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## PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING FOR URBAN AREAS: THE CASE OF RÍO GALLEGOS' MICRO-REGION

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**Abstract**

A significant population growth and the increase of urbanization's dynamics are the common problems of Argentinian conurbations. However, the case of Río Gallegos, an intermediate city in the south of the country, is unique. The city sprawls over two different jurisdictions, the municipal land, almost fully occupied, and the "outer land" that belongs to the provincial jurisdiction. This situation produces a legal crisis due to the lack of planning as well as a clear disarticulation of public actions between the two jurisdictions. In this context, the provincial administration implements the Development Plan for the Micro-region of Río Gallegos (DPM of Río Gallegos). Similar to the concept of urban area, micro-regions are plurimunicipal associations conceived for guiding long-term sustainable development processes. Starting from institutional problems, the approach of the plan however focuses on physical analysis and proposals as guidance for actions and policies, particularly by combining three instruments: territorial models, strategic projects and alternative scenarios. This development plan is proposed as an exercise to define a realistic operational planning scope, reducing expectations that could lead to failure. Based on the study the case of DPM of Río Gallegos, the aim of this paper is to identify and conceptualize instrumental innovations of development planning for urban areas.

**Keywords:** Supra-local planning, urban areas, planning innovation, planning instruments, Argentina

**1. INTRODUCTION**

The urban area of Río Gallegos is the most important conurbation of southern continental Argentina<sup>1</sup>. Within a radius 350 km, is the only cultural, trade and tourist centre. Despite its isolated location, in the last two decades it has a significant population growth and unprecedented urbanization process (INDEC)<sup>2</sup>. This transformation generates benefits associated to economic growth and job creation, but due to its speed and magnitude jeopardizes an important part of the environmental, urban, economic and even legal values of this urban area.

<sup>1</sup> "Urban areas" are adjacent municipalities based units representing a distinctive conurbation and an economic and socially unified zone, interdependent with each other, and showing a contiguous urban growth. Originally developed in the French context, the concept of urban area [*aire urbaine*] applies to demographic units spanning the French national map of adjacent municipalities (communes). Source: INSEE (Institut National de la Statistique et des Etudes Economiques).

<sup>2</sup> National Institute of Statistics and Census, (INDEC), [www.indec.gov.ar](http://www.indec.gov.ar)

The spontaneous urban growth is a hopeless common denominator of most medium sized Argentinian conurbations (Abba, 2010). However, there are aspects that make the case of Río Gallegos unique, perhaps only verifiable in other smaller towns in the Province of Santa Cruz.<sup>3</sup> Urbanization sprawls over two different jurisdictions, the municipal land, almost fully occupied, and the “outer land” that belongs to the provincial jurisdiction. Besides the environmental problems, this situation produces a legal and urban crisis due to the lack of planning and a clear public policy disarticulation between the two jurisdictions (Kingsland, 2012).

Given this process of urbanization, in recent years there is a political and technical controversy regarding the administration and development of the urban area of Río Gallegos (Cáceres y García, 2004). One of the most relevant elements of this debate is the need for new instruments of urban planning and, specifically, supra-local planning. As a result of this debate, some provincial governments develop –with diverse objectives and instruments– plans for the management of its urban areas, which in the Argentine context are called micro-regions. Micro-regions are plurimunicipales associations conceived for guiding long-term sustainable developments and promoting various complementary activities (Lemoine and Sarabia, 2001).

The experience of Argentinian micro-regions begins in the framework of the National Commission for the Promotion and Development of the Patagonian Region (CONADEPA, 1997-99), in order to promote an integrated development of all the productive sectors of this region characterized by vast deserts, isolated population and dispersed settlements of various sizes. Due to its temporal coincidence, we can mention the plans drafted for the micro-regions of Central Mendoza (2006), Chubut Central Plateau (2008), Alto Parana (2008) and Coronda (2010).

Effectiveness and practical results of these instruments, which were drafted quite recently, should be verified in the future. However, these are novel exercises that deserve academic attention and analysis, being particularly relevant examples of the potentiality, limitations and need for “urban” spatial planning.

