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**INSTITUTIONS, SOCIO-POLITICAL ENVIRONMENTS, AND EDUCATIONAL
CHANGE: LESSONS FROM DECENTRALIZATION OF EDUCATIONAL
SERVICES IN BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA. A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS
BETWEEN TWO MUNICIPALITIES**

A Thesis in

Educational Theory and Policy

by

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ABSTRACT

During the last decades, policies of educational decentralization have been globally embraced as a strategy to solve not only problems of governance and finance but also to strengthen educational democratization by bringing decision making closer to the citizenry. Following this worldwide trend, during the early 1990s the Argentine central administration delegated to the provincial administrations some responsibilities of secondary and tertiary schooling. Using an integrative approach and methodology, this study traces different sources of explanation—institutional frameworks, socio-political environmental conditions, and civic capacity characteristics—along the different phases of the 1990s Argentine decentralization policy process while looking comparatively at its outcomes in two school districts of the Province of Buenos Aires.

The results underscores three important points: 1) how Argentina's institutional framework conditioned the policy adoption by centralizing the decision-making and control over the process of education reform at the national level while delegating the responsibilities for policy implementation to the provincial administration; 2) how the province of Buenos Aires adopted and adapted certain aspects of the decentralization policy through informal institutional funding networks of neo-populist style, vesting the education reform to the political aspirations of the governor and, 3) how the distinct socio-political environment of each school district produced differential policy outcomes towards three policies of the decentralization reform: school autonomy, community participation in education, and the role of the local educational administration. These

differences surfaced through the inefficiencies of the provincial administration to respond to new educational responsibilities.

Evidence from the two school districts included in the study—La Matanza and Vicente López—that differ in size, political culture, and socio-economic level illustrates varied resources for adjusting provincial mandates to the socio-political circumstances. La Matanza's chaotic environment, inefficient managerial capacities, and its economic and political subordination to the provincial administration, have been the origins of an almost inactive school-community relationship except for the activity promoted by the decentralized and informal provincial social welfare network that used the school as the center of political clientelism. The school-community relationship's apathy was also evident among the school, local school board and the local administration interaction. On the other hand, Vicente López's charismatic leadership, accountable and efficient managerial capacity—based primarily on an informal institutional funding channel established between the local administration and a local business association—and its political rivalry with the provincial administration have allowed this district to maintain certain autonomy from the latter and to have an active role at the school level. This municipality has also proved to be pro-active in establishing participatory channels between the school, the local school board, and local civil associations.

The particular state-society relationship established in each district proves that socio-political environments and civic involvement characteristics have an important effect in determining the type of community involvement developed. However, the effect dilutes at the school level where the formal structure of the provincial educational system

is still an important determinant of in-school participatory outcomes. As a whole the study demonstrates that when global trends are carried out at the national level, they are not only conditioned by national institutional frameworks but also by local socio-political environments in which they operate proving that, in some cases, neither civic involvement nor decentralization equal democratization at the local and school level.

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INTRODUCTION

In a context of global transformations, fiscal discipline and austerity, and under efficiency and democratization arguments, policies of educational decentralization have been implemented around the world to solve problems of governance and finance (McGinn, 1996; Davis & Guppy, 1997). In the 1990s, as part of those transformations and under the same arguments, Argentina transferred aspects of decision-making of secondary schools and teacher training administration from the central government to the twenty-three provinces and the city of Buenos Aires. The directive of the Ministry of Education resulted in a concentration of control over the process of educational decentralization while delegating responsibilities to the provinces for policy implementation (Dussel & Thisted, 1995; Hanson, 1996; Tiramonti, 1996).

Although global trends have propelled decentralization as a strategy in many nations, the actual implementation of it proves more difficult. The neo-liberal vision of decentralizing the governance of public schooling presents a paradox in implementation (Astiz, 1999). What will be the outcome of implementing educational decentralization in a partial centralized system? Under what conditions does decentralization assist in creating democratic values that strengthen civil society and activate civic capacity in support of public education? Ultimately, how does operational decentralization affect communities with different resources?

The educational decentralization process, or transference as it is usually known, and reform conducted in Argentina offers a unique opportunity to address these questions

for the following reasons: 1) the twenty-four regional governments, with almost identical educational institutional structures, were granted responsibility over the secondary schooling system and teacher training; 2) the Ministry of Education applied the same directive to all provinces and it was conducted almost simultaneously; 3) the social, economic, and political-cultural environment across provinces and within them vary considerably.

Argentina is also an interesting case because: 1) the implementation of educational decentralization is a good illustration of response to global transformations than to a real commitment to change from within; 2) decentralization was achieved during the early 1990s through a top-down process; 3) the implementation process of educational decentralization in the 1990s is a good example of how local economic, political, and cultural characteristics of constituencies were not being considered and instead a *one fits all policy* was implemented.

This case is also a good example for comparative analysis, particularly for those interested in the dynamics, development, and outcomes of institutional environments for whom this study may have significance beyond the Argentine borders. This study has implications for policy makers and scholars worldwide who are trying to involve *the public* through policies of educational decentralization at a time when *the public* is retreating from the civic and political arena (Putnam, 1995; Cavarozzi & Palermo, 1995; Fukuyama, 1995). This study might suggest to policy makers and researchers that policies involving the public needs to be put back into the analysis of educational reforms, particularly when democratization is the main goal.

The ambiguity presented before—in regards to the general process of education decentralization in Argentina—generated my interest in studying the process in depth, particularly in terms of its outcomes at the provincial and local levels. Most of the literature that has been written about educational decentralization in Latin America (hereafter, LA) deals mainly with development, resource allocation, student performance, efficiency, accountability, and equity, is prescriptive in form, and focuses on describing common types and solutions (Rondinelli, 1990; Prawda, 1993; Winkler, 1993; Fiske, 1996; Lauglo, 1996; Hanson, 1997; Peterson, 1997; King & Osler, 1998; World Bank, 1999; Bray, 1999; Wrinkler, 2000). Less research has been concentrated on the political context, implementation, and outcomes of decentralization of educational administration and governance in LA (McGuinn & Street, 1986; Weiler, 1993; Hanson, 1995). Only a few researchers looked at the consequences of implementing educational decentralization at sub-national units (Dussel & Thisted, 1995; Fuller & Rivarola, 1998; Rhoten, 2000). This study expands this under researched area by looking comparatively at the consequences of educational decentralization in two communities, particularly at the connection among institutional structures, socio-economic and political environmental conditions, and educational change.

During the last decades, many scholars have discussed issues of democracy and democratization in light of the emergence of a new wave of democracies in the Latin American region during the 1980s (Huntington, 1991). Scholars were mainly concerned with the survival of these new regimes. In this regard, ideas of administrative decentralization have been introduced under the conviction that local democratization

matters for national democratic governance (Fox, 1994). In general, this conviction assumes a cause effect relationship between decentralization, local democratization, and national democratic governance. According to Fox, “local democratization has two dimensions. First, it opens up sub-national governments for electoral competition. Second, it entails the elimination of exclusionary political practices” (p.106). But is that the case?

For Putnam (1993) and other scholars (e.g., Almond & Verba, 1980; Muller & Seligson, 1994; Diamond, 1994; Reilly, 1994; Inglehart, 1997; Seligson, 1999, among others) the norms and the characteristics of civic involvement ¹ affect the performance of representative government. Putman (1993), for example, using a case study of the reform that occurred in Italy in the 1970s when Rome’s centralized government delegated decision-making and resources to new regional units, explored the effectiveness of regional government. In his work, systematic research showed that certain aspects of governance were determined by civic engagement traditions or the absence of them.

Following some of these ideas my study on decentralization will be an attempt to offer an empirical research that connects institutions, political environment, and

¹ *Civic involvement or community participation* is defined by the way people participate at the local level the number and demographics of active local voluntary associations, activities of voluntary associations, the membership of voluntary associations, and voting behavior in local elections. When the interconnectedness among organizations and the administrative units is considered then I called it *civic capacity*. Civic capacity is understood by Stone (2001) as the way in which different sectors of the community—parents, educators, local officials, non-profit organizations, and others—act jointly around community issues and consequently educational issues.

educational governance.² My argument is that the characteristics of a particular institutional and socio-political environment—provincial and local in this case—will have an impact on the implementation and outcome of educational decentralization policy, and ultimately on the consequences of educational decentralization at the local level. For this reason, this study develops a thorough analysis of the national directive of educational decentralization, the provincial adaptation, and its consequences at the municipal level. The exploration embodied in this work takes me to the peculiarities of the Province of Buenos Aires, Argentina, its institutions, political environments, and to its fascinating diversity.

The overarching question this study addresses is: What are the consequences of educational decentralization in two municipalities of Buenos Aires that differ in socio-political environment and civic capacity characteristics? Thus, this study will look particularly at the outcomes of the educational decentralization process enacted in the 1990s in terms of:

² *Socio-Political environment* is defined by the socio-economic context and the political culture. Following the sociological neo-institutional approach and social movements literature, political culture is defined as the legitimate way of doing politics in a particular context. For this tradition, the idea of *rules of the game* is defined in a broader sense. In this case political culture is not defined as individual level attitudes as the civic culture traditions does but as a *way of doing politics* in a specific socio-economic and political context, which is influenced by the complex relationship of the provincial and local political tradition. I will come back to this point in chapter 3.

Political tradition is defined by the political party that has historically been governing or influencing a particular context. In this study the context is referred as province, communities or municipalities.

Institutions refer to macro structural determinants and provincial education and governmental structures.

1. Power distribution and responsibilities between the national, provincial, and municipal governments. I will look particularly to the role left of the local school council.
2. School governance and the idea of school autonomy
3. School-community relations

Several related specific research questions will guide parts of the analysis:

a) How do formal provincial institutional arrangements affect the outcomes mentioned above? If policies that tend to change the structure of educational governance are enacted, as happened with the policy of educational decentralization in Argentina in the early 1990s, can we expect that practice will follow? In order to address this issue this study will look particularly at the province of Buenos Aires and the two communities of my interest to see how the province dealt with these new administrative responsibilities; if its previous structure of governance and its political environment shape the reform outcomes by shaping actors' strategies and actions.

b) Assuming that practice follows in the province of Buenos Aires can we expect variation across municipalities? What gives an account of that variation? Does the variation depend on their socio-political environment? To give an account of this dilemma, this study will look at two municipalities of the Great Buenos Aires, La Matanza and Vicente López, with different socio-political and economic resources and density of community organizations.

c) How do the characteristics of civic capacity impact on participation in education? This question is aimed at exploring the assumption of those who propose educational

decentralization policies as a way to generate a more accountable and participatory system of education and to strengthen civil society. Thus, do the characteristics of civic involvement and the degree of participation in each locality have an effect on participation in education? And to what extent is civic capacity a condition of the local institutional structure or of its socio-political environment? To answer these questions, I examine in this study a before/after comparison of civil society involvement at the local level after the educational directive was in place.

Using a mixed methodology (Morgan, 1998) and a multiple case study (Yin, 1994) this study is organized as follows. Chapter 1 reviews the general and most current literature about educational decentralization, particularly those studies concerned with Latin America. Chapter 2 looks at the argument and rationale used to decentralize in the 1990s. This chapter also presents some theoretical and policy roots of the discussions on participation and civil society with the corresponding democratization rationale. Chapter 3 brings an analytical attempt to bridge both the traditional decentralization approaches with ideas drawn from the participation and civil society rationale. In this regard, a conceptual model created for this purpose will be developed. This model rests on thoughts coming from the sociological and political science neo-institutional approach. This chapter also addresses the methodological portion of this dissertation and places the theoretical model in action by unfolding the characteristics of this multiple case and mixed methodology study.

Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 show collectively the results of this comprehensive study. Chapter 4 situates Argentina's policy of education decentralization in context. It shows

how globalization has influenced the spread of reforms for decentralizing school governance and the consequences that these global reforms have on national structures of education governance. To meet this purpose, the chapter begins with a description of globalization and decentralization reforms followed by empirical analyses in which I briefly describe recent reforms in four nations and quantitatively examine thirty-nine using the data from the Third International Math and Science Study (TIMSS). These analyses are examples of the consequence that these reforms have on models of administrative governance across nations.

Chapters 5 and 6 cover the qualitative portion of this multiple case study while Chapter 7 gives us a sense of the peculiarities of general involvement and civil society characteristics at the local level and its impact over participation at the school level. Chapter 5 situates the case of Buenos Aires in context by describing Argentina's education decentralization policy formulation and adoption. The chapter shows how Argentina also followed the worldwide decentralization pattern previously described. As these global forces have met and blended with existing national structures, an interesting and complex process has occurred in its administration of education, one among the various mixes of decentralized and centralized administration of education described in Chapter 4.

Chapter 6 builds the cases of the province of Buenos Aires and the two municipalities in question in this study. It shows how the province responded to the education decentralization policy, its implementation and adaptation and the consequences for education at the municipal level, especially for the role of local school

councils, participation at the school level, and school autonomy. The chapter explores the differential patterns and the informal practices that emerged from the municipal case studies and gives an account of how the outcome of in-school-participation, the role of the local school board, and school autonomy was conditioned not only by the provincial system restructuring, but for the most part by the socio-political environment they are a part of. These differential environmental factors act as buffers and moderate the effects of current efforts to decentralize education in Argentina.

The last results chapter, Chapter 7, shows quantitative evidence of participation at the local level in terms of the action and involvement of the voluntary associations that operate in the municipalities chosen for this study and in particular about their involvement in education. The results of civic involvement characteristics in each municipality prove to be an important determinant of collaboration among different administrative levels.

The last section of this venture gives the readers my concluding thoughts and the implications of this study for education policy. Although this analysis is mainly about and particularly meant for Argentina, the analytical ideas expressed here can be of use for scholars in the field, and indeed, will have special relevance for comparative education.

CHAPTER 1
EDUCATIONAL DECENTRALIZATION:
THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL APPROACHES

The decentralization of government services is now a commonplace occurrence used to solve problems of governance and finance worldwide. During the last decades, educational decentralization has been a popular strategy of educational policy in many LA countries such as Argentina. Most of the literature that has been written on administrative change in LA deals mainly with development, resource allocation, efficiency, and accountability, is prescriptive in form, and focuses on describing common types and solutions. Less research has examined the political and cultural context of administrative reforms, the characteristics of the changing role of the national state in an internationalized economy, and how all this influences and constrains the possibility of change in educational governance.

My study of education decentralization in Argentina is not focused on the more basic ideas of the impact on education quality, cost-efficiency, or cost-effectiveness arguments. Instead, the less studied connection among schools, different levels of governance, and community participation is the central point of my analysis. One main question guides this chapter: what theoretical and empirical approaches have been used in the literature about education decentralization policies? As I answer this question, I review the most compelling literature that offers theoretical and empirical approaches to education policy analysis in LA, other developing countries and Argentina. While doing

so, I explore alternative ways of analyzing education decentralization policies in the 1990s.

I start this literature review by clarifying decentralization as a concept. The second section reviews conceptual and empirical literature on educational decentralization that deals with political and administrative rationales as well as recent studies that challenge those approaches. The last section reviews particular studies in education decentralization conducted in Argentina. The chapter, as a whole, identifies strengths and limitations in the literature while setting the foundation for my project.

Theoretical Issues in Decentralization

Decentralization: A Fuzzy Concept

The decentralization of the educational systems in many LA countries goes hand in hand with the process of overall decentralization within the country and the world system. The analysis of the concept of decentralization faces several obstacles. The first is that the literature on decentralization employs so many interpretations (at different levels—administrative, political, and financial—making it difficult to establish clear boundaries) that this makes one justifiably question whether so many perspectives on the process are of any analytic use. As Bray (1984) suggested, a necessary starting point is the clarification of the term. Governments may take different forms, from highly centralized systems, on the one hand, to highly decentralized ones, on the other. At the same time, systems can be centralized in some respects and decentralized in others. Nevertheless, it is necessary to begin with the simplest definition.

Decentralization in essence has been seen as a symbol of modernization, meaning more local or regional participation in the process of decision-making. It "refers to a process in which subordinate levels of a hierarchy are authorized by the higher body to make decisions about the use of the organization's resources [and governance]" (Bray, 1984, p. 5). But the very possibility of talking about decentralization stems from the fact that systems were previously centralized. This may seem an obvious point, but nevertheless, educational scientists have not exhaustively analyzed it in the past.

In addition to the previous definition, Morris (1992) said that the term decentralization entails,

two facts: (1) policies involving governments and their agents at various levels [in an] attempt to devolve powers and to subdivide tasks, and (2) an observable process occurring in many areas, . . . viewed as . . . economic, social, or political-administrative process, with spatial connotations (p. 3).

Although the common use of decentralization is associated with the spatial process, for a better understanding of the LA situation it would be more useful if the decentralization process is viewed as a phenomenon affecting the way the administrative functions are organized, with a spatial connotation of the administrative operations.

For the purpose of this review, it is important to make a distinction between political and administrative decentralization. Decentralization is political or democratic when the process includes people that are outside the original administrative hierarchy in

decision-making. Administrative or bureaucratic decentralization, on the other hand, is essentially a management strategy. Concerning the latter, the political power largely remains at the top level of the organization, while responsibility for some decisions about management, finance and other activities is assigned to lower levels of government (Fiske, 1996).

It is important to recognize, though, that the meaning of decentralization may vary from country to country (Winkler, 1993). Even within a country, differences in interpretation and process of decentralization can be held and implemented simultaneously, as found by Rhoten (2000). Such variation can be important barriers in any evaluation of decentralizing efforts because the means may differ. Therefore, as an initial step towards the clarification of the purpose of decentralization the following section will address some theoretical approaches that analyze decentralization from both political and administrative rationales.

Administrative and Political Rationales for Decentralization

Administrative Rationale

Structural functional explanations, especially using managerial public administration arguments, have been the most publicly justified claims for educational decentralization. Advocates of decentralization usually focus on structural issues related to a given educational system. These approaches are principally concerned with the ways in which educational resources are distributed, managed, and utilized. In general these

explanations claim the need to reform the state's administrative and governance structures under cost-efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and education quality arguments.

Administrative rationales are applied when control of decision-making is devolved to a lower level. According to these rationales some common typologies are created depending upon who has the right to decide and what ideas support the decision to decentralize. It is postulated that this is a more efficient way of achieving educational goals. The key questions in this regard are: (a) how can education be most efficiently and effectively provided, and (b) what are the most responsive and flexible structures for meeting local and recipient needs (Lauglo & McLean, 1984; Rodinelli, McCullough & Johnson, 1989; Rodinelli, 1990; Prawda, 1993; Hanson, 1997). These questions point out that administrative decentralization has more to do with the implementation of educational policies and priorities than with their identification and development.

Spatial and territorial redistribution of control over these aspects tells very little, however, about the power structures that exist in a particular educational system. In a decentralized system, control over key policy decisions may still be retained at the administrative center. This suggests that administrative decentralization is compatible with centralization. Conversely, a centralized educational system may also engage in transferring control. For example, Lauglo and McLean (1984) point out that even centralized socialist societies such as Cuba may decentralize administrative control.

A focus on administrative decentralization efforts may illuminate the ways that an educational system is structured and consequently how education will be provided and distributed, but it ignores the ways in which power is distributed within the system. It

fails as well to differentiate two key dimensions of an educational system: policy control and policy implementation. Governments may devolve powers of implementation to schools or grant other agencies or individuals the freedom to provide education while retaining control over functions such as curriculum and financing.

Administrative decentralization, therefore, does not take into account either the political dimension of education or the process and context in which these changes arise. These structural functional arguments usually assume a cause-effect relationship, which presupposes that the implementation of policies of decentralization will produce a spontaneous benefit for the country as a whole by making the system more efficient. Without ignoring those valid arguments, I argue that we cannot adequately understand the phenomenon using only these lenses, especially since these theoretical approaches are formulated on deterministic explanations. Consequently, this approach fails to grasp issues that are central to arguments made in favor of educational decentralization. These issues are the transfer of power, the functions of the different levels of governance, and the ways in which control is exercised.

Political Rationale

The political rationale for educational decentralization is to redistribute, share, and extend power as well as to enhance participation by removing centralized control over educational decision making. As Lauglo (1996) points out, the political case for educational decentralization raises several questions, among them: who has the right to decide how education will be decentralized? What is the role of the state in educational

decentralization? And, what form of democracy is being promoted when education is decentralized? Issues relating to the privatization of education and the values and objectives that underpin the education system are also brought into sharper focus.

In examining arguments in favor of educational decentralization, various writers have raised doubts about whether decentralization does indeed engender a transfer of power (McGinn & Street, 1986). They further contend that central governmental authority for educational decision-making is never actually totally transferred (Bowe, Ball & Gold, 1992). Thus, the claim of redistribution of authority, as Weiler (1990) points out, cannot be accepted unconditionally. Moreover, the political rationale for educational decentralization generally is overwhelmed by a number of problems. There is increasing evidence to suggest that educational decentralization does not lead to genuine participation (Astiz, 1999; Dussel, Tiramonti & Birgin, 2000). It also has been argued that the policy of educational decentralization is a specific response to the crisis of capitalist welfare states (Arnove, 1997; Torres & Puiggros, 1997).

Thus, the political dimension of this policy can be understood as a reconstitution of the form of the state and consequently a reformulation of the nature of control or authority exercised in education (Lauglo, 1996). In this respect, the crucial claim is that educational decentralization is an attempt by the state to operate at a distance and, by doing so, to simultaneously portray itself as both being with the people and existing at the very point where the policies are implemented. By diffusing forms of control in this way, educational decentralization takes back the traditional power relation that exists between

government and people. Those practices could be promoted by local demands, or simply by constraining the central government.

What neither the administrative rationale nor many of the political arguments do is to recognize the legitimating value of decentralization. For those analyses, the course of action tends to bring the decision-making process nearer to the constituency being served. An important point to address here in order to complement this discussion is that the process of decentralization may act as a clear legitimization policy of the state (Meyer, 1980; Meyer, Boli & Ramirez, 1997). Many educational decentralizing practices can be seen as instruments to increase certain levels of authority while banning certain groups and supporting others. In many cases decentralizing steps may be used as a way to show modernization and democratizing under external pressure while re-institutionalizing centralism. In LA, examples of that type can be found in Chile and Colombia where decentralization attempted to reduce the power of teacher unions while supporting certain levels of control at the center—such as issues of curriculum and teachers' salaries (McGinn & Street, 1986).

Educational Decentralization and the Legitimization of the State

The concept of legitimacy, based in modern sociological literature, is associated with the problem of political representation and loyalty that citizens delegate in a specific political regime (state or government). The state's legitimacy or illegitimacy is related to the idea that the state acts in terms of its legal capacity, which gives validity to the state governmental and political actions.

Giddens (1992), whose ideas are influenced by those of the German sociologist Max Weber, says that the state (as a cultural, political, and geographical entity, associated with the concept of Nation-State) exists when there is a political apparatus (governmental institutions, public functionaries governing over a particular territory), whose authority or legitimacy is supported by the legal system or by the capacity to use force to implement policies.

Legitimacy, according to the Weberian intellectual tradition, lies in the voluntary acceptance of shared values and norms of a specific political system by the social actors. The survival of that system, structured according to definite power relations, depends on the system's capacity to cultivate the common belief of the goodness of its political actions. Thus, the problem of legitimacy becomes associated with the idea of consensus, which can be obtained through the general practice of reformist public rhetoric with the purpose to reach state legitimacy.

Many educational decentralizing practices can be seen as instruments to increase certain levels of obedience and certain authority under the supposition of the *goodness* of the policy. It is important to keep in mind that many decentralizing steps may be praised by the rhetoric of the central government with the intention to show modernization while re-institutionalizing centralism (McGinn & Street, 1986; Weiler, 1993; Astiz, 1999). In many cases those policies were not implemented in the way that they were enunciated. After reviewing decentralization efforts in LA, McGinn and Street (1986) assert that the central role of the state's political project is the main condition to getting beyond the level of rhetoric. An important point that they make is that the state and the people are not

always separate entities, and they may be closely allied or opposed to one another. In each case reviewed by the authors, decentralization was put into effect to favor certain groups and to ban others.

Following the same analysis, Weiler (1993) offered a theoretical basis to understand school decentralization that has its origin at the central level. He argues that central leadership constantly tries to combine two conflicting objectives, assuming effective control over their policies and maintaining the legitimacy of the rules. In this regard, centralization provides control while decentralization fosters legitimacy. Decentralization, in this case, could be a useful tactic to manage conflict and obtain legitimacy—what Weiler called *compensatory legitimation* or remedial strategy.

In this regard, McGinn and Street (1986) opened an interesting debate about the concept of conflict expressed in the process of centralization-decentralization as a single phenomenon. The analysis of recent attempts of decentralization requires an understanding of the contradictions within the political system. In Latin American countries, strong centralization coexists with particular forms of bureaucratic decentralization. This form has been implemented to certain degrees in many countries, particularly in Argentina, Mexico and Colombia.

McGinn and Street (1986) suggested that the state can be considered as a coalition of ruling organizations or groups, and the type of centralization-decentralization describes the center of control institutionalized in the state through educational planning. Through decentralization, the state reduces conflict by increasing the participation of certain groups. The process of centralization-decentralization is seen by these authors as

an efficient way to manage conflict and to promote a peaceful coexistence between groups. However, the situation described by McGinn and Street was not the case in many situations where decentralization was a unilateral decision imposed from the center under conditions of fiscal constraints (Hanson, 1996; Senén González & Kisilevsky, 1993; Senén González & Arango, 1996; Kisilevsky, n.d.; Astiz, 1999).

By analyzing decentralization only within the confines of a country's borders these approaches do not realize what actually is being legitimized: a new international order. Under pressures of international global competition the administrative transformation of the state was conducted, in many cases, within an economic context of fiscal discipline and austerity in public spending. This transformed state needs to be stronger in the discharge of its social duties and better prepared to regulate and control the newly privatized activities. In those cases, educational decentralization was one more tactic of the neoliberal transformation. This argument will be developed in the following sections.

Globalization and Decentralization

Hand in hand with economic globalization goes a change in the role of the state. Globalization means that external variables have an increased influence on the domestic agendas, reducing the margin for national choices. Requirements for external competitiveness have led to greater homogeneity of the institutional and regulatory frameworks of states. These requirements have left less room for widely differentiated national strategies with regard to macro-economic policy (Ramirez, 1997).

Both international public opinion and market behavior have also come to play a role in redefining the range of possible action by states. Information flows freely and rapidly while markets follow certain orthodoxy in economic matters. They establish a pattern of economic conduct, which admits little variation in a world of immense variety of national realities. The complex process of adjustment must not ignore such diversity.

Globalization has changed the role of the state in another dimension. It has completely shifted the emphasis of government action, which now almost exclusively lies on making the overall national economy develop and sustain conditions for competitiveness on a global scale (Davis & Guppy, 1997). And all this has to be done at a time when democratic values and a strengthened civil society compound the demands for change.

Schriewer (2000) refers to the decentralizing practice as an effect of the world dynamic, where educational practices become institutionalized as part of the global educational discourse. Decentralization in this context can be seen as a global imposition of standardized educational models where the local social-historical and political conditions are not taken into account. Following this assumption, it is possible to presume that in many LA countries, educational decentralization is a result of common worldwide-accepted precepts. Educational reforms reveal the need to legitimize a new organizational order. Educational decentralization policies in LA appear as an attempt to incorporate political practices previously implemented in other regions or countries with the primary intention to legitimate global imperatives through the state transformation.

This transformation was internationally accepted as a way to reach certain levels of development (Garrido Perez, 1996).

Nowadays, educational reforms, such as the process of decentralization, have been considered in the LA context as taken for granted practices, rules, and beliefs to reach “modernization.” Despite educational reform practices being essentially isomorphic, in terms of the norms that they share, they have differences depending upon each educational realm. These policies are a product of the characteristics of the organizations that shape the development of the state.

Empirical Studies in Decentralization in Latin America

Empirical studies on educational decentralization will be organized in this review using the same pattern followed to address the theoretical discussion on decentralization: administrative and political approaches.

Administrative Approaches

Since the 1980s, a great number of empirical studies have been conducted to analyze educational decentralization in Latin America. This review will address the most significant ones. Most of the studies have used the administrative rationale as a way to approach the topic. In general, this type of analysis tends to find common patterns and solutions while identifying different decentralization types based on Rondinelli’s typology (Prawda, 1993, 1992; Hanson, 1997; Bray, 1999).

Technical studies of decentralization tend to be concerned with specific policy outcomes. The authors tend to seek a relationship between particular policy inputs and financial, organizational or pedagogical outcomes. In this regard, they assess the effect of decentralization using cost-effectiveness measures such as rates of student's promotion, graduation, assessment rates relative to the resources expended per student, and quality (Stevenson & Baker, 1991; Rounds, 1997; Carnoy, 1998; King & Osler, 1998; World Bank, 1999).

Other studies compare the cost-efficiency of decentralization to centralization as measured by resource generation and allocation relative to the minimization of per student cost (Oates, 1991; Winkler, 1996). Or, they tend to concentrate on fiscal decentralization as a way to achieve equity (Winkler, 1989; Porto & Sanguinetti, 1993; Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo, 1994; Carciofi, Cetrángolo & Larraña, 1996). Some arguments for decentralization in LA have been to move taxing and expenditure responsibilities to the communities. Fiscal decentralization, in particular, is based on the assumption that local governments are able to perform administrative functions effectively and with more transparency.

In the same vein, recent studies in educational decentralization tend to assess its effects on school autonomy and education quality (Alvarez, 1999; Viola Espinola, 2000; Winkler & Gershberg, 2000). Drawing results from different countries in the Latin American region, these studies show that the type of decentralization conducted is a key factor in determining the effectiveness of schools and the quality of education systems. However, is it possible to make inferences of this kind?

Underlying these technical approaches is the “linear and misleading assumption” (Cohen & Peterson, 1996, p. 26) that educational decentralization follows a causal model in which an objective policy leads to clear and discernible outcomes. While the technical or administrative approach can offer some light into the limitations of the process of decentralization at the local level, it cannot accurately measure decentralization implementation nor effectively predict its outcomes due to two main reasons. By focusing on inputs and outputs, this linear analytic model cannot account for the factors that may affect government spending and decision-making, parental commitment, and cultural and contextual characteristics. Moreover, due to its hypothesis that decentralization enhances proficiency and efficiency, the technical approach fails to assess decentralization as a process of social and political change.

Political Approaches

Political approaches to education policy are, on the other hand, generally concerned with the question of power. Within these approaches, practitioners and researchers seek to find relationships between public interests in education and the source and course of public decisions regarding education policy. Consequently, political approaches to education decentralization tend to examine the conflicts over the decision to decentralize, the sources of such conflicts, the possibility of resolving them, and the modes for resolving, or at least, managing them. In this regard, political analytic models focus mainly on tensions and negotiations between national governments, large education bureaucracies, and/or well-organized interest groups (Weiler, 1993; Fiske, 1996).

Following this analytical tradition, Hanson (1996, 1997) made an interesting analysis contrasting strategies, procedures and outcomes of educational reform as they took place in Argentina and other Hispanic countries during the process of transition from an authoritarian to democratic form of government. He found that under a democratic form of government the participative strategy for change encountered many barriers (managerial, financial, planning, among others) that impeded a successful decentralization. The problem with these political analyses of decentralization is that they are often guided by *naïve assumptions* (Cohen & Peterson, 1996, p. 24) that education is only a product of national socio-political systems comprised of clear and homogenously defined interests rather than a myriad of local structures with different expectations and possibilities.

Although political approaches provide some insight into the conflicts that shape the decisions and strategies of education decentralization, these approaches are reductionist in their ability to understand how and why these decisions and strategies play out at the international, national and local level. Decentralization specialists like Brian Smith (1985) argue that decentralization cannot be a political strategy in and of itself because its outcomes necessarily depend on the politics, economics, and sociology of particular local settings.

Interpretative Approaches

Recent decentralization analysis (Fuller & Rivarola, 1998; Rhoten, 2000) challenge both administrative and political approaches. These approaches to education

policy analysis are concerned with “meanings.” Such approaches try to relate personal experiences and understanding with individual logics and actions within the policy process.

Fuller & Rivarola (1998) conducted a study of twelve schools in Nicaragua. The study employed interpretative techniques in an effort to consider “how different school-based actors interpret autonomy and changes in the schools resulting from the reform” (Fuller & Rivarola, 1998, p. ii). This study gives a sense of how actors in particular schools construct meanings about decentralization but, unfortunately, their narrative does not move beyond the mere description of actors’ views in an attempt to make a clear connection with larger contextual factors.

Using a global-local condition of possibility model that examines “international origins,” “national intentions” and “local interpretations,” Rhoten (2000, p. 593) tries to make sense of the decentralization strategy adopted by Argentina in the 1990s. Even when she conceptualizes change in the context of global and local transformations, her study lacks clear details of historical and local—municipal—political determinants that make change happen, or not, at that specific governance level and school level. Unfortunately, her study does not give policy makers a clear strategy to improve the process that is underway.

However, Rhoten’s work is an important source that shows the diversity in interpretation and implementation of decentralization policies among different sub-national units through a comparative analysis of three provinces in Argentina. The study shows that the processes and outcomes of the international originated decentralization

policy are not universal and that the policy interpretations and actions depend on the local geo-economic conditions, administrative capacities, and the provincial state-society relations of power and authority respectively.

Argentine Views

This section reviews literature on the educational decentralization process written by Argentine researchers in the 1990s. Although the material included here is not exhaustive, it represents the most relevant work conducted in the field. The articles presented in this section have been selected based on the purpose of the study and the organization of this review. The format of this section parallels the previous one. It will show the arguments and rationales used in the literature to address the process of educational decentralization in Argentina followed by my critique.

Initial Steps: An Administrative Rationale

Most of the early literature that dealt with the educational decentralization policy in the 1990s was interested in the process from an administrative point of view (Aguerrondo in Prawda, 1993; Bravo, 1994; Ferreira et al., 1994). These studies describe primarily how change took place in Argentina both at the national and provincial level, the new responsibilities assumed by each administrative level, and the newly established relationships between the national and provincial administrative units.

In general, studies of this kind are centered on the description of the National Ministry directive and issues of planning and management. They are concerned with the

organizational structure adopted by the National Ministry of Education and the provincial counterpart as well as the roles assumed by level of decision-making regarding particular educational functions: curriculum and teaching methods, teaching recruitment, finance, and the amount of schools and personnel transferred from the national to the provincial system. Although limited in scope, these studies have been a useful initial step for a relatively *newborn* transformation and field of study.

Years later, the process was more settled as was the analysis on educational decentralization in Argentina. The maturity of the process was reflected in the analytical complexity embraced by decentralization specialists. Following the same administrative rationale, recent studies on educational decentralization have argued that a fiscal argument along with a new pattern of resource allocation propelled educational decentralization in Argentina during the 1990s (Senén González & Kisilevsky, 1993; Senén González & Arango, 1996; Senén González, 1997; Cafirori et al., 1996; Kisilevsky, n.d.). The idea of fiscal discipline in the decentralization initiative, intergovernmental tax harmonization transfers and expenditure agreements, under the coordination of the national level, have become more important than education itself (Senén González & Arango, 1996).

In general, these macro level studies argue that the main motivation for this “fiscal type of decentralization” (Kisilevsky, n.d., p. 4) was to redirect—following the constitutional federalist principle, public expenditures to lower administrative units, provinces and municipalities, thus artificially decreasing the national fiscal deficit. The decision to alleviate fiscal pressures upon the central government was considered by

national level officials as a priority to facilitate the renegotiation of the Argentine external debt and sustain international credit line.

These reports also illustrate the discrepancies between the National Ministry of Education directive, which pursued efficiency and modernization strategies, and the reality of the impoverished provincial budgets, which were unable to assume the newly delegated responsibilities. As the sociologist Senén González stated, “with this type of transfer the nation sends to the provinces, along with the financial burden, the educational problems as well” (1994, p.14 in Hanson, 1996). Thus, the process was carried out without considering regional differences in revenue base, local administrative capacities, and diverse educational needs. Thus, based upon social, fiscal, and financial provincial conditions, the crude reality demonstrated the need to keep reviewing, monitoring, and economically supporting provincial education through national grant programs (Kisilevsky, n.d.).

Although valuable sources of general information, these studies do not sufficiently address what they particularly criticized—the process’ lack of compromise with education. By concentrating the analysis only at the macro level—national and provincial—they avoid finding relationships between the policy and organizational and pedagogical outcomes. Additionally, by only addressing decentralization as a mechanism in itself and not as part of a whole process of reforms, they fail to tell the reader about the socio-political process and the politics of the educational decentralization in Argentina. Regardless of the type of decentralization conducted, policies of these sorts are not politics free.

A Political Rationale

Other studies, following a political rationale, have been concerned with issues of socio-economic contexts, governance, redistribution of political power, tensions between national and sub-national administrative units, and internal political dynamics both at the national and sub-national level (Tiramonti, 1996; Senén González, 1989, 2000). In such approaches, the decentralization process in education is seen as a decision originated as part of a comprehensive reform (neoliberal in form) of the state and the nation's overall public administration.¹ Moreover, besides internal dynamics, these studies recognize that external pressures also helped to push for educational decentralization.

Analysts that use a political rationale try to relate provincial responses to educational decentralization not only to the political tension between the center and the periphery bureaucracies but also with their cultural and political tradition. They show how regional politics are becoming more influential in education with decentralization. Usually, by comparing different provincial case studies, these researchers illustrate the diverse interpretation of the educational decentralization directive and the heterogeneity of provincial responses in implementation (Tiramonti, 1996; Senén González, 2000).

Sometimes, by combining analytic tools from both administrative and political rationales, research illustrates that only in a few cases does the decentralization process help to strengthen local administrative bureaucracies and to share administrative, financial, and decision making responsibilities among national, provincial and district levels (Braslavsky, 1999). In other cases, new avenues of sub-national influence are

¹ For a detailed analysis of these changes see Paviglianitti (1991) and Torres & Puiggros (1997).

restricted to the capacity of local leaders to articulate demands along the lines of political-clientele reciprocity and, in contradiction with the efficiency argument, increased education inefficiency (Senén González, 1989).

By and large, the unit of analysis of these projects is either the national or the provincial level. Alone, however, none of these studies can appropriately account for the effects of education decentralization at the municipal, district and school level. Despite numerous claims to address this level of analysis, few analysts attempted to do so. Very few studies have been found that look particularly to the effects of the reform at the municipal and school level (Munin, 1994; Dussel & Thisted, 1995).

The first attempt (Munin, 1994), presents a critical analysis of the operation of three local school councils after implementing the educational decentralization policy in the province of Buenos Aires. Using three case studies selected by their socio-economic and educational characteristics—low, medium, or high—the research illustrates the interest involved in the different school districts and their ability to govern education efficiently. According to the results, the school councils located in both the medium and high school districts have been able to respond more effectively, although not free from “clientelistic” practices, to the provision of education services.

In sum, the study shows the heterogeneity of local responses and, to some extent, negative effects on education quality and equity. It would be interesting for us, as readers of this study, to get more information on the localities that the author described, particularly because their identity, case selection, and project design remained undisclosed in the paper.

The second study (Dussel & Thisted, 1995) attempted to analyze education decentralization using qualitative techniques. In their case study of one municipality in the province of Buenos Aires that suffers from the general economic turmoil, interviews among different educational actors were conducted in an effort to understand how they interpret changes in the provincial system of education and particularly in their school district. The results show the school district limitations in the decision-making process and the increasing centralization of power at the provincial level.

This study gives a comprehensive sense of actor's perception of new roles, situations, and conditions that affect education in their province and school district but does not go beyond the description of their narratives. Still, there is a need for a more detailed discussion of the institutional, socio-political, and local cultural factors that also have a play in education. By not relating actor's accounts with the larger context, the research limits the possibility for theoretical considerations for policy making.

As a Way to Conclude: General Critiques

Although valuable sources of information, the studies reviewed in this section have two main limitations. First, regarding their rationale and research design (particularly their unit of analysis). Second, they lack concrete empirical evidence.

In terms of the first limitation, these studies, usually under an administrative rationale, describe the process of education decentralization at the macro-level without integrating those that are recipients of those changes: the school and the lower administrative and political unit. By neglecting from the analysis the effects of those

reforms at the local level they limited the scope of their formulations for policy making. This problem also applies to those that focus on the local or school levels; they miss the larger contextual factor that affects reforms at the micro-level. Educational researchers such as Hargreaves (1985), Bowe, Ball and Gold (1992), and Rhoten (2000), among others, called for the need of a framework that gives account of multiple levels of analysis. It is in this area where I hope to make a contribution.

In terms of the second limitation, much still needs to be empirically tested. Some studies keep the analysis at a theoretical level or make assertions not founded on actual evidence or do not publicize their procedures. Thus, this point situates the discussion in the complex terrain of scientific research. Although debating about reliability, validity, and certainty is not the focus of this section, I will just say that according to King, Keohane and Verba (1994), scientific research should be designed to make explanatory inferences based on empirical information. Any process of inference is not possible without systematically collected data. Scientific research relies on explicit and public methods and imprecise rules of research procedures or of inference makes the study unreliable. Although inference is an imperfect and uncertain process, reaching conclusive results from uncertain data is a difficult endeavor. Conducting any type of research in social sciences is a complex enterprise—its complexity may make the inferences less certain yet, no less scientific.

Decentralization, Participation, and Democracy

The purpose of this section is to introduce my main criticism of the literature of educational decentralization while setting the ground for my own research.

Although the process of administrative and political change is the primary focus of scholars who studied decentralization, the role of local governments and democratization have been relatively neglected. Unfortunately none of the theoretical and/or the empirical studies reviewed used the idea of participation as an approach to the process of educational decentralization, particularly when democratization is claimed.

