2015
MAR CHIQUITA	yes	23.7
BOLÍVAR	yes	23.2
PUNTA INDIO	yes	20.1
GENERAL PAZ	yes	17.8
TORNQUIST	yes	16.2
CASTELLI	yes	16.2
BALCARCE	yes	13.7
PATAGONES	yes	11.7
PILA	yes	10.7
LAPRIDA	yes	9.0

Table 3

Municipalities that rely the least on national transfers (period 2007-2011)

	Aligned 2007-2011	Average 2010-2011
PUAN	no	0
BOLÍVAR	no	0.5
PUNTA INDIO	no	0.5
DAIREAUX	no	0.5
25 DE MAYO	no	1
PELEGRINI	no	1
AZUL	no	2
MONTE	no	2.5
GUAMINÍ	no	2.5
BENITO JUÁREZ	no	3

Table 4

Municipalities that rely the least on national transfers (period 2012-2015)

	Aligned 2012-2015	Average 2012-2015
PUAN	yes	0.0
DAIREAUX	no	0.0
PELEGRINI	no	0.0
GENERAL ALVEAR	no	0.3
AYACUCHO	no	0.6
25 DE MAYO	no	0.8
GENERAL GUIDO	no	1.2
DOLORES	no	2.2
MAGDALENA	yes	2.5
AZUL	yes	2.7

Source tables 1-4: own elaboration based on <http://www.buenosairesabierta.org/estadisticas>

¹⁷ The number is remarkable in the political context of the Buenos Aires province, which has voted historically center-right parties, i.e. not Peronist parties. The variables explaining how these districts managed to maintain the places in local executive offices, in an election that represented an historical lost for the Peronist party should be investigated in more detail.

The expenses structure in rural municipalities is also different: these districts spend a bigger portion of their budget in salaries of public personnel. Although salaries represent a large portion of all local budgets, in rural areas the portion spent in wages is above the average. The increase of the portion spent in salaries is in part explained by the transfer of functions but also because of a persistent increase in the number of employees (Iturburu, 2000: 44).

To sum up, the role of the municipal government has changed greatly in recent decades to traditional functions linked to municipalities such as administrative management and provision of some public services. Governments are now expected to perform a role in promoting economic development, social and health programs, protection of the environment, regulation of a wider range of local activities and guaranteeing a crime-free environment. This new formal and informal decentralization of functions did not correspond with a transfer of economic resources, instead resources are transferred to municipalities in a discretionary manner that reinforces clientelistic nexus between mayors and governors, the same way that decentralization process diminished the power for governors vis-à-vis the federal government (Falleti, 2005). Moreover, in the case of Buenos Aires province political autonomy is also a questionable concept. The province has never granted municipalities the right to dictate their own Code, promoting the debate whether municipalities should be autonomous or autarchic¹⁸.

In this line, Iturburu explains that the constitutional reform that incorporates municipal autonomy, signals the direction towards an increased power of the municipalities, but the constitutional change did not develop in parallel with changes in other variables. In consequence, municipal governments are now subject to new social demands that do not correspond neither with their technical capacity nor with Argentina's municipal tradition, or the public resources they receive. Municipal governments continue to operate in deficit and this can lead to a serious deterioration of their autonomy, with respect to their community, provincial governments and creditors (Iturburu, 2000: 31).

¹⁸ The ability to dictate their own charter or code is, for different analysts and jurists, the key element full municipal autonomy, granted to municipalities in the National Constitution. Autarchy is understood as the capacity to self-administration but following norms that are dictated outside the local environment, i.e. imposed. Autonomy means having the right to self-administration and in addition, the right to dictate the norms to which local organisms are subject to as well as the right to democratically elected authorities (Acosta et al, 2015: 23)

B. Public administration in Argentina

The public sector in Argentina currently accounts for 25.44% of the formal employment (3,132,800 workers, February 2018) (Ministry of Labor). This places Argentina above the average for Latin America that was 12.2% in 2015 (Arcidiacono et al, 2015). As a reference, the average for OECD countries in 2015 was 18.06%¹⁹, and for Denmark 29.13% (OECD Stat). In fact, Norway, Denmark, Sweden and Finland are the countries that provide the highest general government employment as a percentage of total employment across the OECD countries (OECD, 2017). In Latin America, public employment was drastically reduced as countries adopted neoliberal policies that focused in reducing the public sector. After the year 2000 public sector employment started increasing although not reaching pre-90's level (Arcidiacono et al, 2015).

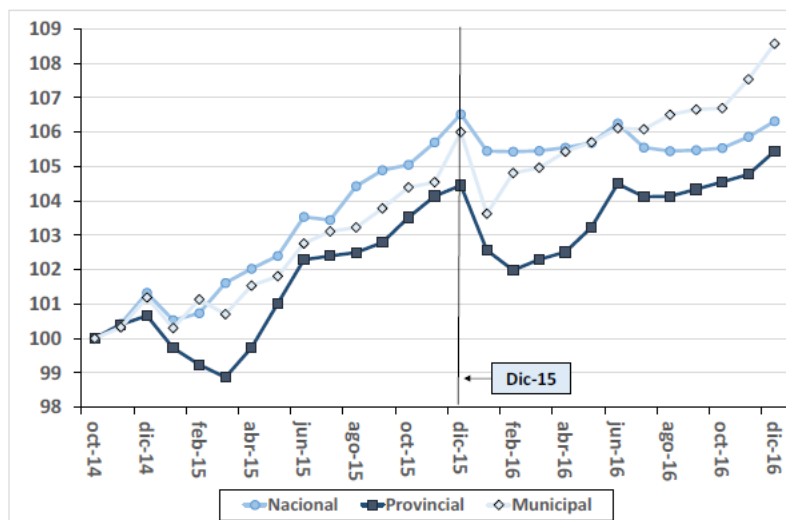
In Argentina, data available for 2010 shows an increase in public employment of 56% compared to 2001 figures. In this period the state, in all its levels, hired a record of 1,293,579 new employees. The total number of 3,600,000 employees seems to be stable after 2010. The greatest difficulty in estimating the importance of the public sector in Argentina is the multiplicity of sources, which makes difficult the task of compiling and comparing information (Dieguez and Gasparin, 2016). Census data is only available for years 2001 and 2010, while most recent data is available through the Labor Ministry. The Labor Ministry does not collect data directly, only indirectly through the revenue service (Federal Administration of Public Income). Municipalities do not inform the institution regularly, resulting in a severe deficiency in the data available. According to a report from the Labor Ministry, an estimate of 32% of municipal public employment is not reported (Labor Ministry, 2017). Only 3 Provinces of a total of 24 report 100% of the municipal employees, one of them being Buenos Aires.

