

ORIGINAL

## Internationalization of Río Cuarto: cooperation for the sustainable local development

## Internacionalización de Río Cuarto: cooperación para el desarrollo local sostenible

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### ABSTRACT

Globalization has evidenced the existing interconnection around the world, which in turn implies that the problems that concern one will also have importance and need of resolution for another. It also makes it clear that we are all involved in the task of contributing to the solution of such problems that afflict our world in general. In this way, different actors, such as local governments, have become increasingly relevant at the international level. This shows that the solutions to the problems of the international agenda must be solved from a multilevel dynamic, since nowadays it is not only the States that have the capacity to generate changes. This final thesis elaborates an internationalization plan for the city of Río Cuarto centered on the axis of sustainable local development. The main problem is the dispersion of international actions due to the lack of a specialized body. For this purpose, a social project is developed for a year and a half, aimed at incorporating an International Relations Secretariat, making the city a member of ICLEI and providing legitimacy and continuity to the Secretariat in order to finally elaborate a subnational international policy.

**Keywords:** Globalization; Interconnectedness; Sustainable Development; Local Governments; International Relations.

### RESUMEN

La globalización ha evidenciado la interconexión existente alrededor del mundo, lo que a su vez implica que los problemas que atañen a uno también tendrán importancia y necesidad de resolución para otro. Así mismo deja en evidencia que todos estamos involucrados en la tarea de aportar a la solución de tales problemáticas que afligen a nuestro mundo en general. De esta manera es que cada vez han cobrado mayor relevancia, a nivel internacional, diversos actores como es el caso de los gobiernos locales. Esto demuestra que las soluciones a las problemáticas de la agenda internacional debemos resolverlas desde una dinámica multinivel, ya que en la actualidad no son sólo los Estados los que poseen capacidad de generar cambios. El presente trabajo final de grado elabora un plan de internacionalización para la ciudad de Río Cuarto centrado en el eje del desarrollo local sostenible. Se establece como principal problema la dispersión de las acciones internacionales por la falta de un órgano especializado. Para esto se desarrolla un proyecto social con duración de un año y medio tendiente a incorporar una Secretaría de Relaciones Internacionales, hacer miembro a la ciudad en ICLEI y propiciar la legitimidad y continuidad a la Secretaría con la finalidad de elaborar finalmente una política internacional subnacional.

**Palabras clave:** Globalización; Interconexión; Desarrollo Sostenible; Gobiernos Locales; Relaciones Internacionales.

## INTRODUCTION

In addition to this, one should consider what was mentioned by the Dom Cabral Foundation and the Prefeitura de Belo Horizonte<sup>(1)</sup> in the AL-LAS Project:

The most powerful argument to legitimize the international action of local governments for sustainability is the need to formulate and implement better and more efficient public policies, on the one hand; and the need for a multilevel and multiactor agreement guaranteeing a higher probability of success of those policies, on the other.

Now, taking up some useful background to the proposal, it is noted that according to a United Nations publication, more than half of the world's population, 3,5 billion people, currently live in cities. By the year 2050, it is estimated that this figure will be around 70 % of the world's population. Although it is true that cities occupy only 3 % of the planet's surface, their proper management is key to sustainable development, since they account for between 60 % and 80 % of energy consumption and 75 % of carbon emissions.<sup>(2)</sup>

In turn, the Sustainable Development Goal N° 11 states the following: “make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”.<sup>(3)</sup> This was later reaffirmed and deepened in the 2016 Urban Agenda. This included the global commitment to sustainable urban development as a fundamental step towards achieving this goal in an integrated and coordinated manner and with significance at the global, regional, national, subnational and local levels, with the participation of all relevant stakeholders.<sup>(4)</sup>

To complement the above, a search was made for success stories that could be useful and provide a guide. An interesting example of a sustainable city is Bahía Blanca, which, like Río Cuarto, is considered a medium-sized city. It is located in the southwest of the province of Buenos Aires with a population of around 300 000 inhabitants. It has managed to establish significant relationships with international actors, which has facilitated its sustainable development. One of its most notable achievements is the acquisition of an action plan from the “Emerging and Sustainable Cities Program” of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). This program offers non-reimbursable technical assistance to support the development and implementation of urban sustainability plans. In addition, they have an international strategic plan that includes several of the tools that will be implemented in this paper. Within their strategies they propose, in summary: the centralization of international projection in the municipality, the development of joint work between different levels of government and society, and collaboration in the coordination of local efforts.<sup>(5)</sup>

Another suggestive case, both for its proximity and belonging to the same province, as well as for its close ties with Río Cuarto, is the city of Córdoba. In terms of its multilateral relations, this city has expanded its presence in international networks, becoming part of 13 of them in various areas, and has other strategic alliances with international organizations: UN, CAF and IDB. Likewise, it has been represented in more than 30 international events, thanks to the constant links maintained with such networks and organizations. Similarly, it is key to take its experience in the development of “Cordoba Breathes”, an international cooperation project, co-financed by the European Union, which aims to make Córdoba a healthy, inclusive, resilient and sustainable city.<sup>(6,7,8,9)</sup>

The aforementioned examples stand out for having solid internationalization plans, with clear and precise objectives, with strategic methodologies and diverse actors articulated and working in an integrated manner. At the same time, both are both developing and executing local sustainable development projects with objectives similar to those sought in this case study.<sup>(10,11,12)</sup>

