

## REVIEW

# Río Cuarto and the challenge of its local internationalization

## Río Cuarto y el desafío de su internacionalización local

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### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** the study addressed the growing relevance acquired by subnational governments in the international arena. In this context, we examined the city of Río Cuarto, Córdoba, which, due to its economic and cultural profile, represented an actor with international potential. Its sustained development prompted its leaders to seek greater prominence in global scenarios, although without a clear institutional structure for this purpose.

**Development:** fundamental concepts such as glocalization, paradiplomacy and decentralized cooperation were reviewed. The author explained how municipalities, through planned strategies, were able to take advantage of international opportunities without contradicting national foreign policy. Río Cuarto, however, lacked an entity specialized in international relations, which generated a dispersed and ineffective management. The advantages of integrating city networks were highlighted, since they facilitated the exchange of knowledge, technical cooperation and the formulation of joint policies. In addition, sustainable local development was highlighted as an integrating axis that contemplated economic, environmental, social and institutional dimensions, reinforcing the idea that internationalization should not be an end in itself, but a means to improve the quality of life in the territory.

**Conclusions:** the analysis evidenced that, despite Río Cuarto's potential, the lack of institutionalism limited its international projection. It was concluded that only through solid strategic planning, based on the articulation between the local and the global, could the city consolidate itself as an effective and sustainable international actor aligned with its local priorities.

**Keywords:** Glocalization; Paradiplomacy; Cooperation; Networks; Sustainability.

### RESUMEN

**Introducción:** el estudio abordó la creciente relevancia que adquirieron los gobiernos subnacionales en el ámbito internacional. En este contexto, se examinó a la ciudad de Río Cuarto, Córdoba, que por su perfil económico y cultural, representó un actor con potencial internacional. Su desarrollo sostenido impulsó a sus dirigentes a buscar mayor protagonismo en escenarios globales, aunque sin una estructura institucional clara para tal fin.

**Desarrollo:** se revisaron conceptos fundamentales como la glocalización, la paradiplomacia y la cooperación descentralizada. La autora explicó cómo los municipios, mediante estrategias planificadas, pudieron aprovechar oportunidades internacionales sin contradecir la política exterior nacional. Río Cuarto, sin embargo, careció de un ente especializado en relaciones internacionales, lo que generó una gestión dispersa e ineficaz. Se destacaron las ventajas de integrar redes de ciudades, ya que estas facilitaron el intercambio de conocimientos, la cooperación técnica y la formulación de políticas conjuntas. Además, se rescató el desarrollo local sostenible como eje integrador que contempló dimensiones económicas, ambientales, sociales e institucionales, reforzando la idea de que la internacionalización no debía ser un fin en sí mismo,

sino un medio para mejorar la calidad de vida en el territorio.

**Conclusiones:** el análisis evidenció que, a pesar del potencial de Río Cuarto, la falta de institucionalidad limitó su proyección internacional. Se concluyó que solo mediante una planificación estratégica sólida, basada en la articulación entre lo local y lo global, la ciudad podría consolidarse como un actor internacional efectivo, sostenible y alineado con sus prioridades locales.

**Palabras clave:** Glocalización; Paradiplomacia; Cooperación; Redes; Sostenibilidad.

## INTRODUCTION

In view of the growing relevance that subnational governments have acquired in the international arena, it is of great importance that local leaders become aware of this fact, as well as of the fundamental role that cities can play in contributing to solutions to international problems through subnational international policy. It is pertinent, in this sense, to take up again the concept of glocalization, developed by Castells.<sup>(1)</sup> Through this idea, the author relates the global with the local and highlights the power of cities to implement regional policies that are referenced in the global.

The city of Río Cuarto, located in the province of Córdoba, has historically been a point of confluence of diverse economic and cultural activities, and therefore represents a strategic node in the regional and national context. As a municipality, it has experienced sustained growth in recent decades, which has led its leaders to seek a greater presence in national and international scenarios. For this reason, it seeks to position itself by taking advantage of the current globalized scenario, where interactions between subnational entities and international actors are increasingly intensifying. Thus, Río Cuarto aspires to be a relevant actor that can influence and benefit from international dynamics.