Graphic No. 1 shows the latest trend on public sector employment (October 2014 to December 2016). While three state levels show an overall increase during the period, municipal employment grew at the highest rate, even considering deficiency in reported figures.

¹⁹ Employment in general government as a percentage of total employment. The employed comprise all individuals who, during a specified brief period, were in the following categories: paid employment or self-employment.

Graphic 1

Evolution of public employment (national, provincial and municipal)
October 2014- December 2016



Source: Ministry of Labor, 2017: 9

In 2016, the national level accounted for 21%, provinces 66% and municipalities 13% of total public employees. The provincial level employs the majority of the public sector workers, a consequence of the decentralization process described in the previous section that transferred education, health and security forces systems from nation to province jurisdictions. Although the difficulty to access data covers all three levels of state, national, the public sector has comparatively more information available. Different organizations (e.g. Ministry of Modernization, union of national public employees) gather data periodically. In contrast, there are no datasets that can help explain patterns on the growth in municipal employment because the municipalities lack incentives to report (Ministry of Labor, 2017).

In the same vein, the legal framework of public administration in Argentina is characterized by a severe fragmentation. Each level of the state regulates civil service under different laws and agreements (Deleersnyder et.al., 2013 and Chudnovsky and Iacoviello, 2015). At the national level, some steps towards a more professional public administration have been taken after the return of democracy in 1983. For example, in 1991 SINAPA (National System of Administrative Profession) was created in order to simplify the career structure and establish a meritocratic

appointment and advancement system (Grindle, 2012). The INAP (National Institute of Public Administration) was in charge of training employees of the national administration. This system was revised and updated in 2008 (changing the name to SINEP - National System of Public Employment), including more specificity in the ranking and salary structure and merit recruitment systems (Deleersnyder et al, 2013).

The first consideration is that these organizations legal frame of reference are only valid at national level. Appointment rules, training and ranking scheme is only valid for employees working for the national administration: municipal and provincial workers use their own systems. This situation forces to analyze the different levels of the organization separated from the national level, where most of the research in the topic has centered.

Consequently, the nature of the problems for different levels of the state are dissimilar. While the greatest problem for national administration has been the complex legal structure, with norms that supersede one another in different aspects and an overall low rate of implementation (Iacoviello and Chudnovsky, 2015), the problem for municipalities is the lack of normative in regards public employment. Each municipality has complete autonomy to set up their own recruitment system, work organization and training opportunities.

Public administration in municipalities of the Buenos Aires province functions within a legal framework provided by the National Constitution, the Provincial Constitution and different provincial laws, from which the Law No. 14.656 – “Municipal Employee Framework Regime” is the most important piece of legislation.

As a legal framework the national Constitution establishes in its article 14bis the right to “stability of the public employee” (Constitution of Argentina, article 14bis). The Organic Law, in its article 241, establishes responsibilities of public employees as well as sanctions for those who do not fulfill their duties. In addition to the Constitutional framework, the Law No. 14,656 dictates more specifically working conditions for the municipal workers including key aspect such as stability, professional career, salary scale, dismissal and categories of municipal employees. The law is considered a landmark on workers’ rights, and it supersedes Law 11,757 passed in 1996 and is considered the illustration of labor market precarization promoted by the neoliberal paradigm (Doval, 2016). Law 17,757 infringed both the right of municipal autonomy and the worker’s rights. It was against municipal autonomy because it established a “Statute for the Personnel of the

Municipalities” unilaterally, and established certain principles in the working relation between employees and municipality that hurt workers. Among other points, it established that:

- The mayor had absolute discretionality over admission, transfer and dismissal of employees, regardless of the seniority. This situation favored greatly clientelism and abuse of power from the municipal executive power.
- Transfers of personell between areas were allowed every time they did not violate the right of ‘family unity’, this opened the door to transfers and ‘punishment’ of employees that did not agree with the government to areas within the municipality considered a demotion.
- Established two categories of municipal employees: temporary and permanent. Temporary personal was in principle hired to fulfill tasks that could not be performed by the permanent staff, for example, substitute personell for paid leaves, consultants or other services offered to the municipality. In practice, the hiring of temporary personell became the rule and some municipalities in Buenos Aires had up to 80% of their total personell hired in through temporary contracts (Doval, 2016).
- Municipal Executive power had the right to establish by decree salary levels and seniority
- The municipal employee was concieved as a pasive subject and were excluded from holding salary negotiations called ‘Paritarias’ in Spanish.

Law No. 14,656, approved on December 6th 2014, changes radically this context allowing each municipality to dictate their own collective bargaining agreement²⁰. This agreement is specific for each Municipality and regulates salary scale, professional career, dismissal of employees and discipline sanctions (Doval, 2016). Moreover, the new Law establishes that temporary personnel cannot surpass 20% of the total number of employees; explicititely mentions that employees cannot be transferred to areas that affect them in a moral or material fashion, undermining his or her dignity; and allows workers to hold salary negotiations between municipality, unions and workers. It changes the way workers are portrayed in the relationship, becoming an active subject of the working relationship (Doval, 2016).

It is still very soon to evaluate the change brought by the law. First and foremost it contributes to increase the rights of workers and their stability in the workplace. Better working conditions are, as described in the theory section, an important way of retaining employees and a crucial part of

²⁰ Each municipality and their employees have the right to negotiate an agreement. In case no agreement is negotiated, both parts are subject to the Law.

an integrated human resources management model. It also guarantees equal opportunities regardless of ethnicity, gender, political opinion, physical aspect, socioeconomic situation, among others.

The new Law leaves performance evaluations and careers details to the agreement reached on each municipality. It is, of course, a sensitive issue because municipal autonomy is a constitutional right that needs to be preserved, but it is worth asking if in the current context of municipal administrations (where no entrance evaluation is held, and there are no clear career path development and training) more specifications in the text of the Law should be included given that this clear selection process and performance evaluations are the base to fight for equal employment opportunities.