The objective of this paper is studying one of these planning exercises: The Development Plan for the Micro-region of Río Gallegos (hereinafter DPM of Río Gallegos) drafted in 2011-2012. The particular aim is to identify and conceptualize the instrumental innovations in development planning for urban

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<sup>3</sup> The province of Santa Cruz integrates the Patagonian region and covers an area of 243,943 km<sup>2</sup>, being the second largest province in the country. The province has 20 local governments which 14 have reached the rank of municipalities and the remaining six are considered as Development Committees (Boix and Gigli, 2010).

areas<sup>4</sup>. First, the framework, objectives, instruments and management of the Plan are informed. At last, some more general conclusions about the nature and the problems of supra-local urban planning are discussed.

## 2. THE CONURBATION OF RÍO GALLEGOS AND ITS URBANIZATION PROCESS

The territorial configuration of Argentina is the result of successive socio-economic models (mercantilist, agricultural, industrial) that reinforced the unequal growth and generated regions favoured by the abundance and concentration of activities, services, people and opportunities, and regions characterized by population dispersion, lack of social services and recurring economic crises (Lemoine and Sarabia, 2001, op. cit.). This is usually exemplified by the growth of the metropolitan area of Buenos Aires, however similar processes occur in all Argentinian provinces, between their capital cities and major towns. In this scenario, two types of territories coexist: those belonging to the areas of production and management, which are embedded in the globalization process, and those that are marginalized from this process (Castells, 1995).

The urban area of Río Gallegos belongs to these marginal areas, despite being the most important conurbation of southern continental Argentina (Figure 1).<sup>5</sup> Its physical characteristics are those of Patagonian Atlantic estuaries and its main geographical and landscape element is the river of Río Gallegos, which is the site of the conurbation and a major overseas port, Punta Loyola. Río Gallegos is the capital of the Province of Santa Cruz and home of the three levels of government. Being an administrative and an economic centre, it is a potential regional pole of the provincial south area<sup>6</sup>. Like other provincial capitals, due to the high offer of public employment, the immigration is one of the main factors of the urban transformation in the last half a century.

In the last twenty years, however, the expansion of the urban area of Río Gallegos is dramatically accelerated emphasizing the conflicting overlapping of territorial administrations. The first problem is the urban sprawl over two different jurisdictional areas<sup>7</sup>, the municipal land of the city of Río Gallegos,

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<sup>4</sup> This is not intended to be an applied study, although it's conceived as a reflective study (Schön, 1983). As noted by Donald Schön, through reflective inquiry is possible to increase the capacity of arguments from professional practices, in particular to overcome the tacit frames of each discipline.

<sup>5</sup> The urban area of Río Gallegos is located 2636 km from Buenos Aires, at the intersection of two national routes, one is extended along the Atlantic ocean (RN 3) and the other connects to the Andes' corridor (RN 40).

<sup>6</sup> Río Gallegos hosts the largest concentration of population in the province, almost 95,000 inhabitants.

<sup>7</sup> The urban system of the Province of Santa Cruz is characterized by the establishment of a small number of towns distributed over a vast territory. The political and administrative system defines seven departments for the whole province; but also there is a political and administrative division of discontinuous municipalities, meaning municipal or communal districts that are non-contiguous territories in the context of the provincial land.

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almost fully occupied, and the so-called “outer land” territory that belongs to the provincial jurisdiction. These outer developments are rapidly growing and expanding. Hence, this particular situation creates a legal and policy crisis regarding the new developments, and worsens the morphology and functionality of the urban area as a result of the lack of planning, the weak municipal and provincial legislation, and a clear public policy disarticulation between the two authorities. Secondly, in recent years fragmentary and dispersed growth of peri-urban Río Gallegos configures an emergency scenario for implementing environmental actions and planning policies (Bielsa, 2011). To illustrate this scenario we can mention the increasingly speculative development pressure on rural land, the high and rising price of land market –facing a growing population demand–, and neighbourhoods without services or minimum accessibility conditions. Progressive and accelerated occupancy of the peri-urban area leads to strained and inadequate responses by the authorities for extending service networks. Finally, it is worth mentioning other factors that deteriorate the environment, the landscape and eventually the housing quality, such as the limited availability of water, the pollution from untreated sewage and household waste, the progressive alteration of the natural relief due to extractive activities, and some roads built on flooding areas. The problems derived from these territorial dynamics have been recently discussed in different academic institutions, professional associations, local authorities, media, citizens' movements, and even business associations. Thus, with different nuances, it was concluded that if current trends of urbanization persist, the environmental quality, landscape values and the functional efficiency of the urban area of Río Gallegos could be irreversible damaged. This could result in serious loss to the competitiveness of the productive sector development, which depends, in great measure, on the competitive opportunities of this urban area.