It is also crucial to bear in mind that although what is proposed in broad terms is internationalization, this is not only an end in itself, but also a means and a tool to improve the living conditions of the population.<sup>(13,14,15)</sup>

To summarize, the relevance of this work can be seen in its focus on globalization and the growing role of local governments. It highlights the importance of the participation of cities such as Río Cuarto in the international arena, contributing to solving global problems and taking advantage of development opportunities. By focusing on sustainable local development, it aligns with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), promoting a balance between economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection. In turn, the proposed internationalization plan can serve as a model for other cities in Argentina and Latin America seeking to strengthen their international participation and contribute to sustainable development. Likewise, the creation of an International Relations Secretariat in Río Cuarto is an important step to centralize and professionalize internationalization efforts, improving the effectiveness and coherence of local policies. This study can also inspire innovation and new perspectives in local public administration, underlining the need to adapt to an ever-changing world and seek collaborative solutions at the global level.<sup>(16,17)</sup>

How can the city of Río Cuarto strengthen its participation in the international arena as a strategic tool to promote its sustainable local development, taking as a reference successful cases of intermediate cities such as Bahía Blanca and Córdoba?

## Objective

To design an internationalization plan for the city of Río Cuarto that contributes to sustainable local

development, articulating actions with multilevel and multi-stakeholder actors, and taking as a model successful experiences of similar cities.

## METHOD

### Situation analysis

The city of Río Cuarto is located in the south of the Province of Córdoba. It has around 246 393 inhabitants according to INDEC data<sup>(15)</sup> and its surface area is around 64,25 km<sup>2</sup>. Such numbers, added to its great progress and independent character, are what make it known as the “alternative capital of the province”. As of this year, 2022, Juan Manuel Llamosas is the current mayor for the second consecutive term. The municipality is institutionally composed of: the Municipal Executive Department, the Cabinet coordination area, the Municipal Sanitary Works Entity, 11 Secretariats and 21 Subsecretariats. However, none of these bodies is exclusively in charge of the city’s international relations.

We have managed to ask some questions to an official of the Municipality of Río Cuarto whose answers resulted in some alarming facts. One of these facts to take into account is the inexistence of a strategic plan for local development. This suggests that there are no predefined guidelines for the execution of activities within the municipality and leads to the assumption that they are established according to the emergence of needs. Also noteworthy is the city’s lack of relations with peers abroad and the scarce participation in international networks or organizations. This could be linked to the lack of a municipal body in charge of planning and carrying out such relations, a fact that is also important to consider as one of the most important cities in a province that is notably proactive in its international relations.

Although the city is not isolated, since it has made some international connections and actions, its performance could be much better and more comprehensive, but it is understood that this may be the result of the fact that those who propose and carry out these activities or links are scattered in different areas of the municipal structure. Without a specialized entity in the area, it is difficult to arrive at projects and results that have components that provide continuity over time.

In order to have a general overview of the development of international relations carried out so far and to be aware of the tools available, a brief breakdown of these will be made:

Participation and/or membership in international city networks: it is part of the Mercociudades network, which seeks to strengthen regional identity and integration to ensure the development of cities and well-being in South America. Its objectives are to improve the quality of life in the cities of the network; legitimize the institutional representation of Mercociudades; influence national, regional and world agendas; create joint policies between cities; stimulate the exchange of experiences.<sup>(6)</sup> However, their participation is not active, although they pay membership fees.

Participation in international events: in this aspect the city is more active. Some examples of this are the participation in the Meeting of Event Destination Cities, which is a space for destinations that host events, organizers, service providers and clients to generate links and business opportunities related to meeting tourism.<sup>(7)</sup> In June of this year, the mayor attended the first day of the World Circular Economy Summit, where he signed an agreement to join the Ibero-American Circular Economy Network together with hundreds of municipalities from the southern part of the continent.<sup>(8)</sup> Likewise, the city participated in the World Summit of Mayors C4 where the Tourism Coordinator Araceli Isla valued the agreement reached with other localities to work from sustainability and sustainability in the area of tourism and mentioned that this is complemented with what they have been working on in relation to the SDGs.<sup>(9)</sup> In addition to this, the city is scheduled to host the Meeting of Economic and Social Councils in November of this year. It consists of an international meeting where issues related to environmental care, sustainable development, work and future and gender perspective will be addressed.<sup>(8)</sup> What has been developed so far shows that there is interest on the part of the city to be inserted and known in the international arena through its participation and hosting events such as those mentioned above. However, this work is promoted by the Secretariat of Sports and Tourism and not by a specific organism in the matter. It should be clarified that some other actions have been carried out, but those considered most relevant for this analysis have been mentioned.

Bilateral relations: many years ago the city signed some twinning agreements, which are, as explained by Salomón M<sup>(10)</sup>, “links of exchange and international cooperation between two communities established through their local governments and formalized by means of a joint declaration”. These twinning agreements were signed in 1964 with Abilene, Texas in the United States, in 1990 with Chillán, Chile and in 2007 with Vinaròs, Spain. However, after a talk with an official of the municipality, it is known that they are not taken advantage of, the dialogues begin and end around the concretion of the legal document.

### Context Analysis

Next, a PESTEL analysis will be conducted to determine the political, economic, socio-cultural, technological, ecological and legal aspects that exert influence and should be taken into account in the present case to be

addressed.