Going back to the main argument expressed in the introduction of this thesis the characteristic of the decentralization conducted powerfully affects the possibility of civic engagement as well as the performance of representative government, particularly at the local level. The concept of participation or civic engagement that I use is broad in several ways. Going beyond the traditional political participation, which Dahl defined as the act of voting, I consider the term as the voluntary capacity of groups to actively engage themselves in political and non-political activities (the definition is based on Verba et al., 1995 and Armory, 1998). The concept of civic participation is associated with the idea of civil society, which has become very popular today thanks to the struggles against communist regimes as well as dictatorships in Eastern European countries and Latin America during the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s.

By the 1990s, there was a shift in the policy paradigm and a change in the rhetoric around decentralization and democratization. The new arguments that these policies followed were:

(a) Decentralization and privatization of education tend to generate a more democratic, efficient, and accountable system.

(b) A decentralized system should be more responsive to the community and to local needs.

(c) Decentralizing practices contribute to empowerment of teachers, parents and the whole education community while making the school reform more effective.

(d) Through competition, schools will improve quality and can obtain more funds to increase teachers' salaries (IDB, 1994; Arnove, 1997; Peterson, 1996).

However, in many LA cases, decentralization was not accompanied by a real attempt to move the administrative and political power to local institutions. On the contrary, as the case of Argentina shows, the process just transferred the financial burden to the provinces while the municipal councils were left even weaker than they were before due to the removal of previous responsibilities (Hanson, 1995; Astiz, 1999; Dussel, Tiramonti & Birgin, 2000). This recent attempt represents a move towards more centralization of administrative and political power while decentralizing the cost of education. In cases where decentralization or municipalization happened, it was under the introduction of choice and market competition in education through voucher systems or programs of *autonomous schools*. Examples of those reforms can be found in Chile, Colombia, and Nicaragua (Rounds, 1997; Carnoy, 1998; Fuller & Rivarola, 1998).

So, the question becomes: What is meant by participation, civil society, and democratization in this recent decentralization strategy? The answer to this question is described in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 2
CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPATION AND THE DEMOCRATIZATION
RATIONALE FOR DECENTRALIZATION

This chapter deals with the policy rationale used to decentralize education in the 1990s. The argument in question is the idea of participation and civil society with the corresponding democratization rationale. Although the democratization rationale is considered as part of the political rationale stated before, which is to redistribute, share, and extend power as well as to enhance participation by removing centralized control over educational decision making, I assigned a separate section to it since civil society participation is separately analyzed in this study.

This chapter is organized as follows, 1) it reviews literature and documents that justify educational decentralization under the democratization rationale, 2) it goes over some definitions and literature about participation and civil society, and finally, 3) it shows the limitation of the literature on educational decentralization to abridge theoretically and empirically these democratizing ideas with the process of educational decentralization in Argentina.

The Democratization Rationale

The return of civilian rule in many Latin American countries during the 1980s and the developments of the Soviet Union and Asia in the early 1990s led to a worldwide revival of political and economic liberalization. In the political realm, the emphasis was

on political democratization.¹ It was believed that the lack of both citizen participation and a strong civil society was not compatible with democracy and the politics of globalization. In this regard, governments began to limit and circumscribe the role of the state in the economy while shifting social rights such as education and health along administrative and political responsibilities, from national to subnational or private entities—communities, schools, non-governmental organizations—through policies of decentralization, autonomy, and deregulation (Almond & Powell, 1996).

In education, decentralization became equated with democratization on the basis of greater local sovereignty and increased responsiveness to the needs of diverse actors. Decentralization was presented as a win-win situation helping “to maintain political stability and democratize while at the same time, improve efficiency of public services, preserve macro economic stability, and respond to the interest of all groups” (Burki, Perry & Dillinger, 1999, p. 17). This change was clearly stated in the policy discourse adopted by regional, governmental, multilateral lending, and intergovernmental organizations,²

National integration and decentralization—the linchpins of institutional reform—call for administrative autonomy and creativity to ensure the

¹ *Democratization* is the process that involves the “movement from authoritarian to democratic forms of rule” (Sorensen 1998, p.1). It is known that this process has different phases: *background condition, preparation phase, decision phase, and consolidation phase* (Rustow, 1970). It is particularly in this last phase, after the establishment of the democratic rule that the idea of participation and civil society play an important role to further democratic development.

² The Argentine policy discourse is included in the chapter that deals with Argentine education reforms during the 1990s.

effectiveness of the new government role. This can create tensions between government and electorate, diminishing the institutional and political effectiveness of the former. Clearly, therefore, it is necessary to strengthen participatory mechanisms that ensure the governability of countries (UNESCO, 1992; OAS, 1998, p. 8).

In the education field, different actors must play an increasingly dynamic role in administration at the central and regional ministerial levels. . . . Centralization can impede the development of diverse educational models and discourage local support and involvement. It is imperative to endow school, local groups with both the power and the means to implement educational reforms. Multinational organizations, such as NGOs and the private sector, must coordinate to establish complementary policies. Broad social consensus is needed to respond effectively to contemporary social demands: international competition [and] democracy-building (UNESCO/OREALC, 1996, in OAS, 1998, p. 41).

The same argument was used at the 1994 and 1998 Summit of the Americas. In this regard, the *Declaration of Santiago* stated:

The strength and meaning of representative democracy lie in the active participation of individual at all levels of civic life. The democratic

culture must encompass our entire population. We will strengthen education for democracy and promote the necessary actions for government institutions to become more participatory structures. We undertake to strengthen the capabilities of regional and local government, when appropriate, and to foster more active participation by civil society. . (Civil society and the Summit of the Americas: the 1998 Santiago Summit, 1999, p.4).

[At the same time, governments should] strengthen educational management and institutional capacity at the national, regional, local, and school levels, with progress towards decentralization and promotion of community and family involvement, (Civil society and the Summit of the Americas: the 1998 Santiago Summit, 1999, p 223) .³

As is seen from the above citations, the triad democratization, civil society and participation became the “stars” of the decade and the new millennium. Besides the lack of definition of the terms in the policy rhetoric, decentralization and civil society

³ The last Summit of the Americas was held in Santiago, Chile in 1998 and it is for this reason the Declaration has its name. The 1994 meeting was held in Miami, Florida, USA. The Summit of the Americas convokes all the democratically-elected heads of government of the countries of the American Continent. The meeting declaration establishes the region common commitment. In 1998, education was considered the key theme. Among other themes were: strengthening of democracy and civil society, political dialogue, economic stability, progress towards social justice, and trade liberalization policies for hemispheric integration.

participation present the principal sociopolitical challenge worldwide as well as for the creation of national polities.

The concern with civility and civic traditions is not a novel endeavor—Montesquieu, Tocqueville, Mill, and Jefferson were concerned with the idea of civil society as an independent sphere between the state and the market (Meyer & Boyd, 2000). Nor is the argument that civic engagement has a positive impact on economic and institutional development (Putnam et al., 1993). What is relatively novel is that societies that attempt to develop the bases for civility (Putnam et al., 1993) can also erode the foundations that support it at local and national levels, which is something that this research addresses later on.

Recently, many governmental and intergovernmental documents and policy papers written by international developmental lending institutions perceive civil society as an outcome—something that is produced to generate other social goods such as *good educational governance*. Usually this literature establishes a cause-effect relationship among decentralization, civil society, participation, and democratization. But why are civil society and participation considered key components in democratic governance and sustainable development? What helps to produce it? What can be done to reproduce participation over time to enhance institutional effectiveness? These questions require entering the terrain of the academic dialogue and exploring the roots of this argument. That is what the following section does.

Revitalization of Civil Society and Civic Engagement

Like the notion of decentralization the concept of civil society and participation also witnessed a significant revival, indeed a conceptual boom, in the social sciences over the past decade (Cohen & Arato, 1992; Putnam, 1993, 1995a, 1995b; Hall, 1995; Fukuyama, 1995).⁴ As the political scientist Alfred Stepan put it, “civil society became the political celebrity” of many recent Latin American transitions and was consistently viewed as a significant player in the democratization literature (1985, p.5).

Although efforts to delimit the civil society concept vary, I have embraced a wide definition which considers civil society as “the realm of voluntary citizen action that operates collectively in the public sphere. . .and at least in the public discourse, distinguishes itself from the marketplace [and the state]” (Armory 1998, p. 40, Schmitter & Karl, 1991; Cohen & Arato, 1992; Diamond, 1994; Verba et al., 1995). According to Linz & Stepan (1996) civil society is in this sense distinct from the political society, which is involved in the competition to win control over the state apparatus. The idea of adopting this definition of civil society is to situate the discussion in the context of Putnam’s and other neo-Tocquevillians’ views whose conception of civil society is similar to the broad definition adopted here and whose main hypothesis will be challenged in this study.

The current emphasis given to civil society and its democratizing principle both in academia as well as in the policy environment has its roots in Putnam’s study of Italy.

⁴ Participation, civic engagement, civic involvement, civil society participation, community involvement or participation, and popular participation are used interchangeably in this study.

In *Making Democracy Work*, the political scientist Robert Putnam and his associates suggested that democratic institutions rest on a historical associational life, what he refers to as civic community—a network of ties and groups that connect to each other to pursue their interests. His view of civil society is that of one in which citizens engage in different types of associations, from football clubs and neighborhood groups to bowling leagues and theatre clubs (Putnam et al., 1993).

In Putnam's view the interaction of those organizations is what improves the effectiveness of democratic institutions, "social trust, norms of reciprocity, networks of civic engagement, and successful cooperation are mutually reinforcing" (Putnam, 1993, p. 180; 1995a, pp. 65-67). In his view, civic organizations are at the heart of democratic stability, "democratic governments are strengthened when they face a vigorous civil society" (1993, p.182). In his study, Putnam identifies a strong civil society with high levels of civic engagement, suggesting a correspondence between structural characteristics of society—the density of *horizontal associations*, those that bridge social and political divisions and are autonomous from political forces, and a certain kind of political or *civic culture* (Putnam et. al., 1993). Thus, *associacionism* explains higher levels of participation, particularly political participation, and civic culture grows out of those participatory societies.

The civic culture argument, a generalized social trust in government and public officials and high levels of tolerance, although in many versions, has the same underlying assumption, the rise of civic voluntary associations promote liberal values and subsequently democratic institutions (Muller & Seligson, 1994; Inglehart, 1997). This

argument in a sense goes back to the democratic theory of the 1960s popularized by Almond and Verba's study (1963, 1980), *The Civic Culture* and *The Civic Culture Revisited*, in which trust in government was a vital component of stable democracies and, therefore, of civic culture.

A similar line of reasoning that presents a positive relationship between civil society and democracy is revealed by several scholars concerned with the fate of newly democratic systems. Among those scholars, Larry Diamond, has argued that "civil society can, and typically must, play a significant role in building and consolidating democracy" (1994, p. 16).⁵ In the same vein, Schmitter and Karl (1991) have agreed on the important role of civil society in post transition periods, suggesting that civil society can alleviate conflicts, improve, and even reinforce civility. According to these authors, civil society can stabilize democracy by channeling demands and thus facilitating governance.

From a public policy perspective, Charles Reilly (1994), has emphasized the strong connection between a strong civil society and robust democracy, and its importance for developing nations. He even suggested that in this new developmental stage that Latin American countries are facing, and structural reform that has changed the relationship between state, market, and civil society, funds should be allotted to social capital formation, which he considers as a condition for economic growth, equity, and democracy (1996, p. 24).

⁵ I should say here that although he stresses the importance of civil society in democratic consolidation he also pointed out that political institutionalization is the most important factor in the consolidation of new democracies (Diamond, 1994, p. 15).

At this point, it is pertinent to ask if this relationship between civil society and democratization is always a linear one. Previous studies have challenged this assumption (Chazan, 1992; Levi, 1996; Tarrow, 1996; Foley & Edwards, 1996; Berman, 1997; Armory, 1998). Can associational life be always a positive thing (Armory, 1998)? Under what circumstances? Can large economic changes influence the relationship between civil society and the state and subsequently civic engagement (Skocpol, 1996)? In this regard, it is necessary to look at the nature of *associationism*, and the relations that civic organization established with one another, the state, and political interests (Foley & Edwards, 1996; Armory, 1998), as well as the mechanisms by which civic engagement can promote democracy (Levi, 1996). Even more, to what extent does the presence of high levels of civic association imply civic involvement and democratization? Also, the call for high levels of civic participation may be an unrealistic demand, especially in contemporary climates of civic and political disengagement (Putnam, 1995a, 1995b).

Supporters of decentralization and civil society worldwide have failed to understand that this relationship between civil society, participation, and democratization is a complex one. Evidence suggests that although organizations of all kinds have been growing all over the world they may not be the kind that necessarily strengthens a participatory democracy (Chazan, 1992, 1994; Armory 1998). Consequently, the following section will review literature that gives account of associational life and participation in Argentina. However, to better address those issues I will devote a short section to make some comments about the idea of participation.

Various Ways of Understanding Participation

The political science literature on participation and civic culture have usually addressed these ideas in terms of voter behavior or political participation. Since the behavioral revolution in the 1960s, *participant citizens* were those who took active part in the political process by voting and group activities (Almond & Verba, 1963). Using large scale national sample data based on crucial psychological variables the authors identify distinct political cultures which differ in individual attitudes towards the political system, trust in political authorities, beliefs of government efficacy and collective political action, and levels of political participation.

As was stated before, Putnam's (1993) work on the political differences in civic culture in northern and southern Italy is also in the civic culture tradition. Although not relying on survey data exclusively as Almond and Verba or Inglehart did, he argued that democracy and democratic change are most effective in those places where there is a strong tradition of civic participation. Putnam measured civic participation in terms of the indirect impact of an autonomous associational density (independent from the state and political interests) on democratic societies.

Policy scientists have been concerned for a long time over participatory models of policy design (Fisher, 1993; Thomas, 1995). Their argument was primarily for community participation no matter what modality it takes. It can be through citizen contacts, public meetings, advisory boards, citizen surveys, and negotiated mediation. It can also be through the formation of interest groups and the representation through them. Similarly, it can be political or non-political and voluntary or non-voluntary involvement

in public affairs (Verba et al., 1995). In addition it is through the use of participatory approaches of policymaking, as Marinoff (1997) argues, that involvement can yield to more effective social policies. It is argued that citizen participation in urban settings can successfully change development policies of local governance by demonstrating the collective strength of local communities. Tulloss (1995) explained how local communities have reshaped policy development through the participation of local community organizations. He argued, however, that many other factors such as political organizing and individual empowerment also contributed to policy success.

In recent years there has been an increasing skepticism that development governments cannot effectively improve the provision of public services such as education and health, and that civil society participation through partnership programs could “empower” ordinary people and supply education for all (World Declaration on Education for All, Art. 7, 1990). The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization defined empowerment as “organized efforts to increase control over resources and regulative institutions in giving social situations, on the part of groups and movements for those hitherto excluded from such control” (UNESCO, 1992, p.5). The focus of empowerment then, has been on decentralization of central governmental institutions and on the need for popular participation and non-governmental organizations to make local governments more accountable.

In the mid-1990s the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and other donor institutions gave still more normative content to this notion with its acceptance of the concept of “democratic decentralization.” Democratic

decentralization would involve the transfer of real competence to the local level so that governments could be more responsive to local demands. The best way considered to broaden participation and higher levels of responsiveness would normally entail establishing locally elected deliberative bodies. In fact, locally elected councils have become the hallmark of reformed local governments and policy reforms in general. Nonetheless, scholars even back in the 1970s and 1980s pointed out that opportunity for participation would not necessarily produce a pattern of broad and open access as local elites could monopolize local government (Uphoff, 1985).⁶

Whether decentralization actually expands participation or what impact decentralization will have in local governments are empirical questions still not adequately researched either in the political science field nor in education policy. The remainder of this review will examine civic participation in Argentina and a special section will be devoted to the idea of participation in education. Current research on educational participation will also be reviewed.

Participation and Civil Society in Argentina. What do we Know?

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the emergence of different forms of collective action and associationism in Latin America coincided with military dictatorships. During that period, institutional channels for social demands were closed; political parties, labor unions, and other popular organizations banned; and state agencies were unresponsive to

⁶ Uphoff (1985) defined participation broadly, however he carefully excluded from their participation view those practices that were not translated into involvement with influence.

the demands of the population. For policy analysts and researchers, the issue then became whether these forms of “new” popular participation were a “new” phenomenon or only a temporary response to the closing of traditional channels of participation (Jelin, 1998).

A review of the literature on civil society, the third sector, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in Latin America and Argentina show an expansion of associations in the region in the last two decades (Thompson, 1992; Levy, 1996; García Delgado, 1997).⁷ These studies argue that in Argentina the third sector has grown considerably since the transition to democracy in the early 1980s. The expansion includes foundations, cooperatives, single-issue organizations, private research centers, and nongovernmental development organizations (Thompson 1992; Levy, 1996).⁸

Not only do these studies show the expansion of the sector but also how important this *explosion* is for the fate of Argentina’s democracy. As I mentioned earlier, these and other scholars have stressed the relevance of civil society participation to democratic consolidation. Thus, it was argued that the growth in number of civil organizations have a positive impact on democratization although the legitimacy of this organizations is still in question. This point is addressed in detail in Chapter 7.

Paradoxically, other studies show different results (Armory, 1998). Using data from the World Values Survey (WVS) Armory’s study of Argentine civil society

⁷ All these are different terms used to refer to nongovernmental, voluntary or nonprofit organizations. The third sector is defined as the sphere that is neither the state nor the market.

⁸ The data reported by Argentina’s National Center for Community Organizations or CENOC shows the same trend. Some of the studies reported above are based on data obtained from CENOC.

illustrates that although the number of civil society organizations increased since the 1980s, citizen participation declined. As Armory stated, “these differential trends reveal important information to understand the nature of civil society [and participation] in Argentina and its linkage with democracy” (Armory, 1998, p. 118). These differences illustrate the problem of the measure of civil society that relies in a single indicator, either the numerical size or actual individual involvement. This discrepancy also shows another problem, although not related with a methodological issue of how to measure civil society participation, but rather with a theoretical inaccuracy, “there is no axiomatic connection between the expansion of voluntary associations and the consolidation of civil society” (Chazan, 1992, p. 283; Armory, 1998). In other words, Armory uncovers an unfortunate reality of Argentine civil society, the amount of associations increased but not individual involvement—or connectedness, a key factor that promotes social capital.

As was established so far, it seems to be that the civil society argument as conceived up to now, is not sufficient to explain the Argentine case. But is this generalization not limited? Could it be that neither of the measures utilized to give an account of civil society in Argentina nor the unit of analysis considered can help us to understand the nature of associational life and participation in Argentina? What we learnt from other studies is that the idea of *civic-ness* is context dependent (Putnam, 1993;

Foley & Edwards, 1996; Tarrow, 1996).⁹ Thus, the local socio-political structure may have an impact on associational life and participation.

The analytic point I want to make here is that a homogenous vision of *an Argentine civil society* (an aggregate measure at the national level) may be a misleading concept and geographic differences should be taken into consideration particularly when central governments, through decentralization policies, have shifted social responsibilities to regional or local administrations, diverting social demands to subnational administrative units (García Delgado, 1997).

The “Local” as the Unit of Analysis of Civil Society and Participatory Practices

Recent studies of civil society-state relations in Argentina have been concerned with the role that civil associations play for local democratic development. This section reviews the most relevant studies the author found for the strengthening of her own argument. Sometimes empirical, sometimes theoretical, all the studies included here situate the analysis at the municipal or district level. The main concern that links them all is their focus in the local cultural, economic, and socio-political circumstances that facilitate or inhibit the development of civil society participation.

In an interesting article, Martínez Nogueira (1995) shows the negotiated interactions between NGOs and the local government in Rosario, Argentina during the

⁹ Foley and Edwards (1996) recognize that “the context dependency of social capital poses conceptual and methodological difficulties for analysts using it to explain macro-social, political and economic outcomes of interest to many political scientists and economists” (p. 7).

early 1990s.¹⁰ In a context of de-industrialization, high unemployment rates, and an increasing number of shanty towns, programs for poverty alleviation were organized by the local government and recently organized NGOs.¹¹ Inspired by its previous exposure and collaboration with grassroots organizations the local government divided the city into decentralized units to identify local priorities and to discuss the programming and coordination of activities with neighborhood organization. From the cases considered in this study, evidence shows that NGOs and community organizations gained legitimacy, communities assumed greater responsibility, and the municipal government ceased to be the sole supplier of local resources, instead became an interested party—one more client for seeking credit for local projects. Such a course leads to competition between local governments and NGOs and, in the long run, to the interruption of joint efforts and change of the municipal elected authorities.

In their study of state-civil society and popular neighborhood associations in Buenos Aires, Cavarozzi and Palermo (1995), argue that after “two or three years of the new democratic government, the fragility of popular participation became evident” (p.35). Around the mid-1980s, there was a clear turnaround in the trend that Argentina in general and the province of Buenos Aires in particular, experienced towards greater participation in urban associative life during the period of transition to democracy.

¹⁰ According the 1991 census, Rosario (with a population of 1.079.359) is the third larger city in Argentina after the city of Buenos Aires and the city of Cordoba with an unemployment rate of 18.2% for the year 1995 (Martinez Nogueira, 1995).

¹¹ In 1989, after a social upheaval in Rosario, the Socialist party gained control of the municipal government. The strategy of the socialist party was to foster direct linkages of cooperation with neighborhood associations trying to win a base of support. The victory in the election process reflected how important local issues were for the constituency being served to the extent of rejecting the promises made by the traditional major parties—Radical party and Justicialista party (former Peronist party).

Although other weaknesses affected organizational life at the local level—such as difficulty in maintaining participation, abandoning innovative styles of action, and lack of monetary resources—an important negative effect for popular organization was their vulnerability to local government and political party intervention.

During this period, politicians both at the local and provincial level, particularly those who share Peronist ideals, continued to act using the old forms of patron-client relations (clientelism). Thus, the local state set most policies without taking into account local organizations, which in turn were merely beneficiaries of residual resource allocation in the form of subsidies granted “to reward the compliant and penalize the unruly” (Cavarozzi & Palermo, p.40). According to the authors, neighborhood associations were close to power, although far from being a source to strengthen democracy.

In a study of popular participation in Mataderos, historically one of the most activist districts of the city of Buenos Aires, Sirvent (1999) examines the economic, social, and political factors associated with the diminishing participation and the general apathy experienced by this district during the years after the last military dictatorship in Argentina. Her study explores the course of social participation through the historical role of voluntary associations in Mataderos. The analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data supported the thesis that the lack of “real participation” (p. 14) derives mainly from the characteristics of the district’s popular culture and political past. Repression, the suppression of participatory institutions, cooptation, and a strong authoritative kind of organizational leadership, inhibited the capacity of popular

organizations to participate, as well as to recognize, the importance of participation and particularly of their role in a democratic society.¹²

From a theoretical point of view, Kolesas (1998) attempts to redefine ideas of municipalism and citizen participation in Argentine local politics. She argues that the current political and socio-economic context has significantly altered the reality of municipalities both at the level of the administrative system and of civil society. Despite the *de facto* decentralization they faced, municipalities in Argentina, which have been historically and politically diluted, became the most auspicious domain for the expression of politics and citizenship.¹³

In this scenario, the local level develops its own sense of participation in relation to the possibility of its context. Without overlooking the immense problems that municipalities face today, and the significant levels of demobilization and clientelism that local organization are experiencing, Kolesas recovers the democratic power that municipalities have today in Argentina. They are “no longer the poor relative of politics. . . they represent the field where politics keeps on being the art of giving oneself and identity as a member of a political community” (p. 143)

¹² The author distinguishes between *real* and *symbolic* participation. Participation is real when local actors are allowed to identify objective interest, develop the capacity to organize and articulate social demands, and learn new participatory mechanisms that lead to deep changes in power structure. Participation is symbolic when although recognized as valid does not lead to action and subsequently to the transformation of the social and political structure. Thus, Sirvent characterized Mataderos’ participation as a symbolic type.

¹³ Decentralization at the municipal level is considered a *de facto* process because the transfer of responsibilities from the national or provincial levels to the local has not been complemented with the institutional change that may rearticulate the relationship between the different administrative and political units.

In sum, all these studies make an effort to distinguish the characteristics of civil society involvement in different local contexts while reaffirming the “local level” as the appropriate unit of analysis required to understand the nature of civil society and participation in Argentina.

Participation in Education

Recent worldwide educational reforms have been characterized by the persistent interest in participation. This movement towards greater involvement has been the link of decentralization policies, school site-based management, school autonomy, parental involvement, and school restructuring efforts to solve education problems. The basic idea underneath all these efforts is to devolve decision making down the organizational ladder and the community being served. Participation in this regard, is understood as the involvement of teachers, administrator, parents, students, community organizations, administrative agencies, and business in educational issues (Anderson, 1999).

As was shown before from other disciplines of study, participation has also been a highly discussed term in the field of education promoting different policy agendas that advance a variety of goals, values, and interests (Boyd, 1992). In this regard, diverse theoretical traditions advocate participation: the representative democracy literature (Barber, 1984), the institutional rational choice and market oriented rationale (Chubb & Moe, 1990), the community organized control tradition (Levin, 1970), and variants of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970).

Other scholars in the field of comparative education made some conceptual distinctions of participation based on the degree of community involvement (Shaeffer 1994; Reimers, 1997). In a diagram designed for this purpose distinctions are made between participation, involvement, and mere acceptance. At the top of the model is the idea of participation at every stage of the decision-making process—policy design, evaluation, implementation, and resource allocation. It is followed by the idea of participation as implementation of delegated powers and service delivery, often as a partner with other actors; then the idea of involvement through consultation on particular issues and the contribution of resource, materials and labor; and lastly the involvement through passive acceptance as recipient of information and the mere use of the education services.

In an attempt to combine ideas of participation from both the political science field and education this study will use the concept of *civic capacity*. I borrowed this idea from Stone (2001), who uses it to analyze school reform policies in eleven urban settings in the United States of America (USA). Civic capacity is understood as the way in which different sectors of the community—parents, educators, local officials, non-profit organizations, and others—act jointly around community issues and consequently educational issues. One of Stone’s assumptions is that although talk about civic involvement and participation in education is abundant, cities and school districts may differ substantially in their ability to mobilize around social issues—education in this case.

In *Civic Capacity and Urban Education*, Stone explores the nature of this varying capacity and looks at it different levels of development. In concert with this definition, my study looks at the distinctive type of civil society interaction in the cases included in this research. As indicated above, the implementation and outcomes of education reform is a distinctive process. Indeed, this study will show how the characteristics of civic capacity have an impact on the development of policy implementation and its outcomes. Therefore, it is important to explore the politics of local education and civil society and how they evolve around the civil society-school interaction.

Participation and Education in Argentina

In a descriptive paper, Pini and Cigliutti (1999) analyze educational participatory reforms carried out in Argentina during the 1990s. One main question is raised in this study: Is participation in decision making compatible with economic restructuring programs? The answer to this question is drawn from recent participatory reforms, particularly the implementation of school site-based councils, as one element among various improvement strategies oriented to democratize school governance. They suggest that in a context of a neoliberal project, which promoted downsizing of government and cuts in social spending, policies intending to reform the education system in Argentina meant higher levels of poverty and social inequalities. Under this situation, school site councils reproduced the existing power relations depending on the socioeconomic status of the community they are a part of without enhancing democratization.

In the same vein, Cigliutti (1993), drawing her results from the school site councils reform conducted in the province of Buenos Aires, Argentina shows that school councils did not result in an increased participation in school decision making. Because of the optional nature of the reform and the lack of clarity concerning the role and scope of the council decision-making, councils were not implemented in all schools and their characteristics varied from school to school. Those that were formed did not have autonomy because the district level was still deciding over issues such as infrastructure and personnel while intermediate and central authorities kept the decision over curriculum and instruction. Cigliutti also notes that the socioeconomic level of the locality has an impact on participation rates.

Tiramonti (1992), in a study of participatory reforms in Argentina, found that participation barriers were posed by school administrators and teachers. It was noted that while administrators took control over the councils, teachers used those environments to advance their own corporatist interests. This situation impedes parents from participating in other than their traditional roles. Thus, these practices reproduced traditional power relations under a new and more progressive participation discourse.

Tiramonti argues that the ambiguity of participatory reform made easier for administrators to carry them out without significant and real changes. Her conclusions stated that although the idea of school councils had a great potential to foster school autonomy, in reality they were frustrated by the lack of technical and material resources to address school problems. This paradox was a result of the increasing tendency of central state officials to decentralize without the resources necessary to accomplish this

new endeavor. Thus, this process ended up burdening local communities with the responsibility for providing resources while exacerbating the differences in terms of education quality.

From an urban development point of view Cangiano et al. (1987) conducts a pilot study in two schools located in the north of the province of Buenos Aires, which analyzes the possibility of using the school space as a way to enhance school-community collaboration. The results of this study show that in those localities that did not have formal channels of organic participation, school-community cooperation was less likely to occur. Another limitation to participation stands from the lack of local cohesiveness. Those localities that received recent internal migration were less likely to be open to programs that establish school-community interaction. Other limitations that the study envisioned were: a) a negative image of the real benefits of participation—usually associated with patron-client relations, b) administrators and teachers negative perceptions of parents' abilities for participation, c) lack of resources—human, time, material, and less interpersonal trust.

Official publications from a program of the Ministry of Education called *Escuela y Comunidad*, or School and Community Program show diverse experiences of school-community work (Programa Nacional Escuela y Comunidad, (n.d.); La solidaridad como aprendizaje servicio, (n.d.)). Those isolated cases of school-community projects are more related with student service learning endeavors and rural development than actual school-community partnerships.

Although a first attempt to analyze school-community participation, all the studies mentioned in this section underestimate the deeply connection among local organizational practices, political environments, and school-community relations. In general, these studies advocate that the socio-political context in which these participatory practices are put in place are of extreme importance, and indeed, have a say in the implementation process; however, these contexts are rarely or deficiently addressed.

Conclusion

An analysis that stresses the factors that give participation and civil society their qualitative dimension in educational decentralization have been largely ignored in the education decentralization literature. Consequently, there is a need to go beyond the scope analyses that usually address decentralization. Education decentralization should be discussed using the framework that combines on the one side, globalization as a determinant of the decentralization that is also shaped by socio-political environments and on the other, civic participation in the context of civil society, especially in LA nations which have been downsizing responsibilities towards lower governance levels since the 1980s.

If the goal of the concept of education policy science is to improve the quality of policy decisions that essentially suggest the improvement of the quality of information on which such policy decisions depends, the notion of civic involvement or community participation has much to offer to the analysis of educational decentralization particularly

because school districts differ in their civic capacity; therefore, it is important to get a better understanding of the nature of this varying capacity. As discussed in the literature, the idea of civic capacity reveals that this emphasis on relationship building and interdependence of actors should be the central point of inquiry. The challenge for my own study is to analyze the characteristics of governance and civic support for public education while retaining responsiveness to diverse interests and concerns in the larger community.

This is precisely because the quality of information should improve if it truly reflects the characteristics of those who are the ultimate stakeholders of public policies. If policies of decentralization attempt to involve the public in education decisions through participatory practices, wouldn't those policies be ineffective where people are disorganized, disengaged, or such community organizations are non-existent? Activating civic capacity on behalf of public education depends on more than the decentralization process underway. In the end, what this study suggests is a creative application of ideas of civil society participation and to applied research that can be used in the literature on decentralization for further theoretical and methodological refinements.

The chapter that follows describes the methodological model for the analysis of educational decentralization in Argentina. This model helps the author to conceptualize and analyze the impact of educational decentralization in the cases included in this study.

CHAPTER 3

AN INTEGRATIVE APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

Various students of educational reform exhorted the use of analytical approaches that blend both levels of analyses and methodologies (Ball, 1990; Bowe, Ball & Gold, 1992; Rhoten, 2000; Levin, 2001; among others). However, there have not been many efforts to implement such a framework. In this chapter I develop an approach to think about educational decentralization and reform in Argentina.

As was stated in the previous chapter, an analysis that stresses the factors that give participation and civil society their qualitative dimension in educational decentralization have been largely ignored in the education decentralization literature. Further, a connection between institutions, socio-political environments, and civil society participation, and their impact on the consequences of education decentralization have not been articulated clearly. For these reasons, this study proposes a way to address these issues by exploring an integrative approach that combines efforts of different lines of investigation while stressing that an important point of inquiry should emphasize the interdependence of factors.

To have a better understanding of the policy-making process of educational decentralization in Argentina and its consequences in two districts of the province of Buenos Aires (Bs. As.), I should focus on the nature of Bs As educational institutions and the characteristics of its diverse political environments without leaving aside the macro-

context in which policies of decentralization arise.¹ To foster this effort this chapter addresses first how the institutional paradigm will be used here, as well as the contributions of the idea of socio-political environments and civil society participation. While doing so, I present a portion of the study in which phases of the decentralization policy is addressed by each conceptual framework.² Then, the chapter presents the scheme of the model used in this study. Lastly, I present how the conceptual frame blends with the methodology and the reasons for combining multilevel methods in this particular case. The chapter ends describing the case selection, data collection, and analyses conducted under each approach.

A Neo-institutional Perspective

Sociologists and political scientists have, for a long time, been concerned with institutions. However, this concern has been recently revitalized by neo-institutionalists. This new version of institutional analysis has many forms, although they all agree that formal institutions, rules and standardized practices usually with legal status, shape both

¹ In another chapter I particularly address the global origin of education decentralization policy conducted in Argentina.

² Bove, Ball & Gold (1992) developed a three stage framework for the analysis of education reform. These stages, which are usually autonomous, are: *policy influence*, the process by which a policy issue is originated and set in the policy agenda; *text production*, when the policy gets formulated and adopted; and *policy practice*, the stage in which policy is implemented. Fowler (2000) divides the policy process in similar stages.

social and political outcomes by determining actors' behaviors.³ In the case of my interest, for example, in 1992 and 1993 the Argentine Congress passed a set of laws that altered the structure of the Argentine education system. These regulations were instrumental for decentralization of secondary education in Argentina to take place. Thus, for different education actors this situation changed the way they used to operate. In a pioneer work, March and Olsen (1984), show the effects that institutional framework has on political process, constraining actors' choices by shaping the way in which political decisions are crafted and put into effect. In this case, before education decentralization took place all the demands were placed at the national level. After the new regulation the provincial level was the center of actors' demands and interaction.

In addition, an institutional approach entails being aware of certain historicity. Institutions, in general, are products of their times and are developed over time.⁴ In conceiving institutions as products of their times, the Argentine educational decentralization policy is viewed in this study as part of a global trend, a worldwide rationality of educational governance towards models of decentralized educational structures. Usually associated with structural adjustment policies, policies of decentralization were implemented. Consequently, national states kept control of international trade and market negotiations, while delegating the responsibility of public

³ I should say that sociological neo-institutionalists (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991) define institutions in a broader sense. For theoretical purposes I limited the definition of institutions to the formal ones, such as governmental structures that constitute the process decision-making and the rules used to organized behavior. The informal institutions are considered separately and are part of the socio-political environments.

For a detailed review of the different forms of neo-institutionalism see Katznelson (1997) and Hall & Taylor (1996).

⁴ For this point see Skocpol & Somers (1992) and Thelen & Steinmo (1992).

services—such as health, education, and retirement plans—to either sub-national administrative units or the private sphere. As a consequence, the policy trend promoting fewer state responsibilities legitimized new state policies of administrative decentralization and educational privatization.⁵

In regards to the second point, currently different structures are still in place that combine aspects of centralization and decentralization in education. Assuming this, it needs to be acknowledged that it takes time for any change to be in effect. This indicates that different institutional structures may operate simultaneously until new institutions are in place. What was put in place first, over a century ago, is still conditioning what comes next. Institutions possess considerable ability to resist change or to reduce its impact (March & Olsen, 1984). This point also acknowledges that actors are accustomed to certain practices and even reluctant to change them—this may be the case of many provincial bureaucracies in Argentina. So even when new regulations change, the *old way of doing things* may constrain any change from happening (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Then, it is the task of any investigator to explore whether the origin of the resistance is structural, cultural, or a combination of both. This point is also addressed in this research.

This study addresses certain historicity in two ways. First, as described in the previous paragraph, by situating the educational decentralization policies as a global institutional norm and source of institutional isomorphism (Chapter 4). Second, by describing the nature of the governmental and educational administrative structures and

⁵ Detailed accounts of this process is presented in Chapter 4.

policy implementation at the national and provincial levels—Argentina and Bs As respectively (Chapter 5). These points are of importance since they help to underscore the peculiarities of the case of our interest and the historical dynamics of Bs As educational institutional design.

Socio-political Environments

However, are these formal rules the only ones that explain the consequences of education decentralization? In addition, adopting a neo-institutional perspective entails being aware of other rules, the informal ones, that are products of socioeconomic and political cultural factors as a whole—what I choose to call *socio-political environment*. These informal rules are the accepted, legitimate, and even standard way of operating in a certain environment. Non-formal institutions and rules include political parties internal regulations, leadership structures, business federations and their actions, union pressures and their internal hierarchy, operation of neighborhood associations and other organized sectors of civil society. It is important to note that probably these informal institutions have a high degree of institutionalization as well as formal institutions. This point was also brought up by O'Donnell (1994, 1996) when he clearly stated that informal institutions should be taken into consideration in the analysis of democratic consolidations in the LA region.

This view emphasizes environments as products of local shared meanings acceptable to all practices and behaviors—political and non-political—that define the worldview of any particular socio-political setting and explains why and how people in a

certain environment behave as they do. In turn, this identity system can take the form of myths and rituals (Meyer & Rowan, 1991). Thus, behavior is bounded by a communal worldview. It should point out that although this worldview is common to all in the environment, socio-political settings are not conflict free (Scott, 1985; Laitin, 1988; DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). Another important point that should be added here, which is probably the most important contribution of this view, is the idea of interdependence of socio-economic and cultural-political factors. Neither socioeconomic and cultural factors nor politics are taken in isolation but as a compound that mediates formal institutions.

By using socio-political environments I distinguish myself from the civic cultural/political culture approach. Political culture in this case, “defines group boundaries and organizes action within and between them” (Ross, 1997, p. 48). Thus, it is not perceived as crucial individual attitudinal psychological variables, but instead, as a resource that local leaders and groups in general use to operate and mobilize people in a particular context (McAdam et al., 1997). This is in line with the idea of political repertoires that Tarrow (1994) talks about; a limited set of routines and practices learnt and shared through cultural traditions. In this vein, socio-political environments are a result of political tradition determinants defined by the political party that has historically been governing or influencing a particular context (in this study communities or municipalities). It is the *way of doing politics* in a specific socio-economic and political context. This way of doing politics is influenced by the complex relationship of the provincial and local political tradition.

As Putnam (1993) mentioned the social contexts in which institutions operate have been under-researched and almost neglected in institutional political analysis.⁶ What this concept of socio-political environments adds to this analysis is the contextual character that the operationalization of institutions adopts. It is not that institutions operate differently based on their context, as Putnam suggested; instead, the environment in which they operate conditions institutional outcomes. My idea here is that socio-political environments frame the context in which education decentralization takes place.

From what I said so far, it is clear that this study examines two explanations of the consequences of education decentralization in Argentina: institutional structures and socio-economic and political-cultural factors (socio-political environments). In this regard, formal institutional structures are held constant in this study both macro-institutional determinants (global and regional trends towards educational decentralization) and, at the country level, the Argentine response to this trend (the educational reforms in the 1990s, the Ministry of Education directives). What varies in this study is the socio-political environments in which the reform takes place.

⁶ It is important to mention here that students of social movement and certain cultural analysts in political science have been addressing these issues (Tarrow, 1994; Gamson, 1995; Raka, 1999). Even to some extent have been abridging issues of culture and structure. The concepts of socio-political environments used in this study are drawn from this literature and from the sociological neo-institutionalism in organizational analysis (Meyer & Scott, 1988; DiMaggio and Powell, 1991 and others).