FIGURE 1 - GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION OF RÍO GALLEGOS' URBAN REGION.

Source: Edited google map.

### 3. THE SPATIAL AND URBAN PLANNING IN THE PROVINCE OF SANTA CRUZ

In this context, the decision of the provincial government of Santa Cruz to draft a Development Plan for the micro-region of Río Gallegos is the foundation stone for promoting a balanced and sustainable environment, considering an integrated urban area. This initiative is part of a spatial planning improvement that the national government developed since the year 2003, with the change of government. Therefore, before entering in the analysis of the plan, it is convenient to describe the background of planning in the province of Santa Cruz.

The province of Santa Cruz has limited spatial planning policies. However, after the political and institutional crisis of 2001, in 2003 began a period of institutional and economic recovery that produces a shift in regional policies. Within the planning initiatives of the National Government, first is worth mentioning the National Strategic Plan (NSP 2016), which provides guidelines for a balanced territorial development of all the provinces. Although it is conducted by the national government, the NSP 2016 starts with a strategic approach and relies on consensus building for its implementation. Secondly is worth mentioning the Land Use and Development Plan of Santa Cruz 2016, drafted in 2007. The most important contribution of this strategic instrument is the definition of the first territorial model and the disaggregated guidelines for the economic development of each provincial department. Finally, we must mention the Town Plan of Río Gallegos (1963). Although it is a locally based plan, urban issues are considered in a territory of 50 km radius. It is a rigorous and comprehensive instrument, similar to many development plans that were booming during the '60s and '70s in many industrial Western countries. Though the plan remains operative, its proposals are exceeded or out-dated.

The 1963 Town Plan is the direct antecedent of the DPM of Río Gallegos. But, what happened to the development plans in the last half century? In the early sixties, the ideas of competitiveness and spatial planning take a new approach based on the implementation of regional development plans, which main objective is the combination of economic and physical planning (Benabent, 2006). Based on the French pioneering experience, these plans adopt an holistic approach in contrast to the sectorial policies, establishing a socio-economic and development framework for the regional and urban planning. However, these instruments are questioned for their rigid, close and omni-comprehensive nature, and their abstract and undemocratic territorial approach (Healey, 1997), particularly because the principle of subsidiarity is denied.

The crisis of regional development plans conceptually implies the primacy of the municipal planning as the only possible instrument for the physical management of the territory, omitting the intermediate scale (Benabent, 2006, op. cit.). Despite the democratic vindication that allowed many municipal plans

during the '80s and '90s –committed to the improvement and reform of the consolidated city– the “municipalist” experience has been wrongly conceptualized as bottom-up territorial planning (Farinós, 2004). At the beginning of the XXI century, its failure is evident in the standardization and bureaucratization of a local planning based on fragmented projects led by the private sector (Font, 2003).

The bureaucratization of planning involves not only local but also regional and national plans. These plans are established as territorial governmental programs or political orientations. They share a strategic nature that eventually turns into a symbol of national territoriality, propaganda, or just pedagogical information (Dematteis, 2004; Bassols, 2004). Instead, because of its “administrative lightness”, sub-regional planning takes on a new role in terms of public policy dimension for spatial planning (Meijsmans, 2010, op. cit.). Despite the diversity of European experiences, supra-local planning implementation removes decision-making from the local sphere<sup>8</sup>.

Something similar happens in Argentina, where the territory is fragmented and the financial and human resources are unequally distributed (Altschuler, 2003). At the regional scale, some authors refer to “infra-municipalism” as a comparable situation in some European countries such as France, Spain and Italy (Iturburu, 2008)<sup>9</sup>. Infra-municipalism is related to the existence of a large number of small and medium local governments without capacity for urban management and economic and productive development. Considering this problem, local association and development planning is promoted on a larger scale, regional or micro-regional, as a potential strategy for development<sup>10</sup>.

Argentinian micro-regions allow implementing ad-hoc boundaries for specific planning policies. Some micro-regions have specific goals, for example, the formation of partnerships for providing services or promoting tourism. Whilst other has a more holistic and comprehensive approach, related to local developments and common visions (Altschuler, 2006). Therefore, the rise of micro-regions responds to different political scenarios. In some cases, micro-regions have a bottom-up approach for addressing unfavourable contexts of crisis and serious social problems, or taking advantage of circumstantial opportunities such as the various national subsidies. In other cases, micro-regions are consolidated as

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<sup>8</sup> Referring to the Spanish context, Bassols (2004) suggests that spatial planning acts as an anticipatory instrument of the new regional division. The new territorial division implicitly leads to a restructuring of municipalities through new supra-local coordination instruments and policies.