Political factors: both the municipal government and the provincial and national governments are aligned under political parties of the same political orientation, ergo the facilitation of dialogue, joint work and a faster line of arrival is foreseen. As an illustration of this idea, the Governor of Córdoba, Juan Schiaretti, invited the city to join the Ibero-American Circular Economy Network. Another fact to highlight is the governor's consideration of Río Cuarto as "Agrifood Capital and Alternative Capital of the province", as he has made clear in some of his most current speeches. Likewise, the government of the province cooperates with the city in several projects, such is the case of 75 blocks that are being paved and are financed half by the province and half by the municipality with an investment of 332 million pesos financed by the IDB.<sup>(8)</sup>

The mayor of Río Cuarto, Juan Manuel Llamosas, is going through his second term, his first term being from 2016 to 2020 and then reelected that year for his second term that will run until 2024. As regards its autonomy, the independent nature of the local government has been previously mentioned, a fact that is associated with the wide margin of maneuver they have, as can be observed in practice.

Economic factors: on the international level, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has exacerbated the damage caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, exacerbating the slowdown in the world economy, which is entering what could become a prolonged period of low growth and high inflation. This context increases the risk of stagflation, with potentially damaging consequences for both middle-income and low-income economies, according to the latest "World Economic Outlook" report.

At the national level, the strong acceleration of prices recorded by Argentina is leading it to close the year with an inflation rate of no less than 90 %, and some experts are already forecasting a three-digit rate, a level not seen in the last decades. Official data for July set off all the alarms since consumer prices rose 7,4 % in relation to June, considered the highest monthly jump since 2002, and 71 % in interannual terms, with an accumulated increase of 46,2 % in the first 7 months of the year. The general level of the Consumer Price Index (CPI) increased 7,4 % monthly in July 2022, and accumulated in the first seven months of the year a variation of 46,2 %. In the interannual comparison, it registered an increase of 71,0 %.

Regarding international financing, a continuity in the execution of these in the country can be observed. In the thematic areas where this fact is most noticeable is in infrastructure, projects related to the SDGs, local development and sustainability.

Socio-cultural factors: according to a study conducted in 2021 by The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) and based on a study requested by the World Wildlife Fund, people's interest and concern for nature increased by 16 % in the last five years, with a trend that continues to rise. People around the world, especially in developing countries, are increasingly aware of the planetary crisis we are experiencing, affecting their behavior and establishing a rapidly growing global mood, described by WWF as an "EcoAwakening". In response to this trend, individuals and consumers concerned about this crisis convey their concerns and demand concrete actions on the loss of nature and biodiversity.<sup>(11)</sup> Data drawn specifically from Argentina are interesting: people's concern about wildlife loss increased from 95 % to 98 %; the number of Google searches related to nature and biodiversity loss grew by 100 %; Twitter conversations about nature and biodiversity loss grew by 444 %; news coverage of nature and biodiversity loss increased by 65 %, all these percentages measured between 2016 and 2020.<sup>(11)</sup>

Citizens want to see stronger political and social action on environmental protection. More than two thirds of those surveyed think that economic recovery plans should be related to prioritizing environmental problems.<sup>(11)</sup>

At the same time, it is observed that the leaders of Río Cuarto also show greater interest in the implementation of practices with a more sustainable outlook. An example of this is the "Green City" project, together with the creation of the Sustainable Cabinet that it implies.

Technological factors: various technological innovations will be implemented in the city through the "Green City" project. Incorporation of new electric zootropes that will have the dual function of removing blood traction vehicles and transforming waste into a source of income through recovery and recycling. Official vehicles will be chipped to adapt them to the use of biofuels.<sup>(8)</sup> In addition, the city is home to the Río Cuarto Technological Cluster, which is a group of companies in the technology sector that join together to strengthen their individual capabilities. In this way, they complement each other to offer higher quality services and products, enabling their members to grow and access new markets.<sup>(8)</sup>

Ecological factors: since the growing interest shown by the city's leaders, several activities have been developed to raise awareness and care for the environment. Such actions consist of: digitalization of procedures; sanitary works that currently comprise 87 % sewage coverage and 99 % drinking water coverage; sanitary works such as a new sewage liquid treatment plant, new sewage collectors in the north and south of the city and new pumping station; transition to the use of LED lights for energy saving and reduction of environmental impact; forestation plans, which in the year 2021 achieved the number of 4000 trees planted; green lungs; forestry stakes; municipal rubbish dump that receives waste from the public and private sectors; green points, which already have more than 50 containers distributed in squares and green spaces throughout the city; green islands for the disposal of electrical and electronic waste; experimental plant for the treatment of plastics;



environmental and gender training; municipal ordinance for the recycling of tires.

The “ Río Cuarto Green City “ project in particular is oriented to the treatment of three axes: care of the environment, social welfare and development of the circular economy. With respect to specific activities it seeks to implement, the following are the following: creation of the Sustainable Cabinet to coordinate all government actions related to the environment and the circular economy; forestation plan, but this time in search of 8000 trees; new electric zootropes; transformation of domestic oil into energy; carbon footprint measurement in municipal buildings; chipping of official vehicles to adapt them to the use of biofuels; education for the environment in municipal spaces; municipal ordinance for the recycling of batteries.

