

Communication strategies from Open Government devices in the province of Córdoba (Argentina)

Estrategias comunicacionales a partir de dispositivos de gobierno abierto en la provincia de Córdoba (Argentina)

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ABSTRACT

The article addresses government communication strategies on transparency in Argentina. For this, it examines two Open Government portals in sub-national areas of the province of Córdoba implemented during the period 2016-2020. The argument states that these modern technological repertoires operate as devices that can be interpreted from two perspectives: on the one hand, as an intermediate zone between what in the field of political communication differs as government communication and political marketing; and, on the other, as a result of the state promotion of technologies and transparency portals per se rather than processes that expand digital democratization practices. Methodologically, the corpus is made up of the two Open Government portals launched in the period in question, political discourses and news in the local press about these initiatives. The article presents the first results within an exploratory analysis scheme that tests dimensions on the Open Government devices, within a critical problematization of the social and political processes in which these valued devices emerge.

Keywords

Government communication;
transparency;
democratization;
political marketing

RESUMEN

El artículo analiza las estrategias de comunicación gubernamental sobre transparencia en Argentina. Se examinan dos portales de gobierno abierto en ámbitos subnacionales de la provincia de Córdoba implementados durante el período 2016-2020. El argumento plantea que estos modernos repertorios tecnológicos operan como dispositivos que pueden ser interpretados desde dos perspectivas: por un lado, como zona intermedia entre lo que en el campo de la comunicación política se diferencia como comunicación gubernamental y marketing político, y, por otro, como resultante de la promoción estatal de las tecnologías y de los portales de transparencia en sí, antes que procesos que expandan prácticas de democratización digital. En lo metodológico, el corpus está compuesto por los dos portales de gobierno abierto lanzados en el período en cuestión, discursos políticos y noticias en la prensa local sobre estas iniciativas. El artículo presenta los primeros resultados dentro de un esquema de análisis exploratorio que ensaya dimensiones sobre los dispositivos de gobierno abierto, dentro de una problematización crítica de los procesos sociales y políticos en el cual emergen estos valorados dispositivos.

Palabras clave

Comunicación gubernamental;
transparencia;
democratización;
marketing político

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Introduction

Studies have been developed for two decades on the link, which is gradually more consolidated, between digital interactions and state governance at a global level. In this scenario, several governments in Argentina have had an advance in implementing open government portals (hereinafter OG). This type of initiatives implies a communicational policy with a set of data on the activities of the government available to citizens, in such a way that useful information is provided for their information and later use (Oszlak y Kaufman, 2014; Oszlak, 2020).

This governance paradigm is supported not only by citizens' diagnostic of distrust in public accountability, but also in fostering public debate in the decision-making process, as it is applied from the conceptualization of digital democracy. Currently, OG has been devoted to international circuits as a result of new state upgrading conditions as well as guiding processes that appeal to transparency, participation and cooperation values; as stated by Oszlak (2017), this is about a paradoxical "metamorphosis" concept, inasmuch as the scope of its implementation questions newness and uniqueness thereof (Ramirez-Alujas, 2011).

In this article, we present an exploratory approximation on the communication strategies of OG, and take two portals as reference in the province of Cordoba, Argentina: The City Portal depends on the Municipality of Cordoba, and the Open Governance of the government of the province of Cordoba. The intention is to analyze, on the one hand, the contexts upon which digital interactions are implemented, and, on the other hand, as portals, quoting Castells (2001), whilst media is constructed in the material infrastructure performing or stipulating practices in the relationship between the State and citizens (p. 161).

We recognize four fields as history and research lines on the extension of governmental portals, which we have proposed as interlocutors in this inquiry, from an actually ample list (Barria *et al.*, 2019):

- In the first field, we found studies focusing on associated political processes of the platforms (O'Reilly, 2011; Hernandez, 2016).
- In the second field, studies that propose OG's linkage to the cycle of public policies or their impact on state administrations (Ortiz, 2012; Oszlak, 2020).
- In the third field, we recognized such lines that analyze the implementation of web portals at subnational levels in several study cases of Argentina (Buffa & Echavarria, 2011; Echavarria & Bruscoli, 2016; Grandinetti & Miller, 2020).

- In the fourth case, we detected that research in several Latin American countries analyze the setting up of mechanisms of control and follow-up of public bureaucracy by means of preparing different indexes (Ciucci *et al.*, 2019; Bonivento, 2016; Herrera, 2017; Ferreira *et al.*, 2012).

Rather than making indexes and quantifying processes, we sought to concentrate on the implementation of political circumstances of GA which give rise to a series of questions related on the differentiation logic between different subnational managing levels: municipal and provincial. From this reasoning, we made an analysis scheme based on the theoretical history of the topic and previous works on the technological arena at a state level. Thus, we linked the topic to studies on public governance with some sociological thesis on technology and contemporary political practices. These analytic coordinates enable the realization of a first empirical exploration of the digital instrument whereby every government under analysis centered its opening policy of public information and citizens' participation.

In the methodological item, the corpus is comprised of the transparency portal implemented in 2016 by the Municipality of Cordoba¹ and by the government of the province of Cordoba² in 2018. In addition, with the purpose of re-constructing the implementation context, we used news from the local press on these initiatives, associated to both government terms between 2016 and 2020. The analysis of the two portals of OG has led us to make a hypothesis in the sense that the implementation thereof and its characteristics have more to do with structural axes of the local politics of each governance than with democratization processes and access to accountability.