<sup>9</sup> Argentina has 1922 local governments (IFAM). This index is relative if some other cases are considered, for example, 37.983 in France, 9.214 in Spain, 4.974 in Brazil, 335 in Chile, 218 in Paraguay (Senate of the Nation, 1997)

<sup>10</sup> “Micro-region” refers to the associations of municipalities, as the term “region” is used for provincial ensembles.

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top-down provincial or national policies. Such is the case of productive development plans or major infrastructure constructions<sup>11</sup>.

Consequently, the construction of micro-regions demands a constant exercise of democracy, between different territorial units, in order to provide legitimacy to the process to be undertaken (Lemoine and Sarabia, 2001 op. cit.). Perhaps the main challenge for organizing micro-regions is not technical but political, due to the overlapping jurisdiction in the same territorial subject-object. However, the implementation of micro-regions is not enough. In order to face this institutional problem sound arguments should be presented in terms of urban and spatial planning (Kingsland, 2011, op. cit.). In this sense, it is not intended to bypass the institutional aspect of the problem, but it is recognized certain "independent value" of technical responses, which in any case must be politically and socially discussed and expressed.

### 4. OBJECTIVES, METHODS AND INSTRUMENTS OF THE DPM OF RÍO GALLEGOS

The DPM of Río Gallegos is draft in a context of a new territorial planning impetus. As mentioned, its main objective is to promote a balanced, articulated and sustainable environment for the micro-region's development, introducing strategies and regulations through comprehensive planning instrument. Next, the purpose, scope, method and instruments of the plan are to be described.

The will to lead the process of urbanization of the micro-region of Río Gallegos responds to four types purposes: (1) urban planning: plan, guide, regulate and promote the necessary interventions regarding housing, infrastructure, supra-local facilities and productive activities, among other uses; ensuring the sustainability and spatial quality of the area, (2) environmental: preserving a particularly fragile environment such as the estuary of Río Gallegos, the landscape, cultural and symbolic values of the urban area; (3) economic: designing policies and value-added actions for economic and productive diversification, and (4) methodological: constitute a key technical and multi-administrative antecedent, that can be generalizable and adaptable to other micro-regions.

As already mentioned, the uniqueness of the micro-region of Río Gallegos is based on its mixed jurisdictional situation, both municipal and provincial. Starting from this consideration, on the one hand, the plan introduces the concept of micro-region as dynamic territorial unit, subject to a project rather than just a geographical or administrative boundary. In this sense, the proposals of the plan are

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<sup>11</sup> In general, micro-regions are implemented through laws, plans or agreements. While municipalities can associate for various purposes, including the economic and social development, micro-regions do not constitute a new level of government (National Constitution, art. 124).

determined by reference points that identify the micro-region in the territory of the real city<sup>12</sup>. On the other hand, the micro-region is divided into nineteen managerial units (fig. 2) based on two conditions, (1) the cadastral clarity and simplicity, and the demarcation of entire rural plots [chacras], to facilitate the eventual land subdivision, and (2) the managerial flexibility, considering the administrative vacuum at the micro-regional level. This flexible framework allows the plan to be driven by appropriate associations (intermediate, mixed or ex novo) depending on the political circumstances between territorial actors.

From the methodological point of view, the effectiveness of the DPM of Río Gallegos is based on its intermediate nature (Elinbaum, 2013), between local and provincial levels. It is also characterized by a potential flexibility for adapting its content to the micro-region unique territoriality. Moreover, the intermediate nature of the plan allows provincial and national policies to be executed through general and comprehensive instruments (Faludi, 1994). But "intermediate" also refers to the scope of these instruments, between the strategic and the more operational approaches (Albrechts, 2006)<sup>13</sup>.

The scope of the DPM of Río Gallegos does not allow re-classifying the land zoning. However, the development strategies that the Plan provides for each managerial unit are bidding for the revision of municipal planning. Thus, the landscape and the physical form analysis of the territory is emphasized as a guide for actions and policies. The plan is considered as a "realistic exercise" to define a reasonable operational scope, lowering expectations that could lead to failure. Consequently, the projective content of DPM of Río Gallegos is prudently constrained to three basic territorial systems or layers (open spaces, settlements and infrastructures), avoiding the omni-comprehensive tendency of general urban plans.