Civic Capacity Approach

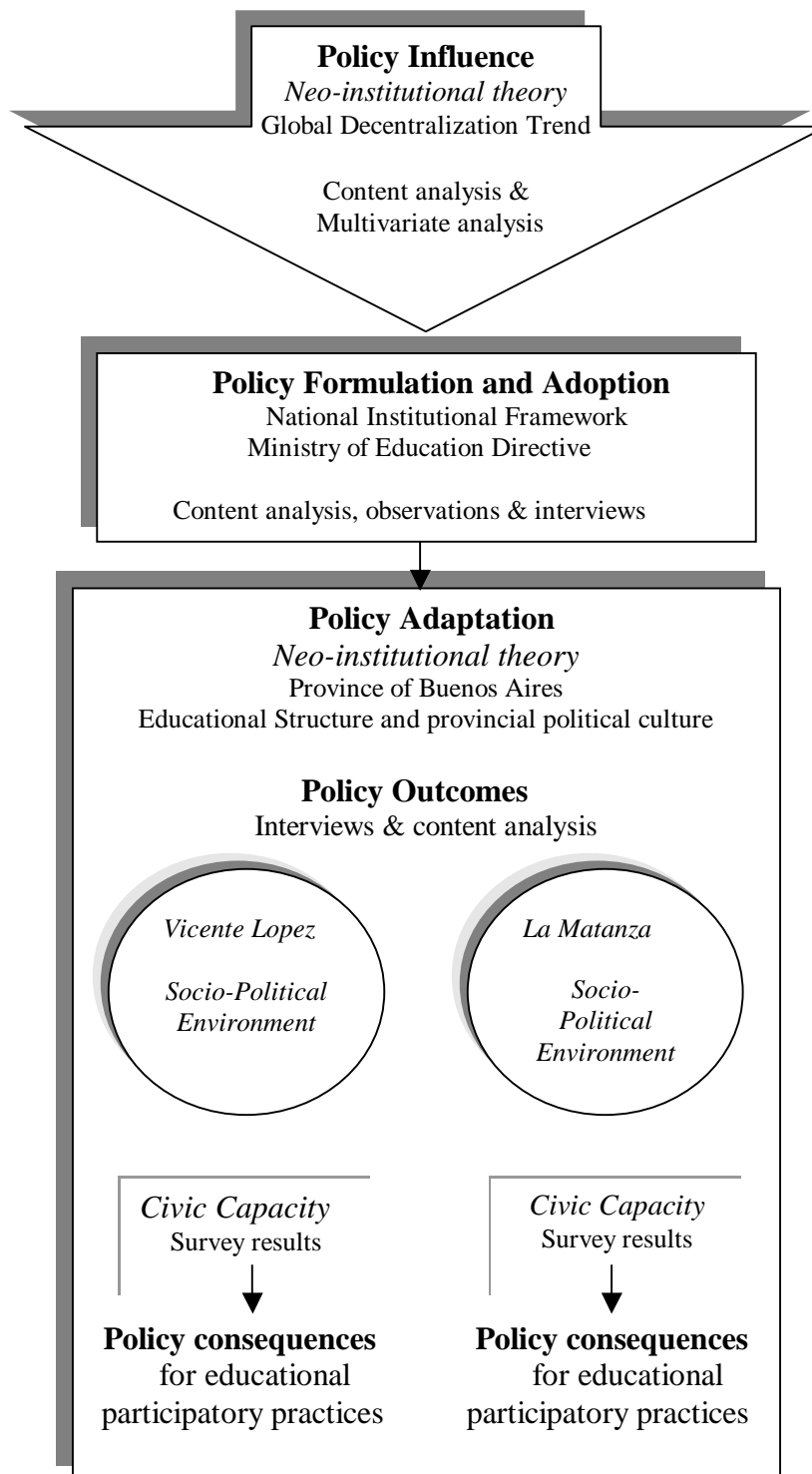
In between these two explanations, this study situates a third one: the idea of civic capacity as presented in Chapter 2. Civic capacity is understood as the way in which different sectors of the community act jointly around community issues (Stone, 2001). This intervenient explanation is included particularly in response to the democratization rationale used to decentralize education in Argentina. This point is also important since this study analyses the consequences of educational decentralization particularly in terms of participatory practices. As I stated before, the democratization rationale used to decentralize assumes a cause-effect relationship among decentralization, civil society participation, and democratization. The purpose for including this intervenient variable is to challenge this assumption on the one hand, and to explore whether civil society participation has any explanatory power over the consequences of educational decentralization in the localities chosen for this research. It is also assumed that civil society participation is context-dependent and determined by formal institutional structures and the socio-political environment.

Civic capacity or civic-ness in Putnam's terms, is considered in this study as an explanation of the consequences of educational decentralization in the province of Buenos Aires and, at the same time, outcomes of institutional structures and socio-political environments. Thus, because environments vary we expect variation in civic capacity across the two municipalities included in this study. Chapter 2 clearly highlighted the theoretical background used to analyze civil society participation and my differences with Putnam in this regard. Civic capacity is addressed in this research by

exploring the fabric of community associational life and their interconnectedness in Vicente Lopez and La Matanza.

The theoretical frame used in this dissertation combines the payoffs of neo-institutionalism and the civic capacity approach. What follows in Figure 3.1 is the model that will help me to address these issues in the real world. This model also includes the methodology used for each level of analysis—something I address in detail in the following sections.

Figure 3. 1

An Integrative Approach Model

A Mixed Methodology

Initially the idea of using mixed methods in social sciences was for *triangulation* purposes (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998; Morgan, 1998; Cresswell, 1994; Green et al., 1989). As those authors suggested, the idea behind that purpose was to *converge findings*. Nowadays, it is believed that the motivation for combining both types of methods, qualitative and quantitative, and levels of analysis is more than that. Morgan (1998) mentioned three other purposes for conducting mixed methods:

- 1) *Creative exchange*, or each method builds on findings from the other
- 2) *Comprehensive coverage*, or each method does something that the other cannot [discovering paradoxes, contradictions, fresh perspectives]
- 3) *Complementary assistance*, or using one method to enhance the performance of the other (p.365)

The motivation for combining the methods and the reason for doing so, derives mainly from the theory or theories in which the researcher is embedded, the levels of analysis reached, research questions proposed, and the way in which the researcher wants—and thinks is more appropriate—to approach those questions in a real setting. Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) note that it is very difficult to disentangle those research steps because they are intertwined and, as a whole, represent the worldview of the individual who is conducting the study. In this particular study, an integrative theoretical and methodological approach is used to analyze the problem of interest, which may

generate more than one question that needs the use of complementary sources of data collection and analyses to construct validity.

Due to the uniqueness of the process study, which combines issues of local institutional structures, socio-political environments, and a process of educational administrative change in a context of global transformations, a multiple case study will be conducted. In this specific case the justification for combining methods and levels of analysis is twofold. First, it tries to provide a solution to what social scientists call *the duality of structure* (Giddens, 1979). This refers to macro-structural approaches, which tend to be understood using a deterministic explanatory model versus those micro-structural approaches, which emphasize interactive explanations and processes. A way to solve that dichotomy is by offering macrolevel phenomena that also studies particular social and political relationships at the local level. In other words, descriptive adequate accounts of large-scale social phenomena should be grounded in statements about actual concrete social situations.

This multilevel design that combines comparisons across countries and within a specific country help me to control for macrolevel effects while testing microlevel theory. The theoretical advantage of this design is that it proves the possibility to test macrolevel and microlevel hypotheses while assessing their interaction within different contexts and incorporating the effects of both types of variables into the analysis. At the same time, its empirical advantage is that it gives the necessary information and arguments to test for alternative hypotheses around the demographic and behavioral practices of civic participation at the local level.

Second, according to Yin (1994), the case study approach of this sort requires in-depth data collection involving different methods and multiple sources of information. This type of research strategy requires the researcher to work in a small unit and to explore a wide range of topics from different perspectives. In the process of the multiple-case study, the researcher uses sequences and interrelationships observed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the whole social setting of which the case is a part.

Research Design

Case Study Approach

This study uses a case study approach to examine the outcomes of educational decentralization and participation in the school districts of my interest. Yin (1994) suggests that a case study is an exploration of a case delimited by time and place. In this method, an in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information is used. Yin (1994) also notes that one study may contain more than one single case. When this happens, the study has to use a multiple-case design. In the process of the multiple-case study, the researcher uses sequences and interrelationships observed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the whole social setting of which the case is a part.

This approach involves the collection of information and data about the case and the preparation of a description of the cases of interest, confronting, validating, and generating a theoretical construct, which invites judgment and offers useful evidence for comparative analysis. Epstein (1992) and Holmes (1992) suggested that comparative research in social sciences should discover a nation's specific character within the

international context. The use of a case study employs these particular findings to achieve explanations of larger patterns of social relations while offering the opportunity to search for contextual generalizations. It is for this particular purpose—contextual generalization—that the mixed method is a powerful tool.

The multiple case study approach is used in my study to reveal differences among localities to enhance the degree of generalization, which in combination with the mixed-methodology and multilevel analysis is helpful for examining particular situations that combine institutional analysis and ideas about socio-political environments. The combination of both quantitative and qualitative approaches will help the researcher to identify variables, questions, and/or areas that need further research, which would not have been identified by the use of only one method. Mixing methods in the different phases of the process of study reflects the research cycle of induction and deduction (Cresswell, 1994).

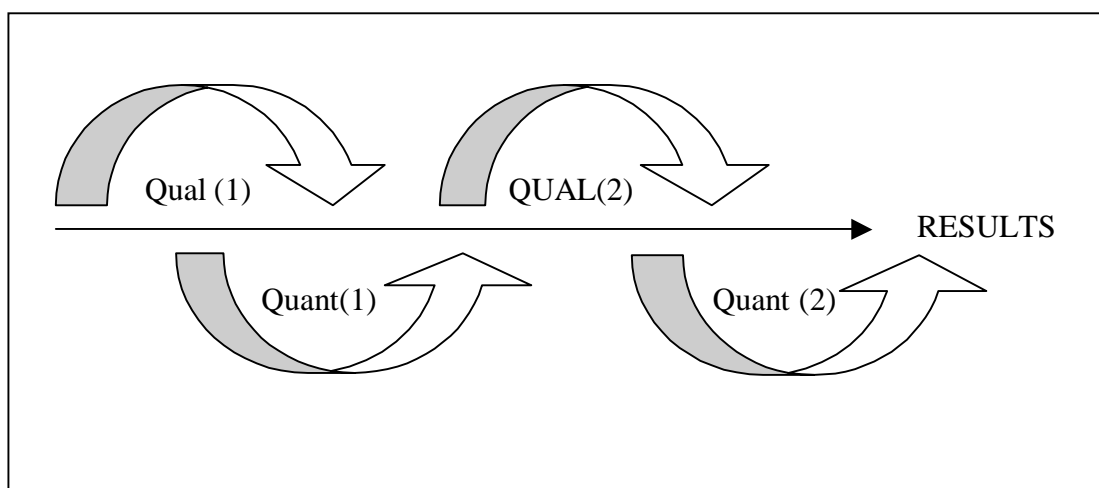
Sequence of Qualitative and Quantitative Research

The main goal of this study is to explore the outcomes of the policy of education decentralization in two school districts in the province of Bs. As., Argentina, as well as look at the connection between schools, different levels of governance, and civil society participation. For that purpose, and following the distinction made by Morgan (1998) and Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998), I present the best alternative model for combining both methods and their plans for data collection in my study. To meet both

complementary assistance as well as the triangulation purposes the illustration (Figure 3.2) that follows best defines the scenario for combining both methodologies.

Figure 3.2.

Interactive Sequence of Quantitative and Qualitative Methods



Source: adapted from Morgan (1998p. 368).

Note: Qual stands for qualitative and quant stands for quantitative. The number that follows each method indicates the sequence of qual-quant complementary combination. The interlocking arrows show that the methods are interdependent for generating results in this study. In the second sequence, the qualitative method is the primary method used and that is the reason why 'qual' is capitalized.

This sequence of complementary combinations of qualitative and quantitative methods allows the researcher to start with the combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis to explore general macro-level hypothesis of a relatively unexplored topic. This combination of mixed method analyses leads to the country level and micro-level portion of the study, the core of this study. In the first sequence, a cross-national

comparison of the impact of globalization on countries' educational decentralization policies is analyzed. This portion of the study gives account of a worldwide trend towards education decentralization in the 1990s and the particularities of its outcomes when this global movement blends with country level structures.

The second sequence, QUAL-quant combination, situates the analysis at the country level. The information obtained from the different sources of data collection and analysis help to design the subsequent questionnaires for provincial and local level interviews and for the survey used for the quantitative approach. The quantitative portion of the study also includes some questions that are addressed in the qualitative portion for triangulation purposes. The results obtained from this sequence of complementary research methods gives the particularities of the outcomes of the Argentine education decentralization policy.

According to Morgan (1998), this type of complementary design generates numerical and narrative data for different purposes, which are linked in some manner. In this case the qualitative paradigm will be the primary source of data collection. Using different sources of information such as: 1) content analysis of different documents, legislations, regulations, and local media; 2) non-participant observation; and 3) semi-structured interviews, the qualitative approach allows the researcher to gather information about the political environments and educational characteristics of our cases of interest. The quantitative portion of the study uses a survey to obtain information about the participation component used in this research.

Unit of Analysis and Sampling Strategy

The unit of analysis in this study is the Province of Buenos Aires, Argentina. Following Paton's (in Creswell, 1994) typology of purposeful sampling, this study will adopt the critical case sampling strategy. In this strategy, critical cases are defined as those that can address the point of the study clearly or are particularly important to make some differentiations. Taking those elements into consideration, this study will primarily focus on two municipalities located in what is known as the Great Buenos Aires, a suburban area surrounding the City of Buenos Aires, province of Bs. As, Argentina.

The municipalities selected are Vicente Lopez and La Matanza. Because I argue that institutional structures and political environments have an impact on participation and the outcome of the decentralization process, these municipalities have been chosen according to some characteristics of their environments. The first one, Vicente Lopez, is a geographically small district but densely populated with only 14 public secondary education services, a net secondary school coverage rate of 75% and an illiteracy rate of 0.8%. It is at a higher socio-economic level—only 4.7% of its population lives under the poverty line—and has been historically governed by the *Radical Party*. The second one, La Matanza, is geographically bigger than Vicente López and less densely populated, with 59 public secondary schools and lower levels of net secondary school coverage rate (illiteracy rate of 3%). It is at a lower socio-economic status—21.6% of its residents live under the poverty line. This municipality has a long history of being governed by the

Justicialista Party—a party commonly known as *Peronist* (See Appendix A.1—Provincial and Municipal Indicators).⁷

Qualitative Method

Questions answered by the QUAL method:

- a) How do formal educational institutional arrangements influence the implementation of government policies (educational in this case) in the province of Buenos Aires?
- b) Can we expect variation across municipalities in the outcomes of education decentralization based on their socio-political environments?

Qualitative data collection and analysis will be useful in this case study because:

- It will help to examine in-depth the complexities and processes that the study encounters.
- It will be useful because little is known about localities, education, and participation, at that level.
- This study seeks understanding about local politics, policies, actors' perceptions about the effects of education decentralization process on participation, school autonomy and the role of local school councils.

⁷ The information provided for each municipality was obtained from *Situación y evolución social provincial. Buenos Aires*. Síntesis N0.1. 1998. Tables 5.2, 5.4, 5.8, and 2.5.

- Relevant variables that will need to be considered in the quantitative portion will be identified.

During the four months that the researcher spent in the field, three qualitative procedures were conducted: content analysis, non-participant observation and semi-structured interviews. The first procedure was performed during the entire period that the researcher was in the field. Regional and local press was examined as well as provincial and national legislation and documents. This procedure was useful to catalogue the patterns and global trends and the origins of educational decentralization in Argentina as well as the official intentions driving public policy since 1989—the year President Carlos S. Menem assumed office. In combination with the non-participant observation, this method is an important tool in the first phase of the study and provides the backbone for the rest of the methods that are used for data collection and analysis.

The second method that the researcher used was the non-participant observation. Using this qualitative tool, the researcher observed neighborhood dynamics, administrative and bureaucratic activities, and local organization's actions to see their interest, if any, in educational issues. This procedure was useful especially in the first period of the fieldwork where the study was more exploratory. According to Marshall and Rossman (1999), it is during that early period that the researcher should establish more flexibility to the design, “the researcher should establish the need and right to determine the precise focus of the research after these first days in the field when new insights begin to clarify patterns and focus the relevant themes” (Marshall & Rossman,

1999, p.64). In addition, non-participant observations provided the appropriate context for the phenomena studied, and thereby helped the investigator to understand better the local meaning of events. During this initial stage the researcher adjusted the theoretical framework, research questions, the situations to observe, whom to interview and what to ask precisely. All those conditions varied depending upon each particular environment or municipality or school district.

Following this initial stage, the researcher conducted the third qualitative procedure: the semi-structured interviews. Interviews are the primary source of data collection. The researcher uses them to get information and build the case studies on the politics of education at the local and provincial levels and developments of the decentralization outcomes within each school district. Those interviews help to corroborate the researcher's own understanding of the process and implications of the educational decentralization conducted in Argentina during the 1990s. Some of those interviews attempt to understand the situation and characteristics of community organizations that operate at the local level.

Two waves of personal interviews—typically 45 minutes to one hour in duration—were carried out. Interviews were recorded. During the month of August 1998, and between the months of October 2000 and January 2001, 33 informants were interviewed. Twenty interviewees were from the municipalities, eight from the National Ministry of Education, and five interviewees were representatives of provincial units. Political leaders, community leaders, representatives of neighborhood associations, top civil servants, party representatives, schoolteachers, parent association representatives,

ministry officials at the provincial and national level, and local and provincial school administrators were interviewed.

Those who were interviewed were selected in various ways, but primarily by means of snowball sample and geographic base. From previous personal contacts and visits, the researcher was able to identify key informants. Those informants were approached initially and names of other possible informants the researcher should talk to were solicited (the researcher did not specify whether they were to have political affiliation or not). This generated an overlapping list of names that were useful in selecting individuals for the next round of interviews.

I consulted several studies (Cangiano et al., 1987; Putnam, 1993; Ciglutti, 1993; Geary, 1996) as models for question ideas. Some of the questions included in the interviews conducted in these studies were a good guide for my case. Some of the questions are as follows:

- Tell me about the most important problems this municipality is facing. [I asked particularly about education]. What do you think are the causes of those problems?
- What are the goals of the national and provincial education reforms and its impact at the municipal level? How do the provincial and local councils actually work? What is the role of the provincial and municipal educational council and councilors?
- Who has influence and over what? Can you identify particular groups?

- What about relations with the central, provincial and local authorities [in regards to education]?
- How do political parties and other organizations operate here?

I included a set of questions for local organization leaders. These questions were included in the questionnaire as open-ended questions,

- When did you join-----? Why? Were you a member of any organization before?
- On what issues do you think local organizations are more effective than the local/provincial or national government?
- What would you say is the goal of your organization? On what issues was your organization mainly concerned with in the last 3 years?
- How does the membership influence the kind of issues your organization is interested in?
- How was your association funded?
- How is your association relationship with the local government and other groups?
- Is your organization particularly interested in educational issues? How does the organization get involved in education?

All the qualitative procedures employed will help the researcher to obtain information about the local informal practice, participation strategies, actions and even power relationships among the political actors for the municipalities included in the

study. They will also give a clearer understanding of the decentralization process conducted and the variables that need to be considered in the quantitative portion of the study.

Data Analysis

Content Analysis

I used methods of content analysis to examine patterns of policy influence and official policy directives. Thus, I was interested in looking for global and regional trends and national responses and adaptation of those trends of education decentralization as materialized in official documents, legislation, international and regional publications, and Argentine and U.S. newspaper articles and local press. This analysis provided me with general statements of policy rationale and objectives and financial, administrative and power relation changes.

Then, I used content analysis and secondary sources to investigate provincial legislation and official provincial and municipal materials provided, such as technical reports, political party pamphlets, union documents, official educational data, etc. In both cases, I analyzed and coded all written protocols for common thematic statements that help to analyze the content of that documentation data by level of analyses: regional, national, provincial, municipal. Some of the codes are as follows: provincial and municipal characteristics, decentralization, transfer, education reform, participation by actor, school autonomy and school organizational structure, administrative change, new administrative and financial responsibilities, etc.

Interview Analysis

This method was used to examine actor's accounts of the decentralization and reform process, changes, and the consequences of them. I limited the analysis to the content of their stories—not the linguistics structure—and to analyze *who* tells *what* and *why*. Each interview was identified and categorized by actor's location, position in the administrative structure, role, and identification number (See Appendix A.2—General Qualitative Categorization Codebook). Then, I transcribed all interviews myself. Once transcribed, I disaggregated and coded them into thematic and conceptual categories using the same codes generated for the content analysis. New codes were also generated from the interviews. After doing so, I aggregated those categories again by type of interviewee and municipality. I catalogued similarities and differences in actors' accounts by municipality, administrative position within the public education system and administration, and political system. By illustrating the differences across localities and position within the administrative level, I can better address the unpredictable diversity in policy adaptation and outcomes. This differentiation allows me to identify environmental from structural representations of the policy process and to measure the effect of environmental and structural characteristics in determining the outcomes across municipalities (See Appendix A.3—Qualitative Content Analysis Materials).

Non-participant Observations

This qualitative method was of much use in the initial phase of this study and also in conjunction with the interviews. I recorded in my field notes events, behavior, and artifacts of the settings chosen for the study. These notes are cataloged and grouped based on the codes identified in the content analysis process; however, new codes emerged from this methodology as well. Those notes are used with the other qualitative methods in a complementary manner.

Quantitative Method

Question answered by the quantitative method:

- c) How do the characteristics of civic capacity impact participation and community involvement in education?

This portion of the study explores and challenges the participatory and democratization rationale used to decentralize education in the 1990s. For this reason I empirically explore the characteristic of civic capacity—the independent variable—in each education district of my interest to see whether it influences participation in general and school-community involvement in particular—the dependent variable. In other words, whether associational growth and participation in different types of civil society organizations (my first measure of civic capacity) and the interconnectedness among them (my second measure of civic capacity), have some impact on civic society activity in education (my measure of school-community participation). It is hypothesized that the

socio-political environment influences the characteristics of civic capacity, conditioning participatory practices and subsequently the outcomes of educational decentralization. For this reason differences in civic capacity outcomes across districts are expected.

Data

To address the question presented above a survey targeted to the organization's authorities was designed for this purpose. Leaders of organizations are opportunistically connected individuals with the knowledge of their organizations and community needs. This type of survey is useful when the problems investigated are uncommon, and when funding is an issue in any particular research. On the negative side, these leaders have an organizational perspective on community issues and needs and a bias towards activities in which each organization is involved. In this regard, their reports will often overestimate the problems the organization's target population is facing while underestimating other issues. To correct for this bias, in-person surveys were conducted in almost all the cases to maximize the information and good will gained. Informant's individual characteristics were also gathered, mainly to get a sense of his historical affiliation and experience in the field.

Sampling Procedure

A door-to-door survey was conducted based on a stratified probability sample (n=105) from a total of 1171 organizations registered in the municipality of Vicente Lopez (N= 435) and La Matanza (N=736). Sampling procedures were based on 11 types

of the civil society associations: (1) community development organizations/social welfare, (2) religious organizations, (3) cooperatives, (4) recreation and sports, (5) health organizations, (6) cultural organizations, (7) foundations, (8) senior centers, (9) civic related associations, (10) single issue associations, and (11) local union related organizations. I purposefully left out two categories that are usually included in official datasets: *public school cooperatives* and the *private school organizations*. The rationality for not including these associations is that they are already involved in educational activities.

The survey comprises information regarding an organization's demographics, local government response, detailed accounts of local organizations' involvement in local affairs and education issues (See Appendix A.4— Survey questionnaire). The survey's questionnaire was pre-tested before the field process. During its design, it was tested with some Latin American Spanish speakers and during the first two weeks of the fieldwork experience with local organization's leaders. After the questionnaire was cleaned, it was distributed to all the organizations included in the sample.

Conclusion

The idea of this approach is to reveal the policy process and outcome as a rainbow of alternatives tied to both institutional and socio-cultural factors of the globalization process and local economic-social and political conditions. For this reason the researcher uses of an integrative approach and methodology in this research. This chapter attempts

to give a general overview of the methods, design, and the data collection used in this study. However, to better address the points I want to illustrate with this integrative approach and methodology, the chapters that report the findings will go in depth, where needed to, in the description of techniques and variables included in the analysis. The chapter that follows reveals the structural global influences of education decentralization in Argentina while setting the stage for the multiple case studies, an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life setting.

CHAPTER 4

POLICY INFLUENCE

Global Trends and Education Decentralization: A Cross-national Comparison

This chapter shows how globalization influences the spread of reforms for decentralizing school governance and the consequences that these global reforms have on national structures of education governance. Although the analyses that are presented here look particularly at the consequences that decentralization reforms have on models of curricular administration across nations, its theoretical basis and conclusions are of relevance for this study of educational decentralization in Argentina. The conclusions of the chapter show that recent attempts to decentralize education governance structures result in a mixing of centralized and decentralized models of educational administration at the national level, a point I argued before in a comparative analysis of education decentralization policies in Latin America (Astiz, 1999).

The chapter begins with a description of globalization and decentralization reforms followed by empirical analyses in which I briefly describe recent reforms in four nations and quantitatively examine thirty-nine using the data from the Third International Math and Science Study (TIMSS).¹ The chapter argues that curricular governance is an indicator of a mixing of centralized and decentralized models of educational

¹ This chapter is drawn from the first section of Astiz (1999) and Astiz et al., (2002).

administration at the national level and provide evidence that these models are indeed becoming mixed as a result of economic and institutional globalization processes.

Decentralization Reforms: Consequences of Globalization for National Education Governance

The Dual Nature of Globalization

Globalization has become a powerful and also uncertain argumentation of contemporary educational analysis. In particular, the spread of decentralization policies and reforms has been a testimony of globalization processes proving that, indeed, the center cannot keep total control in the face of global forces. In spite of often negative descriptions, “globalization” in its simplest form refers to reforms and structures that transcend national borders. Yet, globalization is not only a passive diffusion; rather, it is an active, even aggressive, process of social transformation as well (Davies & Guppy, 1997). Much of the scholarship on education and globalization can be divided into either descriptions of the dynamic process itself or analyses of the macro-political consequences of globalization on schooling (Green, 1997; Prakash & Hart, 1999). This earlier scholarship has, consequently, set the stage for further examination of how globalization penetrates the operating structures of schooling worldwide. In fact, globalization of educational reforms is a potent force acting upon how national school systems develop and operate.

The transforming power of globalization stems from two related, but distinctly dynamic, processes driving globalization itself (Prakash & Hart, 1999). One process,

economic globalization, is the intensification of a global market operating across and among a system of national labor markets through international economic competition (Davies & Guppy, 1997). Market competition, technological change, and multinational corporations are sources of this global economy (Carnoy et al., 1993). Trade and investments are organized across a set of cross-national networks beyond the specific control of any one nation state, facilitating a convergence of national economic institutions and reducing obstacles for cross-national economic interests. A world market and formal multinational markets generate flows of capital, labor, goods, and information.² The often pervasive and exploitive, capital-labor-market system of export processing is one worldwide consequence of this economic form of globalization (Carnoy et al., 1993). Another consequence is that governments of nations routinely react to this process by strategizing financial, labor, and industrial policy relative to recognizable globalizing forces, which hence pulls nations into a tighter connection to a world market system.

A second process, *institutional globalization*, is characterized by convergence towards a uniform model of polity and rationalization (Davis & Guppy, 1997; Meyer et al., 1997; Benavot et al., 1991; Meyer, 1980). At the heart of this transformation is the convergence of formal institutions within and across nations toward similar goals and operating structures. Cross-national descriptions of schools, health care, social welfare, and justice systems reveal significant trends towards this convergence. Institutional

² Examples of formal multinational markets include but are not limited to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), European Union (EU), and Mercado Común del Sur (MERCOSUR).

convergence tends to bring polities towards isomorphism, reinforcing uniform patterns among organizational structure in these sectors (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991).

Like economic globalization, institutional globalization is a process that acts directly upon and penetrates the nation-state. These external forces have an increased influence on domestic agendas leaving less room for widely differentiated national policy strategies. Past studies, particularly those by neo-institutionalists, show that multilateral agencies provide direct influence on the process of institutional isomorphism through influence on nation-states; however, actual policies operate at the national level producing unique strategies for operation (Jepperson & Meyer, 1991; DiMaggio & Powell, 1991).³ This uniqueness is conditioned by national characteristics—tradition, culture, environment—as well as new responsibilities of the modernized state, world market, and world society that are themselves products of global trends. Globalization pushes towards institutional uniformity, but considerable local adaptation and modification of overall trends mark actual processes of globalization (Green, 1997; LeTendre, et al., 2001).

These dual processes of economic and institutional globalization embodies extensive transforming power. Globalization is not restricted to contemporary society only; indeed, globalization is recognized to be a consistently powerful and dynamic social force throughout the history of the development of societies (Mann, 1997;

³ Examples of multilateral agencies which directly influence the process of institutional isomorphism include but are not limited to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the World Bank (WB), the Inter-Monetary Fund (IMF), and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Anderson, 1996).⁴ In fact, globalization processes are historically dynamic ones. Institutional and economic globalization drives convergence towards similar social organizational structures at earlier periods only to be resisted, revised, and synthesized by emerging local adaptation, which sets the stage for another round of global diffusion (Mann, 1997; Anderson, 1996). This simultaneous convergence of state policy agendas and divergence of local and individual policy implementation is a process occurring throughout the history of human society.

Hence these globalization processes shape the development of education, both historically and now. The spread and development of modern, mass school systems show clear signs of global trends and convergence on similar models (Fuller & Rubinson, 1992; Ramirez & Boli, 1987). Much of the logic behind the state-sponsored expansion relies on the policy of economic globalization to develop competitive labor markets and enhance economic activity. Interestingly, scholarship on the development of mass schooling shows the effects of institutional globalization processes and the interrelationship among a set of institutions and assumptions about modern society that produce institutional isomorphism (Boli et al., 1986; Meyer et al., 1992; DiMaggio & Powell, 1991).

It should not, however, be argued that these processes occur in a resistance or conflict free environment. Both the expansion of education and institutional development of modern school systems have occurred with considerable class, ethnic, and other

⁴ Other views talk about how nation-states react to multilateral agencies through resistance (Robertson, 1992).

political conflict that often lead to variations across time and place (Carnoy & Levin, 1985). The empirical case of the impact of globalization on curricular governance cross-nationally illustrates how global trends force a certain degree of convergence on decentralization, and how these decentralization policies are locally adapted to produce unexpected structures with direct consequences on the administrative process of schools.⁵

Globalization and the Rise of Educational Decentralization

Concomitant with economic globalization, a wave of conservative thoughts spread worldwide in the 1980s and 1990s, yielding neoliberalism as a hegemonic policy discourse (Meyer et al., 1992; Morrow & Torres, 2000). Neoliberalism, which is often associated with structural adjustment policies, characterizes a new type of political strategy emerging among nation-states in recent decades. Neoliberal policies facilitate globalization of nation states' policies by creating conditions necessary for state restructuring. Thus, an eroding earlier model that gave policy primacy to a national welfare state gave way to a neoliberal model promoting state withdrawal, privatization, and localization.⁶

⁵ In an exemplary work, Diana Rhoten (2000), using a global-local condition of possibility model examines the “international origins”, “national intentions” and “local interpretations” of the educational decentralization policy carried out in Argentina in the 1990s. She shows through a comparative analysis of three provinces in Argentina that the processes and outcomes of the international originated decentralization policy are not universal and that the policy interpretations and actions depend on the local geo-economic conditions, political and cultural identities, administrative capacities, and the local State-society relations of power and authority respectively.

⁶ In particular, “localization” has come to mean the decentralization of governance over public services such as public education.

Due to this change in public policy, national states took charge of international trade and market negotiations, while delegating the responsibility of public services, such as health, education, and retirement plans, to either sub-national administrative units or the private sphere. As a consequence, the policy trend promoting “fewer state responsibilities” legitimized new state policies of administrative decentralization and educational privatization. These neoliberal policies that decentralized and privatized school systems claim the following virtues: (1) democratic, efficient, and accountable; (2) more responsive to the community and to local needs; (3) empowering to teachers, parents, and others in the education community while improving the effectiveness of school reform; and, (4) the ability to improve school quality and increase funds available for teachers' salaries through competition (Arnone, 1997).

This paradigm shift in public policy also promotes institutional globalization paralleling neoliberalism through a growing uniformity in the institutional and regulatory framework stressing decentralization across countries.⁷ As a consequence, educational reforms across many nations championed a model of decentralized educational governance as a standard practice (McGinn & Street, 1986). Both economic and institutional globalization have sustained interest in decentralization of educational governance, and this is shaping a new image of the state relative to the control of schooling (Torres & Puiggros, 1997; Carnoy, 1999; Morrow & Torres, 2000). This has meant that over the past several decades there has been a preoccupation with

⁷ Seminal works on this view, particularly regarding education are Meyer et al., (1992); Fuller & Rubinson, (1992) and McGinn & Street (1986).

decentralization in the policy discourse about education, particularly among the developing nations of Latin America, South Asia, and Eastern Europe as well as international development agencies (Weiler, 1990; Weiler, 1993; McGinn & Street 1986). This is a particularly powerful example of globalization of political reform since both the economic and institutionalization processes of globalization join tightly around the issue of decentralization of educational governance.

Although global trends have propelled decentralization as a strategy in many nations, the actual implementation of this idea proves more difficult. The neoliberal vision of decentralizing the governance of public schooling presents a paradox in implementation (Astiz, 1999). Will strong, centrally controlled states reduce their role that so clearly legitimates themselves as states? How will decentralization be achieved through a highly centralized process? And finally, can decentralization really assist centralized states to create democratic values and demands for change in educational governance to strengthen civil society? Further over the past two decades, this transformation of the state's role occurs within a policy climate of fiscal discipline and austerity in public spending. The decentralizing state is pushed towards greater efficiencies in the discharge of its social duties, and is called on to better regulate and control the newly privatized activities. Given this major transformation at the hands of political globalization, what is the likely educational outcome of a *decentralization process*, where states attempt to maintain control over the policy process while decentralizing responsibilities for its implementation?

Decentralization and Curricular Control

These questions raise the issue of how powerful global trends translate into national adaptation through a process of accommodation. I examine these issues in terms of policies of decentralization and curricular control. A central area of school operation heavily influenced by the past two decades of decentralization debate is curriculum. Control over the content of school curricula and methods of curricular implementation within classrooms are key foci of decentralizing reforms in many nations. This emphasis is motivated by the overall importance of curricula in the institutional grammar of schooling (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Curricula are major technical inputs to the schooling process; they are also the corpus of cultural knowledge, and can even represent attempts at social control and domination (Carnoy & Levin, 1985). Curriculum is, therefore, a readily contested domain of schooling. For example, in many nations educational policymakers use rhetoric about more accountability within the curricula to prepare students for the competitive world market, yet it is unclear how that is to be achieved. Often decentralization of curricular control and implementation is assumed to achieve a host of effects in ways that are not clearly specified.

Coexistence of Centralization and Decentralization Policies

Given the centrality of curricular control in educational spheres, it is interesting that the connection between centralization of curricular governance and curricular

implementation has been generally under researched.⁸ While there is much useful scholarship on the politics of decentralization, there is relatively little on its empirical consequences. Using cross-national data from the early 1980s, Stevenson & Baker (1991) present one of the few systematic analyses of the curricular consequences arising from decentralizing governance. They find that within decentralized national governance structures there is greater variation in the implementation of curricula in classrooms and more influence from a range of local factors on implementation.⁹ Useful as these results are in understanding the impact of decentralization on schooling, this study was limited to only the officially stated governance policy within each nation and consequently did not examine the shifting political nature of decentralized governance produced through globalization.

As a political response to globalization, countries changed their structure of curricular governance to become more decentralized overall. The goals of the market criteria, represented by productivity, competitiveness, and flexibility in adapting to international changes were in many nations accepted as key strategies to keep up with international competitiveness. For curricular policy, particularly in mathematics and science, this means more emphasis on standardization, achievement, and assessments controlled through policies of accountability and client choice. In many nations these

⁸ This is particularly true given the large number of educational researchers in the U.S. and the recent U.S. policy debate about the effects of increasing decentralization of educational responsibility and centralizing curriculum in mathematics and science (e.g., national voluntary testing). Examples of research on educational decentralization are Gibton et al. (2000), Heyneman (2000), and Spillane & Thompson (1997).

⁹ For results that suggest a high degree of between-school variation in curriculum within a relatively centralized national system see also Benavot & Resh (2000).

policy goals were supported by reorganization of the executive branches of government, assuring participation at the national, regional and local government in educational decision-making about curricula through effective programs of decentralization. At the same time local adaptation due to cultural imperatives, traditions, environment, historical legacy, and national political circumstances have the potential to produce cross-national variations in the decentralization of curricular control (Davis & Guppy, 1997).

Consequently, the usual either/or categories of centralization or decentralization used to describe patterns of curricular governance become less accurate, and even misleading, in an environment of change due to globalization. Here I examine some empirical consequences of the recently observed mixing of centralized and decentralized governance processes in systems as an outcome of both economic and institutional global forces (Astiz & Riordan, 1999). I present two types of analyses: first a brief description of four contrasting national systems undergoing different decentralization reforms, and second an analysis that establishes a comparison between the official reported curricular governance structure and the actual governance structure reported by teachers and principals in 39 nations included in TIMSS.

Empirical Illustration

Country Descriptions

I discuss four national examples that show the dimensions of coexistence of centralized and decentralized governance processes in curricular control. For this purpose, countries have been chosen according to the characteristics of its traditional

educational organizational frameworks. France represents a traditional centralized system, the USA represents a decentralized system and, Colombia and Spain are examples of countries that recently experienced educational reforms, which purposefully mixed centralized and decentralized curricular governance. These four nations are also included in the second analysis.

Colombia. By the end of the 1980s Colombia was in total political, social, and economic anarchy. Drug cartels along with leftist and rightist guerrilla armies dismantled the political capacity of the government thereby eroding its legitimacy (Fiske, 1996). The first step towards reestablishing government legitimacy was through a decentralization policy geared towards most government processes and services. In 1989, the Colombian Congress passed legislation, which in 1991 gained constitutional legality, giving municipalities the responsibility for the administration of public education among other services. The idea was to shift power from the central government, which had exercised control since the 1970s over the political, economical and other institutions in the periphery. This transfer of authority was a form of devolution (using Dennis Rondinelli's decentralization typology) because the National Ministry of Education could not assume responsibilities after the transference (Hanson, 1995). Only in cases of significant breakdowns at the departmental or municipal level could the Ministry intervene.

The reform made a radical change in the role of the Ministry of Education, and particularly in terms of curricular control (Hanson, 1995). The new role was to conduct nationwide policy formation, planning, evaluation, and training. It retained centralized authority over curricular frameworks, but not over specific curricular content. This

change was made under the supposition that decision making close to the school level will better adapt the curriculum to the local settings, and thus yield a greater sense of ownership, improve student teacher motivation, and increase community participation (Hanson, 1997).

After a long struggle among different administrative units about the management of education, the process of educational decentralization culminated in 1992 with a project of the General Education Law drafted by the National Planning Department and the Ministries of Education and Finance to implement municipalization, school autonomy, private sector participation in education, and a voucher system in education for poor students at the secondary level. This project met with considerable resistance by the national teacher's union. As a consequence, a new law was adopted two years later showing some political compromise. The terms of the compromise clearly illustrate the coexistence of centralized and decentralized structures. The responsibilities devolved to municipalities were limited; schools did not have the autonomy to select, hire and sanction personnel. The design of the core curriculum and its assessment remained centralized to increase efficiency and quality through administrative control; however, certain adaptations were done at the local level (Prawda, 1993).

Finally, the Congress did not grant approval for a complete municipalization of basic education, nor for school autonomy. What decentralization did succeed in was in providing legitimacy to the government and limiting the power of the teacher's union (Fiske, 1996).

Spain. During the last period of General Francisco Franco's regime (1939-1975) under secessionist pressures and increasing demands for more stable democratic institutions, the Spanish central government started a process of decentralization that included education. After Franco's death in 1975, democracy was reestablished in Spain. The new constitution of 1979 organized the country into 17 autonomous communities devolving what had formerly been central functions to those regional units. Each of these communities received many governmental functions and services including education (Hanson, 1989). Some of those regional communities, with strong cultural and linguistic traditions, questioned the central government authority and claimed wider powers in education. One important example of that claim was the incorporation of regional languages other than Spanish in the curricula, as well as the use of these languages as means of instruction (Boyd-Barrett, 1995).

After many years of deep discussion about how the regional systems should be organized, a school-based management system was established under which school councils comprised of parents, teachers and students would run local schools. This school council was thought to be more responsive to local needs and allow more rapid decision-making. Their authority included the right to elect school principals while the Ministry of Education retained control over hiring teachers and granting degrees (Hanson, 2000). The Ministry of Education also set and maintained “minimum requirements” governing the school year schedule and identifying common curricular areas, especially those courses associated with national concerns such as Spanish history, Spanish language, mathematics, and science. At the same time, the autonomous regions gained control over

the interpretation and adaptation of the common curricular content to their regional characteristics and needs. This process of curricular adaptation is modified even further within the communities and by each school (Boyd-Barrett, 1995).

A process of decentralization over the curriculum was incorporated within the context of national control over a core curriculum. This coexistence of centralized and decentralized practices shows the tension between the commitment to increase the ability of communities and individual schools to modify the curriculum in light of local and individual needs while keeping unity through curricular control in a fragmented and recently democratized nation.

France. The French case is another example of the coexistence of some decentralized curricular governance within an overall pattern of centralization due to globalization. Since the 1970s, France has experienced several political attempts to decentralize in order to respond to local and regional problems, and throughout the 1980s several reforms attempted to increase local control over curricular issues. Nevertheless, the Ministry of Education maintains a strong commitment toward centralized administration. The most recent effort to decentralize, which occurred in 1982 and 1983, involved regulations that transferred educational administration and some educational responsibilities to departments, regions, and municipalities. However, control over the curriculum is still under the influence of the Ministry of Education. The control over the curricular frameworks illustrates the strong commitment that the French government still has to a democratic tradition, which recognizes the role of the central government as the guarantor of a free and equal public education for all (Botrel, 1996).

The Ministry of Education, which was established officially in 1932 but has been a recognized “body” for more than 100 years, exerts its influence through regulations, evaluation, and supervision. Requirements concerning the number of hours that must be spent annually on certain areas of study in primary and high schools are set nationally; however, some aspects of planning and pedagogy such as the decision over extra curricular activities, school day hours, maintenance and construction of new school buildings, and equipment supplies are carried out at the regional level. The National Program Committee designs programs for elementary and secondary schools at the national level and is composed of experts appointed by the Minister (Hussen & Postlethwaite, 1994).

Efforts to decentralize have been slow because of several reasons: (1) lack of support from the teachers; (2) lack of tradition of civic involvement in education; (3) a strong tradition of powerful central bureaucracy; (4) the belief that education standards and national control equalizes educational opportunities; and, (5) the demands of certain regions for more responsibilities in decision-making (Botrel, 1996).

United States. The federal government in the United States has little formal control over educational administration and policy. With its fifty separate state departments of education and some 15,000 semi-autonomous school districts, it is one of the most localized systems in the world today. Nevertheless, it does have coexisting centralizing and decentralizing processes within its structure that have historically created a number of paradoxes in reform and implementation of reform. The extreme nature of its local control has meant that national reforms have often been defined and championed by

national forces, including both the federal government and non-government organizations. For example, early in its history the American public school system underwent considerable centralization and homogenization by professionally led reform movements within the nation (Tyack, 1974). Contemporary educational reform in the U.S. represents a similar trend where both centralizing and decentralizing factors are at work.