As an argumentative structure of this article, we have proposed four axes. In the first one, we developed theoretical aspects, which, conceptually, have to do with the advancement of information technologies and their influence on democratic processes, with an emphasis on some distinctions and analytic binomials. In the second, we presented theoretical-methodological fundamentals, based on the notion of *devices*, which enable us to integrate the technological activity with more extensive, social and political circumstances or processes. In the third one, we analyzed OG portals in accordance with a data matrix developed by means of three central dimensions: 1) contextual aspects of portal implementation, 2) descriptive markings of the portal *per se*, and 3) transparency, participation and cooperation environs enabled thereby. Lastly, we arrived at the first results on the scope of communicative strategies instituted around GA devices at the subnational levels of Cordoba aimed to further extrapolate the case.

A review of analytic dichotomies

Technological changes associated with the improvement of democratic quality and to the transformation of electoral contexts have given rise to a strong and phenomenal

experimentalist enthusiasm. We joined a stage where the digital is in operation at every level in the social reality, for a number of sequences that have increasingly extended in our daily life (Sadin, 2017), which have even altered the combination and organization of state processes. In an extended technological stage, the incessant increase of computer storage capacity and data processing is understood as the progress of societies.

Our concern focuses in understanding how some components of the link between democracy and political communication currently update. We found the phenomenon of the so called society of information (Castells, 1999a), where it is possible to think on digital mediation of relationships and interdependence in a more structural manner between the *network* and *self* (Castella, 2001). Indeed, digitalization processes act as architects in the public space in contemporary societies: every social system assumes a specific mode whereby political relations establish in the public space (Caletti, 2000).

In particular, specialized literature states two antagonistic positions. On the one hand, the so called optimistic or integrated, characterized by their enthusiasm on technological potentialities and their benefits to bridge the gap between governors and the governed (Ramírez, 2011; Oszlak y Kaufman, 2014; Calderón & Lorenzo, 2010; Elena & Ruival, 2015; Nasser, Ramírez-Alujas & Rosales, 2017). On the other hand, the pessimist or apocalyptic, who, would otherwise distrust the benefits and capabilities attributed to technological developments in the context of naturally unequal societies (Figueras, 2019; Boito & Sveso, 2015; Quevedo, 2017).

As we have disregarded unethical positions, our approach makes an emphasis in the fact that this is not a discussion about technological means *per se*, but about how these technological environs are presented in the search for a democratically intended legitimacy of certain segments of citizens (Echavarria, 2012). In this debate, as we center in governmental communication, a field arises where we can make a reflection on two questions: on the way new state transparency policies organize certain communication strategies from the States, and the emergence of an “intermediate zone” (De Masi, 2000). In governmental communication about political decisions, in a strict sense, political marketing as the image of officials in the managing state is constructed. Hence, in the first term, we are interested in making a conceptual distinction between governmental communication (hereinafter GC) and political marketing (hereinafter PM).

There are different theoretical disputes related to GC as a concept and as practice. To Oscar de Masi (2000), GC “is an instrument of transparency in the exercise of power, a sort of public ethical rule which amends legitimacy of the governmental activity without having to resort to crude propaganda and without regard to the dissemination body” (p. 26). This author holds that the features assumed by GC regarding its diffusive performance in state powers, is closely related to the understanding of the public agenda, to the role of the press and of the media.

Nonetheless, Canel & Sanders (2016) focus on governmental communication, as it arises at the executive branch. To the authors, GC consists of communication implied by the development and performance of a political institution with an executive role, that is, by limiting GC in the form of a president, a prime minister or a ministry to communication of a city major, a council member, or a council member of an autonomous government” (Canel & Sanders, 2010, p. 19).

Moreover, debates on GC divide in accordance with the democratic construction they propose. A perspective centers the obligation of governments on GC with the purpose of informing about their political action and decisions, and they seek to get consensus aimed to accept their projects and politics. In this case, analysts refer to *ex post* legitimacy of the governance (Crespo *et al.*, 2011). This is the recommendation of the main PM consultants and who explain it as a “permanent campaign”.

We have also found perspectives centered on the right of information and positions based on public dialog and on the construction of binding decisions regarding that which is common (Echavarria & Maurizi, 2013). Thus, GC may be considered as a discontinuous process – when a decision has been made – or as a continual process –before, during and after having implemented public policies. In the first case, the question implies getting consensus once the policy has been implemented; whereas in the second case, this is a decision-making model that considers social participation.

PM techniques affect the exchange of 2.0 platforms, and they frequently make an analytical disruption of any definition of GC. This is due that, in practice, PM refers to “a set of modes of thinking and action that may promote and carry out an efficient relationship of power in favor of ideas, persons and political institutions” (Rey, 1995, p. 3). Thus, overlapping communicative strategies from the governmental field, regarding PM modalities; it is increasingly difficult to distinguish or differentiate them, as officials incorporate new media (social networks, for example).

In the 1980s commercial marketing practices were developed and applied more frequently to political changes; this was about “the sale of candidates as if they were consumer items”, which could also be considered as “less party politics” and more “candidate politics” (Stuhlman, 2000, p. 71). In addition, central communication gave new meaning to politics because of the extension of the media system (Martinez-Pandiani, 2000). Proliferation of consultancy and planning strategy technical teams affected the conditions where *how to say* was more important than *what to say* (showing what to do).