Legal factors: from the most general to the most specific, it is relevant to take the aforementioned SDGs and the 2030 Agenda of the United Nations as a guide for countries to eradicate poverty, strengthen peace, care for the planet and achieve prosperity for people, among other challenges to be met. In Argentina, the General Environmental Law N°25675, “This law establishes the minimum requirements for the achievement of a sustainable and adequate management of the environment, the preservation and protection of biological diversity and the implementation of sustainable development” Law Yolanda N°27592, “aims to guarantee comprehensive training in environment, with a sustainable development perspective and with special emphasis on climate change, for people working in the public service”.

The participation of local governments in the international arena is endorsed in Argentina by the National Constitution in its 1994 reform, in Article N°124, which states that the provinces “may also enter into international agreements as long as they are not incompatible with the foreign policy of the Nation and do not affect the powers delegated to the Federal Government or the public credit of the Nation; with the knowledge of the National Congress”. Furthermore, in the provincial dimension, in the Constitution of the Province of Córdoba, in its 2001 reform, Article N°14, paragraph 4, mentions within the powers of the Governor, “he enters into treaties and agreements for the management of provincial interests and the coordination and unification of similar services with the Federal State, the other Provinces, the Municipalities and public entities outside the Province.”

### Organizational diagnosis

This section will proceed with a comprehensive diagnosis of the strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and threats of the Municipality of the city of Río Cuarto. To this end, a SWOT matrix will be developed. This will subsequently help in the strategic planning of internationalization.

Strengths: Río Cuarto is considered the second most important city in the province, after the capital, the city of Córdoba, and has even been called the “Agrifood Capital” or “Alternative Capital. It has a population of approximately 246 393 inhabitants according to INDEC<sup>(15)</sup> and its surface area is approximately 18 394 km<sup>2</sup>. Its mayor, Juan Manuel Llamosas, has a close relationship with the governor of the province, Juan Schiaretti, due to several joint works they have developed and because they are part of the same political party. This is favorable to achieve vertical integration.

It is also relevant to mention that the current government of the city has shown, in recent times, a growing interest in the sustainability of the city through the implementation of some activities, which have been mentioned above. In addition to this, Córdoba is a province that has been actively promoting sustainable development in recent times, making it an important example and ally in this regard.

Regarding the budget, it is important to highlight that, of the budget prepared for this year, about three billion pesos have not been executed, according to what is observed in the Transparency Portal Río Cuarto<sup>(14)</sup>, a fact that will facilitate the possibility of executing the plan since there would be the available budget. The budget allocated to the new Secretariat of Gender, incorporated this year 2022 to the Municipality, will also be taken as a reference, the same is \$70 194 966 million pesos.<sup>(14)</sup>

It is also important that the city participates in the Mercociudades network, which has cooperation agreements with other networks of higher caliber such as ICLEI. This is why access to it would be facilitated through this channel. Although participation in this network is not active, it will be promoted again to take advantage of the benefits it provides and to avoid the unnecessary expense of paying for membership.

### Weaknesses

The Municipality does not have a Secretariat, Directorate or Municipal Unit within its institutional structure that is exclusively responsible for managing and/or promoting its internationalization. The activities related to this that have been carried out are proposed by various officials who seek to carry them out as part of some work within their area and not with a view to achieving the internationalization of the city as a whole. In addition, there is no detailed strategic plan for local development, much less a plan focused on international actions. This makes it difficult to have the clarity necessary to determine the priorities or the focus that the government seeks to give to its actions, thus, the adaptation of the plan becomes a more convoluted job.

Another aspect to take into consideration for the success of this work is the legitimacy and continuity

that can be given to it. This can be more difficult if the population does not support it, either because of misinformation or because they give more priority to acts that have a visible result, such as street asphaltting, street lighting, etc. For this reason, the benefits that international relations can bring to local development should be demonstrated and communicated.

**Opportunities:** ICLEI offers a set of methodologies, tools, training and technical support opportunities to support local initiatives from planning to implementation. Working with ICLEI's multi-disciplinary teams helps partners who are better prepared and equipped to integrate sustainability in a cross-cutting manner into local development policies and plans.<sup>(12)</sup>

The incorporation of multi-level and multi-stakeholder work in the plan is of great relevance as it will enable a greater number of actors to support and endorse the actions to be implemented and will give greater weight to the city at the time of negotiations or activities at the international level. The same is true if we take advantage of regional integration opportunities.

At the present time, issues related to the SDGs and sustainable development are in the mainstream and are therefore part of the international agenda, and this promotes a wide variety of networks and actors that provide technical assistance and cooperation forums on these issues. Joining these networks means a supply of information, cooperation, training, good practices, etc., which are very useful for advancing the city's sustainable development.

**Threats:** Although there is a wide variety of international networks, as mentioned above, it is also true that many of them are centered in the largest cities or in the capitals of the countries, which reduces the options of networks that can be accessed.

In order not to become redundant, both the threats to the economic sector that are evident at the global and national levels, as well as the constant fluctuation of the exchange rate in the country, have been developed in the section on economic factors.

Another fact to consider is that government terms have a duration of four years. The current mayor of Río Cuarto assumed his second term in 2020, so that by 2024 there would be a change of government and Llamosas could no longer be reelected. For this reason, it is necessary to incorporate tools that provide legitimacy and continuity to the plan so that it does not depend solely on the government in office.