Over the past two decades there have been two contrasting forces in U.S. educational reform in terms of the locus of policy generation and administrative control: (1) centralization of the national goals, including curricular goals (e.g. Goals 2000 and national voluntary standards for curriculum and instruction) and (2) decentralization of curricular implementation (Elmore & Fuhman, 1994). Global trends towards education reform based on economic competition have influenced American policymakers to want to increase central (i.e. national) control over curricular content as well as decentralize large, under-performing urban school districts. In particular, international competition has driven concern over central policy towards American education. One of the most well known was the so-called Sputnik-crisis, which led to The National Defense Act in 1958 and increased federal funding and policy influence in mathematics and science through the National Science Foundation (Tyack, 1974).

The economic downturn in the early 1980s and the United States' highly publicized mediocre international test scores set the stage for another round of centralized curricular reforms with some decentralized components of implementation as well (A *Nation at Risk Report*, 1983). Governors, along with several presidents, took a leading

role in establishing state and national objectives for educational change—objectives that can only be reached through states-level education policies (Elmore & Fuhman, 1994). At the same time, neoliberal political trends within the American polity have pushed decentralized policies on local districts, some of which historically have been more centralized.

Comparatively, the U.S. represents a mirror image of many other nations in its response to global trends, yet as a case it illustrates the global trend toward coexistence of both centralization and decentralization processes noted in other nations. The U.S. approaches this from the other end. In the United States, a historically weak policy center is coupled with an extremely localized administration that often leads to the mixing of reforms simultaneously aimed at both more national centralization and more local decentralization. In fact, efforts in each of these four nations to simultaneously centralize and decentralize arise due to different pressures from economic and institutional globalization processes and mix in ways unique to each nation's context. Hence while each nation has some simultaneous mixing of models, the empirical reality of curricular control varies in each.

Quantitative Analysis of Thirty-nine Nations

Similar to earlier cross-national analyses of the impact of decentralization on implemented curriculum I suggest that governance structure does influence patterns of curricular implementation (Stevenson & Baker, 1991). But these earlier studies of decentralization in the 1980s did not consider the effects of globalization on

homogenization of operating structures and hence the presence of mixed models of centralized and decentralized curricular administration and governance.

A question that is answered with the analysis of curricular governance in 39 nations is as follows: to what degree do nations show evidence of the mixing of decentralized governance into centralized structures? To do this I describe and compare what educators in schools see as the *operative* structure of curricular governance with the *official* description of the structure.

Measures of Curricular Governance

“Official” Level of Curricular Centralization (mean=4.21, sd=1.24): A rating derived from the country reports on curriculum control in the *International Encyclopedia of Education* (5= centralized national influence, 1=decentralized local influence).¹⁰ Ratings 2-4 represent a mixing of local and national level influence, with 3 being a relatively even mix between national and local influence. While not fully official, this measure literally coincides with an official description of governance because they are coded by an acknowledged expert (sometimes a ministry official) using primary ministry documents from the early 1990s.

Operational Curricular Centralization (mean=3.41, sd=5.43): This is a ratio of centralized to decentralized influences on a schools’ curricular decision making derived from responses by nationally represented samples of school principals in the TIMSS. Nations with ratios near zero are highly decentralized in practice, ratios around one show

¹⁰ See Husén & Postlethwaite, (1994).

significant components of both decentralization and centralization, and ratios above two show highly centralized practice.

Results

How evident is the mixing of decentralized and centralized governance within nations?

As the argument about the consequences of global forces on the operation of education administrations suggests, Table 4.1 shows that there is considerable evidence of a mixing in of decentralized processes to centralized governance of eighth grade mathematics curriculum.

In the first column, the operational measure of curricular centralization shows national aggregations from principals' experiences with both centralized and decentralized influence on their school's curricular decision-making. These illustrate actual mixes of decentralized and centralized governance. When a nation's principals generally do not experience extensive centralized (national) influence but do experience extensive decentralized (local) influences the ratio is near zero; when the opposite is true for a nation, the ratio climbs significantly above 1.0; and when there are many principals reporting equal extensive influence of both types of governance the ratio is at, or near 1.0. While there is a continuum among these nations' operational governance, there is considerable mixing of both forms of governance of curricula. Almost two-thirds of the nations have ratios between .65 and 1.97 indicating significant mixes of both influential centralized and decentralized administration of mathematics curriculum operating at the same time, and many of these nations have actual equal amounts of both modes of governance. Furthermore, the mean (1.2) among this sizable group of mixed nations indicates a slightly stronger presence of centralized administration but with concurrent presence of considerable decentralizing influences as well. This fits the image of globalization pushing recent decentralization reforms onto more traditionally centralized systems. At the same time there are, of course, some nations that continue to be predominately centralized or decentralized in curricular governance; fifteen percent of these nations are completely or mostly decentralized and twenty-three percent are mostly centralized.

The last point of this part of the story is seen in the measure of the *official* level of centralization shown in the second column of Table 4.1. Interestingly most national experts, working from official ministerial documents from the early-1990s, describe these systems as mostly centralized (80 percent at levels 4 or 5 of this scale). Notable is the high level of *official* centralization of curricular administration among nations whose principals report significant mixing of extensive decentralized and centralized processes. And overall very few nations have *official* reported levels of mixed governance (levels 2 or 3).

Why is there this mismatch between these two indicators of governance? I believe that the measure of operational governance, collected as it is from principals with actual administrative responsibility over curricular implementation within schools, is likely to be a more accurate, sensitive, and up-to-date assessment of the sum total of national and local influences operating on the administration of mathematics curricula within systems. Further, as was noted above there could very well be some difficulties for ministries to accurately describe the complex and evolving process of decentralization of older more centralized structure (as well as the potential for resistance to describing the true situation). Hence in the many nations undergoing a mixing of both, official documents could under describe decentralization or be quickly outdated in a rapidly changing education section under global forces. Thus, I suggest that at this particular point in time it is highly unlikely to expect these two measures to coincide and that *official* measures, too insensitive or too simplistic to describe the emerging complexity of educational governance, will not be very accurate or timely.

Lastly, if one were to make the more generous assumption that in many nations the *official* measure is not so much a result of inaccurate documents as it is of out-of-date documents, perhaps from a time before the full impact of the current round of global pressure to decentralize government services, then these results are even more in line with my arguments about the educational consequences of globalization. Globalization is pushing more decentralized administrative rhetoric and strategies through many nations and they are reacting. In a significant number of nations older centralized administrative structures are in the process of decentralization, but as the brief country descriptions illustrate this is often not an easy transition—it is complex and at times politically messy. Taken as a whole these results demonstrate some of the paradoxical consequences of global forces for school systems and particularly for their governance.

Conclusion

Both economic and institutional globalization forces push nations to decentralize their administration of social services including education. The former force appeals to images of a highly educated labor force for national competitiveness within a world economy, and the latter appeals to a range of democratic images, as well as notions of greater educational efficiency and quality through local marketization of education. A significant set of nations has responded to the legitimizing global forces within a multinational economy and world institutional system by adopting decentralization, as Argentina did. However, as the case of the administration of mathematics curriculum

shows with the TIMSS data, this has been only partial adoption. So in reality globalization has pushed more nations into various mixes of decentralized and centralized administration of education with all kinds of interesting paradoxes.

As the brief case study illustrates one such paradox is the maintenance of centralized authority but with decentralized responsibility for implementation, often with less administrative effectiveness nation-wide. Hegemonic and multi-state communities can impose forms of domestic power through economic and institutional globalization processes that are legitimate but not necessarily effective or influential to social outcomes. Therefore, elements of agency at all levels co-exist within a framework of globalization institutionalization and economic relationships, but this does not mean that these lead to the most effective administration within many nations.

In summary the comparative case of curricular governance in nations illustrates how globalization has produced a set of consequences for educational administration. These consequences are not just simple isomorphism upon one single model of administration. Rather a global push for decentralization has set the stage for a number of national adoptions of this general idea. Consequently, moving toward the globalized center leads centralized national education systems in many countries to adopt national decentralization policies and perhaps even for some decentralized national education systems to partially adopt more centralization. Globalization does not necessarily produce simple isomorphism, yet it does produce non-trivial changes throughout systems of education that in turn may influence what actually happens in the daily experiences of teachers and students in classrooms. In the subsequent chapters of this study I address

how Argentina shared this global endeavor of educational decentralization and how those patterns of international structure of education governance have been officially acclaimed and adopted at the national and provincial levels, resulting in an interesting mix of centralized and decentralized practices.

CHAPTER 5

POLICY FORMULATION AND ADOPTION

Tensions Between Global Patterns and National Realities

Argentina also followed the worldwide decentralization pattern previously described. As these global forces met and blended with existing national structures an interesting and complex process has occurred in its administration of education, one among the various mixes of decentralized and centralized administration of education. Special emphasis is given in this chapter to the Argentine political and educational structures by addressing the contradictions between Argentine formal institutions and historical national practices. By no means do I attempt to address all Argentine contradictions, just the ones I considered important for the development of education and that clearly illustrate the idea behind the chapter's title—between global aspirations and local realities. I should emphasize that the historical accounts of Argentine political and institutional evolution presented here are not meant to be comprehensive. This section provides a general overview of certain characteristics of Argentina's political past and political institutional framework that are helpful in bringing into sharper focus the main objective of this study.

Using secondary sources, archival materials, and personal accounts this case study involves the data collection of Argentina's educational transformations in response to worldwide trends and analyzes the context of the decentralization initiatives conducted in Argentina in the early 1990s. I pay special attention to the policy formulation and

adoption of educational decentralization process rooted in the Law for the Transfer of Education Services (1992) and the Federal Education Law (1993), which highlights—once more—Argentina’s weak interpretation of the constitutional mandate of republican, representative, and federal government; its lack of commitment with these institutions of liberal democracy; its standardized practices of vulnerable separation of powers; a strong presidentialism; and the control of Argentine politics by Buenos Aires through a highly centralized process of decision making and operation.

The chapter basically shows that the decentralization that was carried out in combination with the two education laws mentioned before took the form of *deconcentration*, transferring to the provincial level the management and delivery of secondary and tertiary services, while the National Ministry of Education kept the control as coordinator and controller of the national educational design that the new economic and social international order brought forth for schooling. The chapter ends by setting the context for the Buenos Aires education reform (Chapter 6). The objective here is to integrate some of the previous findings of this study and to put forward meaningful accounts that link them with the limited development of a decentralized governance structure and a pluralist educational system.

Argentine Contradictions: Between Norms and Practices

General Notes

Argentina is a country of contradictions. A country of battles between Federalists and Unitarians for the political construction of the nation state, conflicts between the *center* (Buenos Aires) and the *periphery* (the rest of the provinces), between *them* (provincianos)¹ and *nous* (porteños).² A country of socio-economic imbalances between its capital of Buenos Aires, and the interior, the country's twenty three provinces and 1110 provincial municipalities. It was the dream of European immigrants in the nineteenth century—the land in which cattle, sheep, and wheat contributed to its prosperity in the turn of the century (See Appendix B.1—Argentina's map and general country statistics).

Argentina is a nation that in the early 1910s ranked among the wealthiest countries in the world—ahead of France and Germany—but it has spiraled downward ever since. Today Argentina's declining population—a GDP of -10.7—is the highest

¹ *Provincianos* refers to the people from the provinces. *Porteños* refers to those from Buenos Aires where the port is located. I used the French term *nous*—'us' in English, to denote the eccentricity *porteños* pretended, particularly in the middle of the 1800s when Buenos Aires looked at the French model with admiration.

² The main issue in the conflict between Federal and Unitarians was the form of government to be established in the new nation (after independence from Spain in 1816). The political leaders of the interior, referring to themselves as Federalists, tended to avoid the intense centralization of the colonial period and to equate federalism with democracy. They recognized the economic and social differences between the regions and particularly between the interior and Buenos Aires, and felt that federalism was best suited to recognize these differences. On the other hand, the Unitarians from Buenos Aires were convinced that the best way to politically organize the newborn nation was under a unitarian system that could fuse the warring provinces into one united nation. They were afraid that if federalism was adopted, then unity would be really hard to maintain. Economically speaking, the conflict revolved around the fact that the dominant source of income for the new nation was the import duties collected in Buenos Aires, a sum that usually went directly into the treasury of the Buenos Aires province (Rock, 1987). These two factions were united, albeit fragilely, by the National Constitution of 1853, which served as Argentine fundamental law (it was revised and amended in 1860, 1866, 1898, 1949, 1957, 1972) until 1994.

decline in the world (The Economist, 2002). It is a country that today has almost thirty-six million inhabitants spread over 2,000 miles in length—about one third of the U.S. And yet almost one third of its population lives in the Great Buenos Aires, which is the political and economic core of the nation and one of the largest metropolitan areas in the world (*La Nación*, 2001).

A country with a rich aborigine past, but claims to ethnic and racial homogeneity and a strong European tradition. A country that declares itself to be part of the *first world* with an unemployment rate of almost 20% and with approximately 40% of its citizenry living below poverty level.³ A country that lives between dreams and realities, although a *harsh reality* touched it particularly in the last year, but still dreams as the Spaniards did in the sixteenth century when they hoped to find silver in the River Plate.⁴ This tension between dreams and realities was captured in the words of an informant, “we continue to be fascinated by the country it [Argentina] was instead of the country it has become. We insist in denying it in the name of a dream” (EPA No.10).

Scholars agree that Argentina’s contradictions can be traced to the very nature of its democratic institutions and political system (Smith, 1974, 1978; Snow, 1985; Waisman, 1989; Manzetti, 1993). Likewise, this chapter aims to examine how those institutions facilitated globalization’s influx and how they also conditioned the type of

³ The former president Carlos S. Menem (1989-1999) claimed that Argentina was part of the developed world (the “first world” in his words) since his government established strong ties with the United States of America, what the critics called “carnal relations.”

Poverty line is defined as an income of less than 495 pesos/dollars. *Encuesta Permanente de Hogares*, May 1999. The unemployment rate and the poverty level were obtained from preliminary results of the census 2001 data published in the Argentine newspaper, *Clarín*.

⁴ The River Plate, *Rio de la Plata* in Spanish, received its name just for this reason.

change that actually took place. Moreover, the gap between the Argentine institutional framework and its actual practice is at the origin of new contradictions raised in the 1990s with unexpected consequences.

Brief Review of Argentine Institutional Evolution

Similarly to other countries in Latin America, Argentina's independence did not bring about change in terms of economic, social, or political power (Veliz, 1980; Vellinga, 1998). To some extent one can say that even today Argentina has not experienced a redistribution of economic, social, and political power. Since gaining independence, the most troublesome political conflict has revolved around the distribution of rewards between Buenos Aires and the provinces. Initially, this conflict was to decide whether provincial elites were going to inherit the power taken away from the Spanish crown, with Buenos Aires acting as coordinating center, or whether the future capital was going to dominate the country's formation.

Argentina became locked into dependency on outside markets from its beginnings, following the peace of Buenos Aires, prosperity and rapid incorporation into the world economy and the adoption of European models of progress and modernization. These models depended largely on Buenos Aires pampas, constant supplies of foreign capital, and immigrants (Rock, 1987; Halperín Donghi, 1994). At the same time, Buenos Aires has imposed a similar state of dependency on the other Argentine provinces. Export of beef and agricultural products and import of European goods set the development of Buenos Aires elite, brokers, and decision-makers, who envisioned high

profits from opening the whole economy to free trade. Not surprisingly, provincial leaders were not very enthusiastic with the idea; they realized how free trade could destroy provincial economies and subjugate the interior to the eccentric Buenos Aires. This tension in addition to the political clashes between *Unitarios* and *Federales* continued through almost all of the century (Rock, 1987).

After a long struggle between Federalists and Unitarians, the city of Buenos Aires gained in 1880 the status of federal district—the country’s capital—that not only established the union of Argentine territory and the institutionalization of the nation-state (Oszlak, 1982), but also reinforced the commercial, political and intellectual leadership of Buenos Aires. This leadership was also experienced in education.⁵ Thus, this situation led some scholars to assert that, by the 1900s, Buenos Aires absorbed the nation (Scobie, 1971).

The legal basis for this accord between the provinces and Buenos Aires was outlined in the Constitution adopted in 1853. This Magna Carta, significantly influenced by that of the United States and based on the same liberal ideals, provided a representative, republican, and federal government (Art.1). The constitution of 1853 mandated a separation of powers into executive, legislative, and judicial branches at the national and provincial level as a way to balance power concentrated in a single executive. Each province also has its own constitution, which reflects the federalist structure of the national one.

⁵ A separate section will explain this point in detail.

This Constitution, although revised several times, maintained those liberal principles which remained until today even after the substantive revision made in 1994.⁶ There were, in fact, significant differences in practice with the admired U.S. model. Regardless of those federal principles and representative institutions, the city of Buenos Aires constantly increased its control of Argentine politics while creating a highly centralized policy making process.⁷

Power of Intervention

Argentine liberal institutions were weak from the beginning because they were based on a narrow interpretation of federalism and pluralism (Manzetti, 1993). Although the country assumed a federal system, the central government reserved for itself the right of *intervención* (intervention) in provincial affairs, even though the provinces, according to the constitutional mandate, have autonomous political, administrative, and economic powers (Art.6). Regardless of the objectives and limitations of this constitutional proviso, in practice it was used to replace *unruly* provincial authorities—those who failed to get along with the central government—and to appoint loyal federal administrators.⁸ The intervention power, as it was designed, requires the consent of the

⁶ The 1994 constitutional revision will be covered in another section that deals with president Menem's administration.

⁷ For more information on this period, see Botana, N. (1977)

⁸ A good example of how this proviso was used is the case of the province of Corrientes. Being politically dominated by the *Pacto Autonomista Correntino*, a local party with strong ties with the local elite and in opposition to the *Justicialista* administration, this province was intervened almost all the time during Menem's presidency. The Senate did not present opposition to this determination since during Menem's administration the *Justicialista* party had the majority in that Chamber.

Senate majority to be put in place; however, in practice, having a disciplined, controlled, and copartisan Senate allowed presidents to exercise their will.

Distribution of Finances

Another point to consider that reinforces the power of the central government is the federal control and distribution of finances. The Argentine Constitution of 1853 established the power to tax between the national and provincial governments. The national government was granted the exclusive control to tax over international trade, which initially was its primary source of revenue, while the provinces were granted the authority to establish direct taxes. The constitution also stipulated that both governance levels can raise domestic consumption taxes or indirect taxes. The provinces delegated the responsibility to the municipal government to collect fees, not taxes, in return for services (Porto & Sanguinetti, 1993; Lopez Murphy, 1995).

During the Great Depression, the decline in trade and the limitations that the federal government experienced to keep its finances were evident. For the first time then, the central government considered making use of its constitutional prerogative to collect domestic consumption taxes along with the provinces. This situation ended in an agreement between the provinces and the federal government, frequently known as *Sistema de Coparticipación Federal* (federal revenue sharing system) Law No. 12139 (1935), in which the provinces delegated to the national Congress the rights over certain taxes in exchange for an automatic share in the revenues collected (Pirez, 1986).

The rules of this agreement have been changed over time and were a motive of constant tension between the central government and the provinces; there have been cases in which the agreement was unilaterally changed by decree by the central executive. In 1988, under a Radical administration (1983-1989) a new agreement was reached and a new law of *coparticipación* passed Congress (Law No. 23.548, 1988). This new fiscal contract constituted a step forward in the process towards fiscal decentralization in Argentina. This regulation changed the previous fiscal distribution, which assigned to the provinces approximately 30% of the national primary tax collection to the highest distribution ever. Since then, the national government has received 42.34% while the provinces get the remaining 57.66%. However, national economic constraints and increasing demand of resources from the central government led to new fiscal pacts in the 1990s and the lack of accomplishment of this revenue sharing (Carciofi et al., 1996).⁹ I should note here that, today only 5 of the 24 provincial jurisdictions generates 85% of the gross general product and only 3 provinces constitutes 65% of the country's total exportations. Even more, the City of Buenos Aires and the Province of Buenos Aires accumulates almost 59% of Argentina's total gross product. This number gives us an idea that fiscal federalism is still an illusion in Argentina (PNUD, Índice de desarrollo social, 2001).

⁹ For detailed information on this issue see FIEL, Fundación de Investigaciones Económicas Latinoamericanas (1993). See also, Porto & Sanguinetti (1993).

Presidential Power

The Argentine political regime is characterized by the principle of the presidential system of government. The president combines the position of head of state, the government, the public administration, the armed forces, and possesses the prerogative of declaring a state of siege and the federal intervention previously described. Although the Argentine political system is based on a separation of power between the executive, judicial, and legislative and is regulated by a system of checks and balances, it has been categorized as a *hyperpresidentialist*.¹⁰

In fact, both national and provincial constitutions grant wide margins for executive action to their head offices, including: 1) the ability to appoint cabinet ministers and other administrative personnel, 2) the nomination of the Supreme Court members with the consent of the Senate, 3) the use of delegated decrees and urgency and necessity decrees laws, and 4) in the case of regular legislation, the president can maintain control over policy outcomes by the use of in line veto. The veto power allows the president to advance legislation which, after constitutional amendments, could still be modified to the executive view. In addition, vetoes can also be used to protect decree laws, since any congressional attempt to overrule them can be vetoed (Art.99).

This constitutional recognition of the preference of a strong *solo* executive has been reinforced by political custom both at the national and provincial levels. In a context of historical political instability, a succession of democratic and non-democratic

¹⁰ For further information on the characteristics of presidential democracies, see Linz (1994) Mainwaring & Shugart (1997). A recently published work described Argentine political system as of limited centralism. See Mustapic (2000).

regimes weakened the figure of institutions like the Congress and the Judiciary, while strengthening the primacy of the Presidency. The reflection of one of the national level officials interviewed for this study captures this idea, “if something gets done in Argentina, if things get done at all, it is by its executive offices; no one has more power than they do” (EBAPO No.2).

In addition, the function of congress was not precisely that of determining the rules to organize Argentine society but rather to enact into legislation presidential mandates (Smith, 1978). The relative power of the legislative branch is also evident in the presidential power to pass decrees—with the force of law—under “exceptional circumstances” and for “reasons of necessity and urgency” and with the “general accordance of Ministers that must endorse them” (Art.99).¹¹ It is hard to believe that this accord could not be met since Ministers are presidential appointees.

The power of *intervención*, the federal control and distribution of the finances, the strong executive, and the weak separation of powers among the executive, legislative, and judiciary have converted Argentina into a pseudo-federal and pseudo-plural nation. This situation led Luigi Manzetti to declare that, “institutions of liberal democracy, with the single exception of the presidency, were never institutionalized” (1993, p.4). Other scholars, probably the best-known among them, Guillermo O’Donnell’s *delegative democracies*, went further when questioned about the republican features of Argentina’s political system. He argued that authoritarian legacies and deep social and economic

¹¹ Otherwise indicated, throughout the study all translations from the Spanish version of Argentine legislation and documents it is mine. I assume all responsibilities for the any misinterpretation.

crisis resulted in a policy style that concentrated decision-making in the executive branch with the absence of real checks and balances or horizontal and vertical accountability (O'Donnell, 1994). I should mention here that what was not institutionalized was the formal democratic framework, but rather an informal historical behavior became the standard practice and subsequently the “only game in town” (O'Donnell, 1996, p.40). I will touch on this point particularly throughout the case of Buenos Aires.

General Features of Argentina's Party System

Conservative forces, the agro-exportation interests associated with Great Britain, dominated the Argentine politics until 1916 (Rock, 1987). Although considered initially as a multiparty system, it is apparent that throughout the twentieth century two parties played a major role in Argentine politics. Other smaller parties have played a significant role depending upon their regional weight or as sources of coalitions with the major parties (Catterberg, 1989).

Initially, it was the urban-middle-class based Radical party which pressured the traditional Buenos Aires upper class into reforming the electoral system through the Saenz Peña Law (1912).¹² This law increased political participation by introducing the universal and secret male suffrage and when it went into effect, allowed the Radical party to win the presidency in the 1916 election. This political party remained in power until the military, in conjunction with the conservative forces, entered the political scene in 1930. Military forces have taken control over the government on many occasions: 1930-

¹² The name of the law is attributed to its intellectual author, Roque S. Peña.

32, 1943-46, 1955-58, 1962-63, 1970-73, and 1976-83, eroding the democratic capacity of the political system. Subsequently, when elections have been held, the Radical party and its different factions have been shown to possess the majority of the electoral vote, except in 1946, 1951-55, 1973, 1989-99 when the *Peronist* or *Justicialista* (social justice) party, when not proscribed, won elections.¹³ It is important to note that except for the first presidency of Hipólito Yrigoyen (1916-1922) and Marcelo T. de Alvear's term (1922-1928) no other radical president was able to successfully complete its democratic mandate; discredited governments, unpopularity, and economic crisis, which in turn ended in military coups or revolts, have been the most common reasons for the Radical party's unsuccessful destiny.

The Radicals had strongly supported a liberal-democratic political ideology, although sufficiently vague to make it easy to transform it into a cause of personal politics. On the contrary, they had been conservative on economic matters. When the Radicals were in power, their main opposition to the conservative forces was exclusively political while committing themselves to administer the existing social and economic order. Until the 1930s almost all political forces, even socialists, coincided on the economic model and Argentina's position in the world economy. The reason for this was the manufacturing industry was linked with the agro-exportation economy and the well-being of the middle and working classes depended on exports (Rock, 1987).

¹³ The Radical party accepted and supported such proscription; "the only common cause bringing conservatives, socialists, and radicals together was the demotion of Perón from power" (Manzetti, 1993, p.88)

The party's democratic commitment could be seen through its internal organization. Since its origins, the Radical party evidenced a federal decentralized composition and internal elections for candidate selection. The internal organization took the form of local and national committees called *comités*, hierarchically structured and controlled by local party elites and national *caudillos*—i.e. Hipólito Yrigoyen or later on, Raúl Alfonsín.¹⁴ Although UCR's political support between 1916 and 1930 came primarily from the middle sector, its leadership remained in the hands of the landowning and commercial elite (Rock, 1975). "Radical committees were usually closed circles, which enlisted new members primarily through selective cooptation than enrolling new people which is typical of mass parties." (Manzetti, 1993, p.81).

The other party with popular support since the 1940s, although considered originally by some as an electoral machine or movement (Murmis & Portantiero, 1971; Waldman, 1981; Matsushita, 1983) is the *Justicialista* party. Essentially, with a clientele among the urban lower class, lower middle class, small manufacturers, and organized labor, the *Peronist* party was born initially to provide a popular base to Juan D. Perón. However, it acquired permanency, and with its party status, went far beyond its *caudillo* or leader.¹⁵ Lacking a coherent ideology, Perón used a variety of means to reach support among his varied constituency; the most important ones were nationalism and anti-oligarchy rhetoric, mass rallies, economic policies that addressed income distribution, labor laws, the expansion of the public sector, and political participation of those

¹⁴ See Carta Orgánica Nacional, Unión Cívica Radical.

¹⁵ The Catholic Church initially supported Perón since he reintroduced the catholic religion in public schools.

previously excluded sectors. Moreover, he used his charismatic leadership in a direct connection with his followers without any party or Congress mediation (Murmis & Portantiero, 1971).

The *Justicialimo* claimed to be *the third position*, a middle ground doctrine between the two contending ideologies of the time—free market capitalism represented by the U.S. and Marxist Leninism represented by the U.R.S.S.—with corporatist components of fascism and nazism. For this reason Perón's policies tended to put a strong reliance on the state as a motor of development, rather than letting the market decide how the economy should be run. Indeed, under his leadership, policies of state intervention were put into effect through regulation of business activities, the creation of monopolistic state companies, and interference between the state-labor relations. Internationally speaking and in conjunction with his third position, Perón assumed a Non-Aligned stand rejecting the cold war world division established by the U.S.-U.R.S.S. confrontation (Escudé, 1983).

As a populist-labor based party in which political success depends on union support, its leadership and structure have been vulnerable to organized labor demands in terms of programs, strategies, and candidate selection, weakening the party's formal organization. Lacking the kind of disciplined and bureaucratic structure, its organization depends today on charismatic leadership and an extensive informal network of neighborhood organizations working jointly with the party local *unidades básicas* (UB) base units (Levitsky, 2001).

Both parties have split in different factions a number of times over the century or made circumstantial coalitions with other minor political forces. The divisions have, generally speaking, been more products of personal rivalry than genuine ideological differences while circumstantial coalitions have been perpetrated as electoral tactics. This situation led to their organizational weakness and the untrustworthy fate they have today among the citizenry.¹⁶ Buenos Aires's data supports this statement. When respondents were asked to rank institutions according to their competence from a list of eight institutions, they were ranked as follows: the Church, Congress, political parties, unions, judicial system, armed forces, the media, and businesses. People expressed their lack of confidence in political parties ranking them in sixth place.¹⁷

Another cause that led to party organizational weakness is the fact that they have represented only one sector. Agricultural, financial, industrial, and labor sectors exercised enormous economic and political powers, making the parties vulnerable to separate interest negotiations. For this reason, political parties needed to adapt their structures to the needs of those independent negotiations (Waisman, 1989).

Patron-client relationship, usually known as *clientelism*, has been a political tool used by both parties to get electoral support. Through this practice the patron—boss, caudillo or charismatic leader—offers some form of reward, a job, intervention with the bureaucracy, or material help and in return, the client gives his/her vote and general

¹⁶ In the last election, October 2001, 41% of the electorate expressed its disconformities with the government either with a blank ballot or with an impugned vote. *La Nación*, Elecciones legislativas, October 16, 2001. Even more, in recent protests the slogan repeated over and over again was, "Throw them [politicians] all out!" (field observation)

¹⁷ Nueva Mayoría, *Imagen positiva de las instituciones: 1999-2000*.

support. Support can be understood as joining the party, attending mass meetings, and helping with the political campaign, elections, and recruiting. Both parties, although with some differences that will be shown in the next chapter, tend to appeal to their clientele while keeping them, in general, in a passive role. This is in part because of the hierarchical, asymmetrical, and paternalistic relationship established between leaders and clients (Rock, 1987; Cavarozzi, 1988; Manzetti, 1993).

In turn, both parties, in spite of some differences, look for support among neighborhood associations, but they have never been part of their formal organization (Horowitz, 1999; Levitkky, 2001). Since the 1980s both parties have been in a state of transition; they have both tried to professionalize its cadres, adopting a more technocratic orientation as shown in the description of Menem's administration in this chapter. However, according to the interviews conducted at the local level, "parties have not been successful in filling political vacancies with the best trained individuals, which led to electoral disillusion, general apathy, and lack of participation and political compromise" (EVLMO No.3). This is in line with national and provincial level survey results and of generalized political distrust among Argentines mentioned before.

Citizen Participation

From what was presented up to now, it is not difficult to see the type of citizen participation envisioned by Argentine founding fathers and even reinforced over the years. Elitist and limited was the standard practice. This elitist model viewed the citizenry as a "means" for the sovereign's "ends" and it is particularly the sovereign who

exercised control of the government in their name (Taylor, 2001). The Constitution of 1853 reflects clearly this Hobbesian way of thinking in this statement “the people neither deliberate nor govern except through their representatives and authorities established by this constitution” (Art. 22).

Originally, citizen participation played an insignificant role and there was no reference in the constitution to the political rights of the individual, their legal features, suffrage, and powers. Moreover, the political persona or citizen was not defined. The words used to express Argentines’ rights and obligations have been under the umbrella term of “the people”, “all Argentines” or “inhabitants” (Chapter I, Rights and Guarantees, 1853). This omission had two main reasons: first, the vote was not universal in the Argentina of the middle nineteenth century, and b) the constitution was drafted encouraging European immigration.

This situation changed by 1912 when the Saenz Peña Law was passed. The law expanded political participation by introducing the universal and compulsory male suffrage and by recognizing the citizen’s role to produce a government. It was not until 1947, through the agency of Eva Peron, that women were granted the right to vote. However, participation was limited to the moment when the citizen places his vote; thereafter, the sovereignty was transposed to his representatives leaving the citizen powerless until next election.¹⁸ Later on, successive constitutional amendments have included provisions that recognized political rights and participation, although in some cases, corporatist based. In this regard (Art. 14bis) mentions the right of workers to

¹⁸ I indebt this idea of citizen’s sovereignty to Schumpeter’s interpretations (1976, p.269)

organize free and democratic unions and the right of these organizations to “reconcile collective work agreements” and to strike.

But not until 1994 did the Constitution include democratic elements of political participation and regularized upon that. For this purpose a second chapter of the first section of the constitution was created, entitled “New Rights and Guarantees.” This section, which is in response to the long history of authoritarian rule, contains clear statements of political rights and suffrage and takes into account issues of inequality and diversity. Similarly, the 1994 reform regularized political party activities and the major role they play in guaranteeing the democratic system (Art.38). The legalization of these political organizations legitimized the formal democratic content of the constitution and politics. Unfortunately, close candidate selection procedures reserves for party elites the right to choose their candidates for elected public positions presented in a close ballot to their constituency. Since primaries are not open, this prerogative limits a citizens’ ability to be penalized or rewards individual candidates for their political or professional trajectory.

In relation to the exercise of political rights, the new constitutional amendment recognizes three forms of participation (Art 40). First, the act of voting. This form of participation is one of the minimum requirements for any democratic polity (Dahl, 1971). Second, by initiating legislation in the Chamber of Deputies. This action requires 3% of the electorate to come into force. Third, by the use of referendum. In reality this is a somewhat restrictive form of participation; the issue of debate in the popular consultation is set by Congress. This organization also sketches the procedure and policy of the

referendum. On the other hand, these means of participation are also limited since the vast majority of elected representatives play a minimal role in policy making since as I stated before the decision-making power is concentrated in the presidential branch or party elites.

When it comes to citizen participation in education, it is not about what the constitution says other than assuring that the duty of Congress is to regulate in these matters according to pluralistic principles. The constitution states under the chapter reserved for Congress' powers that it is the responsibility of Congress,

to enact laws referring to the organization and basis of education, consolidating national unity and respecting provincial and local characteristics which ensure the state responsibility cannot be delegated, family and society participation, the fostering of democratic values, and equal opportunities without discrimination whatsoever. . . (Art. 75, 19).

The article clearly mentions that any legislation on education should ensure family and society participation, which is different from actually producing it.

Political participation has been formally clarified by the 1994 constitutional reform in Argentina, although not really enhanced in practice. In such a way, the reform legalizes the facto roles. At least citizens emerged with clearer political powers and certain tools for vertical accountability and this is an important step forward; much still needs to be done since the accountability process is still questionable in Argentina today.

What was described in this introductory section as a whole, briefly reflected the institutional and political features of the country and some of its standardized practices. The period I cover in future sections shows that while changes have been made, they can only be adjustments to the broad status quo. In the next subdivision education will be the focus of my attention. I will look particularly at the effects of Argentine institutional framework on education.

Education: A National Concern? General Review¹⁹

The concept of public education as a state duty was not in place in Argentina until the middle of the 1800s when the nation settled its internal social and political disputes and developed a stable government. Before that time education was an uncoordinated effort between the nation, provinces, municipalities, and the Catholic Church (Solari, 1984; Tedesco, 1986). Two forces combined to create the modern Argentine nation in the late 19th century: the introduction of modern agricultural techniques and the integration of Argentina into the world economy. During that period the Argentine intellectuality, called the “Generation of 1880,” was influenced by the ideas of liberalism, positivism, and laicism, presided over a modernization process adapting ideas and institutions from England, France, and the United States (Veliz, 1980; Rock, 1987).

The institutional apparatus created was capable of defining and implementing the regulations and arrangements needed to support that model (Oszlak, 1986). The public education system was developed as part and in consequence of this liberal project.

¹⁹ Some portions of this section have been drawn from Astiz (1999).

During this period, education systems were developed to establish the foundation of the nation and citizenship. In countries such as Argentina, experiencing an early modernization and strong heterogeneous European immigration, public education also served as an important element of cohesion and social integration (Germani, 1987).

By the mid-1800s, it was widely recognized that education for everybody was necessary under a republican form of government. The provisions related to education in the Constitution of 1853 show that education was a concern of the central government. This is in contrast with the United States, where the absence of any provision regarding education in its Constitution indicates that education was not an affair of the federal government, but of each sovereign state.

The Argentine Constitution stated the following articles in regards to education,

Each province shall enact its own constitution under the republican, representative system in accordance with the principles, declarations, and guarantees of the National Constitution, ensuring its administration of justice, municipal regime, and elementary education. Under these conditions the federal government shall guarantee each province the full exercise of its institutions (Art. 5). Congress shall have the power to provide for the general welfare plans of general education and university instruction (Art. 67).

Unfortunately the Constitution did not specify if the prerogatives of the provinces and the nation in regards to education were mutually exclusive. Thus, an overlapping of

authority resulted from the provisions of Articles 5 and 67. According to the former, primary education is the responsibility of the provinces; according to the latter, the National Congress has the power to establish plans for general education. The lack of a clear demarcation between the responsibilities of the different levels of governance set the ground for national intervention. Moreover, the fact that the national government ordered the provinces to insure education did not exclude central authorities from controlling and establishing new educational regulations to guarantee the provision of education for all and to raise school standards. Examples of that type of legislation have been the National Common Education Law 1420 of 1884 and the Law 4874 of 1905, known as the Láinez Law.²⁰

Through the agency of Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (1811-1888), the influence of the United States during that period has been of major importance in the Argentine

²⁰ The name of the law was given in honor of the intellectual author, Senator Láinez from the Province of Buenos Aires.

schooling system, particularly Horace Mann's ideas of common schooling.²¹ In 1884, the National Common Education Law 1420 was passed. This law made education free of charge, secular, and compulsory for all children between the ages of 6 and 14. The arguments that supported this universal norm were: 1) the need for education for a republican form of government, 2) the need of education for the development and progress of the nation, and 3) the need of education in the assimilation process and in keeping social order. These arguments were clearly presented in the congress debate in 1883,

To resolve the problem of education is fundamental for the life and institutional progress of the republic, principally that of primary education. . . A new country, sparsely populated, needs to hunt in civilized Europe. . . from where immigrants come daily, to increase the population of our cities and to populate our beautiful *campos* [lands], and to make this republic what it should be—one of the first of South America. . . These elements [immigrants] which come to us cannot be assimilated in our weak civilization. . . That is a problem—how to assimilate them. . . I believe that the most adequate, most safe manner to solve this problem, without

²¹ During his visit to the United States of America, in 1847, Sarmiento met Horace Mann and became an admirer of the common schooling ideals. After his return from the U.S. he put some of those ideas in place, among them the normal schools. Later on, as General School Director of the province of Buenos Aires, he helped to establish the provincial education administrative system, which greatly resembled that of the U.S. The 1884 Law of Common Education was modeled upon that of the Buenos Aires province. For more information on these issues, see Solari, M. (1984)

commotion and preserving national order is the organization of common education such as this law establishes. . .

[Thus,] is the state obliged to support religious education or not? That is the question, mister president. This project does not discouraged religious instruction, but does recognized that is not the state responsibility. It is for this reason, that education should be universal. Why? Because this educational regulation should be extensive to everyone in this country and, as you may know, this land is populated by individuals with different religious creeds.²²

It is evident from these comments that at this stage of early development of Argentine institutions, the leaders of the nation viewed education as a tool to foster cohesion, social integration, and citizenship. Even though some passages of the congress debate revolve around the tension over who has the responsibility over primary education—if provincial or national governments—the idea of nation building superseded regionalist and particularistic interests. In Argentina, as well as everywhere else, mass schooling was an important component in the construction of the nation state (Ramirez & Boli, 1987; Fuller & Rubinson, 1992). It is important to note that it is precisely during this period of nation-state formation that the Ministry of Public Instruction was created (Solari, 1984). Much of the logic behind this state-sponsored

²² República Argentina, Congreso Nacional, Diario de sesiones de la camara de Senadores, Buenos Aires 1883, p. 494, 500, 505.

expansion relied on the policy of economic and political modernization. The institutions that emerged during that period were closely associated with that gradual integration and were restricted in their ability to mobilize capital for economic growth and internationalization.

The 1884 law also established the administrative basis of public schooling, outlining duties and specifying activities within the different jurisdictions and administrative entities. Another provision stated by this law was that every town, vicinity, or city between a certain amount of inhabitants should have at least one school and a local school council. The members of the council were to be selected by the central administration. This provision, which may be perceived as superfluous, was not. Actually, it granted the central government, once again, the right to intervene in provincial matters.

Although the provinces have been charged by the Constitutions with the responsibility of adequately establishing primary schooling, this responsibility was not always met. In 1905, the Láinez law was enacted in order to supply the need of educational services throughout the nation. The view of the national government was that, while primary education was the responsibility of the provinces the education of the people was also a national responsibility, “inasmuch as a provincial citizen was also a citizen of the nation”.²³ This law was intended to raise the educational standards of the poorer provinces and to insure educational opportunities for all kids. The law formalized

²³ República Argentina. Congreso Nacional, Diario de Sesiones de la Camara de Senadores, Tomo I, p. 703. Buenos Aires: Compañía Sud-Americana de Billetes de Banco, 1905

the responsibility of the national government for the promotion of education in the national territory as was expressed in the congressional debate in the words of Senator Láinez,

The expense of education is charged by the constitutions to each locality of the republic, but this does not exclude the aid from the Nation, which neither naturally nor legally can be indifferent to the need and the duty of instructing and educating the people of the Republic, especially where elementary schools have been inadequate or non-existent. . . . In order to fulfill the purposes of the constitution. . . common education should be brought to every province, particularly where the fate and progress of the civilized nation is at stake.²⁴

Since then, the national government exerted strong control over education and even set up its own system of general education throughout Argentina. This system included not only primary and secondary schooling but also normal and especial education. It is important to note here that secondary education was reorganized and expanded by decree in the late 1860s under the tutelage of the national government when secondary education was perceived as an issue of national development and concern. Previously, it was an uncoordinated effort of the church and the universities (Solari, 1984).