Meanwhile, the “consultancy industry” became consolidated (Priess, 2002) on the professionalization of marketing experts and consultants, from poll and survey techniques. Within the framework of representation crisis, in different Latin American countries, the States promoted the participation of consultancy firms in the political arena, with the purpose of enhancing the consensus on governments. In this sense, the periods of the loss

of political legitimacy had upgrading processes along with election campaigns and the development of autonomous communication structures, which fostered the participation of citizens (Oszlak, 2013).

In a progressive manner, in its usual operation, public governance has also involved this knowledge, often considered to be of technocratic nature. Therefore, among the “benefits” of PM, such communication strategies are recognized, which seek public identification mechanisms –rather than “citizen” identification mechanisms– which make “working tools that allow them to make a consistent program, to investigate electors to make them fit such program of people’s expectations and to define a comprehensive strategy” (Rey, 1995, p. 3) available to governments. In this sense, you can think of the emergence of some central values, beyond being a member of a political party or an ideological program.

Lastly, we need to make a conceptual differentiation of the notion of digital democracy (DD) and of electronic government (EG), which arises within the context of State reforms in the 1990s. First off, EG was conceived as a state strategy minimizing the cost of information of citizens in democratic systems, which enables new vertical and horizontal accountability mechanisms.

Interaction between the State and citizens is implemented at different levels or instances; generally, this refers to information from the government, procedures and links with the entrepreneurial sector and that are usually lying on a managerial model of public governance based on the citizen-client mode. The concept of *notice board* (Castells, 1999b) has been used as a metaphor to question these improvement processes in the public arena, frequently presented as an essential technological leap of Latin American democracies.

Conversely, the proposal of a DD is associated to a political model of public governance (Echavarria, 2012). This refers to the supplementation of representative democracy with the technological inclusion of participative mechanisms. The decision-making power of citizens is articulated in this concept as well as the likelihood conditions for effective control on the public action. Unlike administrative participation forms, digital democracy implies the effort of managements to contribute in the approximation of decision-making state processes.

In accordance with Garcia Guitián (2016), the analysis of digital democracy implies measuring the interactions between the different manners of citizen participation (institutions and organizations), and considering evaluations on the actual impact of information and communication technologies (ICTs) on the actual performance of political systems.

At present, semantic debates around OG appeal both to strengthening institutional opening and to generating collaborative management capabilities regarding the civil society (Kaufman, 2018). For this reason, we recovered the concepts that link OG platforms together on the “road” to digital democracy (Echavarria, 2012). An unresolved matter lies in weighing

the degree of technology supplying a specific opportunity to the operation of the democratic power, both in aggregative and deliberative terms. Hence, the link between DD and OG is increasingly more important regarding public administration studies.

As stated by Grandinetti & Miller (2020), OG is both a multifaceted and multidimensional category. In this complex character, the emergence of OG is associated with three processes (Cruz-Rubio, 2015): the advent of technological advances related to the increase of connectivity via Internet and Web 2.0 platforms (Castells, 2001). The control of citizens who demand transparency and accountability, among other democratizing demands, and the global consolidation of governments associated with collaborative governance and networks with coordination and co-management expectations of public affairs. The multifaceted and multidimensional nature questions its empirical analysis in sub-national dynamics, which we propose. Therefore, below, we discuss heterogeneous factors that emerge as dominants in the institutionalization process.

Methodological aspects: OG portals as devices

We base the methodological decision of placing OG portals as the main units on three interrelated criteria. First off, taking into consideration that ICTs have a dominant place in the analysis based on the assumption of universal access, OG considerations, both celebratory and disappointing, they do not answer questions about accessibility of unequal societies, to quality of information or to the impact on citizens in the solution of public problems. Therefore, accessibility represents a first problem nucleus in our analysis, which substantiates the decision –in this article, at least– that receipt of these communication strategies by citizens ought not to be considered.

Secondly, the fact of considering OG portals as objects of exploration implies recognizing that putting the manner to configure and to generate citizen participation practices into service. As sustained by Agamben (2015), speaking in these terms is to affirm that the device shall always be involved in a power game, however, linked to its conditioning limits. Thus, the theoretical-methodological category of the device enables the organization of analytic aspects aimed to observe the configuration of sentiment networks or of diverse elements that comprise a communicational policy, covering laws, standards, public policies, electoral strategies, political addresses, bureaucratic spaces, etcetera.

Thirdly, the decision to analyze the settings supplied by OG sites regarding the interactions between the government and citizens, is related with our work hypothesis, that is, that implementation thereof is linked to the dynamics of political competition, which the management seeks to make invisible from intended technological neutrality. Specifically, we are referring to possibility conditions (political ideologies and electoral strategies, to name a few) upon which portals are implemented, which allows us to interpret why the site supplies

some discursive marks and not others. In the analysis we shall see whether these particularities have a repercussion or not on the data opening processes.

At the same time, we will verify whether the factors moving about the adoption of public policies in the subject matter of OG whether correlated or not with the postulates of similar studies (Grandinetti & Miller, 2019). This allows us to explore the likely stipulated manners of action and interaction, that is, the manners in which the experience of an agent –the citizen, for example– is structured and evolves within technological repertoires.

In addition to the methodological criteria mentioned above, we will use a three-dimension interpretation scheme to organize the proposed analysis. This is about empirical registration categories that enable operationalization of the concept of the device applied to websites, based on “the analysis of interaction opportunities” (Echavarria & Juarez, 2007).