Besides the stratified content of the plan, three other instruments are implemented for the social, economic, urban and environmental development of Río Gallegos' micro-region, promoting a new institutional and managerial practice, and the interaction of different public and private actors. Such instruments are: the definition of a territorial model, the statement of strategic projects and the proposal of alternative scenarios related to specific actions.

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<sup>12</sup> The micro-region is included in a polygon which vertex are the following: Guer Aike (crossing of Routes 5 and 3), crossing of Routs 3 and 40, Punta Loyola, Cabo del Buen Tiempo, and North Coast of the estuary to Guer Aike.

<sup>13</sup> The intermediate level is one of the most innovative fields in European planning. It should be mentioned, for example, pioneer British structure plans (now replaced by the joint plans), the French intercommunal plans [*Plans intercommunaux*], Catalan supra-local urban plans [*Planes directores urbanísticos*] and Belgian plurimunicipal plans [*Afbakening grootstedelijk gebied*].



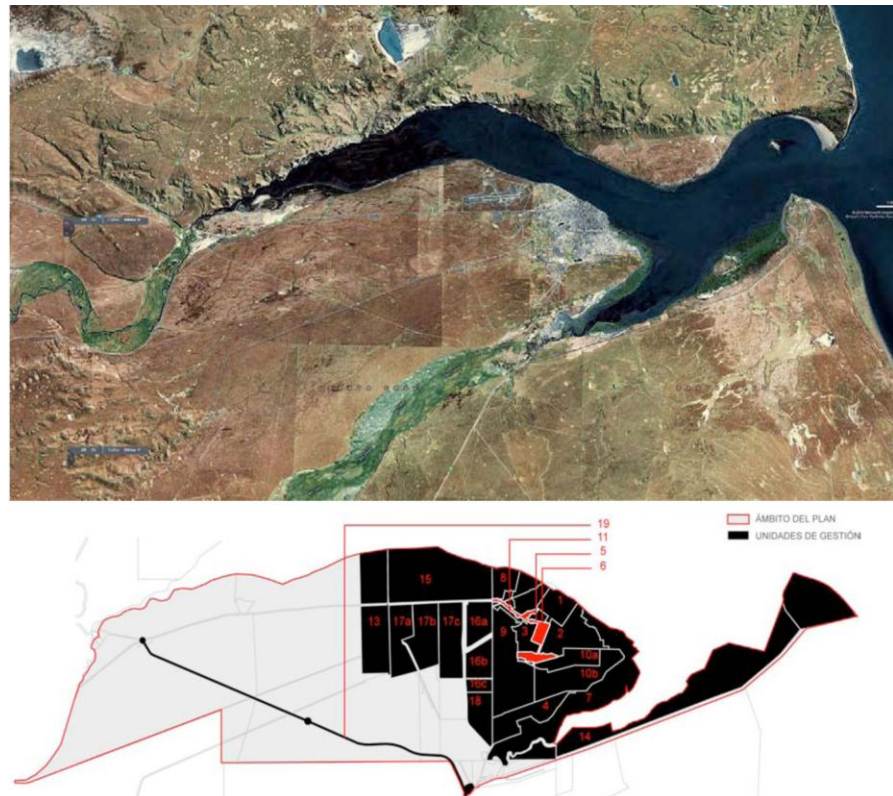


FIGURE 2- DPM of RÍO GALLEGOS' BOUNDARY AND ITS MANAGERIAL UNITS.  
Source: DPM of Río Gallegos (2011)

#### 4.1. THE PLAN AS A MODEL

The local planning has shown its inability to lead by itself the on-going territorial dynamics, which often transcend municipal boundaries (Font, 2011; Nel-lo, 2006, Esteban 2003). This technical and political argument is based on three commonly accepted statements (Galiana, et al., 2010) the regional equilibrium for guaranteeing social cohesion, the more rational use of resources, and the preservation of natural and cultural heritage. Thus, land management adopts a formal expression as a "model" capable of expressing synthetically the urban area's future project. Conceptually, models must be understood diachronically, as the synthesis of the physical framework and territorial dynamics (Serrano, 2003).