²⁴ Idem

Without substantive changes this administrative structure stayed in place until the end of the 1970s, when the national government transferred all primary schools that were under its tutelage to the provinces. The section that follows briefly describes this process as an antecedent of the decentralization of the 1990s.

Antecedents of the 1990s Decentralization Strategy

Since the 1960s the central Argentine government, in many cases under military regimes, made several attempts to decentralize education. All these attempts were promoted at the central level under a financial rationale with the major purpose of reducing the financial burden at the center (Aguerrondo & Senén Gonzalez, 1988). The *transference*, as the decentralization policy was called, was consistently resisted by the majority of the provinces who objected to the financial constraints. As a consequence, in 1972 the Federal Education Council (FEC) was created, represented by all the provincial ministers of education, the educational authority of the city of Buenos Aires and the National Minister of Education. The purpose of the FEC was to institutionalize the provincial presence at the national level and to coordinate and plan the educational policies, over public and private education, while respecting regional autonomy. However, “the real value of this body was as a consultative entity whose decisions were only suggestions that could be adopted or not by the jurisdictions” (Tenti Fanfani, 1993, p. 125). The ever-present topic on the FEC agenda was to discuss decentralization strategies.

The first successful educational attempt to decentralize occurred in 1978 under military rule and after a new financial formula of revenue sharing was established;

Once the financial formula was agreed upon which the national government was to guarantee the sustained transfer of fiscal resources to the provinces through the Federal Revenue Sharing System to cover: a) current salary and non-salary operating expenses of the transfer services; b) school construction and maintenance; c) operating cost increments due to services; d) cost increments due to the system's expansion; e) teachers promotions and salary increases; and f) [reconciliation] of salary and benefits differences between the national and provincial payrolls, a decentralization model and strategy was adopted and implemented (Aguerrondo in Prawda, 1993, p.78).

However, the reasons given publicly for the transference, were: 1) to respect the federalist principle, 2) to improve the efficiency of schools, 3) to shorten lines of communication, 4) to meet local needs, and 5) to diminish central bureaucracy. These assumptions were included in the military discourse to get popular legitimacy or consent for their actions (Isuani & Tenti, 1989).

After an important initiative from the Ministry of Economy and under the approval of the FEC, the transference of the primary service was proclaimed by decree (de facto Law No. 21.809 and 21.810, 1978). The first law granted the executive power to

transfer to the provinces, through individual agreements, all primary and preprimary schools, supervision units, and qualification committees that were under the national jurisdiction. The second law, made special emphasis on the City of Buenos Aires and *Tierra del Fuego* (by then these jurisdictions were federal territories). According to Filmus (1996) 6,700 schools and 44,050 teachers were transferred.

While the decentralization was being implemented the national government ignored the new financial agreement leaving the provinces with only their own fiscal revenues to conduct the cost of the educational transference. The transference process let the central government keep control over: a) the school calendar; b) teacher recruitment standards, promotion, and hiring; c) core curriculum; d) teaching materials and teacher guides; e) teacher certification; f) supervision of instruction, and g) evaluation—the latter was practically never implemented (Aguerrondo in Prawda, 1993).

The inability to participate in the decision-making process generated resistance from the different social forces such as the national and provincial teachers' union—mainly Peronists—and educational administrators who, due to the characteristics of the political system, could not find a channel for their political demands. Both national teachers' unions—the Confederation of Education Workers (CTERA) and Argentine Teachers Union (UDA)—lost power after the transfer due to the fact that the provinces became the center of the political activity (Leonard, 1989). The Catholic Church benefited from this process because the transfer removed many schools from the jurisdiction of the secular national law 1420.

As an official from the education ministry observed in 1998,

the transference was carried out under an authoritarian and economic logics, it was not consultative neither with Congress or governors nor with the sectors involved in the process, without any technical support, ignored completely the goals of implementation—even today transferred teachers are fighting for the problems they have with the retirement system—and I think that is how that [process] varies with the process of the 1990s. The military transferred problems [schools in bad conditions, teachers badly paid]. . . without the necessary finances available to carry it out. In 1992, there was a parliamentary discussion about the transference process and the costs of it were agreed with the governors and incorporated in the *coparticipación*. This compromise has been kept over the years (ENMOno.2).

Under a political climate that intended to promote order through the reign of fear, a product of the authoritarian regime, the central government gained more power and policy legitimization based on technical and financial efficiency. Paradoxically, this process of transference strengthened control and centralization through a top-down initiative of decision making, while ignoring both provincial administrative need and citizen demands. A military model of action was conducted, superimposing the financial issue over the educational under a symbolic mask of decentralization.

Argentine Education Transformation in the 1990s

Argentine Political Evolution Since 1983

Until December 10, 1983, the armed forces formally exercised power. Serious economic problems that led to the reduction of national level expenditures—the decentralization of elementary education in 1978 is an example of that, a war with the United Kingdom in 1982 after an unsuccessful Argentine attempt to take control of Malvinas/Falklands Islands, public demonstrations in the face of severe human rights abuses, and charges of corruption combined to discredit the military regime. Acting under public pressure, the Junta, as the military leadership was called, raised bans on political parties and restored other basic political liberties.

In 1983, Argentines went to the polls after almost a decade. The country returned to constitutional rule after Raúl Alfonsín, candidate of the UCR, who ran his political campaign under the slogan of “democracy feeds, cures, and educates,” received 52% of the popular vote. In the face of the demands of the twofold transition—the transition to democracy, and the transition to a new economic order through structural adjustment—Alfonsín placed priority on rebuilding democratic institutions.

Confrontations with the military, hyperinflation and failure to solve economic problems, food riots, 3,575 union strikes between 1985 and 1989 (18% of them from the teacher’s sector),²⁵ and the subsequent resistance presented by Peronist legislators, undermined Alfonsín’s government legitimacy. These events caused him to leave office

²⁵ The source of union strike data is Nueva Mayoría’s newsletter, March 6, 2002.

six months early after the *Justicialista* candidate Carlos Saúl Menem won the 1989 elections with a populist rhetoric of “*justicia social, salarizado, and revolución productiva*”—social justice, huge salary increases, and productive revolution (Menem & Duhalde, 1989, p. 19). These promises, in line with the *Peronist* doctrine, were never accomplished and an opposite plan was established.²⁶ Once in office, Menem surprised his supporters with a program of market reforms. According to Palermo (1995) this was a strategy for political survival rather than Menem’s conviction. I will come back to this point in another section of this chapter.

With the constitution reformed in addition to the unpopular reforms implemented, the citizenry reelected Menem in 1995 with 50% of the electorate vote.²⁷ The reform that allowed this reelection was a result of the so-called “Olivos Pact” that Menem carried out with the opposition Radical Party leader and ex president Raúl Alfonsín. This pact was viewed as an arrangement among the party elite that manipulated, one more time in Argentine history, the democratic institutions (Taylor, 2001). The debate regarding the reform was a contest between Alfonsín and Menem who failed to include in the accord not only their fellow party members but also other parties and the citizenry. In this

²⁶ Those ideas were at the core of Menem’s platform to win the presidential elections. By productive revolution and *salarizado* he meant to situate the country among the highest productive countries in the world and to redistribute the overall gains among salary and wage workers; he even suggested a five year moratorium of the repayment of the country’s external debt as a first step to achieve those purposes. With such a rhetoric he gained not only the support of traditional Peronists but also the middle class sector that previously voted for Alfonsín and felt betrayed by his bad administration and unfulfilled promises. These ideas, in line with the Peronist tradition of nationalizing companies and services, over-regulating the economy, protectionism, and assistencialism were forgotten as soon as he assumed office. Menem, began an era of privatization, austerity, disinvestments, deregulation, without precedent in any democratic nation in Latin America (Snow, 1993)

²⁷ To understand the reasons that led people to support neoliberal structural adjustment policies see Weyland (1998).

regard the constitutional accord made by the two main party leaders was a closed deal not to be debated by the Constitutional Assembly, which came to be seen as another arena of elite party politics and as the space that reassured Menem's presidential candidacy and Alfonsín's political future as head of the UCR.²⁸

In foreign policy, Menem has dramatically entered into partnership with the United States, the centerpiece of his approach. Argentina was the only Latin American country to participate in the Gulf War and the phases of the Haiti operation. In regional forums, such as the Organization of American States (OAS), Menem was an enthusiastic supporter of the 1994 and 1998 Summit of the Americas where he repeatedly advanced U.S. goals. In order to get closer ties to developed nations, Argentina has pursued relationships with the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and even NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization), and left aside Perón's and Alfonsín's emphasis on making Argentina a leader in the Non-Aligned movement. As a strong proponent for enhancing regional stability in South America, Argentina revitalized its relationship with Brazil, solved the persistent border disputes with Chile, and restored diplomatic relations with the United Kingdom.²⁹ All these measures were taken since, as declared by the Argentine Minister of Foreign Relations Guido Di Tella, "we want to

²⁸ For a detailed analysis of this issue see Nino (1996) and Taylor (2001).

After the constitutional revision of 1994 the president and vice president are directly elected for a period of four years and are allowed to seek an immediate reelection. The constitution mandates a direct election for all provincial senators for a period of six years. One third of the Senate stands for reelection every three years. Members of the Chamber of Deputies are directly elected to four-year terms. Voters elect half the members of the lower house every two years through a system of proportional representation (Constitución Nacional Argentina, 1994).

²⁹ The general information presented in this section has been obtained from various newspaper articles, from 1990 to 1996. See Argentine newspapers *La Nación* and *Clarín* on those years.

belong to the first world, to the western alliance. . . We are implementing the same policies, the policies that have led [many countries] to prosperity.”³⁰

This approach taken in foreign policy by Menem’s administration was an important step to put Argentina back into the global scene. It gave the administration the ability to make long term decisions and build up confidence on the part of international financial markets, which ultimately reestablished creditworthiness by putting forward policies that facilitated strong collaboration and support from international agencies. The process of policy reform during this period will be analyzed in the following section.

General Context: Technocrats, Structural Adjustments, and Decentralization

Technocratic Influence

Following the assumptions presented in Chapter 4, decentralization policies in the 1990s were results of worldwide common accepted precepts that uncovered the need of a new international order. Since the 1980s, in Latin America and particularly in Argentina, these regulations were urged within the framework of structural adjustment policies by international organizations (i.e. World Bank [WB]; International Monetary Fund [IMF], and the United State Agency for International Development [USAID]) and by “interpenetrated elements of the rationalized society”, such as modern actors with autonomous interests, legitimated technical functions and their functionaries, state elites, and professional theorists (Jeppesen & Meyer, 1992, p. 205). These organizations and functionaries made clear their positions in regional and international meetings and

³⁰ *La Nación*, September 23, 1991.

through their official documents as shown in Chapter 2.³¹ As an Argentine education ministry official pointed out,

There are pressures from international funding agencies, particularly when a country is in desperate need for resources, however, recent policies are also result of a sort of contagious strategy across countries —mainly based on the ideas that international consultant have about what is going on in each country than what it is actually happening (ENMONo.3).

These policies attempted to overcome the legacy of the previous decade characterized by a fragile economy, external debt, inflation, high interest rates, growth of the state size, and limited public expenditures. Regime changes, armed conflict, and demands for human rights were the features of political situations of the newly democratic nation. This situation “led to new emphasis on economy and efficiency in state-owned enterprises, reduction in the size of the state apparatus . . . through privatization, and cut back in government services” (Graham, 1990, p.17).

In need of foreign capital, the Argentine government accepted recommendations from the IMF and WB resulting in the adoption of a number of policies such as the

³¹ What was called the “Washington Consensus” is another example of Latin American policy makers—many of them representatives of international agencies, and member of academic and think tank communities—commitment with structural adjustment policies. The consensus reached in Washington in 1990 was regarding the policy instruments to be implemented in the region; trade liberalization, domestic market deregulations, and the privatization and decentralization of estate enterprises and services were among them. For detailed information on the results of this event see Burki et al., (1999).

reduction of government expenditures, currency devaluation to promote exports, reduction in import tariffs, and of course, decentralization. Austerity, privatization, and liberalization, in addition to the increased power of the international financial agencies to monitor government performance and the withdrawal of the state from social policy areas coincided with an incipient process of democratization. The structural adjustment recipes are founded upon similar strategies among LA countries and in other regions as well.

Table 5.1 shows the general characteristics of the structural adjustment policies as adopted in Argentina.

Table 5.1.

Characteristics of the Structural Adjustment Policies in Latin America

| Goals | Tactics | Methods | Major Actors | Implementation |
|------------------------------------|--|--|---|---|
| Fighting Hyperinflation | Reducing state size | State budget reduction | The president | Design and execution by a small technocratic elite |
| Economic growth | Taking away paternalist institutions identified with state-led development model | Liberalization of the conditions for foreign investment | Ministers of the socio-economic sectors | |
| Restoring international confidence | Restructure the socio-economic sector | Privatization of state enterprises, tax reform and deregulation | The president of the National or Central Bank | National policy oriented towards consensus and support in the civil society for the program of reform |
| | | Reform the structure of state bureaucracy | Financial Aid Institutions | |
| | Reforming social services systems | Reform of the judiciary system | State Bureaucracy | At the end of the 1980s Intensification of the democratic process |
| | Integrating countries into the world economy on the basis of competitiveness | Reformulation of central and regional responsibilities and participation: decentralization | Regional governments | |

Source: Vellinga, M. 1998. *The Changing Role of the State in Latin America*. Colorado: Westview Press. p.14, Figure 1.1.

As it is seen from the above table, the national government continues to be active and interventionist establishing the conditions by which the free play of the marketplace and free trade based on competitive advantage would benefit the whole society. Some studies pointed out that tremendous economic and social crisis Argentina faced at the end of the 1980s “opened the window for reform” and helped to empower the new government, particularly through its executive offices as shown in Table 5.1. These reforms were conducted generally by decree, bypassing regular legislative procedures (Keeler, 1993; Llanos, 2001). It is important to point out here that the increasing technocratic orientation of public administration gave legitimacy to the reform packages.

As was suggested by Silva (1998), the strengthening of the technocratic orientation of public administration contributed to the growth of a Weberian state that can resist special interest or coalitions. However, this apparent neutrality or autonomy in the process of technocratic decision-making became part of the new way of doing politics. The technocratic position in government gained legitimacy and power because they were the intellectual brokers between their governments and international capital and responsible for the definition and implementation of the institutional reforms that fostered investors’ confidence.³² For that reason they became the best allies of politicians. During the 1980s and 1990s, central ministries, their technocratic leadership, and their analysts’ offices became more important than ever in policy-making, often to the

³² That was the case of Domingo Cavallo, fourth Minister of Economy of Menem’s administration. Dr. Cavallo received his doctorate in economics from Harvard University during the 1970s. As has happened with other former graduates from Harvard who collaborated in Chile with Pinochet’s regime, Cavallo collaborated also as a technical advisor during the last authoritarian regime.

detriment of the legislative cabinets. Policy-making though, became more centralized and focused around presidents and their technical advisers where the minister of economy coordinates policy and strategic planning.

In this way, technocrats or ministry officials became the liaison with the foreign financial experts from intergovernmental institutions who followed the recommendations of adjustment policies not without certain autonomy. As a high ministry of education official suggested,

There are always pressures but we design the policies . . . there is always space for negotiation. . . (ENMOno.2)

. . . The autonomy from the banks can only be reached with a solid technical advisory group, a group of professionals, . . .we discuss the issues. . . even in some cases we call economy [Ministry of Economy] to tell them that the delegation [the bank's delegation] should leave because we will not take what we do not want . . .soon the bank agrees [laughs]. We know them well . . .how to negotiate. . . We think we know more, probably a *porteño* thing (ENMOno.1).

The liaison between technocrats was facilitated by their common academic backgrounds.³³ Although international political and economic factors played an

³³ Those technocrats have been trained in US institutions of higher education particularly Harvard and Chicago. For this reason, the so called "Chicago or Harvard boys".

important role in the rise and consolidation of technocratic ascendancy, it is not the only reason. Domestic and personal aspirations have much to do with this process as well. Geddes (1994) also suggested that by virtue of their position in government, technocrats use state power to pursue their own political interests. In this regard, she argued that state officials have a great margin in choosing how to respond to international threats while at the same time pursuing their own career success.³⁴

Structural Adjustments

By 1990, with a negative GDP growth (-4.5), a considerable increase in the unemployment rate (it went from 5.4% in 1984 to 9.3% in 1990), and an inflation that surpassed 2000 percent, the newly *Justicialista* elected government panicked.³⁵ After a series of desperate course correction emergency packages, President Menem started a program of economic reform in 1989 that needed eventually to take Argentina away from its state-inward oriented model of growth initiated in the late 1930s and reinforced during the Perón administration. The first step required to conduct such a reform was to enact into legislation a policy reform package, sweeping the existing legal framework that supported the previous state developmental model. The executive office envisioned that this policy initiative could generate discontent, particularly from those sectors that benefited from the previous model. To avoid the obstacles previously faced by Alfonsín,

³⁴ After Domingo Cavallo was forced to resign he created a conservative political party called Acción para la República, his platform for presidential aspirations.

³⁵ Data obtained from Interamerican Development Bank, Economic and Social Progress in Latin America: 1992 Report. Washington DC: Interamerican Development Bank.

Menem obtained the necessary support from almost all labor unions and provincial governors (Murillo, 2001)³⁶ At the same time, the delegation of power was thought of as a useful tool to avoid confrontations that could intensify the economic situation and derived in problems of political credibility (Ferreira Rubio & Goretti, 1996). Because the government also realized that the justice could be a sphere from where opposition to the reforms could be expressed, in a legal argument stating that both executive delegated powers and emergency and urgency decree laws to be unconstitutional, it soon enacted a bill to create a favorable majority in the Supreme Court (Margheritis 1997, in Murillo, 2001).

Consequently, Menem granted *super powers* to his economic minister Erman González, the third one since Menem assumed power in 1989, which enabled him to take control of the Argentine central bank and to cut the expenditure of federal agencies, state enterprises, and transfers to the provinces. This centralization of decisions made him a *de facto super minister* or as he was soon labeled in Argentina, *Super-Erman*. Accordingly, The Economic Emergency Law No. 23697 and the State Reform Law No. 23696 reflected those delegated powers. They provided the legal framework necessary to implement the largest economic program ever experienced. The former law suspended the industrial and export promotion subsidies and the preferences to local manufacturers and provided the dismissals of personnel in the public sector; the latter, set the regulation

³⁶ The lower strata continue to be an important support for the *Peronist* party, even after Menem's neoliberal adjustments (Weyland, 1998). This support was based on cultural and family identities other than monetary rewards (Powers, 2001) or different ways of political clientelism (Levitsky, 2000). National provincial spending increased to reward supportive governors and also to build legislative support (Gibson, 1997; Corrales, 1998).

needed to privatize public enterprises. These two laws guarantee the executive intervention without major institutional constraints. In particular, the state reform law stated that the privatization process could be conducted by decree laws.³⁷ These legislations passed Congress when the president did not have majority in the lower house, but the political convergence was possible in a context of extreme emergency. As Llanos (2001) stated,

Peronist and Radicals. . . facilitated the bills' approval. . . [they] did so in accordance with the arrangements for the transfer of the mandate from president Alfonsín to president Menem. In fact, a twofold agreement was reached by the two major political parties when the Radical Party—then in power—found itself unable to govern (p. 81).

Despite all the changes conducted and Erman's super powers the situation did not get better. In 1991, a new inflationary wave led Mr. González to resign. The ex-minister of foreign affairs and well-known economist, Dr. Domingo Cavallo, assumed the position as Minister of Economy and put into place an anti-inflation shock. Cavallo introduced the Convertibility Plan Law 23.928 (1991), which fixed the peso, Argentine currency,

³⁷ Among other things, the state reform law delegated to the executive the power to intervene in state companies, granted the respective ministers and secretaries the power of sweeping legal disposition concerning the internal organization of those entities, delegation of legislative functions to the executive, and empowered the president to delegate to the ministers power that had been given to his office by this law. On the other hand, the economic emergency law delegated to the executive functions such as, the power to change the national budget and the power to set the official oil price, among others. See Llanos (2001) for a detailed analysis of these reforms and the privatization process in Argentina.

with the U.S. dollar at an exchange rate of 1 peso=1 dollar and prohibited any currency emission. To further constrain inflation, the government restrained by decree wage hikes unless tided up with productivity increases (Decree 1334, 1991). A reactivated economy went hand in hand with stability that stood inflation at less than 4% for 1994 (*The Economist*, 1994).³⁸

During that period, “Argentina was not only implementing the structural reform recommended by the WB and IMF, it also offered prospects of a monetary and exchange rate with stability” (Gerchunoff & Torre, 1998, p.128). Further, it was also gaining the possibility to join the Mercosur.³⁹ With his convertibility plan, Cavallo, considered then a technocrat hero, finally could renegotiate the external debt and Argentina’s inclusion in the Brady Plan for alleviation of the external debt. This result gave Cavallo not only popularity but the possibility to think about his political future as a presidential candidate.

During those years economic growth has been strong while fiscal performance at the federal level has also improved. The improvement of public finances came through structural reforms that dramatically reversed the role of the state in Argentine economic life that led to the opening of the Argentine economy and enhanced its international competitiveness. Privatization of state-owned industries, deregulation, fewer import barriers, a fixed exchange rate, and inflow of capital—mostly in the form of loans—have been the basis of this effort. These measures have also been accompanied by substantial reform and reorganization in the administrative sector, which has had as a primary

³⁸ *The Economist*, November 26, 1994

³⁹ Argentina jointed Brazil, Uruguay, and Paraguay in a common trade market called Mercosur (Mercado Común del Sur).

strategy the decentralization of service provision to the provincial governments. Leading a controversial agenda, Menem has not been reluctant to use the presidency's extensive powers to issue presidential decrees when the congress was unable to reach consensus on his proposed reforms. Another way to impose political limits to the reform was the control exercised over the provinces through tax revenue agreements (the so called Fiscal Pacts signed in 1992):

In view of the increased tax revenues, Fiscal Pacts guarantee a minimum amount of the shared revenue exchange for the reduction in the percentage corresponding to the provinces, in order to correct imbalances in the social security system (Gerchunoff & Torre, 1998, p.136).

The purpose of this agreement was to gain consent for Menem's reform priorities. But this situation did not avoid the financial crisis that the provinces overcame (Gerchunoff & Torre, 1998). What is seen in this case is the use of a patrimonial style by Menem, which combines the use of public resources and arbitrary utilization of constitutional powers.

Another component of this model was the capacity of Menem to get rid of the traditional Peronist ideology without losing political support. Historically, organized labor, largely tied to Menem's Peronist party, has played a significant role in the national political life but that has been significantly weakened by Menem's free market reforms (Murillo, 2001). McGuire (1996) identified several policies used by Menem's government to diminish the union's capacity to oppose his reforms. First, as result of

The Policy Goals of the Decentralization Process

Alfonsín's government did not undo the education transfer process initiated by the military regime, mainly due to the common belief that more decentralization would lead to a more democratic society. It is important to remember here that Alfonsín, during his presidential campaign and later on during his administration, prioritized the rebuilding of democratic institutions over the financial reconstruction of the nation. For that reason his government set the National Pedagogical Congress in the mid 1980s—a national meeting for the discussion about Argentina's education. This meeting was organized in order to generate a forum for negotiation and consensus-building on educational issues in an attempt to involve the populace in the improvement of the educational system (Braslavsky, 1998). Even though its results were vague, at least the Radical government tried to involve the whole population in a political dialogue to pursue improvements in primary and secondary education.

During the Radical government a new *Sistema de Coparticipación Federal* Law N° 23548 (1988) or new federal revenue sharing system was established—the new fiscal contract that set up the foundation of the *Ley de Transferencia de los Servicios Educativos* N° 22.049 (1992), or Transference of Education Services Law. According to the new fiscal contract the equal distribution established in the previous federal revenue sharing system law between the national government and the provinces was changed. For that reason, since then, the national government should receive 42.34 % of the total

revenue system while the provinces get the remaining 57.66 %.⁴² As was stated before, the increasing demand of resources from the central government led to the lack of accomplishment of this new revenue sharing (Carciofi et al., 1996).

With the new fiscal agreement in place, the Radical government attempted many times to transfer secondary school services to the provinces. In spite all the efforts, an agreement was never reached due to the lack of political support from the FEC. Among the reasons for this lack of support was the fact that the majority of the provincial governorships were under the party in opposition and the obvious weak fiscal federalism where the central government still had the responsibility to tax and then distribute the funds to the provinces (Leonard, 1989).

Finally, in the context of structural adjustments previously described, the Argentine government began the process of transformation—as the process of education reform and decentralization was addressed in governmental documents.⁴³ In the words of its leaders, this transformation included two main objectives:

[First,] the transfer to the provinces of responsibilities in the management of education services and [second,] the consensus for a new model of education that changes the role of the national state. Such a role gives the government the capacity to become the prompter of national education. In this regard, the national government is not anymore responsible of

⁴² Federal Revenue Sharing System Law N° 23548, 1988.

⁴³ Ministerio de Cultura y Educación de la Nación, Resolución 2165, Noviembre 1990.

managing schools matters but attending the challenges that the new, economic, political and socio-cultural scenarios brought forth to primary and secondary education (ENMOno.5)

These top priorities should be reached through the participation of three main actors—the national government, the provincial governments, and society—around three principles: 1) equity and quality—equitable access and quality education for all; 2) decentralization and participation—a federal education system defined from the school unit—school autonomy; and 3) transformation in the schooling system—a dynamic and efficient model of organization and management.⁴⁴ These top priorities were expressed in a ministerial resolution (Resolución No.2165, 1990) published during Salonia’s administration. The resolution particularly emphasized that,

the main objective of the policy of education federalization initiated by this Ministry is to achieve a major autonomy of school management in an attempt to liberate the school and its administrators, from inefficient, slow, disarticulated and bureaucratic procedures. . . this policy is expressed in the process of decentralization-integration of education management (p.1)

What this process of *decentralization-integration* meant was “the federalization of the system under a unique logic, the consolidation of a national unity” (Resolución

⁴⁴ Idem

No.2165, 1990, p.1). It was for this reason that a multidimensional organizational reform was proposed in an attempt to make participants all societal actors and education levels of the system. Based on these arguments, the federal and provincial governments were in the process of making substantial changes to reorganize under a decentralization-integration process of most aspects of the education system—curriculum, structure, financing, evaluation, etc.—at all levels of the education system, from primary to higher education.

Around these principles four foundational laws were formulated during the early 1990s. These laws established the regulatory framework set for the transformation: a) the 1992 *Ley de Transferencia de los Servicios Educativos* No.24049. This law granted the federal government the power to transfer through the NME all administrative and financial responsibilities for secondary and tertiary education to the provinces and the city of Buenos Aires; b) the 1993 *Ley Federal de Educación* No. 24195, which provided vague ideas of the operation of the new decentralized governance, structured the new organization and curricula of the education system, and set the roles and responsibilities of each administrative structure—national and provincial; c) the 1994 *Pacto Federal* No. 24856 or Federal Pact. These agreements set public investments for national and provincial governments; and d) the 1995 *Ley de Educación Superior* No. 24521 or Higher Education Law, which created new arrangements for higher education.

In sum, all these regulations settled the role of policy maker, coordinator and controller at the central level while assigning to the provinces the managerial, administrative, and delivery service responsibility of secondary and tertiary education.

This restructuring framework paralleled the change Argentina was undergoing during the 1990s. The following subsections will review the education decentralization process in Argentina by focusing on the Law of Transfer of Educational Services and the Federal Education Law as two distinct but complementary stages of the decentralization-integration process. The former that supports both the fiscal and administrative intentions of decentralization and the latter that enhances administrative and supports political forms of decentralization. For the purpose of this study when I focus on the Federal Education Law, I will particularly address the decentralization and participation principle advocated.

The Law for the Transfer of Educational Services (1992)

By the 1990s the Ministry of Education was aware of the inefficiency of Argentina's education system through the disarticulation, bureaucratization, and overly regulated organizational structure, as noted in the ministerial Resolución No.2165 of 1990 and from previous attempts to decentralize the system's administration. The problems identified included "the distant management of the central government, an unfaithful relationship between the competing provincial and national administrations, lack of supervision, and an inefficient allocation of resources" (ENMOno.2). Under

recommendations from international aid organizations, regional agreements,⁴⁵ and pressures from the Ministry of Economy,⁴⁶ the Law of Transference No. 22.049 passed Congress in December 1991 and was published in the *Boletín Oficial* on January 7, 1992.

The process that ended with the law, in which negotiations started back in 1989 when the national and provincial executives—14 of them under the *Justicialista* party—held the 10th assembly of the Federal Council of Education in an attempt to share a space for negotiation that facilitated the future implementation of the transfer of secondary and tertiary services. Since the beginning of the negotiation process the discussion revolved around finances and the fiscal federalism but not about education (Senén González & Kisilevsky, 1993; Bravo, 1994). However, since the initial decentralization discussions, educational decentralization was meant as a multidimensional and multistage process with the “transfer” of fiscal federalism as its first stage. “Other stages included other components of political, normative, and institutional decentralization” (Resolución No.2165, 1990, p.19).

An agreement was finally met in late 1991 after an evident increase of tax collection and the subsequent increase of the total amount of the federal revenue-sharing

⁴⁵ Also during the same month a regional conference (just before the Mercosur Presidents Summit) called “El Mercosur Educativo” was organized where all the Ministers of Education from the countries that composed the Mercosur participated. In this conference they agreed to create education systems under these main principles: regional integration, citizenship ideals, human resources training, decentralization, among others (La Nación, December 14th, 1991,p.5).

⁴⁶ During the same month that the law passed Congress the Minister of Economy Domingo Cavallo said in a Meeting organized by The Forum of Science, Corporation and Policy:

“ The provinces need to implement adjustment policies due to the fact that they are not only going to be in charge of health and education expenditures but also of planning social welfare....We need to do with the provinces the same as the International Credit Institutions do with the countries” (La Nación, Dic. 4, 1991, p. 18). For full details of the recommendation made by the World Bank see Kugler & Mc Keekin (1991).

system.⁴⁷ This situation enabled the minister of economy, Domingo Cavallo, to argue that the provinces will have enough resources to manage the transfer of secondary education services. Thus, with an increase of U.S. \$1.5 billion in the federal revenue-sharing system in the proposed 1992 budget bill and the exclusion of the secondary and tertiary education funds allocated for the National Ministry of Education, Cavallo forced the transfer of services to the provinces (Senén González, 1994).

Other issues should be mentioned in regards to the relatively mild tension upon the transfer approval. First, the *Justicialista* party controlled the Congress (see Appendix B—Table 1: Composition of the Chamber of Deputies and Senate), and the Radical party appeared not to disagree on the need to decentralize. Some disagreement revolved around the way the decentralization would be conducted. Not even the Church positioned itself against the decentralization practice; its sole preoccupation consisted of freedom of instruction and the subsidies received from the NME (*La Nación*, December 7, 1991).

Another important issue to take into account is that the major national teacher union, CTERA, was a decentralized organization (in part due to the previous transference conducted at the end of the 1970s) and did not present a strong opposition to decentralization per se because the majority of the unions that composed the federation were organized at the provincial level. Thus, the transfer of the remaining national schools to the provinces legitimated the position of CTERA's provincial unions while not affecting the authority of the leaders at the national level. In addition, while the position

⁴⁷ In 1990 the total amount transferred to the provinces in concept of coparticipación was 4.810 millions. This amount increased to 6.904 in 1991 and to 8,846 millions in 1992 (Secretaría de Relaciones Fiscales y Económicas con las Provincias, 1994: 15).

of the latter was growing, union competition was also strengthened. Due to the fact that CTERA was already organized at the provincial level it suffered less than its national organized competitors as was the case of secondary teachers and technical teachers' unions. Therefore, union demands were related more to salary improvement than to the transfer per se (Murrillo, 1996).

The law granted the Executive Power through the National Ministry of Education to transfer to the 23 provinces and the Buenos Aires City all secondary education that were under the NME and FEC jurisdiction (Art. 1). Non-university teacher training services were momentarily removed from the law under the promise of gradual transfer in the future—they ended up being transferred by presidential decree shortly thereafter. The law also established that the national government, in order to accomplish the transference, would sign agreements with each of the jurisdictions that then had to be approved by the provincial legislative branches (Art. 2). In many cases those approvals never happened and the process was mainly coordinated by the governors and their ministers (Bravo, 1993). From the documentation provided to me by the National Ministry of Education and Culture, the signed agreements with the provinces and the complementary resolutions, only three agreements included the legislative approval; those were the agreements signed with the province of Buenos Aires, Misiones, and Córdoba (*Ministerio de Educación y Cultura de la Nación, Convenios de Transferencias, 1992-1993 y Actas complementarias 1992-1998*)

The negotiated agreements, however, considered only the cost of federal government spending for services prior to the transfer. They did not include provisions

to regulate the compensation of differences between the provincial and central transferred teachers' salaries, to improve school buildings, to provide other essential issues to reach the level expected, or even to establish in detail the responsibilities for each administrative level (*Convenios de Transferencias*, 1992-1993). Later on, in June 1992, two presidential decrees were passed (No. 964 and No. 965) that arranged a progressive adjustment of national and provincial salaries within each geographical jurisdiction. Moreover, the decrees specified that while the federal government transferred funds to the provinces to cover salaries of former federal teachers, these amounts have to be deducted from provincial *coparticipación* revenues. This deduction will not be considered if the province's *coparticipación* revenues exceed the real average monthly level for 1991 or if the increase in the *coparticipación* or revenue sharing system is insufficient to cover the cost of the transferred schools. In these cases, the federal government is obligated to provide additional financing to cover all or part of the costs of transferred schools (Chapter 4, article 14th and 15th). This clause left "open space" for individual negotiation between the central government and each provincial government.

The passing of the law did not translate into an immediate transfer; particular agreements with each province still needed to be made. Those agreements defined the pace of the process and gave an account of the tensions that this issue was still generating as shown in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2

Transfer Process by Province

| Province | Political Affiliation | Date of Agreement | Date of implementation | Extra Monies Received |
|---------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| La Rioja | Justicialista | Jan/1992 | Mar/1992 | 0 |
| San Juan | Justicialista | Feb/1992 | Mar/1992 | 500 |
| MCBA | Justicialista | Feb/1992 | Jul/1992 | 0 |
| Mendoza | Justicialista | Feb/1992 | Jul/1992 | 0 |
| San Luis | Justicialista | Mar/1992 | Apr/1992 | 0 |
| Neuquén | Local Party | Jul/1992 | Aug/1992 | 0 |
| Misiones | Justicialista | Aug/1992 | Jan/1993 | 0 |
| Chaco | Justicialista | Sep/1992 | Jan/1993 | 0 |
| Jujuy | Justicialista | Oct/1992 | Jan/1993 | 0 |
| Río Negro | Radical | Oct/1992 | Dec/1992 | 0 |
| Chubut | Radical | Oct/1992 | Jan/1993 | 0 |
| La Pampa | Justicialista | Oct/1992 | Jan/1993 | 2000 |
| Tucumán | Justicialista | Nov/1992 | Dec/1992 | 0 |
| Córdoba | Radical | Dec/1992 | Jan/1993 | 0 |
| Tierra del Fuego | Justicialista | Dec/1992 | Jan/1993 | 0 |
| Santiago del Estero | Justicialista | Dec/1992 | Jan/1993 | 0 |
| Entre Ríos | Radical | Dec/1992 | Jan/1993 | 0 |
| Catamarca | Local Coalition | Dec/1992 | Jan/1993 | 5200 |
| Santa Fe | Justicialista | Dec/1992 | Feb/1993 | 30000 |
| Corrientes | Intervened | Dec/1992 | Jan/1993 | 9500 |
| Formosa | Justicialista | Dec/1992 | Jan/1993 | 4000 |
| Salta | Justicialista | Jan/1993 | Mar/1993 | 0 |
| Santa Cruz | Justicialista | Mar/1993 | May/1993 | 0 |
| Buenos Aires | Justicialista | Dec/1993 | Jan/1994 | 90900 |

Note: the 70% of the provincial government were under the Justicialista party.

Source: Poder Judicial de la Nación. Mapa electoral and Convenios de Trasnferencia de los servicios educativos. Ministerio de Cultura y Educación de la Nación.

I should note here that the Province of Buenos Aires was the last province to sign a transfer agreement with the national government. Among the reasons could be that, from the total amount of school services transferred from the national government to the provinces 33% of them were located in Buenos Aires. Probably, the delay and the

amount of schools transferred allowed the governor to negotiate an important amount of additional funds to cover the cost of the transfer. The delay also caused extreme tension between Buenos Aires and the central administration.

The transfer of secondary education services from the national to provincial governments affected about 1,100,000 students or 50% of total secondary students attending both public (54%) and private (46%) schools. Approximately 72% of the students transferred were enrolled in public schools and 28% in private schools (National Ministry of Education data, Census 1991, and *Convenios de Transferencias y Actas complementarias* 1992-1998). The financial impact of the secondary education transfer to the provinces has not been uniform, generating economical problems for many of them (ENMONo.3; World Bank, 1995). The cost of undertaking the transferred services have varied among the provinces depending on the status of provincial finances before the transfer, the capacity to negotiate with the central authority, the size of enrollment, teacher and personnel costs, and the number and physical conditions of the infrastructure of the schools transferred. In many cases the transfer did not materialize until the middle and late 1990s under the loans obtained by the World Bank (World Bank, 1995).

Again, this effective process of transfer could be seen as a reform under the same financial rationale as the 1978 attempt. This change responds to the model of structural change of the international economy initiated two decades ago that questioned the relationship between the state, economy and society where the ones directly involved in the process were not extensively consulted. According to a highly ranked ministry official,

what motivates the second transfer [in the 1990s] is an article in the 1992 budget law; it was a decision taken by economy [Ministry of Economy] not by the sector [education] and the sector did not have the capacity to veto. . .but it had the possibility to politically frame the decision through the agreements. . . (ENMONo.1)

What this process also showed is that the negotiation was centered around the executive offices both at the central and provincial levels with limited margins for consultation in the CFE. However, something differentiated the 1990s from 1978; it was followed by a process of systemic education reform. I address the consequences of the transfer and transformation process throughout the case of Buenos Aires.

The Federal Law of Education (1993)

The process of transformation was complemented later on with the Federal Education Law that passed Congress in April 1993, while some provinces were still negotiating the transfer of secondary schools.⁴⁸ After a year of negotiations in the House of Representatives, tensions around education financing and the lack of precision regarding the role and responsibilities that the bill would assign to the national and provincial bureaucracies, and the resignation of the National Minister of Education, “the bill passed Congress almost unnoticed by the whole community” (ENMONo.7).

⁴⁸ By June 1992, the bill was still under discussion in the House of Representatives, but it received half-sanction by the Senate, where the *Peronist* party held the majority by its own.

The agreement was not signed until the national administration announced that the bill would meet the requirements of teachers, parents, and the community's demands of free education for all and appropriate financing for public education. Consequently, president Menem passed those two decrees that I mentioned before that included a progressive adjustment of national and provincial teachers' salaries within each geographical jurisdiction. Both the public announcement and the presidential decree laws decompressed the tensions in the House of Representatives and with some provincial administrations. Subsequently, the provinces that until then had not signed the transfer agreements for secondary education, progressively did so.⁴⁹

The objectives of the federal education law were,

- To provide more and better education for everybody by

- Improving teaching quality

- Updating contents

- Decentralizing the system management with the school at its center

- Promoting participation of the whole community: family, community and its organizations, and the private sector

- Eliminating regional inequalities and enhance federalism

- Training for work and life in democracy, promoting national unity and integration with the rest of the world

- To cover all the aspects of education,

- All levels and varieties (including special education, education for adults, fine arts and non-formal education)

- Curriculum contents

- Educational administration and management

- Level of professionalism of faculty and administrators

- Education funding

⁴⁹ Information obtained from national newspapers *La Nación* and *Clarín*, from May, 1992 to May 1993; Convenios de Transferencia de Servicios Educativos Nacionales a las Provincias, Actas complementarias, 24 jurisdicciones, 1992-1994; Resolución del Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, 5 de Octubre de 1993.

- To reaffirm the responsibility of the state for education,
 - It settles and controls the fulfillment of educational policies
 - It guarantees free access and permanency in the educational system assuring equal opportunities through compensatory measures
 - It guarantees educational quality

- To promote a change in the education system in order to enhance its quality:
 - Compulsory schooling extended to 10 years
 - Transformation within levels and cycles
 - Annual assessment of the system
 - Renewal of learning contents
 - Teacher education and updating through the Federal Network of Permanent Teacher training (general highlights, *Ley Federal de Educación*, 1993).

It is possible to say that this law is the zenith of the national government reforming process. The law recognizes education “as a responsibility of the family—as a natural agent—the national state, who is considered the main responsible agent, the provinces, municipalities, the Catholic Church and other officially recognized religious creeds, and social organizations” (Art. 4). However, it only assigned responsibilities to those considered main actors: the National Ministry of Education and its provincial counterparts, the school, and the school community.

On the one hand, the law reaffirms decentralization and encourages democratic participation, but on the other hand, it accepts both the problems that this process generates and the need for a national compromise under a strong national control to be more responsive over the process of institutionalizing change (See Appendix B—The New Formal System of Schooling).

New Administrative Responsibilities

With the transfer of secondary schools to the provinces in 1991, and the Federal Education Law in 1993, the Argentine government defined the purposes for the education sector within an overall strategy of reform of the national government according to the global transformation. Its objectives were based on reducing the central bureaucracy, and decentralizing sector finances and management to the provinces to improve the educational sector efficiency.⁵⁰ The FEL establishes not only the new education system but also the administrative capacities and responsibilities of each institutional level.