The temporary cutback, which we took as reference (2016-2020) recovers the elections prelude for provincial rulers in 2019, where the officials in charge of the municipal and provincial executive branches competed as governors of Córdoba. Specifically, the dimensions do not allow us to study neither the implementation context nor both portals, *per se*, from an exploratory point of view. To wit:

- 1) Contextual aspects: possibility conditions of portal implementation processes, as local norms, transparency policies, precedents, international awarding systems, and the OG place in local circumstances. In addition to formal institutionalization in a specific state structure, this dimension tends to analyze other factors not taken into account in the institutionalization processes; in recent studies, like that of Grandinetti & Miller (2019), explanatory variables stand-out such as the demographic and political-territorial relevance of municipalities.
- 2) Descriptive marks of portals: characteristics of institutional construction or differentiation of OG portals, discursive axes to present the information. This is what Echavarria & Bruscoli (2016) analyzed as criteria of “identification” and “usability”
- 3) Participation, transparency and cooperation environments: possibilities of interaction supplied by OG portals and aspects associated to legibility/illegibility of data provided. This dimension, which Echavarria & Bruscoli (2016) have analyzed as *content*, comes into contact with the information, as such, published in the portals under analysis.

Contextual aspects

The idea of the device may allow us to consider and to highlight the conditions of the likelihood of legitimacy around OG platforms. If we begin by stating that the device is “the network” (Foucault, 2012, p. 128), then we have to start by exploring the heterogenic plot of discourses, institutions and regulations comprising it. Hence, the first indicator we propose is the result of significant practices of the social, political and economic context,

From the full apogee of liberalism in Latin America, the transparency discourse in Argentina was linked to managing public resources. The State’s concern to remove the budgeting “black boxes” was associated to the guidelines of the fiscal policy installed by the International Monetary Fund by means of the Code of Fiscal Transparency, and of what was termed by the second generation of the State Reform (Buffa & Echavarria, 2011).

In the Cordoba province, the topic of transparency acquired a normative status in 2003, with the Financial Administration Act and the Internal Control of the General Administration of the Provincial State (Argentina). The foregoing notwithstanding, from the process of provincial State Reform in 2000, we found history regarding active transparency. In the city of Cordoba, Ordinance N° 10,560, enacted in 2002, is the first access to public information code (hereinafter API) within the orbit of the municipality (see table 1).

In this context, transformation of public management, in terms of managerial efficacy and transparency, accounted to a minimalistic democratization process, as promoted by international organizations. Since the market was considered the preeminent sphere, what the State was seeking was the availability of information to reduce uncertainty on the transactions of private agents. In this scenario, *citizens’ control* is promoted from the postulate that the improvement of flow of information exchange enables the development of vertical *accountability* processes as well as legitimization of government action (Echavarria & Juarez, 2007).

Table 1. Main regulations about PIC in Cordoba, by jurisdiction

Municipality	Province
2002. Ordinance No. 10560 which is the first regulation of PIC	1999. Law No. 8803 of access to the knowledge of the acts of the State
2011. Ordinance No. 194211 which considers the plan of objectives	2000. Law No. 8836 of Modernization of the State. Regulation about active transparency
2012. Ordinance No. 11877 which governs the PIC. The Office of Access to Public Information starts operations	2003. Law No. 9086 of Financial Administration and Internal Control of the General Administration of the Provincial State. Regulatory Decree 150/2004 and Extended Decree 541/2008

Source: data obtained from the Official Bulletin of the Province of Cordoba and the Municipal Digest of the City of Cordoba.

By 2006, the result of a research was that more than 50% of the municipalities of the province of Cordoba had official portals (Echavarría & Juárez, 2007, p. 8). Between 2007 and 2010, “more than 60% of the municipalities [had] developed a website with the ‘gov’ dominion, whereas 11% was done through commercial dominions” (Echavarría, 2012, p. 76). In the period of our concern, and specifically in the topic at hand, for the survey performed in January and February 2019, around 37% of the municipalities in Argentina had implemented policies associated to OG (Grandinetti & Miller, 2019).

These data ought to be read regarding two interrelated events: debates on the transparency of the government which occurred from the promotion of international organizations, and the administrative and upgrading transformations of the State which resulted from these debates in the previous decade. In both cases, digitalization was associated to major progress in terms of democratization and efficacy of management, which aspects lead to institutionalization and standardization processes of different legal forms.

In 2016, the National Congress passed the Law for Access to Public Information in Argentina, which summarizes some of the formal advances on the responsibilities of the State and transparency. Between 2016 and 2018, there was visible progress of the development of these initiatives around OG, within a signed context by public demand and by national supporting programs. Specifically, we identified the Municipal Webpage Program dine by the Ministry of National Modernization. In March 2016, a major newspaper in the province wrote the headline “there is an internal growth of the open government” (*La Voz del Interior*, 03/21/2016), which makes reference to the growth of these sites in municipal distribution of the territory of Cordoba and with an emphasis in medium-sized cities such as Villa Maria.

Moreover, in the case of the city of Cordoba, in 2016, a meeting was held between the Ministry for National Modernization and the superintendent of the City of Cordoba, from which there were several relevant occurrences around OG in the municipal order. The provincial newspaper recorded: “The national government said that it is required that the City of Cordoba be modernized” (*La Voz del Interior*, 02/04/2016). In this scenario, the municipality and the ministry signed an agreement to “reduce the paperwork” of municipal processes and files, and a period was sealed in the sense that the strategies of national governments lie in the direct articulation of municipalities to avoid provincial instances. Likewise, the municipal government created the Secretariat for Modernization, Communication and Strategic Development, as the distribution promoting the OG paradigm. Ever since, the modernization discourse became more evident in the municipal setting, and it was furthermore suppressed in the case of the provincial government.