The main challenge is to evaluate to what extent this formal change signals a change in informal institutions regulating hiring, dismissal and transfer of personnel in the Municipality. It is an unwritten rule of municipal politics that the new government brings ‘its own people’ to the municipality (Pesce, 2017). And the paradox is that, in a context where municipal employees enjoy more stability, the Municipality as a whole develops what O. Oszlak calls “too much-too little syndrome”: the simultaneous existence of excessive number personnel performing routine tasks and insufficient personnel developing critical functions (Oszlak, 2006: 10).

Another example of these informal institutions that prevail in municipal human resource management despite the change of formal rules is the hiring of close relatives in prominent positions. In February 2018, as a way of showing support to national government changes, Buenos Aires Governor issued a decree eliminating the possibility (and also terminating those currently working under these circumstances) of hiring personnel that holds a family relationship with the civil servant that works in the Provincial administration (Telam, 2018b), leaving it up to each Municipality to adhere or not to the new norm (Telam, 2018a). This prompted a wave of complaints, from different districts, exposing how their mayors hired spouses, sons, daughters, in laws, cousins and other relatives in every municipal position available. The response from two of the prominent cases were:

- Municipality of Olavarria – Mayor: E. Galli declared that he “will follow the decision of the President and the Governor who, through these decisions, are leading the change in Argentina’s politics”, but that the norm does not refer to cousins, eight or whom are hired by his administration (La Politica Online, 2018)

- In clear disagreement with the provincial and national decrees the mayor from Hipólito Yrigoyen, Jorge Cortés, declared that his administration always looks for suitable and skilled personnel with great work ethic, but it is not his fault that his family members are the ones qualified for the positions (Davin, 2018).

These examples highlight the lack of central strategic planification of public human resources that characterizes public administration in Argentina (Iacoviello and Chudnovsky, 2015). Instead the appointment strategy that predominates over time is patronage. The roots of patronage in Argentina can be tracked to Spanish institutions that were transferred to colonies, and the consolidation of the Argentinian State in the nineteenth century (Grindle, 2012). However, it consolidates in the past 100 years through different political regimes. Luis A. Romero (2010) divides the recent political experience of Argentina in three distinct periods: the first democratic experience (1912-1955), Military governments (1955-1983) and the second democratic experience (1983-present). Within the first period, democracy and the party system consolidated after the Saenz Peña law of universal, secret and mandatory suffrage in 1912 albeit with different military interventions. This stage was characterized by the appearance of two mass parties: The Union Civica Radical (UCR) and the Peronist Party. They brought profound changes to Argentina's political life although both used patronage extensively. UCR governments multiplied patronage practices, ensuring access of new social groups, especially the new urban middle classes, to public employment (Vommaro and Combes, 2016). Perón, in turn, used "personal appointments to strengthen his control of labor and the government and to bring about significant change in the beneficiaries of state policies" (Grindle, 2012: 168), along with other forms of clientelism.

The second period, in which the military directed the political life of the country, exacerbated the underlying concept that state resources can and should be used for political purposes. Financial maneuvers and contracts for infrastructure granted to groups close to the military leadership resulted in big losses for the state, perceived always as an element to increase personal wealth.

Lastly, after the return of the democracy, the use of patronage appointments gained a renewed meaning after the impoverishment of the working class, led by neoliberal policies. Clientelistic links flourished as a way of retaining votes in an economy that does not offer many other possibilities for rural and urban working classes (Vommaro and Combes, 2016). The use of patronage prevailed through reforms, where new forms of recruitment (such as independent

contractors) manage to bypass weak and conflicting legislation creating a gap between de jure and de facto systems (Grindle, 2012).

Summarizing, “Throughout much of the twentieth century, then, patronage was used to diverse ends by a variety of regimes” (Grindle, 2012), linked to the weakness of the Argentinian political institutions that favors the existence of personalized and clientelistic relations (Vommaro and Combes, 2016).

To conclude, municipalities in Buenos Aires province suffer from structural weaknesses, as outlined along this section, derived from decentralization processes that transferred responsibilities without fiscal or clear political autonomy. The financial situation gives local governments little room for maneuver in their budgets, especially in the case of cattle cluster municipalities.

The legal system evolved in a way that guarantees tenure of public jobs, even though they can be recruited through patronage. Thus employer-employee relations show more progress than other aspects of the human resource management, although this also varies according to the level and the sector of the state.

This ingrained use of patronage as an appointment strategy combined with a fragmented legal framework, leads to a situation where each agency and level of the state develops its own guidelines, which generates great discrepancies in the strategies for human resource management. Therefore, Argentina is characterized as having an intermediate public sector, with some ‘isles’ of meritocratic bureaucracies and persistence of patronage and less developed management systems.

2. Case study: Bolivar

The first section of this analysis focused on describing the institutional framework in which Bolivar, as a municipality from the Buenos Aires Province and the cattle cluster, functions. In this section Bolivar's civil service is going to be analyzed considering the research question that guides this work: to what extent have local bureaucracies implemented recommendations from the Ibero-American Charter for the Public Service? More specifically, through interviews and analysis of primary data the case study aims to determine how are local human resources appointed, managed and dismissed, what are the main drivers of such human resource management strategy and what are the consequences for local bureaucracies.

A. Appointment

Bolivar's bureaucracy is characterized by a two-tier system: a first level comprised by the Mayor's closest advisers, who act as department heads and a second level, that form a permanent body of employees functioning under the direction of department heads.

"Funcionarios": the first tier of bureaucratic staff

The first level of appointees is critical to policy formulation. They advise the Mayor and are in charge of implementing policies through the teams they manage. It is formally the Executive's exclusive right to appoint his team and all the interviewees seem to agree that no other actors participate informally in this decision.

In Bolivar, this group underwent some changes in its composition over time, but the appointment strategy did not change. The predominant appointment strategy utilized is described by Geddes (1994) as 'Partisan', defined as "Political selection of top administrative personnel from within president's party or coalition; loyalty and holding the coalition together take precedence over competence" (Geddes, 1994: 144).