According to the FEL, besides controlling the daily administration of schools, Provincial Ministries of Education (PME) have to adhere to the following financial and administrative responsibilities: (a) program supervision, (b) planning and budgeting, (c) school maintenance and construction, (d) provision of educational materials, (e) hiring and dismissal of teachers, (f) teacher training, and (g) promoting participation of corporate and community actors in technical and pedagogical educational areas. Prior to the statute of the FEL in 1993, several provinces maintained essentially dual educational administrations whereby the Provincial Ministries of Education were responsible for secondary education, while Provincial Councils of Culture and Education (PCCE) ran the more extensive primary system (Word Bank, 1995). The FEL redefined the roles of the NME away from direct administrative responsibilities towards more advisory functions, while confirming the primary and secondary administrative responsibility of the PME.

⁵⁰ From the data provided by the Subsecretaría de Gestión Educativa, Rhoten (1999) reported that the National Ministry of Education reduced its staff from 222611 in 1991 to 3808 in 1996. This reduction is in part attributable to the transfer of secondary and tertiary educational personnel

Table 5.3. shows the characteristics of the new responsibilities assigned by law to each administrative level.

Table 5.3.

General Characteristic of the Financial, Technical and Administrative Responsibilities:
NME and PME

| | NME after FEL | PME after FEL |
|---|---|---|
| Financial | Finances compensatory and training programs. | Finances the cost of all provincial schools as well as the transferred ones. Also assumed the responsibility to subsidized private sector. |
| Technical, Administrative | | |
| Supervision | Controls and supervises the whole education system through national evaluations | Controls and supervises provincial schools |
| Curriculum design | Establish the core curriculum for all schools and reviews provincial proposed curricula | Approves minimum content established by the NME and develops curricular adaptations according to the provincial reality. |
| Teacher training | Offers technical assistance to all educational entities, either national or provincial | Offers provincial training following national guidelines, while forming part of the Federal Training Web. |
| Hiring and teachers' salaries | Teachers' incentives | Hires and pays teachers working in provincial schools, including the transferred ones and those that are subsidized. |
| Student assessments and data collection | Collects national data and conducts national research and evaluation. Collect data for international standardized evaluations | Collects provincial data and conducts provincial research and evaluation.* |

Note: * Since 1997 some provinces started to developed evaluations and research.

Sources: Federal Educational Law 1993, National Ministry of Education documents.

The NME no longer has direct administrative responsibility for secondary schools following their transfer to the provinces in 1992 even though many of the transfers did not materialize until recent years under the loans obtained from the WB. The central Ministry chief functions include: a) evaluating and monitoring the educational system, b) assuring the harmony and quality of educational programs (ensuring correspondence to national goals and policies), c) providing financial and technical assistance among the neediest provinces and social groups, d) setting requirements and conditions for evaluating, and e) operating a federal information system.

The Federal Educational Council carries out coordination between NME and the PMEs. The FEC's new functions and responsibilities were defined in the Federal Education Law (1993). Among its functions, it is responsible to establish national educational policies, set the priorities and proposals for any modification to the regulating framework of the sector, and establish the core curriculum contents of each educational cycle. In order to accomplish the new objectives, the NME also changed its internal structure according to the new requirements (See Appendix B—Figure 1: New Structure of the National Ministry of Education). To make the organization more efficient it reformed the management, created new information systems, and restructured all administrative procedures. It had also implemented “new programs to support the institutional and technical capacity of the provincial educational bureaucracies required for the transformation” (ENMO No.4).

After almost nine years, despite all efforts and the policy instruments implemented there are still some provinces, as is the case of the province of Buenos

Aires, characterized by : “1) weak managerial structures—more political, less technical, 2) unclear roles and responsibilities of the actors involved in the system, 3) centralized administration at the provincial ministerial units, and 4) overpopulation at all intermediate administrative levels” (EBAPO No.1). In the province of my interest old administrative patterns of and political culture coexist with the reformed decentralized structures proving administrative decentralization a difficult process. Instead, the system has fallen into old forms of power structure and authority. I will leave this point aside for the moment because it will be of great concern in the chapter that follows.

Political Decentralization: Participation in Education

When it comes to participation, officials at the National Ministry of Education declared under political decentralization arguments that the school and the community are at the center of the reform initiative and are the main agents of change (Art. 41). In this regard, the law specifies that the schools have the responsibility for developing their own institutional projects and connecting with the community (Art. 42).⁵¹ This point was also raised by a ministry official in 1998,

⁵¹ The Proyecto Educativo Institucional, or Institutional Education Project is a plan for the school supposedly develop by the school community to ensure that the school organization is attuned with the whole education reform. This project, which is a management tool, has the purpose to adapt national and provincial mandates to the local identity and situation of the school institution. It also sets the curricular frameworks, designed at the national and provincial level with the local school situation. “The institutional education project is a key management instrument to implement the reform at the school level” (Zona educativa, 1990, p. 23).

the purpose of this transformation, the new model we have in mind right now, is the improvement of the school's institutional model. That is why we put so much emphasis on the autonomy of the institution which is our point of arrival. . . . Autonomy means greater responsibility for each school to establish its priorities, to best manage its resources, to recruit their personnel. . . . [Thus,] the type of decentralization we think is appropriate is at the level of the school. Some have been talking about 'municipalization' and we resisted that idea. We do not want to generate another bureaucratic administrative level. (ENMONo2).⁵²

The transformation and school reorganization mentioned is perceived by ministry officials as part of a bigger project—the transformation of capitalism, which requires going from a formal democracy to a participatory democratic system. This transformation requires that some decisions should be taken at the grassroots. However, from their statements they do not believe that parents and community members should be involved in the process of the school decision-making. Regarding community and parental participation the same person said,

In education when people talk about participation they assign particular emphasis to the role of parents and community members in the school

⁵² I should note here that that same year President Menem insisted on decentralizing the whole administrative system to the municipal level. The idea did not have much echo (*La Nación*, Noviembre 8, 1998).

decision-making process. I don't think that is the case. I always give the example of a professional medical team in a hospital . . . If a kid needs an operation, parents will not decide if the operation needs or not to be done. They may have an opinion about it and depending upon the seriousness of the case they might be involved in the final decision. But the decision regarding the why, how, and when is reserved to the professional doctor. Physicians, as professionals, have to understand what space, in the process of decision-making, is reserved to the patient and the family. Well, the same applies for the school's professional team. Teachers as professional should be able to listen and understand the demands of the community and give a professional response to those demands. Parents should not be inside the school managing it (ENMOno.3).

According to this statement there are some tensions between what is stated in the law and what were, and still are, the real objectives of ministry officials. Even more, there are some discrepancies between articles in the law regarding this issue, particularly in terms of the role and responsibilities assigned to *the community*. It is clear from article No. 44 that there is a difference between the *school community*—parent, students, teachers, school principal, school staff, and representative organizations (unions), and school principal—and the *community as a whole*. The law states also that the school community has the right and duty to participate in the design of the school's institutional

project, the school's organization, and in the school decision-making process. However, their involvement is limited to the support and improvement of education quality.

However, when the law refers particularly to parents' rights and duties (Art. 44), their involvement, defined as "in support to the school administration," (Art. 5) has to be channeled through the school's collegial organization and does not have to interfere with the duties of administrators and teachers. In the same vein, when the law talks about teachers' rights and duties (Art. 46) it reserves for them the right to participate as unionized workers and to "collaborate in solidarity in the activities of the school community" (Art. 47). Nothing is stated in the law of what role teachers and parents have in the school institutional project design or decision-making process. The law is mute when it comes to specifying the roles and responsibilities of what is now considered part of the school community and reserves for the school the role of establishing the liaisons with community organizations.

It seems to be that according to the law, the extended community and even some school community actors are visualized as part of good governance—in accordance with civil society's ideals presented in Chapter 2—as it focuses attention on what groups, other than government, can do to improve education. To some extent, the policy design recognizes government limitations to the provision of education services and it is particularly in this sphere where it opens the space for community organizations' interaction. It is in this realm where communities are responsible to handle what either the school or the governments fail to do. However, it is reserved first for the national

government and then, the provincial administration, and lastly to the municipalities setting the rules that will govern that interaction.

Reaffirming Responsibilities

In 1994, in order to support the new administrative structure, the national government and the provinces signed another agreement, *Pacto Federal*, or Federal Education Pact, to achieve the financial and administrative duties and responsibilities stated in the FEL. This new agreement stated the need to:

- Generalize teacher training in accordance with the educational transformation underway
- Eradicate *rancho* schools (schools in very poor condition).
- Expand enrollments
- Improve the efficiency of the educational system
- Adapt educational facilities to the new structure of the system

To achieve this agreement the national government committed itself to invest \$ 3.000 million pesos/dollars in five years beginning in 1994. The provinces, on their behalf, committed to finance 20% of the investments undertaken by the national government and to re-invest in education the savings obtained by better management of the system. This national government compromise was in addition to the *Plan Social Educativo*, or Social Education Plan created in 1993 to balance the education system inequalities by aiming resources at schools serving poor communities. The selection criteria used by the program to divert resources to the schools was highly questioned by

some provincial officials, arguing its use for “political clientelism” (EBAPO No.2). One of my interviews at the national level proves this assumption,

I was right on time for my first interview of the day. The office was almost empty, just two secretaries and myself. Obviously, as always, my interviewee was late, although according to the secretary the person was in a meeting. I was offered *mate* what made me think it will take longer than expected. Half an hour later, a group of almost thirty five women with a different Argentine Spanish accent (definitely from the interior) and carrying carry-on luggage arrived together to the office talking about a bus trip. They kissed the secretaries and went into the office as if they were very familiar with it. After waiting for more than an hour, I was told that my interviewee was still busy and could not attend our meeting, instead, a person who coincidentally was coordinating the women’s group was assigned to answer some of my questions. This middle level official from the province of Santa Fe, received me in her office; just a glass divider partition separated her from the talkative and loud women’s group who were, by then, all at their desks making phone calls—in some cases 2 or 3 shared the same desk—. This doesn’t look like a ministerial office, I thought. After talking about the program and how it is carried out, I asked particularly about this intriguing group of women. The person said, “they

are the liaisons with the provinces”. I came to realize that they were *punteras* (field notes, BA, August 1998).⁵³

The *Plan Social Educativo* supplied 32% of the education resources transferred from the National Ministry between 1993 and 1998. This plan represents annually approximately 6% of all national education expenditures (Rhoten, 1999, p. 75). The plan was presented by ministry officials as an example of decentralized administration. On the one hand, it allowed localities to decide which schools will receive the funds, and on the other hand, it gives the school a discretionary power over those funds (ENMO No.4).

It is important to note that in a movement towards fiscal and administrative federalism, the provincial total share of education spending increased from 61% to 75% between 1990 and 1997. The municipal level also increased its spending during those years—it went from 1.8% to 2.3%. In the same time period the national spending decreased from 37% to 23% (Evolución Gasto Público Social, 1997). As a percentage of the 1997 GDP, the distribution stands as follows: 0.85 for the national level, 2.91 for the provinces, and 0.09 for the municipalities, totaling 3.75%, which still seems low in comparison with the average education spending in Latin American (4%) and OECD countries (5%) (Evolución Gasto Público Social, 1997; UNESCO, 1997; Education Indicators, U.S. Department of Education, 1996). Nonetheless, the central administration continues to be an active actor in financing education. Even more, when the national government spending in education and the monies transferred to the provinces via *Plan*

⁵³ *Peronist* party local brokers.

Social Educativo, which is not included in the transfers through *coparticipación*, are summed they account for a total of 55% of Argentina's total education expenditures while the provinces cover only 45%.⁵⁴ Other sources of funding come from parents' voluntary contributions to the school-base *cooperadora*, or parents' cooperative. Although good quantitative indicators of the overall funding for public education that particularly includes parents' cooperatives are not available, through the interviews conducted for the Buenos Aires case study, teachers and administrators recognized the importance of those organizations for funding the daily school's operation (i.e. for buying instructional materials, mobilizing contributions from private sources, food for the kids, etc.).

In addition to the *Plan Social Educativo*, since the mid-1990s the National Ministry of Culture and Education has been working in collaboration with provincial authorities on the development and implementation of programs that support the development of innovative models of school-site management, pedagogical practices, and school community collaboration projects at the school level. One of those programs is the *Programa Nueva Escuela Argentina para el siglo XXI*, or New School for the Twenty First Century, which assists provincial administrations to improve pedagogical supervision and management and schools in the development of participatory school management strategies—in relation to the school institutional project, integrated learning plans, team teaching, among others. Unfortunately not all provinces were involved in

⁵⁴ This numbers are only estimates. Its is very difficult to determine exactly what share of provincial education budgets are financed by *coparticipación* funds, federal transfers, and external loans.

this endeavor (ENMO No.5) In spite of the efforts to enhance school-based management strategies some difficulties have been experienced: a) the traditional centralized and bureaucratized structure of management creates obstacles to school-based management; b) limited incentives and initiatives to empower school supervisors and directors; and c) small numbers of collaborative relationships between the school and community organizations.⁵⁵

Another program is the *Programa Nacional Escuela y Comunidad*, or School and Community National Program. This program was intended to collaborate directly with the schools in the development of school-community collaboration initiatives. The program has two main objectives: a) the enhancement of service learning projects as part of the school institutional project, and b) the decentralization of social demands, usually placed onto the school, through a web of communication and articulation with social organizations (*Guía Aprendizaje-Servicio* (n.d.), p. 12). Under both objectives the school is at the center of the school community interaction. First, by designing service activities that does not foster the service-learning requirements but also provides a real service to community problems. Second, by diverting social demands to civil society organizations.

According to a ministry official the program was initially intended to address the first objective described above to enhance service-learning in the school curriculum and not as an extra curricular activity. Later on,

⁵⁵ These remarks are supported by the information from my field research in the province of Buenos Aires and described in other studies conducted in Argentina such as Ciglutti, 1993; Dussel and Thisted, 1995; Rhoten, 2000; and World Bank, 1999.

with the global explosion that the issues of civil society have had, on the one hand, and the increasing societal demand that the school has been receiving—according a Gallup study half of the Argentine population believes the school along civil society organizations are among the most trustworthy institutions with the capacity and competence to respond to social problems—on the other, we decided to expand the program (ENMOno.6).

Subsequently, in the last two years, the program incorporated the second objective with the purpose of establishing school-community collaborations for social problem-solving initiatives. So far, the program has organized conferences, service-learning contests, published materials with guidelines on how to include service-learning approaches in the curriculum and PEI, a data base with the description of approximately 3,000 projects from the whole country, and the National Ministry of Education and Culture dedicated a website to the subject.

However, the program did not go further in the analysis of the organizational characteristics of the participant schools and community associations. Neither explored the environment and institutional setting that facilitated the development of school-community collaboration or if among the cases compiled communities required a legal and favorable governmental environment to their functioning, or what class of problems had been handled and among those, how many had been handled successfully by different combinations of schools—i.e. public and private—and civil society

organizations—i.e. for profit or non-profit. I will attempt to address these points through the case of Buenos Aires.

Conclusion

Following global institutional trends Argentina initiated in the 1990s a process of education decentralization. Through the Law of Transfer and the Federal Education Law, the national government decentralized the administrative and financial responsibilities to the provinces while retaining control over the process of educational transformation—over the *when*, *how*, and *what*. The participatory component of decentralization reforms, political decentralization, was enhanced through the negotiations, although limited, via the *Consejo Federal de Education* where all provinces, through their minister of education were represented. Other participatory initiatives seems to be only attempts, difficult to operate in practice, and are a matter of continuous controversy. These difficulties stand from the tension between those global imperatives and national structural realities and standardized practices which in turn create a gap between what is stated in the law and what can actually be operationalized.

As the state retreated in the administrative and financial field, however, it still manages to reinforce its central position. It is in this kind of development that one can see the dual transformation of decentralization-centralization and the essence of the Argentine case. This analysis shows the paradox of the decentralization process in which a strong centralization coexists with particular forms of decentralization (financial and administrative, only to certain levels), with the center of control institutionalized in the

national state through educational planning, while through decentralization, the state solves conflicts (based on federalism) increasing the participation of the provinces to a certain extent.

The purpose of the education decentralization was to transfer (in a form of deconcentration) responsibilities for secondary education to the provincial states through a series of agreements between the federal government and the provinces that facilitated the transfer of reduced financial resources and also provided the framework for the administration of federal and provincial services. Even when decentralization did not go as far as a simple or apparent bureaucratic and financial change, in the daily practice it reinforced the centralist authority of the state in which decentralization as rhetoric may well represent the full embodiment of the modern Argentine state.

CHAPTER 6

POLICY ADAPTATION AND OUTCOMES

Buenos Aires: A Multiple Case Study Socio-political Environments and Informal Institutional Practices Virtual vs. Real Policy?

In this chapter, I analyze educational change and decentralization during the 1990s in the province of Buenos Aires. First, using secondary sources, archival materials, and associational survey data I present descriptive and empirical information on the geographical, political and socio-economic context as well as the educational institutional development. I focus on the peculiarities of Buenos Aires and its historical contradiction between its ideological commitment with a decentralized educational governance, local participation, and its actual centralized practice. I also examine the relationships among politics, institutional design, and education.

Second, using archival materials and interview data, I examine contemporary public policy making in Buenos Aires as a result of the changes implemented at the national level. In this section I concentrate on the directives of Buenos Aires regarding the implementation and consequences of the 1991 transfer of educational services and the 1993 education reform. I particularly focus on those issues concerning the role of the local school council, participation, and school autonomy.

Third, using interview data I explore the impact of education decentralization across districts that emerge from the municipal case studies. Education and community leader perceptions are grounded in the peculiarities of their socio-political environments.

Their views are catalogued, interpreted, and contrasted with the directives' definitions and the views of the provincial level education administrators. I argue that local education actor's views and actions about participation and school autonomy, although conditioned by the provincial educational formal structures and political culture, are shaped by the socio-political environment they are a part of. Finally, I end the chapter by comparing and contrasting the consequence of the reform for participation and school autonomy in both municipal cases, and looking at the crossroads between the effect of structure and socio-political environments.

Buenos Aires: General Geographic and Demographic Characteristics

The province of Buenos Aires is located in the central region of Argentina, in what is called *Pampa Húmeda* or Humid Pampas (with a total annual rainfall of approximately 1,000 mm). On the north, it is bounded by the provinces of *Santa Fe*, *Córdoba*, and *Entre Ríos*; the Atlantic Ocean, and *Río de la Plata*, on the east; the province of *Río Negro* and the Atlantic Ocean, on the south; and the provinces of *Río Negro*, *La Pampa*, and *Córdoba*, on the west. It has an area of 307,571 square kilometers (8.2% of the total country) and concentrates 38% of the country's total population. According to the last census, the population of Buenos Aires is 13,755,993 inhabitants. The province is divided into 134 departments or municipalities with separate political and

administrative powers. The capital of Buenos Aires is La Plata and is the residence of administrative and governmental powers.¹

The province produces almost 50% of the country's agricultural production and 70% of Argentine cattle is raised in its lands. Buenos Aires holds 40% of the total Argentine industrial institutions and 49% of the country's total job posts, of which 70% reside in the Great Buenos Aires. Since the very origins of the Argentine Nation, the province of Buenos Aires has had social-economic relevance due to its location, the fertility of its lands, its mild climate, and the fact that it has been the most important area of circulation of cattle, agricultural products, goods, and human settlement.²

The Great Buenos Aires (GBA) area refers specifically to the municipalities or *partidos* that surrounds the city of Buenos Aires. Nineteen *partidos* comprise the GBA. About two thirds of the total student population is concentrated in this area (see Appendix B—Buenos Aires and Great Buenos Aires maps). Thirteen districts are highly urbanized, with a population density that exceeds 3500 inhabitants per square kilometer. The remaining municipalities have a population density of less than 3500 inhabitants per square kilometer and still have substantial areas of land use for some agriculture and leisure activities. With the exception of Lanús and Vicente López that experienced a slight population decline during the end of the 1980s and early 1990s, the population growth rate continues to be significant in the GBA—10.7% between 1991 and 2001. The municipality that increased its population the most is La Matanza, which according to the

¹ INDEC census data 1991. Preliminary results from the census 2001 were obtained from *Clarín*, August 27th, 2001.

² *Consejo Federal de Inversiones* (1999).

last census holds 1,253,240 habitants (INDEC, Census, 1991, preliminary results Census 2001).³

The GBA is divided into five sections within two rings of industrial and demographic development. The inner ring includes those municipalities that surround the city of Buenos Aires and they experienced an earlier industrialization and settlement—which is the case of Vicente López. The outer ring contains those municipalities more distant to the city of Buenos Aires and went through industrial and demographic development much later. More than half of La Matanza is located in the outer ring. The sections are divided as follows: northern (4 municipalities: Vicente López, San Isidro, San Fernando, and Tigre), northwestern (6 municipalities: General San Martín, General Sarmiento, Merlo, Moreno, Morón, and Tres de Febrero), western (2 municipalities: Esteban Echeverría and La Matanza), southwestern (3 municipalities: Almirante Brown, Lanús, and Lomas de Zamora), and southern (4 municipalities: Avellaneda, Berazategui, Florencio Varela, and Quilmes). Most of the neighborhoods had their origins around the railroad system, close to the railroad station and then grew outwards. Because this research is particularly interested in municipalities located in the northern and western sections, some general characteristics of these sections are presented below.

³ Preliminary results of the census 2001 data published in the Argentine newspaper, *Clarín*, August 27th, 2001.

Northern Section

Within the northern section Vicente López and San Isidro are probably the wealthiest municipalities in the GBA, although Vicente López is perhaps more homogeneous in population composition. Most of the middle-class and elite urban expansion in the end of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century has occurred in this section bordering the Río de la Plata. Along the shoreline are shipyards, boat store facilities, yacht clubs, and rowing clubs. Large tracts of open lands are given over to rugby clubs, tennis clubs, golf clubs, polo grounds, the Hippodrome of San Isidro, and the aristocratic Jockey Club.

The Pan-American highway extends along the northern section from the City of Buenos Aires and bifurcates out of San Isidro, one branch running to Tigre and the other heading northwest. Various industries are located near the highway as well as high trendy malls, luxurious sport clubs and elite and middle class neighborhoods. These neighborhoods resemble the North American high middle-class suburban style of construction. Housing quality begins to change noticeably to the north of San Isidro, with more working class neighborhoods.

Vicente Lopez is composed of eight counties: Carapachay, Florida, Florida O., La Lucila, Munro, Olivos, Vicente Lopez, and Villa Martelli. Among the more prosperous counties are Florida, La Lucila, Olivos and Vicente López. Vicente López is one of the most densely populated municipalities in the GBA with 8,576.7 inhabitants per square kilometer.

Western Section

Along the Río Matanza (Matanza river) are the *partidos* of Esteban Echeverría and La Matanza. The northern side of the river is heavily urbanized, with over a million people concentrated in the lower eastern half of La Matanza. The western side of La Matanza, located in the outer ring of the GBA, is sparsely populated in comparison with substantial strips of open land. The average population density of this municipality is 3471.1 habitant per square kilometer and comprises 14% of the total GBA population (Census, 1991).

In recent years, horticultural production and biological food activity projects have sprung up along the western section and became an important component of food supply for the whole Buenos Aires' region (Flood, 1991). Although industrial employment has declined in the last decade, a total of 3.542 industrial facilities are located in the area, such as: Mercedes Benz Argentina, Whirlpool Argentina, several textile factories, refineries, etc.⁴ The Central Market of Buenos Aires for wholesale agricultural products and the International Buenos Aires airport are located in the western territory. Despite those official numbers, nowadays most of La Matanza factories are almost empty or abandoned. Many of them were unable to compete internationally when Argentina opened its economy almost a decade ago.

The section is predominantly low-middle to working class in social composition. Poor quality housing and slums are frequently seen in the area. Established primarily by

⁴ La Matanza is the district with the highest number of industrial facilities in the province. The province account for a total of 36270 establishments. For more information see the Provincial Ministry of Production web page at <http://www.gba.gov.ar>

internal migrants and later on by immigrants from neighboring countries, these shantytowns are located on the fringes of the City of Buenos Aires and more affluent neighborhoods of the district.⁵ Of La Matanza's people 36% live today in poverty.⁶ La Matanza is composed of 13 counties: Aldo Bonisi, Ciudad Evita, Ciudad Madero, Gonzalez Catán, Laferrere, Lomas del Mirador, Rafael Castillo, Ramos Mejía, San Justo, Virrey del Pino, Tablada, Tapiales, Villa Luzuriaga. Ramos Mejía and San Justo are the most prosperous counties within the municipality.

The socio-economic difference between these two sections of the GBA was clearly expressed by a school supervisor who worked in both regions, and who was one of my key informants during my field work experience. "In my weekly trip to La Plata, I clearly see the difference between Vicente Lopez, San Isidro and the western section. It's like crossing the border between the United States of America and Mexico, that's what it is!" (EVLPSNo.2)⁷ The difference presented in this statement is at the core of my analysis in this chapter.

Buenos Aires Modernization

The most profound change in Buenos Aires occurred after the end of World War II, when the disarticulation of the export-import economy gave way to a welfare state led by Perón. His program nationalized Argentina's transport system, public services, and

⁵ The description of GBA sections are based on my field experience and information obtained from Keeling (1996).

⁶ *The Economist*, February 2, 2000, p. 23.

⁷ Based on her place of residence and work she needs to cross both section in her way to the provincial governmental administration located in Buenos Aires' capital, La Plata.

major industries, which led to the installation of an import substitution industrialization and economic independence. This import substitution program benefited urban areas in general and primarily the Buenos Aires, which received a strong rural-urban immigration flow during the postwar period.

Buenos Aires became then the land of opportunity for working and middle class people due to the increasing job openings in the newly industrial area and in the public sector. With those recent demographical changes, the peripheral areas of the city expanded on what we know today as the GBA, which soon became the cornerstone of the *Peronist* electoral support. During this period popular participation expanded, particularly following the pattern of popular urbanization. Community development organizations were established, placing claims to local authorities and providing services for the new settlements (Cavarozzi & Palermo, 1995; García Delgado, 1997).

Reflecting the post 1945 new world political and economic order, direct investment from the USA was initiated in Buenos Aires in 1950. Foreign capital concentrated in areas such as petrochemical, automobile, pharmaceutical, mechanical, and electronic industries. Concomitant with this industrialization a new industrial belt developed along the major communication axes on what we know today as the outer ring. Since then, Buenos Aires experienced further changes, particularly in recent years. As I showed before, under the leadership of Carlos Menem, Argentina opened up one more time to the world economy and attempted to globalize Argentina's economy and society. With policies of privatization, deregulation, and openness, the government encouraged an influx of speculative capital into Buenos Aires and along with deindustrialization grew

the service sector and the external banking system (Andersen, 2002). The short term benefits of this process has been affecting Buenos Aires seriously.⁸

Nowadays, the most noticeable characteristics of this province are a bankrupt economy (with an estimated fiscal deficit of \$1804 million dollars for 2001, holding 33% of the provinces' accumulated debt), high unemployment rate (18.5%), population concentrations in the metropolitan area, and lesser relative population in the interior (63% of the total population is concentrated in less than 2% of the province's territory). The urban population comes up to 95% (INDEC, Census 1991). According to a study conducted by the *Dirección Provincial de Planeamiento y Evaluación de la Calidad Educativa* or Provincial Directorate of Planning and Education Quality, poverty rate in the province has increased almost 5% since 1995—it went from 29.9% in October, 1995 to 35.3 % in May, 2000 and has increased almost 24% since 1980 (*Estudio 1*, 2000).⁹ Another important factor in understanding poverty increases during the last few years is the change in income distribution. The share of income received by the upper 20% of the population rose from 51% in 1990 to 54% in 1998, while the share of the lower 20% fell from 4.6% in 1990 to 3.8% in 1998 (*Encuesta permanente de hogares*, 1990-1998).

⁸ In the 1990s, the GBA lost 5.508 industrial plants; and between 1991 and 1995 the manufacturing industry eliminated more than 200.000 jobs (CEB, 1995)

⁹ The unemployment rate does not consider the percent of underemployment, which according partial results of the 2001 census the Great Buenos Aires has almost 50% of its population in that situation. Poverty rate figures do not include the percentage of indigent people, which has been increasing in the last decade. It went from 7.7% in October 1995 to 8.9% in May 2001. Due to the strong correlation found in Murmis and Feldmand (1996) between unemployment and poverty, in the last decade poverty and inequality has increased paralleling unemployment rate increase in the province of Buenos Aires. While in the 1980s only the 11.5 % of the total GBA households lived under the poverty line, today that numbered increased to almost 36%. Provincial indicators for unemployment rate, fiscal debt and bankruptcy have been obtained from partial results of Census 2001 published in *La Nación*, August 27, 2001.

During the last decade people not only became poorer but also the gap between the rich and the poor became wider.

It is interesting to acknowledge that when survey respondents from La Matanza and Vicente López were asked to describe their socio-economic situation over the last five years on a scale of better, equal, and worse (see Table 6.1), the overall data confirms the trend described above. About 14% of the respondents answered *better*, while 48% selected *worse*. When examined by socio-economic level, about 51% of the lower tier and 45% of the middle class respondents indicated they were *worse* respectively. When those self-identified as middle-lower class and lower-working class were asked about the source of their socio-economic depression, the most important responses were: a) not having work (32%.) and b) not having stable work (18%.) What can be inferred from these responses is that unemployment was heavily weighted as a source of individual unstable socio-economic situation, much higher than any political issue.

Social polarization, environmental degradation, deindustrialization, eroding middle class lifestyles, rising unemployment, battering social welfare, and sharpening poverty coexist with the dream of the provincial status Buenos Aires had in the past and aspirations of global economic involvement. Institutional, community, and individual responses to this tension stem from the convergence of local and global forces. In the following section I shift from a broad historical overview of Buenos Aires and its general characteristics to an analysis of the contemporary political and institutional landscape of Buenos Aires.

Table 6. 1.

Self-Perception of Socio-economic Conditions in the last 5 years, in percent.
Districts combined.

| | Total | Socio-economic level | |
|-----------------------|-------|----------------------|-----|
| | | Middle* | Low |
| Better | 14 | 16 | 12 |
| Equal | 36.5 | 34.5 | 28 |
| Worse | 48 | 44 | 51 |
| No answer /don't know | 1.5 | 5.5 | 9 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Note: n= 60

Numbers are rounded.

* in this category I included all respondents who identified themselves as middle class. The same applies for the *low* category.

Recent Political Evolution in Buenos Aires

Besides the importance Buenos Aires had as an economic core it became a *political treasure* in the 1940s due to the voting counts of 37% of the total Argentine electorate. Since 1983 the two major parties have alternated in office. First, during Alfonsín's administration, the Radical party won the provincial elections with results that resembled national level choices. With 52% of the popular vote over almost 39% of the PJ, Alejandro Armendariz (1983-1987) obtained the governorship. Still under a Radical national administration, Armendariz was succeeded in office by the *Justicialista* Antonio Cafiero (1988-1991), who finished his mandate in the course of Menem's presidency.

Since then, the *Justicialista* party dominated the provincial political scene. The last three governors have been *Justicialistas* and have all been seduced by the presidential

seat, which conditioned, in one way or another, their acts of government to their individual political aspirations. It was particularly during the last two administrations of Duhalde's terms (1991-1999),¹⁰ when major changes in education took effect—the transference to the provinces of secondary and teacher training services and the federal education reform. It is precisely during his administration that the legal framework was modified to make the reform possible. Consequently, Duhalde's administration will be the focus of my attention, particularly his political and managerial style.¹¹ These characteristics have determined not only the reforms put into place but also their implementation and outcomes.

A Neo-populist Style

While previous administrations have been concerned with the removal of long-term and heavy authoritarian legacies from Buenos Aires' institutions and society through policies that stressed democratization and participation, Duhalde's administration put the emphasis on *equity, administrative efficiency, and work ethics* (*Provincia de Buenos Aires, Ministerio de Gobierno, 1994*) in an attempt to distinguish himself from the unpopular neoliberal turn of Menem's government, from which Duhalde was the vice president until 1991. Once he declared: "Menem became an ally of the powerful and

¹⁰ Duhalde's first term was from 1991 to 1995. He was then reelected after the provincial constitutional amendment of 1994 that allowed a governors' consecutive re-election (Art. 123).

¹¹ In this chapter I do not cover the provincial constitutional changes since those have been adjustments to the national constitutional changes and the Federal Education Law. As happened at the central level, those changes reinforced the provincial executive. I cover, though, some of those changes but with regards to education changes that went into effect during the 1990s.

that is not what *Justicialism* is all about (*New York Times*, 2002).”¹² However, Duhalde agreed that Argentina had no choice but to open itself up to competition and to re-engineer the state. When he was asked about what was missing from Menem’s plan he answered: *el salarizado* (*La Nación*, 1996). Of course, neither Menem’s nor Duhalde’s policies would have satisfied Gral. Perón; for that reason strong and direct ties with the Peronist constituency were needed.

Accordingly, the provincial administration followed the general national and international pattern of state reform, not without a quota of *pure Peronist lineage*. As expressed by a provincial official, “Duhalde could not get rid of the traditional populist practices while implementing liberal types of policies, he needed them if he wanted to be reelected or even for his future presidential aspirations.” (EBAPO No.2). Students of recent neo-populism in Latin America agreed that although governments faced fiscal and structural constraints on state spending, nevertheless they managed to create material benefits to their constituency by, among other tactics, targeting social programs for the poor (Palermo, 1998; Weyland, 1996).¹³ In a number of ways, Duhalde benefited the popular sectors directly by implementing policies targeting social programs in the province.

What allowed Duhalde to act with substantial autonomy from the national party leadership and to implement a robust social program in Buenos Aires was his strong ties with the provincial Peronist branch of which he was, and is still today, the president. As

¹² *The New York Times*, November 21, 2001. See also *La Nación*, July 7, 1996.

¹³ Although scholars that look at recent populist administrations put their emphasis on national level administrations, the argument is also useful in this case.

a local party member put it, “he is the boss, he has the money. . .” (EVLPL No.1).¹⁴

Actually the two major party factions in the Buenos Aires of the 1990s are faithful to Duhalde and they had controlled the Buenos Aires legislature from 1991 to 1997 (see Appendix B—Table B4. Provincial Congress Composition).

Besides controlling the provincial congress, “these two factions have been distributing among themselves positions in the provincial and national governments and municipal electoral lists. . .” (EMPL No2). Those factions or *líneas internas* are the *Liga Federal* (Federal League) led by the National Chamber of Deputies president and acting provincial party president Alberto Pierri and the provincial minister of *Obras y Servicios Públicos* (Public Services), Hugo Toledo, and the *Liga Peronista de Buenos Aires*

¹⁴ See also *La Nación*, Julio 7, 1996.

(Buenos Aires Peronist League—LIBEPO) run by the provincial Chamber of Deputies president Osvaldo Mercuri.¹⁵

With the control of the bureaucracy, which means control over state resources and job posts used for patronage, and the provincial Peronist factions on his side, Duhalde was able to put into place an *asistencialista* network (social welfare or problem-solving network) side by side with structural adjustment reforms. Programs such as *Plan Vida* (Life Program),¹⁶ a food distribution program targeted to pregnant and nursing women and women with young children, have been the biggest endeavor funded by state resources from the *Consejo Provincial de la Familia y Desarrollo Humano* (Provincial Council of Family and Human Development). This institution was presided over by Duhalde's wife, Hilda Beatriz González de Duhalde, widely known as *Chiche*.¹⁷ Other programs that targeted education were implemented through the *Consejo Provincial del Menor y la Familia* (Provincial Council of Minor and Family). According to the government's plan, education was "at the center of its social development" (Programa de

¹⁵ The information about Duhalde and the party operation in Buenos Aires was obtained from interviews with party members and local officials. I should note here that throughout the interviews the names of the different *Peronist* faction in Buenos Aires never came up. The internal party factions have always been referred by their leaders, not by the factions' names, which to some extent confirms the *caudillista* character of Argentine Peronism. I obtained the *líneas internas* names from some pamphlets, newspapers, and street painted graffiti, which I confirmed with footnote number 86 in Steven Levitsky (2001). I should add that each faction represents two of the most important *Peronist* electoral districts in the province, Lomas de Zamora and La Matanza led by Mercuri and Pierrri respectively. Duhalde has developed politically in Lomas de Zamora where he was elected mayor for more than one term. As he moved up in the political ladder his placed was occupied by other leaders such as Mercuri; however he has never lost his political strength in this district.

¹⁶ The phase problem-solving network is used by Auyero (2000) who describes in detail the operation of those networks in Buenos Aires. I will just make a general description of their operation, for who they work for, and particularly their connection with education.

¹⁷ Chiche is Mrs Duhalde's nickname. Mrs Duhalde, once an elementary teacher in a working class neighborhood in Buenos Aires, is also the president of the provincial *Justicialista* party women's branch.

Gobierno, Dirección de Educación y Cultura de la Provincia, 1994). I refer to it in the section that deals particularly with education reform.

In order to make these policies possible, Duhalde's administration needed to make some structural changes. The changes not only addressed the government organizational structure, such as the creation of the councils mentioned above, but they went even further by restructuring the state and the provincial constitutional framework. These steps paralleled changes conducted at the national level. In fact, Duhalde maintained the rhetoric used with Menem in his vice-presidential campaign about an "efficient state and social justice" and he actually managed to implement both goals during his administration (Plan de gobierno de la Provincia, 1994).¹⁸

Indeed, the same rhetoric used internationally, regionally, and nationally was used at the provincial level to foster state reform, privatization, participation, community involvement, and decentralization policies. According to official documents, the provincial social policy was based on three pillars: a) active participation of the community and NGOs with the purpose to identify and solve local problems, b) creation of problem-solving networks (*redes solidarias*) at all levels—provincial, regional, municipal, and c) decentralization and regionalization for the development of social programs (Programa de Gobierno, 1994, p. 2).

Thus, Duhalde's administration soon became committed to privatize or conceding nearly every productive service operation in which the provincial state was engaged in as a way to obtain capital, diminish public debt, and reduce fiscal deficits (Law 12292,

¹⁸ See Menem and Duhalde (1989) for a detailed description of their 1989 platform.

1992; Law 3341, 1992; Law 111, 1996; Decree 743, etc.).¹⁹ Through these measures Duhalde did obtain capital but his administration was unable to reduce public debt and fiscal deficit; indeed, they increased over time. With an increase of the provincial total social spending between 1993 and 1999, the provincial debt was also engrossed.

While total social spending went from 7,961 millions in 1993 to 10,523 in 1999, the provincial total public debt went from *pesos* 1,112 millions in 1997, the lowest since 1991, to 3,864 millions for the year 1999.²⁰ According to an official from the provincial administration, “Duhalde left his successor a fiscal deficit of *pesos/dollars* 2,300 millions” (EBAPONo.4).²¹ Yet, social programs were financed, in some cases, through alternative channels that used extraordinary funds through national transfers and external loans. These sources of funds are usually not detailed in the annual budget and are subject to discretionary use such as the *Fondo de Reparación Histórica* (Historical Compensation Fund), which for the fiscal year 1994 almost constituted 10% of the provincial gross product (*Evolución gasto social provincial*, 1994). These funds, instead

¹⁹ See also *La Nación*, Préstamo del BID para Buenos Aires, November 11, 1996; and *La Nación*, *Los franceses tras el agua y la Luz de la provincial de Buenos Aires*, May 20, 1996.

²⁰ The total social spending includes: education, health, the pension system, social security, social housing, and other social welfare programs. Some of those programs are funded with national transfers. *Evolución Gasto Público Social, Período 1980-1997*. Dirección Nacional de Programación del Gasto Social. Secretaría de Programación Económica y Regional. 1999. Cuadro 1.7, p. 56.

²¹ The critical situation faced by the provincial administration that succeeded Duhalde, Ruckauf-Sola, led to another state reform law to reduce public administration and the declaration of default early this year. This law was sanctioned by a ‘necessity and urgency’ decree during 2001. *La Nación* 16/07/2001, Página 9. For more information on Bs As bankruptcy see *La Nación*, February 4, 2002 p. 16 and *La Nación*, February 12, 2002, p.2. The total public debt includes: loans from the *Banco Provincia*—the provincial official bank—multilateral loans mostly coming from the IDB and WB, bilateral loans mostly from Spanish banks, provincial bonds, and other loans. For detailed information see *Evolución anual de la deuda pública 1991-1999 (2002)* Dirección de política y financiamiento público. Ministerio de Economía de la Provincia de Buenos Aires.

of being distributed through the established channel—provincial government-General School Directorate-Local School Councils-Schools—are transferred directly from the provincial government to the school.

In addition, the programs run through the *Consejo Provincial del Menor y la Familia* and the *Consejo Provincial de la Familia y Desarrollo Humano*, the *Fondo de Reparación Histórica* have not been delivered through the traditional institutionalized channels. They have been used as a *personalista* method to link the masses with its leader. As expressed by an interviewee, “social plans were the direct connection between the government well, Duhalde, and the poor. . .and he was clever enough to use the same Peronist voters to carry out those programs” (EMPLNo.4). Social plans were implemented through the agency of Chiche—viewed as *the woman, the mother, the spouse, the teacher, the vivid image of Evita*, and a group of almost 30,000 volunteers, known as *manzaneras*—women community leaders or local party brokers.²²

The *Plan Social* was put into operation initially in La Matanza and later on in other poor districts officially declared as *bolsones de pobreza* (poor areas) in the GBA. According to official figures, by 1997 the program reached 38 underdeveloped provincial districts and 3,000,000 people.²³ Working jointly with the *unidades básicas*, the role of *manzaneras* were, in its origins, to identify and subsequently distribute in the blocks they

²² These women work in certain blocks that have been assigned to them. The Argentine Spanish translation for block is *manzana* for this reason the name *manzaneras* meaning block workers.

²³ See Programa de Desarrollo Social, Gobernación Duhalde (n.d.).

had assigned, food, medical services, and other basic needs (EBAPLNo.4).²⁴ Later on, the *Plan Vida*, in combination with other plans from the same provincial office, expanded toward other areas such as housing, school lunches, family projects, etc. In compensation for their work these women received the same weekly donation they distributed to their neighbors and most importantly, political access and/or rewards. In the words of a *manazanera*,

you know. . . knowing the right persons to talk with and to get what you need. . . actually we have received help to contact the person who owns that land. . . we want to build there a center for the kids, a place where they can stay and be watched by one of us. . . we don't want them in the street, it is getting very dangerous (ELMCLNo.1).