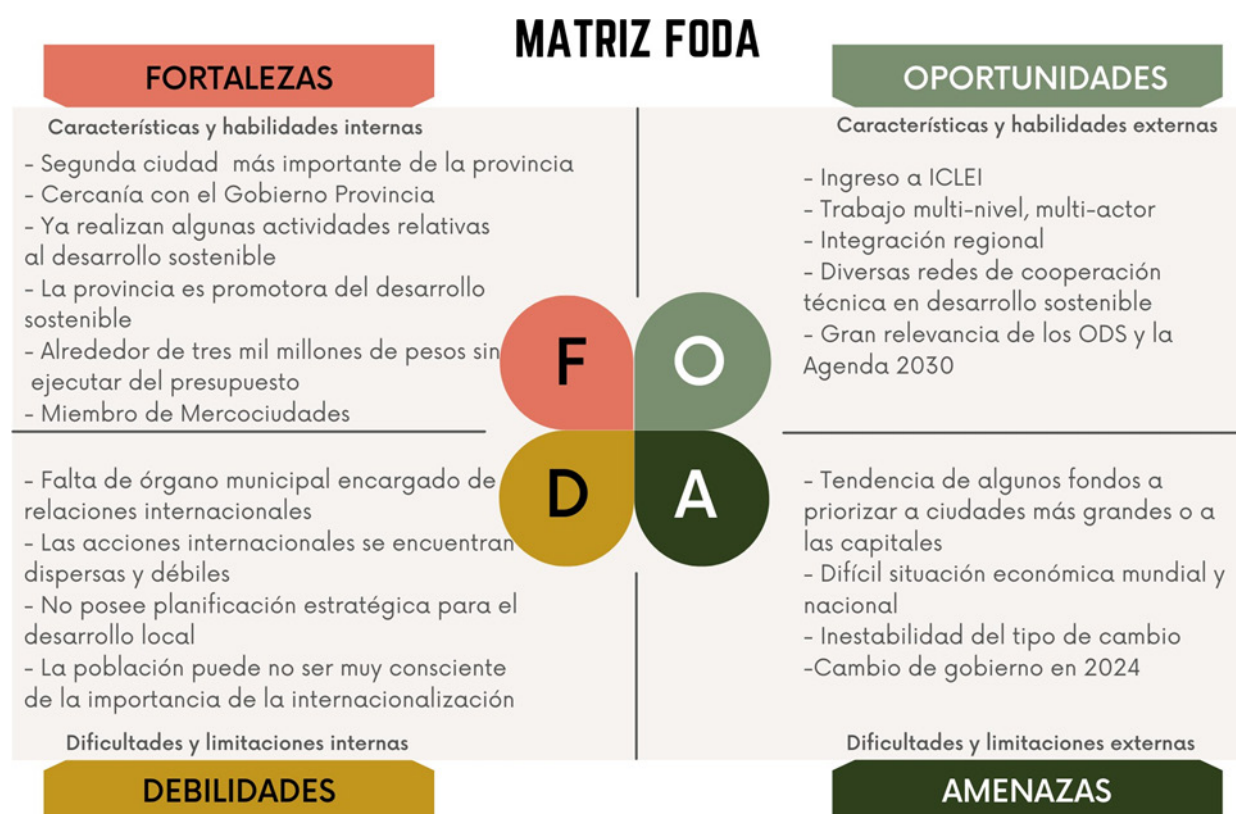


Figure 1. SWOT Matrix

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Summarizing the information analyzed so far, both practical and theoretical, a diagnosis will be made to identify the fundamental aspects to be considered in order to subsequently develop an internationalization plan appropriate to the needs and possibilities of the city under study.

The first point to be addressed is the need for a body, within the municipal framework, exclusively devoted to developing activities aimed at international relations and regional integration of the municipality. As has been seen in the development of this work, the city is motivated and has the potential to develop more broadly in the international and regional spheres. However, actions have been developed in a disjointed manner, ergo a planned and unified internationalization strategy has not been achieved. It is for this reason that the incorporation of a Secretariat of International Relations in the municipality is proposed, aimed at bringing together the activities that are being carried out in this area and will be responsible for directing and planning the city's international actions.<sup>(18,19,20)</sup>

In relation to the above, it should be taken into account that the plan, although it will be characteristic of the government administration that executes it, should ideally be continued and deepened by subsequent governors. To achieve this, it should include actions of a more complex, dynamic and open nature, with strong top-down and bottom-up interactions, i.e. multi-level collaboration, and it is useful to include multi-actor collaboration. This implies vertical integration, i.e. the active participation of other state actors such as local, provincial and national governments; multi-actor integration, i.e. non-state actors such as international organizations, the private sector, academia and civil society forums. This strategy has been implemented in the examples of the cities of Córdoba and Bahía Blanca and has shown that it favors governance and guarantees the success of the project, as well as its transcendence over time. To achieve this, once the Secretariat is formed, meetings will be held with stakeholders at the different levels mentioned above. For vertical integration, contact will be made with the Secretariat of Regional Integration of the Province of Córdoba, which provides technical assistance to the municipalities of the province that seek to make contact with the outside world. For multi-actor integration, it is proposed to resume participation in Mercociudades to take advantage of the benefits of cooperation, projects, actions, etc. offered by UTADS; join the ICLEI network, which will provide technical assistance, cooperation, training, etc., to achieve sustainable local development; hold meetings to publicize the new Secretariat and evaluate future joint work with the National University of Río Cuarto and Bio4. The university is part of the Forum of Universities of the province, already works with international connections with university networks and creates student and teacher mobility programs. Bio4 is an important company located in the city that specializes in the production of bioethanol and derivatives, and has already worked with the municipality, but not in international matters.<sup>(21,22,23)</sup>