This group represents the Mayor's closest team and advisors and, if the Mayor is democratically elected, it is positive for the Mayor to select a team that will help shaping policies people voted for. In Bolivar, this accounts for an average of 60 people that the Mayor appoints directly trying to ensure the highest degree of support. Loyalty is therefore an element that is present on every top personnel designation (Geddes, 1944 and Grindle, 2012), what might change is the importance given to the competence.

The Mayor also executes the right to create departments, depending on the government's priorities. There is no formal post description and recruitment process designed to select the individual that matches with the skills required. On the contrary, it is the Mayor who through an informal process selects the individual that, firstly, needs to be loyal to his political project and secondly, can efficiently coordinate his or her area.

The second level of appointments

The second tier of municipal employees is comprised by the bulk of the public employees that are employed by the municipality providing services that range from waste collection, cleaning services, administrative and medical staff.

According to the Provincial Statistics Unit, Bolivar had 969 municipal employees in 2010, while 1,648 employees worked for the national (246) and provincial (1,438) sectors. Information from 2001 census is not separated among different levels. Assuming that those sectors kept their proportion of employees²¹, it can be estimated that municipal employees were in 2001 around 569. All the interviewed agreed that today the municipality counts with an estimate of 1,400 municipal employees, including or excluding (depending on the source), independent contractors. The fact that a basic piece of information as the exact number of employees cannot be easily accessed highlights the challenges of the research and the limits to the initiatives of public access to information. Overall, the number represents an increase of 246% in the municipal staff compared to 2001, and a 25% to 2010. In contrast, the total population of Bolivar increased from 2001 to 2010 by 5.4% (INDEC, census 2010)

The personnel are divided in permanent and transitory. Nevertheless, there is another category that needs to be added: independent contractors. Independent contractors, although a legal form utilized to hire services in a one-time manner, became an under-covered way of hiring personnel and is extremely difficult to track and monitor. It is believed Bolivar has in between 300 and 400 contractors. Independent contractors are not formally employees of the municipality and do not have any of the rights granted by law to public employees, including representation by the union. They negotiate their working conditions directly with the municipality on a personal case by case basis.

²¹ It is a fair assumption as the provincial sector counts with teachers as their employees, the most numerous group of public employees in the city. As per 2010 census, 9,3% of the public employees were national, 54,2% provincial and 36,5% municipal.

The prevalent appointment strategy in this second level is patronage. Interview No. 6 confirms that “In the lower layers [second tier of public employment], an impartial recruitment is not guaranteed in Bolívar, on the contrary, the militancy and political identity are prioritized to their technical profile”. Similarly, interview No. 2 corroborates that “The decision of hiring employees responds more to electoral politics than to the specific necessities of the municipality”. Each election, he continued, brings 60 to 70 new employees to the municipality that are expected to bring not only their votes but also their entire families. This forms what M. Grindle calls a ‘patronage system’: not just a few, closest advisors designated by its loyalty, but a situation “where discretionary appointment for personal and/or political purposes is a principal route to a nonelected position in government for a large portion of those enjoying such positions” (Grindle, 2012: 18).

To families in this second tier of employees, the most important benefit they get from the relationship with the patron, is the prospect of a stable job. This differs greatly from the first tier of employees who join the public administration to influence local politics and policies, and where the salaries (although higher than those from the second tier) do not represent the biggest incentive. The fact that municipal jobs are such a crucial element of the lives of these people explains why employees keep their support to their patron. Oliveros (2013) analyzes why employees continue to be loyal to their patron once they got their jobs. She concludes that is in the client’s interests to have the patron in power, because these employees perceive that their fates are tied to the political fate of the politician who hired them (Oliveros, 2013: 4). One of the interviews summarized in this way the link between patron and employees in Bolivar: “[...] They don’t even have the ability to complain [for better work conditions] because they feel that the Mayor or the official who gives them the job are doing a favor for them”.

In exchange for a stable job, clients not only ensure a vote for their patrons, and some dedicate time for their political campaigns, but also provide ‘favors’ (i.e. routine tasks simplified to the beneficiary) to friends, family and party supporters (Oliveros, 2016). This is a source of benefits for the incumbent party that come at no cost for them and provides an enormous advantage over their political opponents. In this explanation lies the core of the path dependency argument. Patronage becomes a strategy that shows increasing returns, i.e. politicians gain *more* support, and higher exit costs. That is to say, a Mayor that renounces unilaterally to patronage recruitment can put his or her party in a disadvantageous position (high exit cost), abandoning a practice that increases support at virtually no cost for the party.

The likelihood of a change promoted from other levels of the state is unlikely, given the described context in which municipalities operate, where clientelism is a common practice. Historical institutionalism, in this way, provides an optimal theoretical framework to analyze appointment strategies.

The organization of work in this level does not count with accurate and updated job descriptions. In Bolivar each department formulates demands in terms of personnel to the Human Resources department and, depending on the Head of the Department's connections with the Mayor and the importance that is given to the area in the local environment, more personnel are assigned or not. What is important to highlight is that, because patronage is the predominant appointment strategy the recruitment process works in the opposite direction as most bureaucratic organizations: individuals get a job in the municipality if they contributed to the (elected) Mayor's political campaign and then they are assigned a task. Interview No. 7 explained that there is a surplus of 300 to 400 people in the municipality that do not have a specific task assigned. They are granted a position if they collaborate with the Mayor's political campaign and once they get the job it is quickly assessed what they can do: if they can mow the lawn they work in parks and recreation, if they can use a computer they are assigned to an administrative area that can absorb one more employee.

A partial exception to this process are positions that require professionals of a specific field, e.g. medical staff. In this respect, oftentimes more qualified positions are open to politically independent or even opponents to incumbent parties because in the local environment, the pool of qualified people in certain areas is reduced. Still, the process is run in most cases without a formal post description and the requirements of the candidates are flexible.

In none of the cases are impartial selection processes, conducted by independent bodies, granted. This means that guiding principles of equality and non-discrimination as mentioned in the Charter and in the "Municipal Employee Framework Regime" Law cannot be guaranteed.