However, in the practice of supra-local planning, models are used to induce a specific territorial structure (Esteban, 2003). In the model of the DPM of Río Gallegos, all top-down provincial guidelines are considered, but also the physical form of the territory is identified as a primary condition for any intervention. Without relegating socio-economic aspects, the plan has a morphological approach for establishing clear spatial parameters for the whole micro-region.

Furthermore, the model combines the political orientation of multiple administrations involved in the plan through two basic schemes. The first is based on the traditional top-down administrative hierarchy,

expressed by radial structures, to promote the centrality of the inner city. While the second scheme is based on the administrative horizontality set through polycentric and nodal structures. Given the jurisdictional complexity of the micro-region of Río Gallegos, a model that addresses the two basic schemes is implemented. To this end, the model defines a new civic, institutional and service centre at the micro-regional scale, and some new complementary central areas for diversifying economic activities, such as logistics, industrial and retail.

New central areas not only complement the local economy but also constitute nodes of the transport and market networks at both national and international levels. The combination of the two mentioned structuring schemes, centripetal and nodal, allows developing dense, compact and efficiently connected "parts of the territory"<sup>14</sup>, but also the necessarily distance for preserving natural spaces and corridors. Thus, the open spaces' network becomes the third structuring element of the micro-region's model (fig. 3).



FIGURE 3 - DPM OF RÍO GALLEGOS' TERRITORIAL MODEL.  
Source: DPM of Río Gallegos (2011)

#### 4.2. THE PLAN AS A PROJECT

Based on the comprehensive perspective of supra-local problems, those responsible for the DPM of Río Gallegos intend to develop the most important objectives of the territorial model by combining its operational and strategic nature. Unlike strategic plans, as Faludi (1994, op. cit.) noted, strategic projects are based on the morphological coherence of the territory, defining suitable spaces for urban and regional developments. Strategic projects are comprehensive because they link the primary components of a single micro-regional urban structure. But they are also strategic because they transcend the usual isotropy of sectorial plans and the lack of structural perspective of municipal plans.

<sup>14</sup> Following the concept of "parts of the city" defined by Aldo Rossi (1964) as urban fabrics that share the same built morphology.

Moreover, although strategic projects are deferred, they refer to concrete interventions for being implemented in the short and medium term, revealing unprecedented options for local and micro-regional developments. This is evident in three key actions:

- The Micro-region's Main Street: It involves the redesign of the National Route nº 3 in an urban avenue for up scaling the downtown (new civic centre, governmental offices and facilities) and consolidating intermodal transport nodes (bus, rail and metro) between the inner and the peri-urban city.
- The Airport City: it involves structuring new neighbourhoods, the airport and the port taking advantage of the infrastructures of a new logistic platform.
- The River Front: It involves developing an environmental system (protected areas, rural pathways and facilities) along the edge of the estuary, integrating multiple intervening scales and policies (fig. 4).
- In short, projects determine the synergy between areas (protected zones), points (intermodal nodes) and lines (infrastructures, natural corridors) for integrating the city with its territory, and guiding the demand of potential activities, preventing the spontaneously multiplication of others (Louguet, et al, 2006). Facing the institutional and administrative complexity, strategic projects are an exceptional laboratory where action and reaction come together.

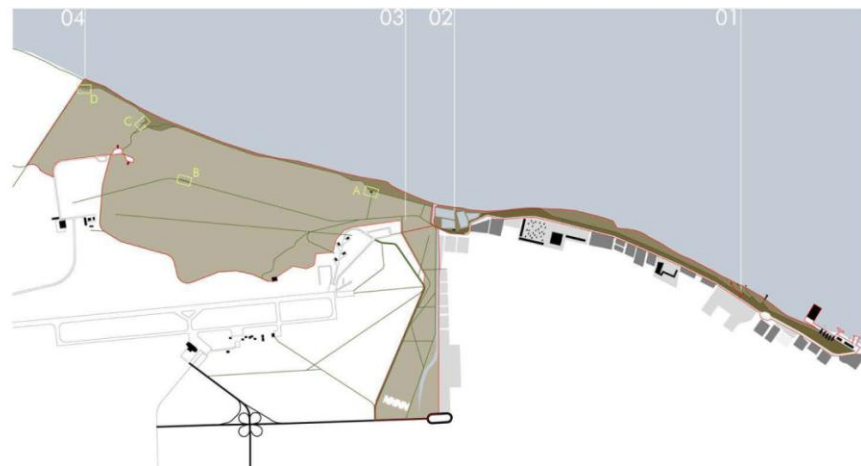


FIGURE 4 - STRATEGIC PROJECT FOR THE INTEGRATING THE RIVER FRONT.  
 Source: DPM of Río Gallego (2011)