The *Social Plan* was clearly an exchange of favors for votes and shed light on the convergence of political *clientelism* and the social policies implemented by the *Justicialista* party in the province of Buenos Aires. It was an informal network to reassure patron-client relations and to secure future political support. This network linked state funding with local political leaders, local organizations, party brokers, and

²⁴ The interviewee told me the same as Auyero (2000) found in his ethnographic study. The work of the *manazaneras* was deeply entrenched with the work of the *unidades básicas*.

unidades básicas.²⁵ The implementation of the program was indeed decentralized and each unit of the implementation chain was autonomous from each other, although, under strict control of the provincial executive. Chiche would ultimately make the final decision in a vertical and monopolistic manner and she soon became synonymous with the benefits distributed.²⁶ The established structure of human resources, extensive channels for policy implementation, and local problem solving networks helped Duhalde to act ignoring country level leadership and, indeed, to informally integrate its constituency to the provincial party structure in a discipline and direct linkage to its leader thorough policies that had little to do with Menem's, or even his own, neoliberal package.²⁷ In sum, Duhalde's administration was able to install a type of leadership that combined *Peronist ways* with a neoliberal restructuring program.

²⁵ Local organizations blossomed during this period in the GBA. According to the results of my field experience many of them had, and some still have, strong association with the above mentioned informal network that the Justicialista party established to pursue its ambitious social program. In this point, I hold a different position from Levitsky's (2001) argument about the relationship between the Peronist party informal structure and community organizations. While his argument showed the cooptation of local organizations by the party local structure, my study makes a distinction between organizations' type and party's cooptation. I distinguished them between *new*—founded mainly during the 1990s, and *old*—those founded from the turn of the century to the early 1980s, associations. My empirical results also show that some of those *new* organizations have been mostly used for clientelistic practices by the Peronist local informal structure. I will come back to this point in the last chapter of this study.

²⁶ In 1997 Mrs. Duhalde run for Congress and won, leading a party faction that espoused Evita's legacy. The electoral rally starting the party faction was held at a football stadium filled with her *manazaneras*.

²⁷ I will come to this point later on while describing the situation in La Matanza.

Historical and Institutional Outline of Buenos Aires Educational Evolution

Evolution of Buenos Aires' Education System

By 1875, before the consolidation of the nation-state and the creation of a national system of education, the Province of Buenos Aires institutionalized its system of education—one of the oldest in Argentina—under Domingo F. Sarmiento's leadership.²⁸ The provincial *Ley de Educación Común No. 2688* (law of common education) was primarily intended to organize and unify primary schooling; secondary education was initially provided in Argentina by the national government although some normal and secondary schools were created under the provincial control.

Probably the main feature of this foundational administrative system of education was its decentralized structure of governance. The Provincial Constitution of 1873 established the governance of the provincial education system as follows. At the central level, the General Directorate of Education and a General Education Council—these offices were designated by the provincial executive power after the approval of the provincial Senate—and, at the district level, local elected school councils.²⁹ Since their origin in 1875, both the General Education Council and Local School Councils, were meant to be political participatory units to balance power of strong *solo* executives and to represent through their views, the diverse Buenos Aires constituency.

²⁸ The General Direction of Education was in existence since 1817. The Provincial Constitution of 1873 institutionalized this office as part of the provincial governance structure. Domingo F. Sarmiento was the General Director of Education between 1856 and 1861 (Solari, 1984). He was the first Argentine elected president for the period 1868-1874.

²⁹ The provincial constitutional amendment of 1889 changed the name of the provincial Senate to House of Representatives.

According to the provincial Law of Common Education of 1875, local school counselors should be elected in each municipality from local neighbors (Art.206, Administrative Regulative Law of Common Education No. 988). Their role was intimately connected with the schools' operation. For example, local school councils could appoint or dismiss teachers, appoint substitute teachers, administer local educational funds, build schools, supervise academic matters, and do local school fundraising among others functions (Art. 49).³⁰ However, the decision-making power assigned to these councils did not last for long.

The arbitrary use of the council's functions and the lack of commitment with the provincial goal of education for all were the arguments used to constrain local councils' activities and functions (Munin, 1993). Paradoxically, the reasons of the school council existence were precisely its arbitrary functions and the council's flexibility. The General Directorate of Education evidenced the freedom that was granted by the law to those councils and the political and territorial consequences of the power attributed to them. Thus, two years after the enactment of the Law of Common Education, Sarmiento, as general director of education, expressed his disillusion with the local school councils' operation;

In practice, the results [of the council's operation] are weak, there are not many neighbors interested in the progress of education, or they do not

³⁰ As popular and secret vote was not granted in Argentina until 1912, local school councils were selected from local elites. For this reason, local councils were limited participatory entities.

know how to stimulate it; or those who actually have recognized aptitudes they are unable or do not want to assume those responsibilities, or ultimately, political parties preferences, town rivalries, and the lack of general commitment, end up discouraging those who do have the willingness to work . . . ³¹

Fourteen years after the enactment of the Law of Common Education, the provincial constitutional amendment of 1889 limited the responsibilities and functions of local school councils, “the local school administration will be in charge of the local school governance unless its operation interferes with technical issues” (Art. 213, 5). The ambiguity regarding what were considered technical and administrative functions gave the General Directorate of Education the power to override some council’s decisions. It is important to note that in 1884 the National Law of Common Education No. 1420 considered the establishment of local school council, but only as a supervisory unit, whose five members should be elected from local parents and by the National Council of Education (Art.38).

In 1905, a reform of the National Education Law of Common Education took place. The Ley Láinez of 1905 handed over the responsibility of the provincial central administration and local school councils. From then on, the local council’s role was limited only to administrative functions, not pedagogical, particularly to those related to local school enrollment, local school financial assistance (mainly for the maintenance of

³¹ Sarmiento, D. F. Obras completas, T. XLIV, p. 334 in Tedesco J.C. (1986, p.87).

school buildings), control of local school personnel duties, and determination of sanctions in cases of violation of the educational law. Consequently, local school councils lost control over instructional supervision and the power to appoint or dismiss teachers, which were considered pedagogical functions. These functions were transferred to the Chief Inspection Office. This office was hierarchically dependent from the Directorate of Education (Munin, 1993; Misuraca & Vasquez, 1999).

The provincial system of education kept this basic organizational structure until 1983. Probably the most important change experienced by the system during the interlude was the reform that took effect after the Peronist provincial constitutional reform of 1949, which replaced the provincial central educational governance structure, for a Ministry of Education. The same constitution removed local school counselors from their functions (Art. 167 bis.). Thus, local school councils without counselors became just an administrative unit subordinated to the authority of the Ministry of Education through the Chief Inspection Office. Local councils regained some of their original functions during democratic governments (1958-1962, 1963-1966, and 1973-1976); however, they lost almost all authority during the last military regime (1976-1983) (Munin, 1993).³² Another administrative office that suffered successive change since its creation was the General Council of Education. When not banned, it changed from sharing the executive power with the Direction of Education to be only a consultative body.

³² For detailed information on the history and functions of Local School Councils see Munín (1993).

The General Directorate of Education, General Council of Education, and Local School Councils were recovered as administrative units with the return of democracy in 1983. Since then local school councils have been elected through universal vote. With the passing of the Local School Councils Law No. 10589 (1987), local councils regained some of their previous functions and authority, although they were still subordinate to the authority of the General Directorate of Education. During the administrations of governor Armendariz and governor Cafiero local school councils were habitual channels used for the distribution of monies used for school infrastructure. These administrative units were also responsible for appointing the district's teachers—responsibilities they soon lost.

Antecedents of the 1990s Participatory and Decentralizing Reforms

During the years of democratic euphoria, and as a result of the second National Pedagogical Congress that took place between 1984-1988, some problems affecting the national and provincial education systems were identified.³³ Among the identified issues were: lack of federalism, centralism as opposed to democratization, and bureaucratization. These problems referred to unclear definitions of the national and provincial education systems, a poor distribution of resources, limited role of the Federal Council of Education, the hierarchical and centralist organization of the system and the lack of possibility for actual participation at the local level (*Circular Informativa sobre Regionalización, Descentralización y Nuclearización Educativas*, 1988, p. 10).

³³ The first pedagogical congress was conducted in 1884.

In response to these issues, two steps were proposed to decentralize the Buenos Aires system of education: a) a process of *descentralización y regionalización*, (decentralization and regionalization) and, b) the creation of *consejos participativos de escuelas* (school-site participatory councils). These steps, in line with political decentralization arguments, were recognized by the educational provincial authorities “as part and in consequence of a democratization project going on other Argentine provinces and countries in Latin America ” (*Circular Informativa sobre Regionalización, Descentralización y Nuclearización Educativas*, 1988, p. 10) and, as an important move towards,

the recognition of *subjects*—society, community, groups—with diverse socio-cultural identities that enable them to be in charge of their own communal interests. . . This process [regionalización] will allow the development of strong ties between educational institutions, governance levels, and regional organizations—unions, neighborhood organizations, clubs, media, etc.—to reach a mutual compromise that guarantees the expansion of the educational sphere towards an authentic *education community* (*Circular informativa sobre regionalización, descentralización y nuclearización educativas*, 1988, p. 10).

Unfortunately, none of the proposals had a successful end; neither produced the intended participatory and decentralizing outcomes. The process of *regionalization* did

not go into effect and the school-site participatory board (provincial Decree 4182, 1988) did not have so much power because of the optional character of the policy and the resistance it faced. In the words of a teacher there was another reason for which the school-site boards were unsuccessful,

In a limited number of schools school-site boards were implemented and after a couple of years they have been forgotten and, in many cases, they have been used as a space where some groups advanced their political aspiration, that's why they were so much resisted. We didn't want the school to be a *unidad básica* or a *comité* (ELMT No.5).

The reason for implementing school-site participatory councils was an attempt to promote participation of the community in the school decision-making, both in primary and secondary schools. I should point out that the provincial administration thought that a decentralized educational management would not be effective without participation at the school level. The General School Director of the province expressed this view as follows.

The project conceived the school-site board as an organic channel for participation and a way to transfer power from the central unit to the community; the economic circumstances should not be a problem here,

what is necessary is the willingness and the political decision to make it happen.³⁴

Thus, the regulation reserved the right for the *education community* (parents, teachers, school administrators, school-site cooperatives, and students) to effectively act in school decision-making; however, the technical-pedagogical aspects were still reserved for school professionals (Art. 3). Community organizations could be invited to participate in the meetings but without a vote (Art. 5). Another mechanism used to incorporate community organizations to the school life was the *Jornadas de Trabajo Solidario* (journeys devoted to social service). With this program parents and neighbors collaborated with the school with their own work, time, tools, and monies. Generally speaking the activities were related with the maintenance of school buildings and recreation areas (EVLSPNo.1).

According to the provincial Director of Education, Antonio Salviolo, school-site participatory councils were meant to be optional and not mandated bodies due to the high resistance the project faced. Its creation was mainly confronted by the private education sector, teachers, principals, supervisors, and teacher unions who were fearful of “a possible institutional anarchy and of parent’s interference in pedagogical aspects” (Cigliutti, 1993, p.3). However, other reasons prevented these participatory efforts from prospering. First, the country’s political and economic situation, which ended in 1989 in

³⁴ Speech delivered in Santiago de Chile for the Regional Office of Education for Latin America and the Caribbean (ORLEAC) Santiago: ORLEAC, 1990 p. 2

hyperinflation and food riots and an extreme tension between the Radical government and teacher unions.³⁵ Second, at the provincial level the governor, Cafiero, lost his presidential candidacy in the *Peronist* primaries in 1990. It is important to note here that Cafiero was part of the *Peronist renovation* branch called *Línea Renovadora*, which from 1987-1989, tried to democratize the party organization and reduced the influence of union bosses by establishing direct internal elections for candidate selection and leadership (Mustapic, 1996).

However, the renovation branch was unsuccessful in imposing long term changes beyond internal elections (Levistsky, 2001). As mentioned by a local party leader, “probably Cafiero’s loss in the party’s primaries, plus the unfavorable results in Buenos Aires’ constitutional referendum meant the triumph of the traditional Peronism and with it, centralization, verticalism, and personalism. . .” (EBAPONo.4). Consequently, Cafiero stepped down from the position of party chairman, losing the party’s political support. The lack of support not only meant the party’s lack of commitment to democratize the organization but also the unwillingness to foster any real democratizing reform. This situation shows again how education policy was subjected to the interconnectedness of the general socio-economic context, politics, and personal political fate.

³⁵ I pointed out this issue in Chapter 5

The Implementation of National Educational Reforms

After the FEL was passed and the province assumed the responsibility for secondary education, the provincial legislature passed in 1995 the *Ley Provincial de Educación* No. 11.612 (Provincial Education Law). This law adjusted the education system to the new provincial responsibilities assigned by the decentralization process that transferred secondary and tertiary schools to the province, the requirements of the 1993 federal education law, and the new constitutional framework. In response to national educational changes and the provincial priorities set by Duhalde's administration—equity, administrative efficiency, education quality, and active participation of the community for problem-solving purposes—education reform was conceived as a centerpiece of the provincial social plan.³⁶

The provincial education law established the same education priorities set at the central level. Amongst those goals were: democratization, federalism, solidarity, decentralization, participation, and development of social and special programs (Art. 4). These objectives were to achieve the “administrative efficiency of concerted participation of state and society to foster education equity and quality according to regional necessities and demands” (Art. 2) while keeping the school unit as the center of the process of reform (Art.19). Since the provincial education law particularly established that the provincial state has the main responsibility to promote free education for all (Art.1), to meet this purpose the provincial government stated its compromise to carry out

³⁶ It is important to note here that many of Duhalde's political advisers share CEPAL and UNESCO ideals. These organizations for more than a decade have been advancing issues of equity as a precondition for democratic development in the region.

social welfare programs to assist those with unmet basic needs (Art. 3) and even assigned a special role to the school in the implementation of programs of social welfare orientation. This proviso, however, was not included in the Federal Education Law. Definitely, the provincial education reform was in tone with the social role Duhalde assigned to education and the whole spirit of his administration.

In terms of the proposed actions these strategies translated into the functional reorganization of the managerial structure with strong implications for the way the services were delivered. Since then, the provincial managerial structure was organized on the basis of a regional administrative decentralization. It is clear from the law that this organization was a strategic objective for the successful implementation of the provincial educational reform (Art. 46). This new regulation placed a strong separation between administrative and pedagogical functions, which were deconcentrated to the level of 134 districts (that coincide with the electoral districts). The new administrative system is as follows.³⁷

At the top of the organizational structure is the General Directorate of Education and Culture (DGCE) with ministerial hierarchy. This unit has the overall responsibility of the education system. It is followed by sixteen *Jefaturas Regionales* (Regional Chiefs) for each branch of the education system (general basic education and polimodal schools) appointed by the DGCE and reporting to the *Subsecretario de Educación* (under-secretary of education) and to the corresponding education branch *Dirección* (Directorate). These *Jefaturas Regionales* oversee the operation of *Secretarías de*

³⁷ See the organizational chart in Appendix B.

Inspección (Inspection Secretariats) at the district level, and *Supervisores de distrito* (district supervisors), selected, although not always, on a competitive basis. These Secretarías Inspección, through the districts' supervisors, are responsible for carrying out the reform at the district level and of the bulk of administrative work in relation to the technical and pedagogical operation of the provincial education system. For example, they are responsible for filling teaching vacancies and for providing statistical information to the DGEC on the standard functioning of the district such as teacher attendance, school drop outs, etc. (Art. 48).

Also at the district level, local elected school boards or councils initially created to be political participatory units, became administrative intermediaries vis-à-vis the municipal administration, school-site cooperatives, and provincial authorities mostly to mobilize resources for schools within their district. Local school councils do not have budgets on their own, but they are in charge of the processing of funding requests for school lunches and the improvement of school buildings.

The number of school counselors varies across districts and depends on the amount of the district's school services. Counselors are subject to electoral scrutiny every two years (Art. 50-51). According to the law the counselors' office is incompatible with other public administrative job posts except for public university professors (Art. 55). Other exempt individuals to run for counselors are those that might be directly or indirectly interested in any business contract in which the local school council would be involved, such as business and civil organizations, directors, administrators (Art. 54).

The lack of clarity of this exception turns into practices that do not always coincide with the established regulation. Since the office of counselor is a honorary and unpaid position, a counselor's candidacy has been limited to those who are active teachers in the provincial system because they have the prerogative of requesting paid leave of absence if they occupied a highly ranked office within the public education structure. Although this prerogative formally applies for university professors, apparently it has been expanded for the teaching profession without any distinction of the education level. I should say that school directors and teachers have been historically occupying school counselors' positions. Another informal practice also applies for the selection of the local school council's Technical Secretary. This position should be designated by the DGEC on a competitive basis (Art. 65). However, it is usually a political appointed position (EVLCE No.2).

Another important point to consider is that in an attempt to adapt themselves to the new administrative requirements, municipalities have set up education and culture directorates or secretariats that have started to play an active role within their limited formal authority. While municipalities have only a significant quantitative participation in the delivery of education services, in the majority of the cases at the pre-school level, they provide additional funding sources for the province, mostly to be used for infrastructure work and other minor expenditures. Still the bulk of the funding for public schools, of which almost 90% goes to pay the sector's salaries, comes from the provincial level (Ministerio de Economía de la Provincia de Buenos Aires, 1995, p. 42).

An additional funding source comes from the *asociación cooperadora escolar* (school-site parents cooperatives). Each school in the province has one to which parents voluntarily contribute an optional monetary amount (the amount varies across school districts and the socio-economic situation of the family).³⁸ The cooperadoras usually organize different fundraising events for the school or look for private contributions. However, *cooperadoras*' activities are not limited to fundraising; they organize school trips, extra curricular courses, and social activities for the students and their families. According to the *Manual para Cooperadoras Escolares*, or the school-site parents' cooperatives manual, their "primary and natural function is to assist the school in eliminating all the causes that have a negative affect on students." (Art. 1). In addition, as the manual states, "the *asociación cooperadora* involvement has not been to address technical, administrative, or disciplinary school issues unless the school requires to do so." (Art. 4). So even when both the FEL law and the PEL stress the role these associations have as participatory mechanisms, *asociación cooperadoras* have not been granted the authority to participate actively in the school other than with funding.

Policy Adaptation Summary

This section showed that this phase of the policy process was a result of the formal institutional capacities of the provincial government (measured in terms of administrative organizational structures, regulations, and resources) and its political

³⁸ Unfortunately there are neither systematic studies of the overall funding for public schools in the province, nor estimates of the contributions by *cooperadoras escolares* and municipalities.

culture (political operation at the provincial level and informal practices for the channeling of resources and demands and the education system operation). Jointly, these approaches reveal the effects that institutional and cultural factors have on how the provincial government adapts national directives for implementation.

Despite universal mandates set by the two national regulations the provincial counterpart included a local characteristic. As illustrated through these pages, the adaptation of Buenos Aires included ways of accommodating administrative and financial functions associated with the new responsibilities assumed for the management of education to the individual political aspirations. Consequently, with the control of the provincial Peronist party structure, provincial legislature, and provincial bureaucracy, Duhalde put into place side-by-side the implementation of structural adjustment policies and social welfare programs of neo-populist style through an informal decentralized network controlled by the Peronist party. These programs were at the center of the implementation of certain participatory practices in education. Although the provincial reform deconcentrated the education system in practice, a hierarchical and centralized education management is still in place.

Policy Outcomes

Views from the Districts. Reform Implementation and General Outcomes

To this point this study has focused primarily on macro-level narratives linked with individual perceptions of the policy process presented. In the remaining sections of the chapter individuals express themselves as members of a community with views about

the political and educational structure and culture and public policy outcomes under which they live. Their words and perceptions reveal how their views are conditioned and filtered by the socio-political environment they are a part of.

In the first section, I combine district views about the reform outcomes, since the interview results reveal coincidence of general reform outcomes across them. The sections that follow will concentrate on the distinctive outcomes across districts in regards to participation, school autonomy, and the role of the local school council. On the basis of interview findings policy outcomes reveal the complexity of perceptions resting on a mixture of concerns about political interests, cultural clashes, and municipal and provincial tensions.

General Perceptions of the Transference and Education Reform

Generally speaking, education actors have a negative perception about the decentralization process and the implementation of the federal and provincial education laws. Some distinctions, however, are to be made since interviews underscore dissimilar concerns based on an actors' position within the education system structure but not by socio-political environments. Criticism of general councilors, school councilors, chief inspectors and supervisors revolve around broad administrative, financial, operational and cultural issues, though not exclusively. However, principal and teacher concerns are more limited to the impact of the changes over the daily school life.

These attitudes constitute two patterns of thinking about educational issues. First, a *macro-micro linkage*. Provincial education administrators in this case think about the

system's changes and outcomes as part of larger forces, including national and state general policies. Their beliefs show that the education sector alone is not responsible for the changes and outcomes, but rather broader institutional changes. Moreover, an effective change in education requires political and institutional changes as well. Second, *micro-focused affairs*. In this case, actors' attitudes are of immediate concern and although aware of macro level changes, their focus is less thoughtful and more concerned with local and provincial level effects.³⁹ While school administrators and teachers do see national level changes as the cause of education problems they do not expect them to be solved politically but pedagogically. These distinctions between macro-micro linkage and micro-focused affairs helped me to categorize education actors' views about the reform outcomes as follows.

Macro-micro Linkage

At the beginning of the 21st century, education actors' views reflect the difficulties the provincial system of education is facing after the implementation of the 1990s reforms. Provincial education officials and administrators suggest the difficulties of isolating the results of the educational changes from the broader Argentine picture.

Argentine institutions are in crisis, they usually lack specific planning, or when the rules are there no one respect them. Institutions work according

³⁹ Unionized teachers, particularly from those that have federal coverage prove to be more aware of macro level tendencies. For a detailed analysis of federal teacher union response to market reforms see Murillo (2001).

the person that leads them. Political representation is also in crisis, unions and political parties are unreliable. Citizens are voting less and less over the years and even blank ballots are increasing in number. Besides, radical changes are implemented here that are copies, shapeless embryos, and before any result could be seen or, central authorities changed and with them changes occur—there is usually no continuity—or if the same people stay they manage to change something for electoral purposes (EVLPS No.1).

According to the interviewees' accounts, this pattern is evidenced through the implementation of the educational reforms. Once schools were transferred, "the problem then became the provincial administration. Duhalde wanted to complete the process of reform no matter under what circumstances: *without consensus*. . . it was *improvised, disorganized*, and with harmful results for the provincial education system" (EBAPANo.10).

From their arguments one can agree that administrative officials are not as critical of the reform in itself as they are with its implementation and practice. Provincial administrators and education leaders attributed the limited results of the reform to national-level economic conditions, the market approaches implemented, and to the financial constraints that the province encountered after its implementation. However, their main concern revolved around the celerity and unplanned process of reform, lack of

support, and the cultural shock experienced by those institutions that were previously under national tutelage,

since the process was conducted by force and, without the necessary measures to carry it out, it soon became a race against time; an accelerated implementation without resources and needed infrastructure, and even worst, a cultural shock that end up in a clear discrimination from both sides (EVLCENo.3).

The interviews reveal a strong agreement about the differential cultural pattern between provincial and transferred national schools. This difference is identified as rooted in the political and administrative environment in which schools have been operating. From these arguments it is possible to speculate that unintentionally or not schools reproduce the pattern and act in consequence of external pressures (Hannaway, 1993). Thus, the school organization adapts certain practices that become the norm. Therefore, as soon as national schools and national inspectors find themselves in an unfamiliar socio-political environment, they not only resist it but they also try to reinforce previous practices to maintain their identity. In fact, the culture of national schools still persist and transcends regional boundaries to the extent that they still call themselves national schools.

The tension between environmental pressures for change and national school's resistance was at the origin of conflicts outside and within the school organizations.

The tension within the system was clearly expressed by a supervisor who said,

In the first meeting we had all together, both *the transferred* [transferred supervisors] we called them pejoratively in that way, and us [provincial supervisors] we could not understand each other, to the extent that someone said—we are talking in different languages!. . . After hours of hot discussions, a transferred supervisor suddenly stood up and said, are you [referring to the provincial supervisors] and the province going to tell us how to run our schools? After saying so, he left the room and the meeting was over. But from that moment they knew that there was no other option than to accept they were in the province (EVLSNo1).

Both groups—the former national and the provincial—presented throughout our conversations a certain resentment of each other. In the words of a former national inspector, “before administrative and pedagogical issues, although sometimes burdensome, were handled easily than today. Here everything is based on negotiations . . . this shows the lack of administrative capacity the province has” (EBACINo.1). On the other hand, chief inspectors and provincial supervisors agreed that, “in spite of the resistance former national supervisors ended up accepting that they were doing a more desk-based type of work, but in the province you have to walk to the schools; put your feet in the mud . . . We gave them our support to understand that” (EBACI No2).

loyalty towards the institution and to each other. Moreover, “it helped to create a sense of community and mutual compromise” (ELMSNo.7).

The national education administration also implemented a system called *Proyecto 13*, or project 13, a pilot program oriented towards the improvement of education quality through an enhanced curriculum, extracurricular activities and lessons, and a teacher-student advising program. Some schools such as the National School of Vicente López and of San Isidro that were among the pilot schools, even implemented an International Baccalaureate program for highly motivated students run and administered by a group of parents, teachers, and school administration. Although secondary public education had been free in Argentina since its origin, extras fees were applied for those students enrolled in the international baccalaureate program.

In combination, all the characteristics described above created a highly positive image of national school performance among the Argentine population and for this reason, their increasing demand. Up until 1983, a national highly competitive entrance examination was required to be admitted into national secondary schools. The admission benchmark was determined by each institution based on the year of demand and available vacancies. According to the provincial supervisor “the national system was highly elitist and not anyone was able to be admitted.” (EBASNo.2).

This picture differs greatly from education actors’ accounts about the situation at the provincial schools. As presented in a previous section, the administrative provincial system was very *complex, rigid*, and even provincial teachers were perceived as less qualified than their national counterparts. Schools, and in turn, local school councils did

not have a say in a teachers' appointment process and funds for infrastructure purposes were channeled for more than one source and in an unorganized manner.

The process of teachers' appointments was and is still today ruled by the *Estatuto docente*, or teachers' statute approved in the late 1950s, which is still a point of continuous confrontation between central authorities and teachers' unions. The main aspect of this statute is that decisions on the professional teachers' career are handled by teachers through a special board. This board is responsible for assigning points for a teachers' qualification and tenure.

Teachers, on the other hand, generally toil under oppressive conditions, unclear and very political selection processes, and unstable work situations. They teach one or two hours in one school, two or three in another, and they have sometimes hours in a third or fourth school. For this reason they are called taxi teachers. Sometimes teachers' contracts are as substitute or provisional teachers, which in many cases are never granted tenure. The reason for this instability is that the tenured position belongs to someone else that for some reason is not actively in the system because the person has an eternal medical leave of absence or a higher ranked job within the provincial public administration. For all the reasons presented above, lack of commitment, fragmented institutions, and a general apathy are the norm in the schools that belong to Buenos Aires.

There was a clear distinction between both systems, which without a doubt could generate difficulties and tension among their actors.⁴¹ Besides the tensions between the two distinctive worlds, the difficulties experienced through the transfer process and the changes implemented with the education reform uncover an old Argentine contradiction: the rivalry between the center and the periphery expressed in a previous section of this study—a rivalry that is as vivid today as it was in the past. These tensions were manifested in the comments of teachers and principals from both districts; however, those comments were exemplified by their experiences within the school boundaries.

Micro-focused Affairs⁴²

How do the problems previously identified by supervisors, chief inspectors, general education councilors, administrative officials, and local school councilors affect the daily school operation? According to teachers and school administrators those problems affected the school in many ways to the extent that they produced a general deterioration of the quality of services schools provide. First, both teachers and school directors mentioned the lack of autonomy they have today and the instances of control that have been added within the system ladder since the last reforms. “National schools used to have more autonomy, not intended though, but real.” The principal mentioned that this autonomy allowed her to select her team, portrayed as “a group of committed,

⁴¹ See Appendix B for a self explanatory description of the characteristics of the provincial administration and the tension with the national counterpart. This description shows my experience in a public provincial middle school.

⁴² Detailed accounts regarding differential practices and outcomes regarding participation at the school level are included in the districts’ case studies.

experienced, and motivated teachers. Today that is not the case.” According to her comments, what rules is the unfortunate situation of a great number of *professor taxis* with a negative impact over the school. “Even when teachers put so much effort from their part, it is impossible to feel attached to an institution where you only spend two hours twice a week, she said.” (EVLSP No.2).⁴³ Furthermore, according to her accounts this situation also affected the communication within the school and particularly teacher-principal collaboration.

Another point in relation to the previous one was pointed out. Since “the process of teacher selection is not completely transparent (sometimes very political) and on top of that salaries grew less day by day, in consequence the teachers we receive are usually not as qualified as they used to be” (EVLSPNo.2). This concern regarding the general deterioration of the teacher profession was also a matter of concern among other administrative officials, scholars, and stakeholders.⁴⁴ Teachers and administrators complain about the lack of pedagogical support they received during the implementation of the reform and even when courses and materials were administered by the National Ministry of Education, that proved to be insufficient and of very low quality. The consequence then, “is more pressure over the school because at the end we are going to be blamed about the poor schools outcomes” (ELMTNo.2).

It is worth mentioning that throughout the interviews the issue of funding was always there; it was particularly a subject of great concern among those principals who

⁴³ I included the code assigned to this interview only once since all the quotations are from the same interview.

⁴⁴ Particularly about this point see Braslavsky and Birgin (1995).

cannot count on their school cooperatives and do not receive extra monies from the municipalities. Since the schools were transferred and the reform was implemented,

more pressure was put on us to search for funds [said a school principal].

One may say that since there is a provincial office that deals with infrastructure and we have a local council which acts as a liaison to place our requirement, thing will be easier. Well that it is not the case.

Depending on the type of repair needed, our request requires the signature of the supervisor and then goes to La Plata. Moreover, the whole process is highly influenced by the connections you have; as everything in this country (ELMSP No.3).

Overall, the underlying assumption from the micro level affairs is that a system that attempted to distribute bureaucratic control negatively affected schools, particularly through blending of politics, inefficiency, and a vertical accountability mechanism. Subsequently the section that follows will address this problem particularly.

Administrative characteristic of Buenos Aires. In general, the provincial administrative system is negatively perceived across districts. To my surprise socio-economic status, political preference, location, and position within the administrative structure have very little effect on an actor's perception in this regard. When I particularly asked about general characteristics of the education system administration,

educational actor's views coincided across positions and education districts. However, some interpretations of the problems identified differ. Possible reasons for this coincidence could be many; however, I will present two that are in line with the study arguments. First, as suggested by Gamson (1992), peoples' behaviors (in this particular case, their perceptions) are framed by the contemporary political discourse that could be read and heard in the media. Second, this concurrence can also indicate that the structure in which they live manage their voices (Hannaway, 1993).

The categories identified from the grassroots as representing the provincial system are: *extremely bureaucratic and inefficient, vertically structured and inflexible, centralized, fragmented, lack of compromise, unplanned, devoted to clientelism and particularisms*. In the words of the education administrator,

there is no clear and defined education policy in Buenos Airesthe provincial administration is trapped between the inertia of the transformation process and an unclear diagnosis of the system inefficiencies . . . *virtual vs. real* policy. (EBAPONo.1).

Probably it is the lack of an informed policy—adjusted to Buenos Aires needs and realities the cause of the inoperative and chaotic perception actors have about the provincial administration. “Improvisation rules”, declared a school supervisor (EVLSNo.3). Moreover, this situation could also be the reason for its inflexibility and fragmentation.

According to interviewees' comments the system is formally hierarchically centralized at the provincial level but since control mechanisms are loosely attached with one another they leave space for *personalism* and *clientelism*. Although this contradicts arguments that supported recent decentralization as shown in Chapter 2, in this particular case decentralization produced a formal centralization of control at the provincial level but at the same time opened space for reinforcing traditional informal political practices. This paradox is apparent through teachers', school councilors', and school principals' accounts.

I give you an example of what I told you. In some occasions unintentionally or by bureaucratic inefficiency, while one school receives three subsidies for repairing the same problem others receive none. Usually the rules are there, but the procedures are unclear, sometimes obscure . . . the results then, as we know, chaotic . . . (EVLCENo.4)

The system is extremely bureaucratized; we have to report every step we give . . . and here comes the role of the supervisor; she can be a facilitator or an obstacle. She can give you the contacts, ideas, or even help to accelerate the processes, make things happen, otherwise issues can sit for ages in a drawer. It depends on the superior (ELMSPNo.6).

Talking with supervisors and stakeholders the process by which decisions are made and implemented is generally coming from the top and not always transparent, a fact that indicates that many of these decisions represent less systematic efforts to include different sectors of the education community and consequently more short-term political investments. These views expressed how the provincial social-political environments are important determinants of organizational structures. However, much still needs to be analyzed. How are all these problems handled at the local level? How much local socio-political environments can tell us about the outcomes of decentralization reforms? The sections that follow reveal these points.

Vicente Lopez: Efficiency in One-man's Territory

Socio-Political Environment

Ever since the democratic transition (1983), the municipality of Vicente López has been in the hands of the Radical party. Since 1987 Vicente López's Major *Enrique García* has been winning municipal elections with relatively wide margins. Voters' predilection for García has increased between 1987 and 1999—from 40 to 68%.⁴⁵ Although the Major's main political support comes from the UCR's constituency and recently from his alliance with the FREPASO in a center-left force called ALIANZA, this support alone does not give an account of the his political success in Vicente López.

⁴⁵ Calculated using data provided by the Junta Electoral de la Provincia de Buenos Aires.

El chino or *el japonés*—the Chinese or the Japanese—as the mayor of Vicente López is known, has been described by the community leaders interviewed as the “stereotypical Argentine caudillo” (EVLMONo2). Four times mayor of one of the richest districts of the GBA, García has built his power through his *leadership, personal charisma, patronage*, and most importantly in our times, through the *perceived efficiency of his administration*. In concurrence, all these characteristics make Vicente López an *exceptional* place. As education and community leaders declared,

When I started to date who today is my husband, for obvious reasons I was frequently coming to Vicente López to visit and I could not believe how nice, clean, and organized this neighborhood was, at least in comparison of were I used to live before I married. Then, I became to realize why García was so popular, why people like him so much (EVLTN02).

We do have a municipality, which is exceptional, the Major is exceptional . . . we have the unconditional support of García and other municipal entities. If you need something, you just pick up the phone and talk directly with the [municipal] Director of Culture; that it is very important! Whatever you need to improve your school, you have it. The municipality supports you; they give us a big hand (EVLSPNo.1).

With Enrique García you do not have to run to *la Plata*, problems can be solved here; he knows very well his territory and the needs of the municipality (EVLMONo.2).

Only a caudillo can stay in power for so many years and stand over the party's fragmentation, which in turn Radical competing party factions have been Gracias' most fervent opponents. In 1987 he won the party primaries by only 150 votes (EVLMPLO.2). The UCR is extremely fragmented both at the national and provincial levels, which affects the party's governance. Various factions compose the colorful rainbow of alternatives, though not all have national coverage.⁴⁶ That is particularly the case of the faction led by García: "Vicente Lopez is his feudal state as happens with the Posse's in San Isidro, Quindimil in Lanus. This is a phenomenon we commonly expect from the provinces but also happens at the municipal level" (EVLMONo.2). It is precisely because of his leadership and charisma that his followers worry about what could happen with this faction if he decides to run for Congress, "we may disappear . . . he listens, analyzes, plans, manages everything in a timely fashion. The problem is that he does not train people downwards, he does it all" (EVLMPLONo.2).

⁴⁶ Those party factions are: *Causa Popular Renovadora*, led by Enrique Gracia; *Corriente Opinión Nacional* (CON), led by Federico Storani; *Recuperación Radical*, led by Melchor Posee; *Vergencia*, led by Juan M. Casella; *Movimiento para el Desarrollo Social* (MODESO), led by Leopoldo Moreau; *Futuro*, led by Rodolfo Terragno; *Participación Radical*, led by the former president Fernando de la Rúa; *Ateneo del Centenario*, led by Jesus Rodriguez; and *Radicales para el Cambio* (RAPACA), led by Ricardo Alfonsín (H). This information was obtained from an interview with a local party leader. It is interesting to mention that when the party member was asked about what factions have national coverage he could not easily identify them. "It is very confusing, very difficult to tell. Sometimes they go alone or with different factions. Depends on the election, the candidate . . ." the person said. However, the party leader clearly identified the competing local factions, just the first four listed above.

While his leadership and *personalist* character have been sources of political support at the local level they have also limited his personal political aspirations (EVLPA No.1). Once president of the provincial party branch, and later on, member of the National Chamber of Deputies from 1983 to 1987, his *personalist* style and unprofessional profile discredited his image within the party organization, limiting his political actions to the confines of his own territory.

As a politically skillful person García atomized the opposition in the district. To attain this goal, in some cases he invited *Peronist* party members to join his cabinet or made circumstantial coalitions with other forces with electoral purposes; that was the case in the 1999 election. On the other hand, the *Peronist* party, the main opposition force—was unable to politically operate in Vicente López as it does anywhere else (i.e. Matanza, Lomas de Zamora, etc.). As expressed by a local *Peronist* leader,

here we cannot bus people to meetings, as they do it in Matanza; and even to do so you need money, something we do not have. . . you have to give them [clientele] something. . . it is not enough with a *choripán*”.⁴⁷

(EVLPL No.4).

Besides the material benefits used for clientelist purposes that Peronists do not have access to in Vicente López, the socio-economic characteristics of the district are not

⁴⁷ *Choripán*: sausage sandwich. The *choripán* is an Argentine traditional barbeque meal usually eaten at popular events or parties.

compatible with the type of *clientelist* practices *Peronists* usually implement. This situation was apparently better understood by Gracía who won adherents by implementing populist tactics oriented towards education and health and attuned to the new district's demands. On the other hand, once Gracía was in power, *Peronists* did not present any real opposition. In the words of a municipal leader, “when elections are over, *Peronists* respect the authority . . . and they know Gracía governs for the people” (EVLMONo3).

Most critics of Gracía's leadership style came from his *correligionarios*, as Radicals called among themselves, who disliked his populist way. In the words of other party members “other radical partisans disapproved of Gracía's low style” (EVLPMNo3). These middle class critics were evident in their rejection of what was perceived as more in tune with the *Peronist's* style and demagoguery. Such a criticism of Gracía was only filtered through the UCR, not from the voters or other party members. However, what his critics disliked is precisely what appealed to his supporters who perceived him as a competent and accessible leader.⁴⁸

In a context in which the idea of *municipalización*—administrative and fiscal decentralization to the municipal level—is getting more and more supporters, among

⁴⁸ Information obtained from various interviews in Vicente Lopez.

Those, the current Buenos Aires' governor, Vicente López is viewed as a model to follow due to its managerial style.⁴⁹ Newspapers with national coverage have been addressing the case of Vicente López, as a successfully managed municipality. In an article titled *The municipal government, closer to the citizenry*, García, in a well articulated discourse, expressed that,

Paradoxically the process of globalization produces another process in radical opposition. This process is the strengthening of the basic cell of government, the municipal government. It is right there, where the day-to-day problems should be identified and solved. This is the main compromise that those who have received from our fellow citizens the responsibility to govern have today. This responsibility has been increasing over the years particularly with the systematic implementation of policies of exclusion by central administrations. The municipal priority is to give support and listen to the problems that big sectors of our population are facing today. The secret to adopt efficient policies is to be

⁴⁹ See Menem reflató la municipalización, *La Nación*, November 8, 1998; La municipalización, una promesa incumplida, *La Nación*, January 5, 1999; Laura Vales, Solá planea una reforma educativa con recorte y municipalización, *Página12*, Marzo, 1,2002.

Municipal interests as well as civil society concerns were raised in Argentina during the last years through a tremendous media and governmental campaign. The years 1998 and 2000 were declared *the year of the municipalities* and *the year of voluntary work* respectively and special programs and activities were organized. Accordingly, new governmental units both at the national and provincial level were created to advance municipal awareness; even governmental web sites were created with that purpose. In the same vein, the two major Argentine newspapers, *Clarín* and *La Nación* have been advocating those issues through articles, editorials, special editions, and even by creating their own foundations to advance solidarity, social capital and NGOs-government collaboration.

with the people. Only in that way, we will be able to implement policies responding to their demands. It is this listening capacity that gives us in Vicente López the possibility to implement a broad range and ambitious programs. . .through a proactive attitude with social sensitivity. We are devoted 'to do' by adequately and efficiently responding to the demands of our people. This action gives content to our democracy (*La Nación*, 2000).⁵⁰

This passage illustrates Garcia's views of the role municipalities should be facing in the new century, which are in line with managerial public administration arguments. Thus, efficiency, responsiveness, effectiveness and accountability were transformed into his core concerns. Accordingly, he restructured and expanded his administration to successfully advance those new global requirements and to effectively meet society's growing demands. Thus, a series of agencies were created within the municipal administration. These agencies work, in some cases, in cooperation with non-governmental associations such as the Red Cross, Caritas, the Rotary Club, and Lalcec, among others.⁵¹ However, the great majority of the monetary incentives required to carry out those programs and the organizational leadership are both coming from the municipal

⁵⁰ García E.El gobierno municipal, más cerca de los ciudadanos. Estar junto a la gente". *La Nación*, Julio 6, 2000.

⁵¹ Both the Red Cross and The Rotary Club are internationally known organizations while Lalcec and Caritas are organizations with national scope. The former devoted to cancer awareness and the latter, a Catholic organization dedicated to help disadvantaged groups.

administration. In the words of a top municipal bureaucrat, “it is usually the municipality administration who takes the lead” (EVLMO No.5).