Launching the OG platform from the government of the Municipality of Cordoba turned into one of the most emblematic policies of the management, in line with the guidelines of the national State from the presidency of Mauricio Macri (2015-2019). Implementation of the platform had a remarkable promotion by the municipality and its officials never stopped referring to it in the media or in their own social networks. This experience was presented as

a response to the public problem of corruption and the lack of accessibility to information in the local instance, that is, as a technological advancement or as a milestone of the management. Thus, the municipal government recorded the institutionalization of transparency policies in history from year 2000 as some sort of a chronogram, which is a measure of the progress in this subject (and which was published in the same portal).

On the other hand, two years later, in 2018, the government of the province of Cordoba put its own OG platform in operation. Although there is interest in this state area to digitalize services and open data, launching the platform did not have the same tone of celebration on record at a municipal level. In this case, the experience was scarcely promoted on governmental information and on the press, and neither did it have a central place in the addresses of provincial officials. The foregoing notwithstanding, the provincial State had had an advancement in the development of sites of the electronic government, as a Digital Citizen or at the Procurement and Contracts portal.

The emergence of both OG portals should be understood within the context of international demands around transparency, as it was erected in the new preeminently identified agenda with the paradigm and technologies around OG. The international gaze operating by means of rewards and invitations to implementers as speakers in conferences and symposia, maybe is one of the central criteria of the state's decisions when implementing this type of portals.

There are several non-governmental organizations both at a local and international levels as political actors who are on file under transparency, participation and cooperation, not only related to demands but as an ineludible way of challenging remedies. Therefore, several incentives were quickly established towards state openness, from rewards, distinctions and memberships to the construction of rankings based on a diagnosis about how transparent the different managements are regarding OG prescriptions (see table 2). These flows of ideas, management models and technologies are built by way of selection from the OG premises. In contrast, the governments are legitimated in this installed international circuit of rewards.

Table 2. Awards received, by jurisdiction

Municipal government	Provincial government
<p>2016. Awarded by the Conocimiento Abierto Foundation, for obtaining the first place in the Open Data index in Argentinian cities in 2016.</p> <p>2018. “Most Innovative Practices” Award for their government policy of transparency. The prize was awarded by the Inter-American Conference of Mayors and Local Authorities in the U.S. Embassy in Buenos Aires.</p>	<p>2017. Receives the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) honor</p> <p>2018. The Center of Implementation of Public Policies for Equity and Growth (CIPPEC in Spanish) gave Cordoba a 9.90 score in its ranking of Provincial Budgetary Transparency.</p>

Source: data obtained from graphic media (2016-2019).

It is also possible to affirm that both OG platforms report the influence they get regarding the circulation of ideas from different scenarios. In addition to actions of public incidence developed by local actors, (New Cordoba Network of Citizens), and of the agenda established for Sustainable Development Objectives (hereinafter SDO) fostered by the UN. We were able to identify some officials and personalities who, from their place as bureaucratic workers have actively participated in circulating ideas associated to OG in the province of Cordoba. Their agency is given in view of their capacity to permeate in different power spaces at the same time: universities, OG international conferences, scientific organizations, et cetera (Romanutti & Echavarria, 2019).

The New Cordoba Network of Citizens has an active role at a local level based on transparency policies and accountability.³ The goals plan structuring the projection of municipal governance was the product of the initiatives of this social organization. Notwithstanding, in the case of the municipal portal, possible tabs and operations to be performed are clearly marked by guiding axes of the Open Government Partnership (OGP),⁴ whose influence is considered to be of the highest relevance (Corrado *et al.*, 2016). Conversely, in the provincial site, the referential support is inspired by agreements signed in 2015 with the United Nations Organization (UNO); in a more specific manner, we refer to the Global Agenda for Sustainable Development, whose objectives and goals to be fulfilled before 2030 stipulate the *open governance* of the provincial transparency portal.

In our media registry we also saw that as the moment for the elections was becoming near, set for the month of May 2019, and in spite of temporary disparities on the implementation of the above-mentioned portals, discursive convergences increased between both managements around OG, which uniformity was to be understood after the elections period. This event allowed us to raise a work hypothesis: the implementation and characteristics of public actions associated with OG would have a closer connection with the structured axes of the local policy of each management with the democratization and accessibility processes of accountability, *per se*.

The electoral use of OG has been specifically significant regarding the expressions of the candidates themselves to the intendancy of the city of Cordoba. During the municipal elections in May 2019, the candidates were questioned by *Red Ciudadana Nuestra Cordoba* about their proposals.⁵ In this opportunity, the formula that would eventually win the election –Martin Llaryora and Daniel Passerini– was taxative in respect to the Open Government:

To us, the Open Government, it is going to be a state policy, where transparency, participation and accountability will be a reality. The open data portal ought to cover the activities of every municipality. One of the main premises of the Open Government includes the participation, the use of information for new policies, new proposals and, finally, a co-creation of citizens in public management (candidates of *Hacemos por Cordoba*, quoted in *Red Ciudadana Nuestra Cordoba*, 2019, pp. 107-108).