#### 4.3. THE PLAN AS ALTERNATIVE SCENARIOS. AN OPEN-ENDED PROCESS

The scheduling of actions proposed for the micro-region development is inseparable from decisive circumstantial aspects such as the availability of public resources and the priorities of governmental

action, which logically vary depending on territorial dynamics. Unlike municipal plans, actions' scheduling of supra-local plans involve a complex framework of public, private, collective and individual actors. Also, deferred execution of proposals (implemented in the revision of municipal plans) constrains concrete interventions to be fitted within four years municipal legislatures (Esteban, 2012).

However, the structural nature of the plan allows micro-regional objectives to have a longer effect. Thus, in the DPM of Río Gallegos, the gap between the model and projects is reduced by strategies for inter-administrative management of supra-local objectives. The schedule of the plan alternates between ad-hoc and guided developments. On the one hand, scheduling is a strategy for communicating the plan's priorities and leverages the resources available in each legislature. On the other hand, is a process of technical reasoning, through continuous negotiation and consideration of alternative or incremental scenarios in the short, medium and long term (fig. 5).

The first is the scenario of open spaces. This is a minimal investment scenario and therefore interventions are based on specific actions for reconnecting and protecting natural areas, especially regarding the estuary. At this stage, existing urban fabrics must be completed.

In the medium term, the second scenario is related to the development of infrastructures. Once the vacant lots of the inner city have been occupied, and the costal system has been reconnected, the aim of this second stage is to "prepare" a platform for attracting new economic activities with high added value. The radial mobility scheme is to be transformed into a meshed scheme through minimal interventions, renovating and completing the existing network.

In the long term, the third scenario is dedicated to the development of new activities and settlements. Planners try to take advantage of the increased accessibility that would enable the horizontal scheme of meshed infrastructures for building an industrial and logistics platform, linked to the airport and the port. The potential productive development of the micro-region of Río Gallegos depends on these actions, being a key strategic pole for the national decentralization process and the international competitiveness.

Scenarios allow relating strategic projects to the guidelines of the model, increasing the coordination of actions at the micro-regional level, addressing the most appropriate institutions to foster specific developments, and the instruments to be carried out. In short, rather than the performance of blueprint results, the DPM of Río Gallegos provides a reasoning line illustrated by a set of actions that leverage the opportunity of the uniqueness of its territory.