Taking this framework as a reference, the purpose of this report is to offer a diagnosis of the current capacities of the Municipality of Río Cuarto to insert itself in the international arena and to propose an internationalization plan, conceived as a tool and enhancer for sustainable local development. This concept is defined by Buarque<sup>(2)</sup> as a process of social change and increase of opportunities for society, making growth and economic efficiency compatible, in time and space, with environmental conservation, quality of life and social equity, based on a clear commitment to the future and solidarity between generations. For this, a social project is elaborated, which is defined by Cohen<sup>(3)</sup> as “a minimum unit of resource allocation that, through an integrated set of processes and activities, aims to transform a piece of reality, reducing or eliminating a deficit, or solving a problem”.

Despite its potential and aspirations, Río Cuarto faces significant challenges in its international insertion. Current initiatives, although well-intentioned, are scattered and do not follow a clear and coherent strategy. Therefore, the lack of a specialized body for international relations is identified as a problem, as this limits the city's ability to establish strategic alliances, take advantage of global opportunities and position itself as a relevant player on the international scene. Thus, the main area affected is the municipal structure, where responsibilities for international relations are dispersed and without a unified approach. The key factor in this problem is the absence of a specialized entity in the city, which leads to the dispersion of efforts and lack of continuity in projects. The magnitude of the problem is significant, limiting the city's capacity to develop effective and sustainable international actions, in addition to making it an ongoing and structural issue, related to the internal organization of the municipal administration.

## DEVELOPMENT

In this section we intend to collect the theories and concepts that are fundamental for the development and understanding of the work in progress.

Regarding the participation of subnational states in the international arena, International Relations have addressed the issue based on the various transformations that the international system has undergone and that have modified the central and unitary character of the nation-state. New actors, both governmental and non-governmental, have appeared on the international relations scene.

In the case of Argentina, the participation of subnational bodies was stipulated, after an important reform in 1994, in Article 124 of the National Constitution, which reads as follows:

The provinces may create regions for economic and social development and establish bodies with powers for the fulfillment of their purposes and 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.<sup>(4)</sup>

In relation to this, and in accordance with our case study, De Marcilio<sup>(5)</sup> comments that “Argentina has constitutionally authorized the provinces and left the municipalities and regions free to act internationally with

the legal backing of the Constitution”.

For greater precision, it is pertinent to take up again the Constitution of the Province of Córdoba, reformed in 2001, in relation to its participation and that of its municipalities at the international level. It can be observed that in its Article N° 144, where the powers and duties of the Governor are detailed, in subsection 4, it mentions: “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, with the approval of the Legislature and giving timely account to the Congress of the Nation, as the case may be”.

It also enters into agreements, with identical requirements, with other nations, foreign public or private entities and international organizations, and promotes negotiations with them, without affecting the foreign policy of the Federal Government.<sup>(6)</sup>

Given the goals to be achieved with the present work, which takes as its main actor one other than the State, a municipality, it should be understood that it materializes its international action through subnational international policy, according to Mariana Calvento<sup>(7)</sup>: understood as the political decision and public tool of local governments that deals with promoting international insertion, through a strategy and objectives tending to take advantage, articulately, of the opportunities of the foreign context with the needs of the territory.

As mentioned at the beginning, the existence of the glocal generates an institutional reality in which cities have the possibility of executing different strategies, among them lobbying, understood as the action carried out by a group that seeks to exert pressure to influence certain public policies, in search of multiple resources aimed at satisfying internal needs. This process “induces a realignment in the relations between the State, capital (both domestic and global) and territorial sites of economic restructuring”.<sup>(8)</sup>

Aligned to the above, decentralized cooperation is a key issue in the international action of cities and in turn, it is an instrument of development cooperation that has its own identity and peculiarities, such as horizontality, knowledge transfer and territorial basis. Another important feature to highlight is that this cooperation modality places local governments and proximity to the territory at the center of its action. Furthermore, the same author states that decentralized cooperation: it is defined not so much by its actors as by the scope in which the development of the territory is impacted and promoted; and in which the participating local governments assume a leadership and articulating role of the development strategy and of the other participating actors of local, state or international rank.

In addition to this, defines a series of trends and evolutions of decentralized cooperation from the Euro-Latin American perspective, among which one of them is to take it as an “instrument of international action of local governments and, therefore, overflowing the framework of mere development cooperation and solidarity”.

In turn, Oddone<sup>(9)</sup> mentions the benefits brought about by decentralized cooperation, since: it stimulates the participation of cities in the field of international relations. It reinforces paradiplomacy, while being driven by it in a process of organizational recursion. By reaffirming the local through its internationalization, it consolidates the action of non-central governments in the national concert and strengthens to varying degrees their negotiating capacity vis-à-vis the higher levels of government.