B. Management

Management of the staff of municipal employees is exclusively dictated by remuneration. The salary of the municipal employee has been brought up as a key element in all the interviews. A

great number of employees earn less or the minimum salary²², which represent a big challenge to recruit and maintain qualified personnel, being at the same time the reason why all the discussions about municipal employees refer invariably to their salaries and not to other management elements such as training or performance evaluation. In 2017 it has been reported that the salary of the majority of municipal employees is less than 10.000 pesos a month (Conciencia Medios, 2017), and the poverty line for the month of July for a family of 4 was of 15,024.72 pesos/month (INDEC, 2017), resulting in a great number of employees receiving less than the minimum to provide for their families.

The reason for low salaries lies on the deficit municipal budget. Like other municipalities in the cattle cluster, 65% of Bolivar's expenses are comprised by personnel's salaries (SCE, 2014). This precarious situation is the result of external constraints already discussed, but also of the constant increase in the staffed public employees. This generates a vicious circle that reinforces on every election: local authorities incorporate more people that helped in the Mayor's political campaign; these jobs add more pressure to local budget; local budget cannot afford substantial increase on salaries and training of the existing personnel; in spite of the budget restrictions, the next election more personnel are hired.

Notwithstanding the signature of a collective bargaining agreement, part of the new Law No. 14,656, Bolivar's situation of municipal employees has not changed substantially. The signature of the agreement needs to be pointed out as a substantial improvement in the employment relationship, an element that is part of the Charter. Even though employees can now hold negotiations with the municipality regarding wages, all the increases on employees' salaries are associated to the increase in the municipal taxes (essentially, the rural road maintenance fee). Some of the interviews pointed that the signature of the agreement, that included the need of regularize employees that were transitory, adds more pressure to municipal budget producing the unintended effect of compromising the negotiations for current employees.

Education and training, another important item in the Charter's human resource management strategy, is not only absent through the hiring process but also throughout the professional career of the personnel. In Bolivar, "It is very difficult for the municipal employee to achieve an

²² In Argentina the "Minimum, Vital and Mobile Salary" (MVMS) is established periodically by the "Work Council" comprised by Labor Ministry, Unions and private sector representatives. Although it should be, by law, the minimum amount that a worker should earn to provide for him or herself and their families, in the last negotiations the MVMS has been established under the poverty line announced by the INDEC.

improvement, a training for their professional development as an employee. Training is very limited when they join as employees and almost non-existent throughout their careers” (Interview No. 3). Those interviewed agreed that the elements that hinder the development of a more trained or qualified workforce can be summarized in lack of support from other levels of government, lack of incentives for local actors, low salaries and lack of available qualified workforce.

In the first place, given the budget restrictions, a change in the technical capacity of the municipal employees needs strong support from higher levels. Instead, higher levels emphasize the vision of the municipal employee as part of the budget, rather than a crucial actor in local development. As an example, the current Buenos Aires Governor (M.E. Vidal 2015-2019) called for a ‘fiscal pact’, that asks, among other things, municipalities not to increase personnel at a higher rate than the population increase (Bullorini, 2018). Simultaneously the resources provided for training are minimal and when training involves traveling to Buenos Aires or La Plata, personal and municipal resources need to be employed. In the case of administrative personnel, the organization in charge of training is the Provincial Institute of Public Administration (IPAP). The IPAP only responds to municipalities’ requests for training, and therefore does not provide education opportunities if the municipality does not organize it.

At the local level, what can be perceived is a general lack of interest in training. It is not in the Executive’s priorities to train their employees, except for minimal training to those performing specific tasks, and there are no scheduled or programmatic training. Unions are also an actor exclusively focused on salaries and other compensations to employees, leaving the training and qualifications as a minor topic.

As explained, the topic of low budget for the municipality and consequent low salaries was recognized by all respondents as one of the main sources for lack of qualified personnel. Initially, salaries are not attractive enough to recruit already trained personnel, that is instead captured by the private sector. Secondly, if they get trained through their positions at the municipality they find better and more profitable options in the private sector, as is the case of rural road maintenance exemplified with the training of personnel qualified to operate machinery. “Another problem with qualified people is that within the municipality they do not have a good salary. A person who knows how to work well prefers to go to work in the private sector, whether in construction companies or sowing and harvest because they earn much more than they earn in the municipality. Those who are not good enough, end up working in the municipality” (Interview No. 4).

Lastly, some of the interviews highlighted the local restrictions on the pool of candidates. One of the interviews mentioned the difficulty of finding qualified personnel in Bolivar, attributing it to the ‘local brain-drain’²³, that is, students that leave Bolivar to study in bigger cities often do not return. This produces a local scarcity of young-qualified personnel that is common to municipalities of the cattle cluster and works as a constraint in the ability of appointing qualified personnel. The phenomenon is well captured by the demographics statistics: the population pyramid shows Bolivar has a high proportion of retired population (older than 65 years old²⁴). Compared to provincial figures, Bolivar has a higher percentage of people aged above 65 years old: 3.4% for Buenos Aires Province and 4.9% for Bolivar.

The question raised was why the local education does not adapt to the municipality’s needs in terms of qualified personnel. The answer for most of those interviewed is that local education offered was developed in complete disconnection to the local environment. Representatives of Bucca’s government, however, mentioned efforts made to match the careers offered with the demand of local companies and to incentivize professionals to return to Bolivar. When asked if the municipality, as the biggest local employer, had any communication with local institutions in terms of needs to train their employees the answer was negative. The only nexus between local education and municipality is a program of internships for law and accounting students.

To finalize, it is important to emphasize that patronage, as the guiding principle of employment, affects not only the appointment phase but the management of the existing staff. As Grindle observes “processes of recruitment determine expectations about obligation -to the person and his or her priorities or to the “service,” its norms of behavior, and the responsibility of office” (Grindle, 2012). In Bolivar, there is no performance evaluation system and possibilities of a professional career advancement without the favor of a political patron are very slim.

²³ Bolivar’s education network is comprised by primary and secondary schools both in urban and rural areas and two possibilities for higher education: the “I.S.F.D.y T. No.27” Institute, which educates teachers in different areas (e.g. teachers of kindergarten and primary school among others) and vocational training. Secondly, the University Regional Center (CRUB) where students can attend classes for the first year of the University of Buenos Aires (having later on to move to Buenos Aires to continue their studies) and the full careers of accounting, law and mechanical engineering from the University of La Plata.