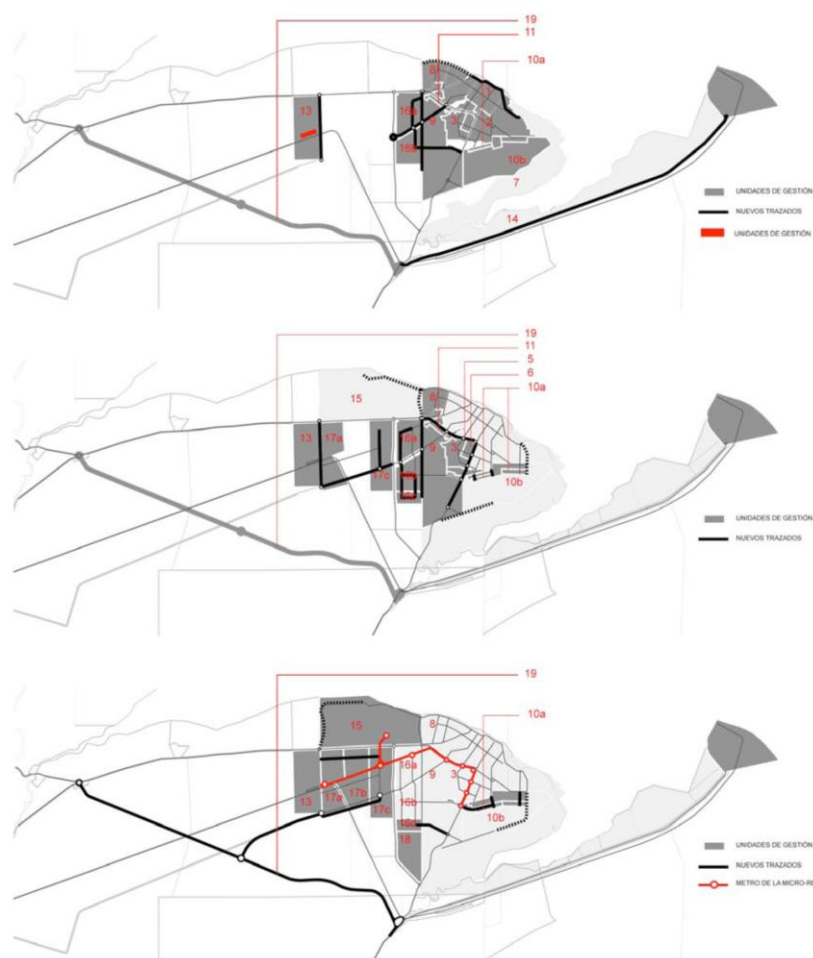


FIGURE 5 - INCREMENTAL AND ALTERNATIVE SCENARIOS.  
 Source: DPM of Río Gallego (2011)

## 5. CONCLUSIONS: THE NEED FOR SUPRA-LOCAL PLANNING

In this article we studied the instrumental contributions of a pilot experience of supra-local urban planning in Argentina. From the experience of the DPM of Río Gallegos, some important conclusions can be derived for the community, academic and professional practice debate about urban planning instruments and, more specifically, about the management of micro-regions through development plans. These necessarily provisional conclusions, due to the recent drafting of the plan, can be grouped into four propositions:

- 1) Integrative and transformative territorial dynamics impose the need of new planning tools for territorial development, towards a balanced, integrated and sustainable environment. Only through these instruments the community can guide and correct the spontaneous tendencies

of urbanization and, at the same time, constitute political, institutional, socio-economic and environmental programs for improving the interaction among multiple territorial actors.

- 2) In the current phase of the urbanization process these instruments should promote an integrated and robust spatial planning model against emerging risks of urban sprawl, mono-functionality, jurisdictional overlapping, speculative real estate pressure, legal fragility regarding land ownership and natural risks of flooding and pollution. Although the implementation of models is not enough for ensure the environmental sustainability –which requires the existence of many other economic and social policies–, models are a major determinant for achieving these goals. To this end, priority must be given to physical analysis of the territory as a guide for actions and policies, defining a reasonable operational scope of planning and lowering expectations that could lead to failure.
- 3) In addition, based on the holistic perspective of territorial models, supra-local plans allow improving development objectives through projects that combine strategic and operational approaches. The so-called strategic projects are able to integrate the city and its territory, guiding the demand of activities, and preventing the spontaneously reproduction of others. Being catalysts of the territorial model, models act as a management and design hypothesis to be developed according to top-down guidelines for open spaces, settlements and infrastructures systems. But at the same time strategic, projects must coordinate general objectives for local and sectorial planning. At the micro-regional scale, strategic projects are a tangible demonstration of how local and ad-hoc interventions can be part of broader territorial framework.
- 4) Besides strategic projects, above all, development plans are tools for managing a process. Thus, establishing blueprint images is a notion that decay. In theory, these images should be achieved at the end of the period covered by the plan. Instead, the current planning must establish a set of rules and instructions for guiding territorial developments. Despite the complex framework of actors, supra-local development plans allow to decrease the gap between the model and projects through plurimunicipal managerial strategies, for example, prioritizing integrated objectives and considering alternative or incremental scenarios. Thus, the structural nature of these plans allows supra-local targets to have a longer and steady effect.

On the whole, we have presented the main lessons derived from the drafting of the Development Plan of the Micro-region of Río Gallegos. Supra-local planning is essential to

deal with current urbanization dynamics that could jeopardize urban areas' territories, affecting the quality of life, natural systems and productive developments. Still, it may be added that, along with the legal, political, administrative and technical issues that have been informed, there is another critical determinant of these planning exercises: the culture of spatial planning. The consensus on the scope of micro-regions and development plans can never be absolute, because the diversity of interests is inherent to any society (Nel-lo, 2011). But it is not exaggerated to argue that the future of spatial planning in Argentina depends essentially on how the new territorial culture, based on the values of respect for the environment, functional rationality and social cohesion, will spread and prevail.

Future studies should evaluate the performance of recently drafted supra-local plans and inquire whether these instruments have an effective influence on the fragmented management of the territory, or instead they promote informal mechanisms as part of the system.

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