Regarding actions aimed at insertion in international networks, in the AL-LAS Project on International Action for a Sustainable City, the Don Cabral Foundation and the Prefecture of Belo Horizonte define city networks as a set of local governments that, in pursuit of a consensual objective, carry out collective work by cooperating with each other. (...) In general, they are constituted to exchange or seek information and especially to distribute it, this is their great property. They also serve to identify opportunities hidden from traditional processes, to raise funds, to organize actions and projects, to act in public policies, among others. Networks are created to defend common causes and interests. They contribute to the promotion of territorial development, inducing internal articulation processes conducive to creating a favorable environment for their purposes.

It is also proposed to take into account what Castells<sup>(1)</sup> state: networks of cities allow both their insertion in a superior system of relations, consolidating mechanisms for the development of the promotion and image policy of the city, as well as access to large volumes of information serving as a stimulus for the internal development of quality of life and competitiveness.

It could be inferred then, that city networks are essential facilitators for urban development and effective insertion in the global panorama. This is so because networks not only improve cooperation and information exchange between cities, but also enhance local development through the promotion of innovative public policies and the improvement of quality of life. Integration in these networks broadens access to essential resources and knowledge, fostering equitable and sustainable growth, which is essential in the context of an interconnected world.

Oddone<sup>(9)</sup> states in relation to this that the classic “hierarchical and pyramidal format of work is replaced by a model of interdependence and complementarity among the member units of the network”. This is because horizontal work allows the identification of shared interests and problems while facilitating the outlining of strategic lines for joint work. These networks have a multicentric nature, which is favorable for the participation

and concerted action of the constituent parts.

Considering the main objective to be achieved, Albuquerque<sup>(10)</sup> understands local development as an “integrated approach in which the environmental, cultural, social, institutional and human development aspects of the respective territorial area must also be considered”. The social and institutional dimension includes local participation, cooperation between public and private actors, the creation of networks and territorial social capital, institutional coordination between the different levels and programs of public administrations, and the promotion of local entrepreneurial culture. On the other hand, the environmental dimension incorporates the local environment as an asset that is fundamental for development. Similarly, it values the natural environment and cultural heritage as differentiating elements of the territory, since their conservation and enhancement offer the possibility of incorporating elements of quality and differentiated identity to local processes and products, this being the added value of territorial competitiveness.<sup>(10,11,12)</sup>

In addition to this, and in relation to the environmental dimension mentioned above, there is the concept of sustainable local development, which is appropriate for the case study.<sup>(13,14)</sup> Defined by Buarque<sup>(1)</sup> who considers it as process of social change and increase of opportunities for society, making growth and economic efficiency compatible, in time and space, with environmental conservation, quality of life and social equity, based on a clear commitment to the future and solidarity between generations.<sup>(15,16)</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

The present analysis highlights the growing importance of the international participation of subnational governments, highlighting the strategic role that cities can play on the global stage. In this sense, the city of Río Cuarto, with its economic, social and cultural potential, emerges as an actor with concrete possibilities of international insertion, although it faces structural limitations that hinder this process. The lack of an entity specialized in international relations within its municipal structure represents the main obstacle, since it prevents the design and execution of a coherent and sustained internationalization strategy.

The incorporation of the concept of glocalization makes it possible to understand how the local and the global are interrelated, providing cities with tools to act at multiple levels. Through instruments such as paradiplomacy and decentralized cooperation, municipalities can access resources, knowledge and alliances that enhance sustainable local development. In the case of Río Cuarto, these tools could serve not only to strengthen its international positioning, but also to improve the quality of life of its population through the implementation of innovative policies, adapted to the particularities of the territory.

The creation of city networks is another key aspect. These networks facilitate the exchange of experiences, technical cooperation and the design of joint projects, promoting a horizontal and multicentric governance model. Active participation in such networks would allow Río Cuarto to connect with global agendas, make its needs and capacities visible, and access opportunities that would otherwise be out of reach.

In turn, sustainable local development should be the guiding axis of any international strategy. This perspective integrates economic, social, cultural, institutional and environmental dimensions, promoting equitable growth that respects the environment and is based on citizen participation. Only through strategic planning that articulates the global with the local, and that is based on a strong institutional commitment, will Río Cuarto be able to consolidate itself as a dynamic actor in the international arena.

In conclusion, the internationalization of Río Cuarto is not only a possibility, but a necessity in an interdependent world. To this end, it is imperative to overcome the current structural weaknesses and build a solid institutional framework that allows for an effective and sustainable international insertion aligned with local priorities.

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