Indeed, in 2019, specifically, at both state levels, we identified: a) Greater visibility of actions for promotion under OG; b) Governmental references to the same civil institutions and local networks committed to transparency and citizens' control (*Red Ciudadana Nuestra Cordoba*); and c) The same political discourse on the fulfillment of "goals" (the Goals Plan of the municipal government and provincial SDO), like the conception of "milestones" –in the development of different state actions under OG.

Furthermore, once the elections were completed, ex-officials of the provincial government of Cordoba would explicitly disclose this strategic logic for the use of OG, who circumvented the structure of municipal governance with regards the OG version. For example, the clerk of the new municipal governance in charge of the Modernization area, and formerly in charge of the homologous area in the provincial government, said: "I cannot be disclosing information which cannot be validated as a neighbor. If you say you changed 25 thousand LED lighting units, and they cannot be referenced geographically, without credible support, which could validate it, there is not much sense" (Alejandra Torres, quoted at *La Voz del Interior*, 05/03/2020).

In the political discourse of the post-electoral stage, differentiations were evidenced among provincial governments, in respect to the governance implemented by the City Portal. Thus, we have an illustration on how the exchange under OG is expressed in the discourse, both regarding candidates and officials, under the parameters of electoral politics in the circumstantial setting.

Descriptive markings

Once the implementation context has been developed, we focused on developing the features acquired by OG portals, specifically, the City Portal and Open Governance. From an analytic-descriptive approach. In principle, the allocations upon which these instances depend are different, which is a condition for the communicative aspects of each transparency portal. In the provincial government, OG policies are in charge of the General Secretariat of the Government. In this agency, the officials respond to a clearly "technical" profile, which is actually associated with broader liberal matrixes. In addition, references to the Open Governance site (its institutional name) essentially submit to appeals of re-signified liberal-republican nature, that is, that the authorities be in charge of the accountability.

As an example, the person in charge of this portfolio, Silvina Rivero, made reference to launching the site in these terms: "an advance in the subject of active transparency and accountability, two actions comprising fundamental axes of our governance" (News Portal of the Government of the Province of Cordoba, 2017). This ideological impression, in addition to reference to SDO, makes the governance axes upon which the portal revolves to

be depoliticized or at least –in its abstract definition– detached from the problems of local politics. We refer to the significant family and persons, prosperity, planet or associations and peace.

In the municipality of Cordoba, politics around transparency make the “myth” or self-representation achieved by governance or builds *per se*. It is so, that the self-proclaimed policy of municipal transparency enabled an arena of conflict in the union field in view of a publication of wages of municipal employees. In May 2017, the provincial newspaper published: “For the first time, the municipality published the payroll of its 10,186b employees” (*La Voz del Interior*, 05/07/2017). In this sense, the circumstances under analysis configured tensions among political actors (at the union level with municipal workers who coalesced at the *Sindicato Union de Obreros y Empleados Municipales*, SUOEM, by its acronym in Spanish, mainly) for legitimacy and criteria for the definition of data which had to be effectively disclosed.

This impression makes it different from the transparency portal of the provincial government because of the capacity of the municipality to combine, in the data provided thereby, strategies and positioning in the local policy with merely technological aspects. This tension is also presented in the selection of the significant that comprise the organizing axes of the OG portal. In this case, there is a discursive accent, above all in two or three preeminent categories in the OG paradigm: transparency and participation.

In the implementation process of local OG, the media coverage of the official in charge of the *Secretaria de Modernizacion, Comunicacion y Desarrollo Estrategico* (Secretariat of Strategic Modernization, Communication and Development) headed by Marcelo Cossar cannot go unseen (table 3). This official, since he took office, carried out the defense of the OG benefits as well as the promotion of the municipal portal in different media, achieving a role which the provincial version did not have.

The right to AIP and the data opening policies, to a greater extent, rests in the organization of information which the governments, by means of their transparency policy, makes available at portals. Therefore, it is important to take into account which type of archives may be obtained and their potential to exercise future transactions on databases, aimed to delineate ways to control citizens. Furthermore, the degree to update information is crucial so that citizens, in an effort to exercise public complaints, have necessary data available.

At this point, in quantitative terms, the volume of data published by the municipality is radically greater than the data available in the portal of the province during the period at hand. In 2018, the municipal government presented the new portal of Open Government, which contained a number of data eight times greater than the number there was in 2016 (City Portal, 09/05/2018).

Table 3. Descriptive aspects of OG, by jurisdiction

	Municipal portal	Provincial portal
Name	Portal de la Ciudad [City Portal]	Gestión Abierta site [Open Management]
Administrative Agency of the portal	Ministry of Modernization, Communication and Strategic Development	General Ministry of Government
Year of launch	August 2016	September 2018
Organization or organisms of reference	Plan de Metas 2016-2019 [Plan of Objectives], which the supervisor defined at the beginning of his appointment, in accordance with the Ordinance No. 11.942. The plan has the stimulus of the Red Ciudadana Nuestra Córdoba [Our Córdoba Citizen Network]	The Agenda 2030 was agreed with the UN in September 2015, which defines the 17 Objectives for Sustainable Development (OSD) and 169 goals to solve political, economic and environmental issues
Core ideas of management included in the portal	Transparency Participation Mobile applications Web accessibility	Family and people Prosperity Planet Associations and peace

Fuente: elaboración propia con datos de Portal de la Ciudad y Gestión Abierta (2016-2019).