The double challenge that the local government must face if international management is to be successful should not be overlooked. This has to do with the work carried out within the organization. On the one hand, it is necessary to set up a team that is qualified and appropriate to the subject matter, since it must recognize the crucial opportunities for cooperation. On the other hand, this team should plan a clear communication strategy, oriented to interested audiences and the general public, with the objective of informing these acts of government that take place within the framework of international relations. Here we can mention aspects such as the objectives to be achieved, the reasons that lead to their realization, the benefits that can be obtained, etc. In short, efficient communication leads to better decision-making, legitimizes actions and informs citizens, making them more aware of and closer to international issues. In this aspect, advances such as new technologies and social networks facilitate this task in part, since they act as instruments that benefit the transparency of government actions.<sup>(24,25,26,27,28)</sup>

### Implementation plan

This section breaks down the internationalization plan. It will be carried out taking as a basis the integral analysis of the component factors of the context surrounding the city, added to the theoretical aspects developed previously and the diagnosis.

### Scope

Temporal: in the first instance, a short to medium term duration is foreseen, i.e. 18 months from the effective execution of the plan to fulfill the objectives. However, it is expected that the continuity of the actions will be part of the long-term municipal management together with the consolidation of the new agency in the institutional structure on a permanent basis and regardless of the changes of government that may occur.

Spatial: the plan to be worked on is limited to the entire area of the city of Río Cuarto, province of Córdoba, Argentina. It will also take into account the extension of the scope given the relationships to be established with international actors.

### Resources

#### Human

It is desirable that the body to be established to promote international relations should have the rank of a secretariat within the municipal structure, since it is expected to have a transcendental action and be able to work jointly with other areas of the municipality. Therefore, a professional in the field of international relations

will be needed to hold the position of secretary and be in charge of carrying out the plan together with a team.

For the team that makes up the secretariat, it is considered necessary to incorporate another professional, more political, to be in charge of relations with local stakeholders, who would serve as undersecretary. A professional specialized in communication is also considered necessary. This professional would be in charge of internal and external communications, in line with specific objective N°3, and would work in conjunction with the Undersecretary of Press and Communications of the Municipality. This person would play an advisory role.

In addition, it is essential to have personnel for the administrative part and the execution of the activities and directives coming from the Secretary, Undersecretary and Advisor. For this purpose, it is proposed to hire an estimated 4 employees, who need not necessarily be professionals in the field of international relations, but it is desirable that they have previous experience in public administration and/or experience that is assertive for the performance of the position. In addition, they will receive training provided by the ICLEI network to improve the quality of the team.

### *Materials*

In relation to physical spaces, the offices available in the Municipality will be used. It should also be considered that in the current post-pandemic period, home offices are increasingly used, so that a hybrid work modality can be used.

Regarding technological inputs, computers will be necessary, which must have webcams and microphones suitable for developing virtual meetings if necessary, printers and stable internet connection.

### *Financial*

Fees corresponding to the Secretary, Assistant Secretary, Advisor and collaborators, estimating the expense for the total duration of the project. The monthly salary of each one is based on figures provided by an official of the municipality, since there is no detailed information in the municipal budget.

ICLEI network membership is established based on the region, country and number of inhabitants of the city. In the case of Río Cuarto, the cost is U\$D 1 237,5.

Technological tools for the team to carry out its work. Seven notebooks will be needed for this purpose, since, taking into account the possibility of hybrid work, it will be necessary for the equipment to be transportable and one will be assigned to each employee. As for other supplies such as printers, telephone or internet, it is understood that the Municipality already has them.

Based on the above, an estimated budget, in pesos, was prepared for the development of the plan during the stipulated 16 months. The same is valued at a total of \$28 679 014,75 million pesos.

### *Knowledge*

The ICLEI network offers its members access to information, data and news to help guide their sustainability agenda. In addition, they provide a set of methodologies, tools, training and technical support opportunities to support local initiatives from planning to implementation. In addition, by working with ICLEI's multidisciplinary teams, partners are better prepared and equipped to integrate sustainability in a cross-cutting manner into local development policies and plans.<sup>(12)</sup>

Mercociudades, through its Thematic Unit on Environment and Sustainable Development, promotes virtual spaces for exchange among members tending to share knowledge, experience and good practices.

### **Identification of actions**

The following is a breakdown of the actions that are deemed necessary to develop for the proper implementation of the specific objectives and, consequently, of the general objective and the internationalization plan.

Integrate international relations into the municipal structure in order to combine and carry out international actions.

### *Actions*

Select and hire the appropriate personnel for the performance of the positions.

Mapping of the activities that the Municipality has carried out in international matters to date.

To establish meetings with the agents and areas of the Municipality that are carrying out international activities to coordinate the continuation of these activities in a cooperative manner.

Establish meetings with the Secretariat of Regional Integration of the Province to inform about the new Secretariat and request advice.

Identify and establish alliances with key players in the international arena that may be useful to promote and foster the city's sustainable local development.

Submit all the necessary documentation for the city to become a member of ICLEI.

Establish a meeting with ICLEI's multidisciplinary team to plan technical assistance and collaborative work.

Take training on local sustainable development provided by ICLEI.



Analyze the work plan, programs, projects and actions carried out by Mercociudades UTADS in search of opportunities.