The majority of the students however, choose to move to bigger cities to pursue their studies, e.g. Buenos Aires, La Plata or Tandil. This has tremendous consequences for the city’s development: in the first place most of the qualified labor force chooses not to come back to Bolivar, since the employment possibilities are very slim and salaries lower than in bigger cities. Secondly, it increases the gap between families that can afford sending their children to study to another city and those that cannot, resulting in poor families with poor or no access to higher education.

²⁴ This age is based on ordinary retirement pensions that can be claimed by women older than 60 years old and men older than 65 with at least 30 years of contributions.

Workspace responsibility does not take the form, as suggested in the Charter, of mechanisms to ensure attendance and reduce absenteeism, prevent conflict of interests and rectify in an effective manner unsatisfactory conduct on the part of public service employees. On the contrary, the lack of formal written job descriptions and procedures opens the door to the provision of ‘favors’. Oliveros explains that “The recurrent use of discretion—or perceived discretion—in the everyday undertakings of public sector employees, and the consequent personalization of problem-solving, help give voters the impression that personal relationships are vital for getting things done in the public administration” (Oliveros, 2016: 374). It also establishes a very subtle and unfair advantage for the incumbent party, as they can favor political allies using state resources in a mechanism that is very difficult to track.

Lastly, the organization of human resources functions, as in the case of Bolivar, highly politicized. The head of human resources is a key political position that negotiates with the unions and other department heads, rather than a technical designation. The current largest union (ATRAMUBO) has aligned very closely to the government, who has appointed one of its members as the head of human resources. Simultaneously, the unions exchange jobs in the municipality for less pressure in the negotiations for salaries, oftentimes following directions with higher levels of their own bureaucracies. In this sense, unions are currently an actor that validates the patronage appointment strategy.

C. Dismissal

Conforming to the legal framework described in the preceding section, unjustified dismissal of employees is, in general terms, very rare. Interviews asserted that their formal laws, i.e. the stability of the public employee guaranteed in the National Constitution and informal rules, such as the existing practice of automatic renewal of temporary employment contracts, grant almost 100% of stability for municipal employees.

Unjustified dismissals are also objected by unions, but as described above, unions are a political actor that can negotiate with the municipality job positions that will result in more or less resistance to specific measures. Consequently, unions will question unfair discharges more vehemently if those affected are aligned with their political views, or if they want to put more pressure on the municipality.

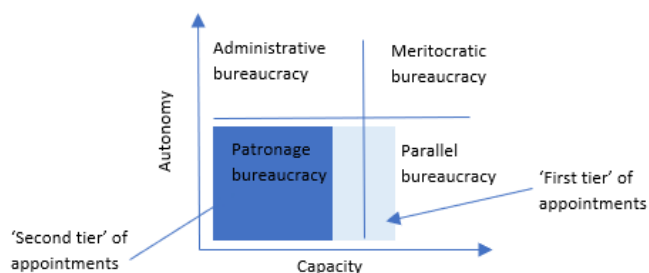
As a result, in Bolivar rather than dismissals political opponents are demoted, transferred to other areas or given less resources to work with compared to those that are aligned to the Mayor's party. Even after the signature of the collective bargaining agreement, following the provincial Law No. 14.656 that prohibits unfair and discretionary dismissal of employees and transfer to areas that affect them in a moral or material way, no substantial changes have been observed.

Consequences for local bureaucracies

The characteristics of Bolivar's human resource strategy has clear consequences for the local bureaucracies. While the first tier of appointments can be characterized as a patronage/parallel bureaucracy, the second tier is clearly a patronage bureaucracy that lacks both autonomy and technical capacity.

Graphic 2

Capacity and autonomy of Bolivar's bureaucracy



Based on Iacoviello et al; 2010

Within the first tier, political loyalty takes precedence over technical capacity in the selection process, leading to a staff with very low levels of autonomy but varying degrees of capacity. For example, as a political strategy E. Bucca decided to form a team with young and educated appointees, trying to give Bolivar a 'fresh start' and differentiate from the Simon's team. This team had some characteristics of a 'Parallel bureaucracy': technical and educated that enjoy higher salaries than the rest of the personnel (Iacoviello et al, 2010),

While more capacity might be understood as a positive impact in development and policy formulation, more competence in this tier of appointments can hardly bring structural changes. Because of their connection with the Mayor and technical knowledge they have great chances of promoting strategies of local development, however, their temporary nature represents an obstacle to structural changes. For example, Bucca's government executed different projects related to

Bolivar's local development like the creation of a science or technology park and housing projects in less-advantaged neighborhoods. These projects included funds from the Inter-American Development Bank and represented a phenomenal technical effort in terms of application. Bolivar is in fact, the only municipality in the Cattle cluster to apply and benefit from these resources²⁵. Other accomplishment is the first survey among municipal employees that asked about their expectations and demands. Both examples are great improvements for Bolivar's development and local human resource management, however, these are efforts that are extinguished as soon as the officials leave their posts.

This is of critical importance for the opportunities of local development. Even though these bureaucracies have the possibilities of bringing about good projects and initiatives, they are not capable of generating enduring changes and giving the tools to the second tier of employees, that enjoy more stability, to generate themselves these projects and initiatives.

These teams' main purpose is to build support for the Mayor, and innovations are brought if they are perceived as a way to increase votes and political backing. The technical capacity is a secondary characteristic of the appointee. Moreover, competence can become a positive variable only if there is political autonomy to implement new ideas and projects. An example in Bolivar is the appointment, in G. Erreca's administration, of Juan Matías Simón, son of Juan Carlos Simón. Matías Simón is a lawyer that was not a part of any involvement at the municipality at that moment, but as the son of the Mayor brought political connections to Erreca's first experience as an interim Mayor²⁶. His education was not the main reason why he was appointed to that position²⁷.

Within the second tier, as a consequence of patronage appointments, the levels of autonomy are also very low. Regarding capacity, it is important to note that patronage does not necessarily results in low capacity (Grindle, 2012). In Bolivar, the absence of merit recruitment is combined with a great disregard for technical capacity. As Grindle puts it: "in patronage systems, competence can be a criterion of hiring, but whether or not it is depends upon the preferences of the hiring patron" (Grindle, 2012: 22). Technical capacity is only valued, to some extent, in first levels of recruitment and professional positions.