Transparency, participation and cooperation environments

Transparency appears as the basic axis in these two platforms. However, while there is no space exclusively dedicated to this signifier in the provincial portal, in the municipal site references are explicit, to the point that there is an exclusive section encompassing very action in this sense. In the municipality, signifiers of budgeting transparency appear under the “transparency” tab in the open data section.

There, you can find divided expenditures per purpose and function of municipal allocations, to include the City Council, the Court of Audit and the Executive Branch, with their relevant secretariats. At the Government Portal there is access to different Datasets, pertaining to the several public allocations; there, you can see databases, charts, documents related to debt, budget, municipal co-participation, public expenditures, among others.

The bidirectional nature of GC refers both to the need that the government reports its activities and the manner in which citizens (or another type of public) receive, recover, and respond to this information, as a comprehensive part of the communicative process (Echavarria & Maurizi, 2013). In this sense, the participation axis in AG platforms under analysis does not have a protagonist role, although there are clear differences between both

sites. Regarding open governance, there are no references to the participation instance, the likelihood of cooperation to improve access to information, nor is there any reference to another specific function of the site suggesting “cooperation”. Moreover, no claims may be generated, request public data or make proposals from the web. Notwithstanding, databases are in an open format, in such a way that it is possible to make operations with them, or to cross check information.

In the case of the municipal portal, there is an explicit reference to participation. Here, interaction with citizens is stipulated, in the first place, by means of four non-digitalized modes of participation: citizen participation centers, public hearings, neighbor centers and neighbor participation boards. Nonetheless, participation in the portal is provided in a tab named “citizen participation” and it is centered in the possibility to suggest ideas through the platform from different pre-established axes (*Cordoba Sustentable, Cordoba Competitiva, Cordoba Equitativa e Inclusiva, Desarrollo Sustentable*). Also, a possibility is suggested to participate or cooperate, the use of free software to design and manage the site and, therefore, the potential availability for group participation of users to “improve” it.

Another problem core of OG sites is the degree how data are manipulated, or selection criteria, of “open” governments in their respective developments. The portals offer some evaluation criteria for works –or public policies– developed by the same state governance, but there are clear differences. The City Portal had permanent updates around the advancement in the implementation of policies, ordered around “goals” and their “indicators” stipulated by norms from the Goals Plan of the government.

However, in the municipal case, the goals evaluated in terms of their execution status (not initiated; in progress; reached goal; exceeded goal) lack references to be contrasted, and make detail information on the progress degree to be centered in the officials who operate the site. This is an interesting point for our analysis, because the portal is presented as a glass window of state activities, whether performed or undertaken.

This implies a difference from the provincial portal, which only presents major objectives for the management without any value of the progress degree (let us remember: the 17 ODS and 169 stipulated goals by the United Nations Organization). That is, Open Governance is not designed to inform the progress status of the works or of the policies in such a way that there may not be a follow-up of these actions in real time, as if the municipal version intended to may it possible.

In both cases, it would seem that data publication is intended to achieve significant visualizations to obtain consensus on already made political decisions, instead of manners of citizens’ co-participation. Hence, design and development of contents, from the most relevant semantic aspect, the idea of transparency is more important than participation or cooperation (see table 4).

Table 4. Environments of transparency, participation and collaboration

	Municipality	Province
Evaluation criteria of public and political works	Not started In process Goal accomplished Goal overcome	Without criteria
Criteria of budgetary transparency	Open data	Open data
Criteria of citizen participation or collaboration	It allows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presenting ideas in predetermined core axes • Participation focused in improving the site through access to free software 	It only allows downloads from open source databases. It does not allow collaboration
Construction of image of public servants	Yes	No
Sworn statements of public servants	Personalization of each servant and details of the declarations	Depersonalization of each servant. No declarations are presented.
Reference audience	General public: “Neighbor”	Specialized audience/Informed citizen

Source: data obtained from Portal de la Ciudad and Gestión Abierta (2016-2019).

With regards the main political actors of each management, we may note a great difference. The provincial site is characterized by marked depersonalization of the actors involved, we can see constant reference to the government and to its manner to manage, or the UNO as a symbol of ODS. However, there is no explicit reference to provincial officials, not even to the governor. Conversely, there is a tab in the City Portal named municipal officials detailing an organization chart of the governance; in addition to being a manner in which officials are presented this adds to the idea of being close to the society, presenting is most informal side.

In this point, data are presented as their *curriculum vitae*, that is, their previous positions or their education, but what distinguishes them is that there is “color” information included, like their hobbies or literary likes. This is a relevant aspect because it has favored the fact that the cabinet of officials builds a desirable image, generally, from identity of the province of Cordoba, the idea of family, sport passions, education, personal career, and the value of transparency, unlike other municipal workers, their sworn statements –where assets and liabilities are shown–.

For example, regarding this type of information, in the case of the superintended, the following is mentioned:

I am from Cordoba and I am married to Melisa, with whom we have 3 children: Juana, Bautista and Pedro Mestre. I like football and I am a fan of Talleres. I am 44 years old and I am a Lawyer, from the National University of Cordoba. I have a major in Public Service Regulation Law of the Austral University of Buenos Aires and did a Higher Course in International Trade at the Entrepreneurial Education Institute of Madrid, Spain (City Portal, 2018).