Establish meetings with key agents of UTADS to incorporate the city in projects, programs, actions, etc.

Participate in the virtual programs of debate and exchange of good practices in sustainable local development promoted by UTADS.

Incorporate actions that give legitimacy to subnational international policy to ensure its continuity regardless of changes in government.

Establish meetings with the different areas of the Municipality to discuss the task and approach of the new Secretariat and thus generate transversality and coordination.

Inform the population of the benefits that the Secretariat will generate for the city through publications on the web and social networks.

Communicate results at the end of each quarter to demonstrate transparency.

Establish meetings with the National University of Rio Cuarto and Bio4, being key players in the private sector and academia, to plan joint work.

*Time frame*

In this section we will make use of the Gantt Chart tool in order to plan the amount of time to be used for the development of each of the activities listed above. The project has an initial duration of 18 months, which will be grouped in the diagram by quarters. The plan is scheduled to begin in February 2023 and will therefore last until the end of July 2024.

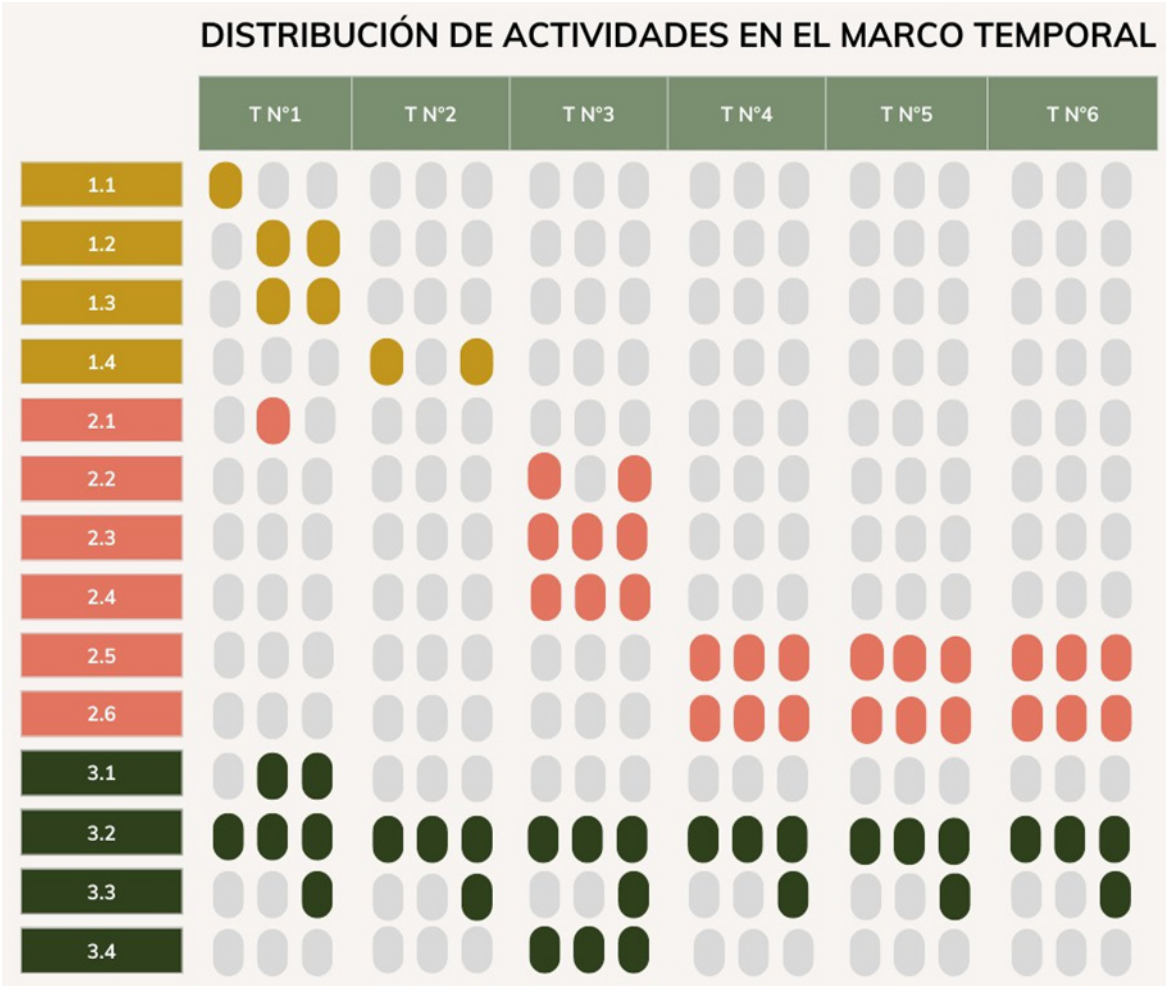


Figure 2. Gantt chart for distribution of activities in the time frame

**Monitoring and evaluation**

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is a central part of good governance arrangements and is necessary for evidence-based policy formulation, budgetary decision-making, management and accountability.<sup>(13)</sup>

This section will detail indicators that will help determine the degree of success of each activity. This evaluation is very useful for a subsequent analysis of the causes and consequences that led to each result,

which in turn will serve as a parameter to be taken into account in subsequent actions.

Regarding the specific objective N° 1, it will be considered that the execution of this objective was successful if:

- There is a report on the activities carried out by the Municipality in international matters up to the time the plan was initiated.
- A meeting was held with each area of the Municipality that has been executing actions in international matters.
- Two meetings were held with the Secretariat of Regional Integration of the Province of Córdoba.