²⁵ Data available at "Programa mejoramiento de Barrios" website: www.promeba.gob.ar

²⁶ In this opportunity, Erreca was acting as Mayor while Juan Carlos Simon was on sick leave. Two months later, he officially assumes as a Mayor as Simon takes his seat at the Provincial Senate.

²⁷ Another good example was the appointment of Mariano Sarraúa as director of urban services (who belongs to the Cambiemos coalition, opposition to the current government), with the possible intention of influencing in the primaries of the Cambiemos coalition (Interview No. 3).

This particularity is combined with an inadequate management of the personnel, including poor training, and sociodemographic conditions such as small pool of qualified personnel, which altogether results in low capacity. To illustrate the point, the latest statistics show that 37.5% of the personnel had only primary school education, some of them incomplete, while only 18% had a degree (college or university) (INDEC, census 2010).

Different consequences arise from this situation, in the first place, patronage bureaucracy leads to an inefficiency in the use of local resources. Interviews emphasized that roughly 70% of the budget is spent on salaries, leaving a small margin to implement other types of policies. “Bolivar has a surplus of 500 employees, that does not allow the municipality to use that money in productive activities” (Interview No. 2).

Another economic effect that has been mentioned was the deficient provision of services. This is a claim raised by the Road Commission²⁸. An interview mentions cases where:

- Personnel less qualified is assigned to operate better machinery as a way of praise for political affiliation
- Political connections lead to misaligned needs. For example, canal construction, critical infrastructure in flooding periods were performed on E. Bucca’s father ranch when other areas where more urgent
- No supervision that leads to other forms corruption

The case of road maintenance becomes a good example of how appointment strategies not based on merit or experience, can lead to great economic inefficiencies either by providing a low-quality service or by encouraging some corrupt practices and misuse of public resources (Oliveros, 2013). The overall condition of the rural roads in Bolivar is very precarious both because of the lack of resources (machinery) and the lack of qualified personnel to perform activities, affecting not only transport of cattle and agricultural products but also the mobility of rural workers and the provision of services, notably the rural schools (Road Commission, Press conference 16/6/2017).

²⁸ The Road Commission was established formally in 1989 by a municipal ordinance. After its modification in 2010 it is now comprised by representatives of multiple organizations that include grass-root farmers movement, cooperatives, Bolivar’s Women Federation and the Rural Society. The Commission has representatives from each organization and from the local Executive and negotiates the rate of the rural road maintenance tax and, in practice, audits the works of the municipality in road maintenance. Considering the importance of agriculture in Bolivar’s economy and the exclusive reliance on motor vehicles to trade goods, road maintenance can be expected to be a priority in the municipality’s activities.

However, some of the interviews highlighted the fact that municipal jobs affect in a positive way the economy by providing jobs to a number of families that would not be otherwise employed. With a number of 1.400 employees Bolivar's municipality is the single biggest employer in the municipality²⁹, since the second source of employment, namely agricultural activities, is distributed among multiple smaller employers. In the absence of a manufacturing industry, the public sector offers the only source of employment that is not subject to cycles of agribusiness (affected by natural conditions, international prices), although affected by other type of political cycles. Moreover, public sector in Bolivar absorbs an increasing portion of internal migration, i.e. people that cannot find stable employment in the rural sector either because they cannot adapt to new structural or temporary circumstances (e.g. they cannot use technologically complex machinery or they cattle ranches had to reduce personnel through the last crisis). Although there is no available data that can picture the phenomena, it is believed that around 7,000 people left the countryside and moved to the city of Bolivar, adding pressure to the housing crisis and basic services such as sewage, drinking water and natural gas.

Furthermore, it is difficult to think how a municipality that can not guarantee the provision of basic services, considered a traditional role of municipalities, would successfully adapt to the new functions that, after the decentralization process, municipalities are expected to fulfill. In this way, a bureaucracy with low autonomy and capacity hinders the ability of municipalities to formulate and implement policies related to economic and social development, environmental protection, health or security and crime, i.e. the "new functions".

To conclude, Bolivar's municipal bureaucracy lacks a long-term human resource planning strategy that connects the needs of the organization with recruitment practices and management. Throughout the interviews and the analysis of primary data it was found that:

-Appointment strategy is based on patronage. As summarized by B. Geddes, mayor's face the dilemma of designating someone that can contribute to their personal political career or a competent person that can contribute to long-term success of policies. These choices are not mutually exclusive, but in most cases party loyalists or other political motivated appointments do

²⁹ As shown, the number is even higher when three levels are combined. The ability of the municipality to politically appoint employees in other levels of the state has been asked during the interviews and all agreed that there is no direct influence on the appointment from the municipal Executive. These jobs are also politically appointed but they respond to provincial networks of patronage rather than municipal.

not necessarily come with position specific credentials. In Bolivar, Mayors have consistently chosen to build political support over long-term policy goals, following what the Geddes calls a partisan appointment strategy. Partisan appointment strategies select top personnel based on loyalty to the party or coalition, followed by competence. In the lower levels, positions are filled based on patronage criteria (Geddes, 1994).

-Management is also far from the guidelines provided by the Charter. Remunerations are very low and lack external equity, hindering the ability of the municipality to hire and retain qualified personnel that leaves to positions in the private sector. Training and performance evaluations are elements that are not part of personnel management. This leads to a weak workspace responsibility, fostering corruption cases and favoritism in service provision.

It is clear that the local incumbent government has great incentives to increase patronage appointments, which has been described as a path dependent activity. With each election, promises of jobs in the municipality bring more votes, becoming at the same time a practice extremely difficult to change. Consequently, the municipal staff grows in complete disconnection to the needs of the municipality, both in numbers and capacity.

Municipal bureaucracies characterized by the lack of autonomy result in employees that are unable to pursue long term initiatives outside their political patron, with the result of good initiatives being lost in between administrations³⁰. Lack of capacity hinders the development of new initiatives; at the same time, it affects the quality of the services that the municipality provides.

The Charter promotes a concept of public service as a central tool for development, empowering Latin American democratic systems. On the contrary, the study of Bolivar revealed how municipal bureaucracies are understood solely as a source of political support.