Finally, we noted a communicational piece from the sophistication listening period, through PM; it is characterized by a high complexity degree regarding the definition of the public of reference. While the municipal portal seems to question the general public, the province appeals to a more competent public who are aware of public governance. At the municipality, the site is intended to a non-specialized public, and as we perform a literal reading of the contents, we note there are references of the kind: "Hello neighbor". At the Open Governance section, we find greater sophistication levels in the presentation of proposals and a discursive appeal related to the UNO which, as we stated, it is distanced from daily public problems. The nuance of development or sustainability place it representing an international agenda linked to citizen claims with high levels of information and specific expectations in the political field.

Conclusions

In this article, we presented some of the preliminary results mentioned in the communicational strategies of the open government by two subnational instances. In order to be aware of the scopes of these initiatives, we have selected two portals: The City Portal of the City of Cordoba and Open Governance of the government of the province of Cordoba. In this opportunity, we considered significant aspects from the qualitative point of view that compare the implementation processes of the portals. Therefore, we identified the contextual dimension as a heterodox explanation to the adoption of OG by the subnational levels, and disregards demographic variables or intrinsically institutional that prevail in other studies.

In this sense, we centered ourselves in the analysis of materialized differentiation logic of the OG contents, when dealing with governance whose political proposals compete in the same electoral district. More than seeking representativeness or quantification of the institutionalization process of OG, we sought to build a communication channel from where we articulated a sociological, relational and critical gaze for the technologization processes noted. In this scenario, the conceptual dichotomy built as we find out about GC and PM, is highly productive to the empirical analysis of governmental portals.

Under this analytic horizon, we found that in both sites, the institutionalized modes of GC are overlapped and reduced in a declaratory structure; which depend on political

contexts, external actors and, especially, communicational resources based on PM techniques. Implementation thereof pertains to a highly professionalized process (gurus, technicians, advertisers, et cetera) from which governments build the image of their management, and that of their officials, rather than advancing in incorporating citizens in the decision-making processes.

In this sense, the cases we are analyzing reveal how the information and data provided at the OG portals reinforce the structuring axes in the ways to do local politics, over the bet for democratization processes or the guaranty to the right to API. On the one hand, the communicational strategy of the municipal portal of Cordoba seeks significant visualization appealing to interlocutors who are acquainted with the use of virtual platforms. On the other hand, the communicational strategy of the provincial government from the open management, responds to a liberal model on public information, which shuts off the stipulated association between OG and citizens' participation. In both cases, the novel portals of OG have turned into more than governance "myths" than in proposals based on citizens' participation.

The result of the analysis provides us with an analysis strategy on the diverse used of the OG portal, from an organizer detached from information to a tool to manage conflicts inasmuch as the portal becomes present in the local political dynamic. Indeed, we noticed that, based on these instrumental criteria; state argumentation is interrupted on justice criteria that guide the policies and the management of public funds.

OG is presented as a technological materiality, which synthesizes a highly consistent manner of how to manage from the government under a technocratic and liberal state of affairs, which became popular with nuances from the 1990s to present.

Finally, the results obtained allow us to assume that the analysis of democratization processes around OG cannot be simply obtained from a quantitative point of view, but that they should be searched by means of an always contextual or relational construction on the local ways of doing politics. This confirmation takes us away from celebratory positions on these technological repertoires, which place them as a rupturing and innovative model of the 21st Century democracies, and which are attributed formidable benefits for debate in the political arena.

In essence, OG is a proposal that should mainstream every management area on many paradigms associated to digital democracy, because the fact of reducing this to a portal weakens its changing and democratizing potential. That is, this is not simply about implementing a site with diverse levels of availability of public information, but about involving citizens in governmental governance. Bets to consider this as promoters of transparency and digitally mediated participation have only achieved a fetishizing or merely rhetorical use of an open government in the social reality.

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¹ The city of Cordoba is the capital of the province (of the same name) and it is the second in the number of inhabitants in Argentina, more than 1,300,000 (INDEC, 2010), which represent 40% of the provincial population. In the period at hand, the city was ruled by the Union Civica Radical party. The superintendent was Ramon J. Mestre, who exercised the municipal executive branch since 2011. As of

2015, collaborating with the PRO Party (Republican Proposal) had access to a second term. At a national level, PRO won the elections in that same year, also, from an alliance, which propelled Mauricio Macri to hold the presidency of the country.

² The province of Córdoba is located in the central region of Argentina, and for the last national census (INDEC, 2010) it had more than three and a half million inhabitants. It is the second most important electoral district of the 23 Argentine provinces. For the period considered, the province was governed by the We Make For Córdoba Alliance and Governor Juan Schiaretti, of the Justicialista Party, had been the provincial executive since 2015.

³ The Red Ciudadana Nuestra Córdoba emerged in 2009 by the participation of Córdoba, universities, research centers, professional associations, foundations, companies and citizens.

⁴ The beginning of the Alliance for the Open Government started at the summit held in Paris in 2016, which gathered 3,000 representatives of 70 countries, from every continent. Argentina has been a member of this organization since 2012.

⁵ By way of conclusion, the Red Ciudadana published the following report regarding the consultations on GA with the candidates for mayor of the city of Córdoba: “Despite the speeches in favor of participation and access to public information, the Open Government for the most part does not integrate the agenda of proposals - with the exception of the UCR. No force supports the sanction of an ordinance that regulates it and almost none assumes a goal of 100% response to requests for information. Only Encuentro Vecinal agrees to propose that 100% of the requests and their responses (deadlines, type and content of response) be recorded and periodically disseminated on the municipal website. On the other hand, none assumes the goal of publishing the fiscal responsibility indicators prescribed by law” (Red Ciudadana Nuestra Córdoba, 2019, p. 6).