A meeting with each municipal area is considered as a minimum basis, since it would be enough to have knowledge of the main idea, the progress made and the aspects that can be contributed. At the same time, a minimum of two meetings with the Secretariat of Regional Integration are established because it is assumed that one will be for presentation and mutual recognition and the other to deal with more specific and objective-oriented topics. It is clarified, for these actions as well as for the rest, that if, for example, more meetings are held than expected, this is considered positive.

Regarding the specific objective N° 2, the execution of this objective will be considered successful if:

- Río Cuarto is effectively a member of ICLEI.
- Two meetings were held with the ICLEI multidisciplinary team.
- Each member of the Secretariat team took an ICLEI training on local sustainable development.
- There is a report on the work plan, programs, projects and actions being carried out by UTADS that presents opportunities for the city.
- The city is involved in three UTADS projects or actions.
- They participated in three UTADS programs of discussion and exchange of good practices in sustainable local development.

A first meeting will be sought with the ICLEI multidisciplinary team to exchange ideas and objectives and a second meeting to establish the joint work scheme. The number of trainings and participation in debates and exchanges of experience are thought in relation to the need for them, but taking into account the limited time of the plan. For similar reasons, the involvement in three UTADS projects or actions is estimated, in addition to the six-month time frame for the planning and execution of each one.

In relation to specific objective N° 3, the execution of this objective will be considered successful if it was successful:

- A meeting was held with each organ of the Municipality, which in total are 14.
- An official publication was made in the Municipality's web page where the objectives and benefits provided by the Secretariat to the city are commented.
- A publication was made every week or every 10 days on social networks.
- A follow-up evaluation was carried out every three months and the results were published on social networks or the web.
- A collaborative work was carried out with the National University of Río Cuarto and one with Bio4.

The deadlines designed for the publications are based on a number of days that is not overwhelming for the public or for those who plan the publications, but at the same time generates the feeling of being active in networks. However, a collaborative work with each non-governmental actor is already considered useful, taking into account again the limited time, to achieve links that will later benefit the legitimacy and continuity of the Secretariat, although the ideal is to promote more in the future.

A follow-up evaluation will also be carried out at the end of each quarter. The purpose of this is to provide greater transparency and at the same time it is beneficial to observe if the direction being taken is the right one. If it is not, this will help to implement the necessary changes early and thus ensure that the objectives are achieved in a more concrete manner.

## CONCLUSIONS

Having developed this paper it is hoped to have effectively communicated the important role cities play today on the international chessboard. After the various modifications in the political, cultural, economic and social conditions that the cooperation-oriented spaces have undergone over time, the variety of actors occupying a place in them has become increasingly wide, and among these new participants are indeed the subnational governments, cities and municipalities. In this way, they have come to have the capacity to make decisions within the international agenda, almost challenging the now practically obsolete statocentric paradigms of the Westphalian state. Such is the case that, at present, one of the main focuses for international organizations is local governments. They create spaces, programs, develop actions, generate relationships, all this without national governments acting as intermediaries. The evolution of international cooperation has made it possible for these organizations, international networks, national governments, civil society, the private sector, among

others, to generate a virtuous circle of interrelation. This results in a driving force for the municipalities that helps them to develop policies for internationalization and encourages them to position themselves before different sources of financing, investors, cooperators, etc.

The idea that gives rise to this final degree work has been to elaborate a tool for this insurgent actor that is the city of Río Cuarto, which is a contribution in two aspects. On the one hand, by dealing with the internationalization of local governments, which is a current topic in the discipline of International Relations, and on the other hand, by outlining a process of planning and implementation of what would result in a subnational international policy aimed at achieving sustainable local development of the city. This with the purpose of achieving a solid municipality in its regional and international actions, resilient, with an important weight in its decisions, recognized in the international arena, with a sustainable city structure that can be considered an example once it has evolved.

## RECOMMENDATION

As a first point, it is recommended to establish stronger ties at the regional level, considering that working and representing as a block generates greater weight when dealing with more powerful actors at the international level. In addition, there are great benefits to be gained from working together with regional peers, such as cooperation for the development of activities, exchange of best practices, advice, etc. In its particular case, Río Cuarto belongs to the Central Region, a sub-national territorial integration block, made up of the provinces of Córdoba, Entre Ríos and Santa Fe, with important transcendence in the country and broad international action.

A second recommendation is to apply for international awards, as they have recently become more relevant as a positioning strategy. Some of the benefits are focused on publicity for a successful policy, entry into a league of cities that are benchmarks in the field, different organizations or cities become aware of the city and include it in events, it allows validation of policies by recognized organizations and helps to demonstrate to citizens that the actions carried out are on the right track and are internationally recognized. The awards themselves are often accompanied by financial support, although not in large sums, or usually consist of some rather technical assistance to improve and / or develop a local policy.

Finally, in a more general way, it is recommended that other axes be incorporated into subnational international policy, in addition to evaluating and incorporating more actions. Although it is important to continue to focus on sustainable local development, there are various approaches that can complement it. Likewise, once this policy has been strengthened, it is possible to think more specifically about strategies to position the city as an internationally known reference in some area in which it excels.

What is fundamental is that this work lays a useful foundation, which can be taken as an impulse and a gateway to the different opportunities that can be obtained through international cooperation.

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