³⁰ Within the main examples I was able to collect during interviews are: the office of rural tourism, a project developed during Erreca's period that was discontinued in Bucca's administration and the incentive professionals to return to Bolivar, initiated by Bucca but not continued by Pisano.

Conclusion

The research question that guided this study aimed to answer to what extent have local bureaucracies implemented recommendations from the Ibero-American Charter for the Public Service, signed by Argentina in 2003.

The Charter established several functional requirements of the public service so Latin American bureaucracies can fulfill their roles as promoters of development. The Charter expresses the consensus reached by Ibero-American countries about the need, first and foremost, of a human resource planning that can link the agency's strategy with recruitment and management of personnel. Moreover, the document outlined several elements necessary to establish and retain a professional and efficient bureaucracy.

Through the analysis of the case of the municipality of Bolivar, it was established that the development of local bureaucracies does not follow the recommendations from the Charter in any way. Answering the question of how are local human resources appointed, managed and dismissed it was explained that the appointment strategy focuses exclusively on patronage appointments and the organization of work i.e. the description of posts and the skills required for applicants to fulfill roles is nonexistent.

Secondly, personnel working at the municipality is deficiently managed. In contrast with the Charter's suggestions, the salary of the personnel is not subject to coherent criteria based on the merit and ability of the employees. On the contrary, collective bargains agreements between municipality and unions set up general pay levels, and the mobility of each employee to higher categories depends on personal political connections within the municipality and seniority. Moreover, salaries are not characterized by an external equity, i.e. a competitive salary compared to the private sector which discourages employees from pursuing a career in the municipal environment. Performance evaluations do not follow an impartial and objective criterion, instead personal and political connections influence an informal evaluation scheme. Additionally, training is very scarce and does not follow a stable pattern.

As a result, what the Charter calls 'workspace responsibility' is not assured. The lack of clear and objective performance and workplace obligation rules leads to the widespread misuse of state resources, leaving to personal and ethical considerations to judge basic elements of any employment contract such as hours the employee should work or whether they can make personal use of municipal assets, etc.

On the positive side, the employment relationships between the municipality as an employer and employees was improved as a consequence of the implementation of the Law 14.656. The legislation, among other advances, grants the right to municipal employees to discuss wages with employers, a right that was previously refused to municipal employees. However, there are some elements that preclude the improvement of municipal worker's conditions. First, salary negotiations are linked to the municipal budget. In a context where municipalities are not granted financial autonomy, this sets a clear limit to the aspirations of local employees. Secondly, the existence of informal institutions or 'rules of the game' on how employees are hired, promoted and dismissed clearly obstructs the implementation of formal laws that establish basic principles such as non-discrimination, unfair dismissal or transfer between departments.

The theoretical framework allowed focusing on these formal and informal institutions that shape the complex background in which local bureaucracies operate. On one hand, municipalities in Buenos Aires province suffer from chronically deficient budgets, a situation that is worsened in cattle cluster districts that have more rigid incomes. Transfers from national and provincial levels help compensate deficit budgets, although they do not represent a programmatic and steady income, rather a clientelistic link with higher levels of the state. Hence, municipalities politically aligned to national and provincial governments enjoy more transfers and the possibility to cover current expenses as well as infrastructure projects. The underlying concept that politicians reproduce at the local level is that state resources can and should be used for political purposes. At the municipal level, one of the greatest assets in control of the local Executive body is the municipal civil service. Consequently, the municipal staff growth is driven by political dynamics rather than organizational needs.

This situation is combined with a weak formal framework in which municipal bureaucracies function. Municipalities operate in a system that guarantees autonomy in certain areas (such as appointment strategies) and reduces independence in others (e.g. financial). Apart from the aforementioned Law 14.656 and the general framework provided by the Municipalities Law and National and Provincial Constitutions, there are no regulations on how employees should be hired, managed and dismissed. Moreover, there are no formal definitions on the role of bureaucracies in the process of policy formulation and implementation. The consequence is a profound disconnection between the constitutional law, labor regulations and the human resource management strategies (Chudnovsky and Iacoviello, 2015).

This institutional framework in which local bureaucracies operate represents one of the main drivers of such human resource management strategy. The second element that explains such human resource management strategy are the increasing returns and lack of incentives for Mayors to change these practices. It was described how patronage appointments represent a great source of political support that utilizes state resources exclusively. The costs of exiting unilaterally are extremely high, and it seems very unlikely that any Mayor will renounce to such benefit voluntarily without external or internal pressure to do so.

The consequences of such human resource management strategy are vast. In the first place, local bureaucracies suffer from low autonomy and low capacity. Low autonomy and technical capacity are the result of a partisan appointment strategy (Geddes, 1994), that prioritizes loyalty over capacity in the higher levels and patronage on the lower levels. As Oliveros explains, in lower levels, there is a prevailing understanding that it is in the client's interests to have the patron in power, because their fates are tied to the political fate of the politician who hired them (Oliveros, 2013: 4). At higher levels, low autonomy means that the guiding principle to policy formulation is the political support for the Mayor. Projects are supported or dismissed based on the political gains, rather than long term development goals. But at all levels, this appointment strategy disrupts the most basic goals of the bureaucratic organization that no longer works 'for the municipality' but rather 'for the Mayor's political project'.

Low technical capacity reduces the municipality's efficiency in the provision of the most basic services, rising several problems among citizens and limiting the economic development, as seen in the road maintenance example. Moreover, it hinders the ability of the municipality to respond to new challenges and responsibilities that cascade from other levels of the state. Municipalities are transferred, through formal and informal channels, responsibilities related to economic development, safety, health, education that cannot be properly addressed because they require technical expertise that is not present in the local environment.

Personnel may not only lack capacity when appointed but also fail to develop as a result of slim training possibilities given throughout their career. Some of the reasons for this have been summarized in lack of support from other levels of government, a lack of incentives for local actors, low salaries and a lack of an available qualified workforce.

All together it reinforces the conceptualization of local bureaucracies as a mere part of the budget or, alternatively, a source of votes for current or future governments rather than an active actor in

the promotion of local development. Therefore, there is a disconnection not only with the functional requirements outlined by the Charter that aim to establish and retain a professional administration but with the concept of public service itself.

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