Among the newly created administrative agencies is the office of the ombudsman, which is a mechanism of accountability of the bureaucracy to the citizens as well as an open space for citizen’s demands. This office receives complaints and suggestions from the citizenry on the quality and efficacy of public services and local administration. Since it is a new office no data is available to compare residents’ demands in the past. From the data obtained from this office for the year 1999-2000, among the total amount of demands received the highest numbers correspond to local traffic and transportation incidents (22%) and the increase in municipal service delivery fees (16%).⁵²

With a strong relationship established with local businesses, García, who is a businessman himself, works jointly with the *Fundación Empresaria* or Business Foundation. This informal municipal funding organization was created by García in 1987 to subsidize the municipality’s veil of efficiency in the form of direct subsidies for school improvement, cultural events, and local health institutions. In return, participant local businesses receive tax exemptions. These subsidies go primarily to the area of education and culture and are used by Mayor García for establishing direct linkages with his constituency.

⁵² The ombudsman office was created in 1997. Municipal regulation No.11591. Data obtained from Oficina del Ombudsman, Porcentaje de reclamos por temas, 1999-2000.

The municipal leadership is also apparent in its relationship with the provincial administration. Although politically in opposition, the provincial administration lets García *do*. In the words of a municipal administrator,

When resources are scarce, who can put a limit to a person who does everything for you? He gives financial support for improving schools' buildings and provides the services the province cannot provide. We have the power that money and action give us. Besides, the political time frames are different we work for today, the province for a year from today, and the nation plans for two or three years ahead (EVLMO No1).

Since 1997 the municipality experienced troubles for receiving from the provincial government its *coparticipación* allocation, which many attributed to reasons of political rivalry. But it is precisely the debt the province has with Vicente Lopez that gives García leeway and autonomy for pursuing his own political agenda, strengthening his dynamic attachment to Vicente Lopez through a carefully drafted discourse of efficient management.

Despite the perceived municipal efficiency the Major also made a widely used political patronage.⁵³ As local leaders agreed, the municipal administration is overpopulated, untrained, with unclear administrative roles and overlapping powers across administrative units, and highly bureaucratized. However, knowing the right

⁵³ For an early use of municipal patronage by the Radical party see Horowitz (1999). See also Rock (1975).

person helps to accelerate any administrative procedure. According to provincial data, municipal employment in Vicente Lopez increased from 2938 employees in 1994 to 3437 in 1999.⁵⁴ Besides the traditional explanation that linked patronage with the Radical political success, two other possible reasons for this recent increase can be mentioned. First, the creation of the above mentioned entities within the municipal formal structure to advance the locality new requirements and, second, in the context of a growing unemployment rate municipal politics becomes an important source of employment, especially for white-collar workers who can easily be employed as clerical workers within the municipal bureaucracy.

Recent structural adjustment policies had a negative impact in Vicente López, like everywhere else in Argentina. Local leaders pointed out how much the *community changed* in the last decade, which is mainly attributed to the country's economic difficulties experienced since 1995—a year after the *Tequila* crisis.⁵⁵ They mentioned the difficulties the impoverished middle classes underwent, “from unemployment and low pensions to the inability to keep what they had been able to obtain over the years” (EVLPLNo.3). However, the impact of the economic crisis is not homogenous across Vicente López counties. As told, Munro, Villa Martelli, and Villa Adelina suffered more than any other county in the district. Unfortunately, official figures of economic decline

⁵⁴ The source of civil service employment comes from the Dirección Provincial de Gestión Municipal. Secretaría de Asuntos Municipales e Institucionales. Ministerio de Gobierno. Table 16.3. Planta Personal Municipal.

⁵⁵ In 1994, Mexico experienced a serious economic downturn caused by currency devaluation, commonly known as Tequila crisis. This economic crisis seriously affected the biggest Latin American economies.

in the district are not available. In spite of those difficulties, the district is still perceived by its neighbors in an advantageous condition when compared with other municipalities,

our location is advantageous, we are just minutes away from Buenos Aires City, we have access to information, training, and knowledge plus all the amenities of the city, something that the people leaving 400 km away do not have. . . and even in difficult times, we have resources. . . these are among the things that make Vicente López a special place”

(EVLMONo.3)

In interview after interview education and community leaders expressed their overall individual dissatisfaction with the country’s socio-economic and administrative conditions, the decline in public services and government corruption. However, a different picture is presented when they talk about the municipality of Vicente López. When community leaders are asked to identify the most problematic issues the district is facing today, the following problems were identified: safety, unemployment, corruption, education quality, district economy, and local government inefficiency—safety obtained a proportion of 62% of the responses. Education quality, corruption and local government inefficiency were rarely selected. Above all, their high levels of satisfaction are expressed in regards to his leader and Vicente López management, although they believe that much work still needs to be done.

Educational Structure in Vicente Lopez

Besides the schools administered and funded by the provincial government, Vicente Lopez has its own municipal system of education. The education system has 10 preschools, a school of visual arts, a music and dance institute, and a secondary school. Although there are other municipalities in the GBA that offer some of these services, particularly preschool and daycare services, Vicente López is one of the few communities that provides secondary education services staffed and funded through the Municipal Directorate of Education and Culture. School professors, though, receive their paychecks from the provincial administration and are supervised by provincial supervisors.

Nevertheless, this local secondary school has kept certain autonomy from the provincial educational administration. According to education leaders “the Paula Albarracín de Sarmiento [the school’s name] has that image of quality education public schools used to have in Argentina, which has been lost over the last 15 years” (EVLTN0.4). Offering a comprehensive curriculum and several extracurricular activities, the school *Paula Albarracín de Sarmiento* “has been able to cope with the requirements of the new century education quality” (EVLPS No.3). Quality education was one of García’s major endeavors in his political platform and he actually acted in concurrence with his political promises.

From the municipal budget plan presented to the local legislature for the fiscal year 2001, an approximate 7% of the local budget is devoted to expenditures in education

and culture.⁵⁶ As mentioned before, other sources, through the *Fundación Empresaria* are available for educational expenditures. As declared by a high municipal official, “García has been able to maintain a quality education program through subsidies from this organization. If a school-site cooperative needs money for painting or repairing school bathrooms, there goes García with the fundation” (EVLMO No.2). It is interesting to mention that actors’ views about education quality is measured in terms of the availability of resources and the *adds* a school can offer. Various teachers and administrators mentioned this point when they referred to parents’ attitudes towards education. I will come to this issue in a later section.

The administrative educational arrangement is organized to support the education system mentioned above. It has, as well as the provincial level administration, a Municipal General Directorate of Education and Culture hierarchically dependent from the Government Secretariat and divided into two directorates: Education and Culture. The municipality has no supervisors by education branch and area studies since they are by law dependent from provincial authorities. The local education directorate works in collaboration with the Local School Board. Vicente López School Board is a Radical body integrated with 8 councilors, 7 from the UCR and 1 from the FREPASO. According to one of its members,

⁵⁶ Calculated from the 2001 budget proposal published in the *Boletín Municipal*, Año XXVII, No.381, p. 27.

we have a very tense relationship with the province, which started with Duhalde's administration. The source of the tension is not only because we are Radicals but also because we are in a Radical municipality. Consequently, we do not receive a *peso*. The municipality handles, in collaboration with the Fundación Empresaria, almost all the maintenance work in the district ” (EVLCENo.1).

As I mentioned before, according to the *Ley Federal de Educación*, the faculties of the *Consejo* have been limited. Nowadays,

we only select janitors and personnel for administering school lunches, we administer the requests of teachers' resignation, leave of absence, transfer, salaries, retirement, and title's legalizations. We also supervise school maintenance, provide support and advise for school cooperatives and to the whole education community, and we oversee school cooperatives accounts. As you see, we are involved in the formalities of the processes but we are completely powerless. Oh! I was forgetting something important. We also request the monies for *comedores escolares*, or locally run school canteens, and we distribute the uniforms and tennis shoes used by the provincial government for *assitencialismo*. The administration of those programs are obscure, no one knows how are they operated and who really manages them (EVLCENo.5).

Other school actors shared this view and mentioned that local school councils could perfectly handle and decide over many administrative school procedures while reducing the ineffectiveness of Buenos Aires educational administration. Even more, I find many education and community leaders in this district supporting municipalización. They mentioned that Buenos Aires has 134 school district realities, with different resources, needs, and demands, which are not captured with policies that tend to homogenize. However, they do agree that the process could also generate inequalities and curriculum inconstancy, “the content of the knowledge schools impart should be the same. I want 134 school districts managed according to their needs, but I do not want 134 systems of education” (EVLSNo.3).

Interestingly enough, the views from the district put a finger just on the issue of so much concern among education policy makers, *how* education systems should be decentralized and particularly *what* areas of the schooling life should be decentralized.

How is Participation Viewed in the District?

By and large, participation in its broad sense is viewed in decline when compared with the 1980s pattern,

there was a strong movement in the 1980s but in the last probably five years things changed for the worst, at least in its most traditional way participation declined—political party affiliation, voting, unionism,

collaboration in school cooperatives, neighborhood associations, etc.— you can see a generalized lack of compromise, resignation, apathy. People lost any interest. . . however this is not only here, it happens everywhere else (EVLMONo.2).

According to education and community leaders' comments this pattern of limited involvement is extended to every aspect of human life. The reasons identified are rooted in the broader socio-economic changes the country experienced in the last decade. Underpinning this change is what one of the interviewees called "*social atomization*, where each individual limits only his or her action to what is of their immediate concern, precluding themselves from the rest of the society" (EVLSNo.1). This point can be very well connected with Taylor's (2001) statement presented in the previous chapter about the connection between the rise of neoliberalism and its atomizing effect.

Other arguments associate involvement decline to Argentine political circumstances. First, with the long period of authoritarian regime, "probably Argentines still today did not overcome from the fear of the dark years, which may prevent them from involving" (EVLPLNo.3). Secondly, with high degrees of corruption across Argentine institutions,

people do not want to get involved because of the perceived untrustworthiness institutions are subject to today, and those who are actually involved in an organization use it as alternative path for

individual political aspirations. They do not think about the social good of participation (EVLCLNo.2).

According to these arguments, political activists search for political involvement outside the traditional representative established channels—political parties—which may say something about the internal structure and selection process within the party’s organizations.⁵⁷ Party members agreed with this point and blamed themselves for the unfortunate candidate selection, “the crisis of representation is in connection with our inability to successfully attract the best and more competitive candidates” (EVLPLNo.7). However, this fateful candidacy is also attributed to the lack of people involvement, “participation was opened up for those who have been participating forever and this is applicable to political parties, neighborhood organizations, school cooperatives, and unions” (EVLPLNo.2). It is interesting to note here that although party members recognized candidate selection as a problem they do not view it as part of the party’s organizational structures and process of candidate selection.

Certainly according to these views both arguments are plausible. People are getting less motivated to be involved in institutions that have questionable reputation and at the same time, this lack of involvement opens the possibility for concentration of political power and access. Consequently, citizens look for alternative channels for

⁵⁷ I succinctly addressed this point in Chapter 5. For detailed information on this subject see Manzetti (1993).

representation and access while restraining their participation to the betterment of particularistic or personal interest.

In short, education and community leaders' comments express that contemporary trends in participation are related to a series of general institutional factors and political practices that may be also affecting participatory relations at the school level.

*In School Participation*⁵⁸

Parental Involvement

Teachers and administrators agreed that parents' involvement diminished during the last decade as well,

democracy engaged everyone in the 1980s . . . we even implemented a school council that worked very well. Nowadays the situation changed because the student population we received changed. As you well know, in the early 1990s public school in Buenos Aires suffered a sort of emptiness since middle class parents preferred to send their kids to private institutions. Now, as a consequence of recent economic hardships those middle class parents cannot afford private schooling any more and send kids back to public school with resignation. . . not by conviction as it used

⁵⁸ I should mention here that although an important component of in school participation, students' involvement was not included in these case studies. I was not granted approval from the provincial administration for interviewing students at the end of the academic year.

to be. This situation, without a doubt, affected their participation.

Besides, if both parents are employed, they have not much time left to actively participate in the school (EVLSPN0.1).

As mentioned before, former national secondary schools had a very high reputation among the community for their instructional quality. In the late 1980s, due to economic difficulties and the subsequent disinvestments in education, outrageous amounts of teacher strikes, and the decision to remove secondary schools' admission screening process, helped the weakening of that perception.⁵⁹ Consequently, when possible parents sent their kids to private school, as the school principal comments show. It is important to note here that private schools blossomed during those years to the extent that today we can find more private than public schools in the district—from a total of 156 schools that combine EGB, medias, and polimodal schools, 119 are private.⁶⁰ Although updated numerical data about the actual private schooling situation in the district is unavailable, teachers' comments reveal that many private institutions have not been able to cope with the migration of students to the public system, in many cases, resulting in the private school restructuring or its disappearance.

The data indicates that although still active, parents' participation in school cooperatives (the institutionalized channel for parents' participation at the school level)

⁵⁹ For numerical accounts of teachers' strike during this period see footnote no. 25 in Chapter 5

⁶⁰ Information provided by the Local School Council. Data from INDEC. Dirección de Coordinación del SEN en base a datos de la Dirección General Red Federal de Información Educativa. Relevamiento Annual 1997. Table Unidades Educativas por nivel y sector. Provincia de Buenos Aires por partido.

experienced certain limitations. Parents are less likely nowadays to devote the limited open time slots they have for their active work in the school. In some cases, participation is limited to the monthly monetary contribution, which has also been reduced over the years. Teachers, school secretaries, and school directors reported that an average of five to ten parents are actively involved in schools' cooperatives, "those parents that usually send their kids to public school by conviction are those who actively participate in the cooperadora" (EVLSPNo.3). However, those numbers may increase for special events. Those events are generally organized by the school administration. I should mention that I noticed that both school administrators and teachers show an enormous sensitivity towards the difficult situation many parents are experiencing today and their lack of involvement was very much vindicated. Under no circumstances was parent involvement criticized by any of the school actors interviewed.

Educational administrators reported that participation also depends on the characteristics of the school administration, "there are school directors that know how to integrate parents into the school's life. There are more permissive directors than others and in consequence they are more open to parents' motivations and demands" (EVLCENo.3). This comment is in line with the argument presented before that stressed the role of the leader in determining institutional outcomes in Argentina. In this regard, participation was also attributed to the school culture and differences among institutions apply.⁶¹

⁶¹ See Appendix B—Box 1: The peculiarities of a participatory school environment in Vicente López.

Administrators-teachers Collaboration and School Autonomy

According to the FED school administrator-teacher collaboration is an important component for the successful design of the PEI, which was considered a centerpiece of school autonomy. School administrators in general were more likely to view their participation with teachers in positive terms and they particularly see themselves as open and understanding. Principals mentioned the need for consensus building both with teachers and parents. However, they clearly see the difficulties of the process of teacher appointment as limiting teacher participation and collaboration in the school. On the other hand, the school administration sees any type of collaboration and interaction between them and teachers and teachers with teachers as a very difficult project after the transference process. “Before we could organize some activities during the weekends. Now that is an impossible option. Teachers run from one school to the other during the week to make a better living, we cannot ask them to come during the weekends” (EVLSPNo.3).

School administrators also perceive some problems that affect in school collaboration since the recent education transformation was implemented,

the reform incorporated 8th and 9th grades to the formerly primary school.

In many cases, as the construction of new classrooms in the formerly primary schools is in process, 8th and 9th grades operate as a semi-independent unit within our school [formerly secondary]. So we have kids and ex-primary schoolteachers working in our school but under different

rules and objectives. This [situation] is a source of conflictive relations (EVLSPNo.2).

By and large, teachers generally talked about communication problems with the school administrators and supervisors—comments with which supervisors agreed. At the root of this problem is again the fact that teachers work in various schools and consequently, belong to no one. In this regard, although teachers and principals mentioned that the PEI has been successfully developed in their school, it is recognized the important role the principal had in its elaboration. As a teacher declares,

to be honest, our participation is minimal. The design of a PEI requires having a permanent teaching body that could establish certain compromise with the school. Well, this is not happening in a polimodal public school in the province Buenos Aires today. (EVLTNo2).

When it comes to teacher-to-teacher collaboration, the same pattern applies. Teachers report limited time to interact with their colleagues. They describe that when they occasionally spoke to one another it was about more administrative issues than pedagogical and usually about the new pressures the system puts on them. However, considering the multitude of pressures under which they work and the low salaries perceived their complaints towards the education system structure have been unreasonably mild. A sort of resignation is evidenced. Some of the teachers interviewed

even expressed that in the context Argentina lives today they can consider themselves privileged; they have a job and they are still being paid.

When I particularly asked school principals about how much autonomy and flexibility they have their answer was: “not many. We do have more responsibilities, though” (EVLSPNo.1). Both teachers and principals perceived the provincial system as very rigid and as subordinates they are expected to accept orders not to question them. Moreover, the only space they feel they have a say is in the design of the PEI, which as I previously described is limited under the system’s constraints. It is envisioned by the school community that it would be an important improvement of the quality of education if they can plan together their courses to meet student’s needs—something they see momentarily unreachable (EVLNo.8). On the other hand, they feel some flexibility is possible in regards to the school cooperatives,

it is in the only space we have control over our decisions, however we do also have more pressure to go and look for the funds needed. Honestly, I do not have the time to do so. Besides, I do think we are ill prepared to be managers; we are just teachers (EVLSPNo.1).

School-Community Collaboration

In Vicente López the data shows that it is usually the school that is the organizer of two or three annual activities that are open to the whole community. In general, those activities take the form of festivals with the main purpose to collect funds for the school

cooperative. In other cases, activities take the form of *scholars' day* open for community participation and intended to show students' abilities through interactive booths in which everyone can participate.

In other cases, the school building is used for the developing of activities organized by the municipality and local public and non-profit organizations (Lalcec, Cruz Roja, El Hospital de Vicente Lopez among others) with the intention to generate health awareness and prophylaxis. However, schools are not involved in the organization process of those activities. They are just the means towards community awareness activities. Jointly, the Municipality and the Vicente López Fire Department also organize other courses targeted to community awareness.

School principals report their collaborative work with municipal centers such as the Municipal Center for Youth and Adolescence Assistance and the Municipal Center for Women. Both institutions work jointly with local schools offering psychological and family counseling and substance abuse treatment and awareness services. Collaborative work with other schools was also mentioned; however, it is usually with the EGB the *polimodal* school articulates with.

But when it comes to school-community association collaboration their interconnectedness is almost minimal. Schools sometimes use neighborhood club fields for their physical education activities or for special events usually without any charge. Teachers and principals also reported that some neighbors collaborate with the school by doing some gardening and helping with minor maintenance issues.

Even though neighborhood organization leaders declared their interest in education, the interest is in some cases profitable. Some of these organizations offer *clases de apoyo escolar*, or tutoring classes at a minimal cost. Caritas, one of the biggest Catholic NGOs in Argentina, offers similar math and Spanish tutoring programs for homework assistance without any charge. Caritas also collects used clothes and accepts house appliance donations that are then distributed among disadvantaged educational institutions. The Rotary Club is identified as one of the most active institutions working with schools in the municipality. It contributes with medals and awards for intercollegiate athletics and with a one-year fellowships for students in 9th grade and polimodal.

The local school council and school supervisors coordinate much of the activities that the Municipality and NGOs organize in the school building. Sometimes, depending on the activity, official authorization is required. In this case the local school council acts as liaison between the school, central provincial authorities, the municipal government, and local organizations. It is interesting that the Municipality of Vicente López runs a special tutoring program under the approval of the district supervision unit and the local school board. However, “central authorities are not aware of this program,” a supervisor said (EVLSNo2).

Recently created foundations and NGOs with national coverage— Fundación Bank Boston, Credicoop, CEAMSE, Conciencias, Poder Ciudadano, Fundación Citybank, Fundación grupo Clarín, Fundación diario La Nación, SIEMBRA, among others—have been organizing activities for EGB and polimodal schools. Many of those activities are: regional and national sports tournaments, “be a business man for a day,”

internships, civic awareness projects, etc. Some school administrators reported that their schools have been participating in some of those activities.

La Matanza: A Chaotic Environment

Socio-political Environment

An organized disorganization is the title of the paper in which Levistky analyzes the current organization and management of the Peronist party in Buenos Aires. Interestingly enough, the title applies very well to the situation La Matanza lives today. Through my fieldwork experience and actor's accounts, the chaotic situation of Matanza was evident. As educational and community leaders express,

As Discepolo's tango says, a *cambalache* [something messy]. We live in a state of anomie, in Durkheim terms . . . A very difficult environment for teaching and learning (ELMTNo.1).

In a local publication a *Justicialista* provincial deputy who is also the general secretary of the union that groups employees of the western Buenos Aires business, referred to La Matanza in this way "those industries that want to do business and create jobs here, will say: there is no way to do it in Matanza, it is a *quilombo* [in *lunfardo*, *porteño* slang, means a cheap brothel] (Política, 2000, p. 5).

But what could generate this chaotic situation in La Matanza? The answer to this question will lead us to the intricateness of its socio-political environment and to

understand why the country's greatest modern writer, Jorge Luis Borges, once said of the Peronists, "They are neither good nor bad, just incorrigible."⁶²

The gritty suburb of La Matanza has been historically a *Peronist* feudal state without a noticeable lord. Since 1983, the competing *Peronist* party factions have alternated in office. Except for the 1983-1987 period that the province of Buenos Aires was under the leadership of the Radical party, the *Justicialista* faction that governed La Matanza was in line with the governor's *línea interna*, or party faction. In 1987, the *Peronist* Federico Russo from *línea Renovadora*, loyal to the former governor Antonio Cafiero, won elections with 53% of the electoral vote. Later on, from 1991 to 1999, Hector Cozzi a candidate of the faction loyal to the provincial chamber of deputy's president Alberto Pierri and to the governor Eduardo Duhalde, won the district elections with 46% and 58% respectively. In 1999, the *Peronist* party experienced its most difficult election ever in La Matanza, winning with only 41% against the ALIANZA, which obtained almost 40% of the electoral vote. Except for the ALIANZA no other political force was able to challenge the *Justicialista* leadership in this district.

The *Justicialista* party has politically succeeded in Matanza on the basis of its *organized disorganization*, a decentralized and complex informal structure composed by an *assitencialista* web of neighborhood associations, political patrons, *punteros*, and base units (Levistky, 2001). Through this web the Peronist party was able to maintain a *clientelistic* practice base on governmental funds and other non-material resources. According to some statements made by party members "the distribution of food,

⁶² Larry Rohter (2002). *Política 2000*, Año 1, no.7, December 2000.

medicines, jobs and contacts are among the most traditional practices . . . ”
 (ELMPLNo.4). However, base units, under the mask of recently created NGOs and neighborhood associations, have provided other services such as soup kitchens, support for seniors, child care centers, sport activities, etc. This complex and informal structure made a local official describe this district as follows,

Matanza equals poverty, unemployment, social programs for poverty alleviation, clientelism, corruption, unemployed protesters blocking the roads, generalized frustration . . . a no man’s territory, just chaotic. It is a mirror of the Justicialismo and the innermost political dynamics of this party” (ELMMONo.1).

In the context described, the implementation of social programs for poverty and unemployment alleviation were a fundamental strategy to keep this district going and prevent widespread public protest. Since 1997 unemployed protesters have been gaining the streets of La Matanza and blocking route 3, the main commercial road south from Buenos Aires to Patagonia.

These protests took the form of *piquete*, or barricade and since 1997, 909 protests have been conducted in this district.⁶³ These protests were initially started by former public administration employees supported by the CTA and CGT’s (Confederación

⁶³ Data gathered from a study conducted by Nueva Mayoria. Récord mensual de cortes de rutas desde 1997, April 5, 2002.

General de Trabajadores and General Confederation of Labor) dissident labor organizations that criticized Menem's neoliberal policies.⁶⁴ Over the years, this mobilization has been gaining followers among the less benefited sectors of the structural adjustment reforms, including unionized teachers. As support for these protests widened their claims diversified, from job post and housing programs to an increase in education funding.⁶⁵ Although their demands were revolutionary, the solutions were not. Simply promises for more *assitencialista* programs.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ CGT supported Menem government in its origins. After the implementation of structural adjustment policies that negatively affected labor and particularly national unionized workers, the CGT divided in two in 1989: CGT-Azopardo and CGT-San Martin; a pro-Menem and pro-reforms CGT-San Martin and a populist CGT-Azopardo. In 1992 they unified. Subsequently a group of unions—led by a Buenos Aires teacher's union and the public administration employees—broke with the CGT and created a new Confederation of Argentina Workers (CTA). This confederation resisted market-oriented reforms and participated in the organization of FREPASO. Years later, truck drivers' and bus drivers' unions formed the Movement of Argentine Workers (MTA), a populist faction within the CGT. For more information on these issues see Murillo (2001), Chapter 6.

⁶⁵ Information obtained from an interview with a local teacher's union leader.

⁶⁶ Those *piquetes* represent how those clientelistic practices in the province of Buenos Aires, in this case public employment, were in tension with restructure programs implemented by the provincial administration—cut in public spending and job post—which in turn required the implementation of social programs to sustain those individuals who have previously been granted with jobs within the public administration.

Consequently, in a context of economic hardships, the provincial social plan presented before, *Plan Vida*—in all its forms—school food programs, fellowships for students attending *polimodal* education in the form of nine monthly allocations of pesos 100 to improve high school student's retention, and even the national *Plan Trabajar*, or work plan run through municipal governments, were channeled through the *Peronist safety net* for the policy implementation of the distribution of goods and services.⁶⁷ In conjunction, all these programs were intended, according to provincial government documents, to address poverty in a comprehensive manner (Duhalde Plan de Gobierno, 1999). However, it also provided channels for patronage distribution that supports the *Justicialista* local machinery.

Political leaders declare that at the municipal level this safety net operates through *punteros* who are usually those with job posts in the municipal administration and loyal to a higher rank public official—the patron that gave them the job. In many cases, a *puntero's* job is reduced to mobilize people for party purposes for which he or she needs material resources. The patron usually obtains the money, or other material resources, from social plans carried out by the provincial government, the local government agencies he or she may run, menial job posts in the municipal administration, or contributions that the *puntero* then distributes among his or her faithful basic units. As it is seen, the *puntero* is the liaison between the party grassroots and its hierarchy. As

⁶⁷ *Plan Trabajar* was and is still today a national workfare plan of \$120 for which unemployed people received a stipend and in return they work approximately four hours a day for the municipality. As told by one of my informants in La Matanza, generally they clean, paint, and do some maintenance work in local schools, parks, or public buildings.

Levitsky (2001) mentioned, punteros and UB are informally associated in local organizations called *agrupaciones*, not included in the formal justicialista provincial chart. I counted in La Matanza at least 15 highly visible *agrupaciones*, which publish some of their activities in municipal or justicialista pamphlets; I suspect that much more can be found although none of the Peronist interviewees could tell me how many *agrupaciones* are in La Matanza.

Because the relationship that unites punteros and UB's is of informal character, and based on the resources the puntero can obtain, the relationship is usually weak and unstable. As a party member mentions, "UB's support is extremely volatile since support follows resources (ELMPLno.5). It is particularly this volatility that gives this safety new autonomy from the Justicialista party structure and legitimizes in the movement nature of Justicialista party.⁶⁸ In turn, this instability and competition for resources is what gives the chaotic character to the municipal administration.

With this context in mind, one can expect that efficiency is not what rules in the municipality of La Matanza and this district administration greatly differs from the Vicente López model. Moreover, the system is organized to avoid the release of any type of information, particularly data tied with local finance and funding sources and local employment.⁶⁹ The administration is overpopulated and the process of hiring—as shown

⁶⁸ Article 3 of the *Veinte Verdades Peronistas* or, twenty *Peronist* truths states that *Peronism* is a movement and that all *Peronist* work for the movement. Even more, it states that those who served a caudillo are not true *Peronist* (*Veinte Verdades Peronistas*, Escuela de dirigentes Juan Perón, n.d.)

⁶⁹ It took me more than a year to get La Matanza's proposed budget for the year 2001. When finally obtained through a *puntero*, the information was impossible to read since the different budgeted items were not detailed and references of items categorization were missing.

before—is extremely politicized. There are approximately 5200 employees officially declared; however, reliable data about La Matanza employment is very hard to find.⁷⁰ As declared by a radical party member, “some of the job posts are either unofficial or *ñoquis*” (ELMCMNo.1).⁷¹ I should mention here that members of the ALIAZA coalition confirmed they used clientelistic practices in La Matanza as well, “we were able to balance the Justicialista majority using the same methodology. It is sad to say but we copied their clientelistic practices. It is an easier way to secure votes” (ELMPLNo.4). Some of the practices implemented by la ALIANZA were very similar to those put in practice in Vicente López by García; monies are diverted to public schools in forms of fellowships or subsidies for school improvement (Política, 2000). However, these practices are less frequent and the generalized *game in town* presented before is what is the norm in this district.

Educational Structure in La Matanza

All EGB and polimodal schools located in La Matanza are administered and funded by the provincial government. Only preschool and kindergarten institutions are run and funded through the Municipal Under-Secretariat of Education. As in Vicente López, this under secretariat is hierarchically dependent from the Major through the Government Secretariat. In contrast to Vicente López administrative organizational

⁷⁰ The source of employment data comes from the Dirección Provincial de Gestión Municipal. Secretaría de Asuntos Municipales e Institucionales. Ministerio de Gobierno. Table 16.B

⁷¹ *Ñoqui*, refers to those public employees that just appear in the office to collect their paychecks. The reason for the name, the Italian pasta, is due to the tradition that *ñoquis* are served every 29th of each month. Salary paychecks are usually received around the same date, at the end of the month.

arrangement, in La Matanza education and culture are two separate and distinctive administrative units. The cultural office has a secretariat status while for education an under secretariat is assigned. The lower status assigned to the municipal education office is not in contradiction with the provincial mandate since it is still the provincial administration which has the control of the whole management of the provincial system of education. Besides, the municipality is in charge of a total of 23 preschools and kindergartens for which a big administrative unit is not required.

Although a small educational structure, the 2001 municipal proposed budget estimated a cost of almost 16,000,000 million pesos for education personnel, which seems to be an unrealistic number considering that on average teachers, school administrators and janitors earn approximately 400 pesos.⁷² I should mention that no reliable records of education finance were obtained from the municipality. According to extra official reports, probably 2% of the annual municipal budget is devoted to education and culture. This number coincides with the national reported average of municipal education funding (INDEC, Gasto Social, 1997).

From the limited information obtained from the local school board, its internal composition changed in the last few years. Although the *Justicialismo* kept its traditional majority—6 out of a total of 10 counselors—its seats have diversified since 1999. The remaining four counselors are two from the Radical party and two from the FREPASO. According to a member of the local legislature, “this situation made things more difficult.

⁷² The information was obtained from a copy of the municipal budget obtained. When the budget was proposed 1 peso= 1 dollar.

Although we still keep the majority, there is much competition between forces which delayed things even more” (ELMCENo2). School actors declare that the local board was less than effective in dealing with their demands, proving the inefficiency previously described. To that extent, a school director declared that, “it is not working, it is inefficient, worth for nothing . . . they are just a liaison with not much responsibilities . . . certainly we are doing most of the job” (ELMSPNo.12). These statements evidenced two important issues that resulted from the last reforms. First, how little control local school boards have in comparison with their assigned function in the early 1980s and, second, how much administrative responsibilities have been assigned to the school administration.

According to a teacher, “education was never a priority in Matanza as well as Matanza’s education was never a priority for the provincial administration” (ELMTNo.9). Evidence of that is that the local school board declared in 1999 the state of educational emergency in the district.⁷³ Documents published by the local branch of the provincial teachers’ union, SUTEBA, or Sindicato Unico de Trabajadores de la Educación Bonaerense, gives an account of this situation. The union presented to the local authorities a list with 15 schools that could not start the 1999 academic year in the district and 28 that were in deplorable conditions. Among the problems identified were:

- 1) building in extremely delicate conditions or under construction, 2) lack of teachers and

⁷³ Information obtained from an interview with a local administrative official. Probably for this reason none of the Local School counselors accepted to be interviewed. General information of the local school board, although minimal, was obtained through an informant.

basic school furniture (desks and chairs), 3) contaminated water, 4) unusable school restrooms, among others.⁷⁴

Education administrators report that there has not been much collaboration between the local school board, the municipal administration and regional educational supervision units to solve the district educational problems. The interaction between these local and provincial administrative entities depended on which faction of the *Peronism* was in power in the municipality. As an administrator reported:

things changed since Balestrini is the major, he is more concerned about education. We can sit and talk about education issues with him and ask for support; at least that is an improvement. With the *Pierrista* administration we could not even reach the Major (ELMPANo.6).

Changes were evident, however, since the implementation of the *Plan Trabajar*. Through those minimum monthly stipends the municipality had granted the necessary work force for the school maintenance needs,

From the provincial office of infrastructure, through the local School Board, and with the collaboration of the municipal work force, some

⁷⁴ *Situación de las Escuelas del distrito de la Matanza ante el inicio lectivo. 1998-1999. SUTEBA Ley Federal de Educación: Un Nuevo año con viejos problemas S/N, SUTEBA.*

maintenance work was possible, and an important degree of decentralization was put into practice, don't you think? (ELMSNo2).

So far, that collaboration was restricted to the area of the school board concern, school maintenance, school food programs, and school scholarships. Nonetheless, the evidence presented before shows that the collaborative work in regards to school maintenance was somehow unsuccessful and still many schools are in states of emergency. On the other hand, some irregularities applied to the food programs and *polimodal* student's scholarships. In this regard, a provincial political appointee said, "the main problem is that those scholarships have not been given on the bases of merit and they have been assigned without any control whatsoever" (ELMCINo.5).

When it comes to in-site-school-cooperatives and the management of school food programs in the outer ring of La Matanza, complaints arise. Official documents report a number of 279 school food programs in this district. Those programs are delivered through provincial contractors directly to elementary schools and preschools. The role of school cooperatives and school directors is to request through the local school council, based on the amount of students they have enrolled, the necessary funds to support those school food programs. Local officials declare that enrollment numbers are usually inflated. Moreover, teachers and local school administrators express that in many cases some of those school cooperatives are co-opted by *justicialistas* UBs and *manzaneras* who usually take the lead on how the school cafeteria would be run and who will have access,

we also experience some rivalry between local party broker to take control over the *cooperadora*, it is ashamed . . . It is well known that school No.2 is run by a *Justicialista* couple who think they own the school . . . they use the school cooperative as a means to capture votes (ELMTNo.10).

It is evident from this account that not for any reason do teachers and school administrators reject parent and community participation at the school level. I will cover this point later on.

How is Participation Viewed in This District?

Similarly, what education and community leaders express in Vicente López, participation in its broad sense is also viewed in decline in La Matanza when compared with the 1980s pattern. Although in this case, the majority of the arguments revolved around La Matanza's extreme socio-economic conditions. Some views follow,

If people do not eat, how can they think of participating? . . . Extreme economic deprivation have broken all social relations, the family, the school, the *sociedad the fomento* [neighborhood association] . . . everything . . . The euphoria of the 1980s died years ago. We lost any democratic compromise gained during those years, . . . we even organized the pedagogical congress in Matanza where everyone was participating for

the future of our educational system, well, that died as well.

(ELMSPNo.11).

The frustration expressed in this statement is a standardized sentiment across education actors' in Matanza, who viewed economic conditions as the cause of the crisis experienced among societal and political institutions. The decline of the people's involvement is a generalized preoccupation among teachers, local community leaders, political leaders, and educational administrators; however, some of them recognized that this decline is not homogenous across the district,

in general participation is determined by the socioeconomic level. Thus, you will see differential practices across counties. Let's say, you will see more people getting involved in school cooperatives in San Justo and Ramos than in Catán. As well as the economic conditions of Matanza differ from ring to ring of demographic settlement, participation varies accordingly (ELMCINo5)

Some arguments make an attempt to go beyond economic factors and make broader claims that ties participatory deficiencies with actual political representation. "There are not many places left in Argentina for participation, only the street and the school. There is a serious crisis of representation since there are no leaders" (ELMSTNo.1). This statement, which comes from a unionized young teacher, is

particularly interesting since it is in opposition with the unoptimistic and determinist views of the majority of the arguments heard interview after interview in La Matanza. Why is it interesting? For two main reasons. First, it places the school as space where participation is still possible. Second, it shows the lack of clear leadership in Matanza while also recognizing that the historical pattern of participation in Argentina has been associated with a strong and visible leadership.

It is interesting that none of education and community actors' interviewed see recent *piquetes* practices—except for union activists—as an alternative way of participation. Possible reasons for this unawareness can be, a) *piquetes* are a novel event, still not recognized as a legitimate participatory expression, and b) *piquetes* are viewed just as corporatist claims that do not go beyond their immediate and particularistic demands.

Overall, these results suggest that while community and education leaders are disappointed with the participatory pattern in the district their extreme micro-contextual reference limits their views about participatory actions. In large part, these limited views led most of them to accept almost with resignation the current situation of the district and, in turn, reinforced the status quo.

*In School Participation*Parental Involvement

In the extreme context of desolation previously described, my education informants agree that parent involvement in Matanza's schools is almost nonexistent.

Teachers, principals, and supervisors mentioned that,

parents come to the school just for necessity; their participation is scarce . . . and when they come, it is to ask for help from the school. Usually it is the school that makes the call when there is any problematic situation with our students. Then, the school tries to mediate. However, in many cases the school has no answers or the mediation is unsuccessful (ELMCSNo.15).

We got to the point that parents have to think how to obtain what they are going give theirs families to eat so education becomes less of a priority. They come to the school looking for food. On the other hand, the school is ill prepared to deal with these extreme situations and so do we (ELMTNo.5).

The typical family in La Matanza is big and experiences many problems. Kids are alone and frequently abused; parents are unemployed . . .In short,

a very complex social situation usually caused by poor economic conditions (ELMCINo.5).

Again, teachers and school administrators express the extreme conditions of Matanza's teaching and learning environment. They even question if indeed, any process of learning is actually happening in public EGB and *polimodal* schools. Yet, their accounts underscore that the rising population that the schools are serving are not only economically and intellectually in need but also emotionally—something for which they feel completely unprepared to respond to.

The increasing poverty of the district affected not only parents' involvement at the school level, but also their monetary contributions for school cooperatives, which are considered fundamental for a school's daily functions. According to the comments of directors and school secretaries, school cooperatives only rely nowadays on funds coming from the different provincial sources, which are not many. Still, they mentioned the amounts they personally invest in materials needed for classroom instruction. "Since the monies are insufficient we have to buy school material out of our pockets" (ELMTNo.8). In addition, teachers reported that the lack of parents' participation demands their active involvement in the school cooperatives, "someone has to take the role if not the school receives nothing" (ELMTNo.8). Teachers report being in the cooperatives for more than ten years without being replaced; "we are always the same, we just exchange roles. We cannot leave . . . if we do, the school cooperative disappears" (ELMTNo2).

It is interesting that while teachers and administrators claim more contact with parents, some derogatory and critical comments towards parents are observed. Feeling stigmatized, teachers and school administrators have a negative parent image as ignorant, lazy, and thieves. Images that might be very difficult for parents to break. A schoolteacher's—who is also the school secretary—statement can exemplify this point, “if they do not come to participate is for something . . . definitely here they cannot steal. I have control of every cent of the school cooperative budget; they can say I am a witch but not a thief” (ELMSANo.17).

This superiority-inferiority power relation observed among schoolteachers, school administrators, and parents and the lack of confidence and distrust on parents' capacities and abilities will easily repel parents from getting involved or simply to become passive and consensual listeners and viewers of their child's educational life. It is also evident that it is the school in this case who sets the timing and preferences for school-parents interaction, which may well be motivated for teachers and school administrator sentiments.⁷⁵

Administrators-teachers Collaboration and School Autonomy

In general, the interviews disclose that the same rigid and vertical structure of the provincial system of education is reproduced within the school organization. As a teacher said,

⁷⁵ See Appendix B—Box 2: The particularities of a *polimodal* school in La Matanza.

both what the director and the supervisor say, it is the rule. There is a hierarchical established line that regulates the system and generally, we follow. Sometimes teachers are still afraid of the authority. We are not used to question it (ELMTNo.3).

Teachers report that their interaction with school administrators is limited to some problematic situations with the students, in relation to the school reform or other school administrative issues. As is expressed in the case of Vicente López, teachers declared that the lack of time they have in each school is one of the causes of the limited communication with the school administration. By and large, they do not think there is much interaction within the school personnel and that in many cases both directors and supervisors are not accessible. The interviews also revealed that participatory activities with the school community are not encouraged, except for special events such as the commemoration of Argentine independence and other national festivities. Yet, some teachers believe is not their responsibility.

When it comes to teacher to teacher interaction, the data shows that individualism is what characterized their socialization. Teachers are almost alone in their practices. Not much pedagogical talk is shared among colleagues. Again and again the lack of time and teachers' sense of belonging are the arguments exposed. Teachers report "to work out of inertia with almost no possibilities to establish any fruitful relationship with other

teachers and students; we do the best we can under the conditions we work”

(ELMTNo8).

The schools visited in this district report the design of the PEI, although they recognize the significant role played by the school administration team in the process of getting it done and the difficulties they experience for its implementation. “It was done because it was mandated and if the supervisor says so . . .” a teacher said. Teachers, supervisors, and directors report that the characteristics of in school participation might vary from school to school, and it particularly depends on the school director and the degree of compromise of each individual teacher.

Interviewees report that the school director is a central piece of the whole educational transformation.⁷⁶ They are not only in charge of the pedagogical aspects of the school but also they have to take care of the maintenance of the school building, deal with the contractors that provide the food for the school, control and report teachers’ attendance, request substitute teachers, and other managerial work. But at the same time, directors report that those responsibilities came with more control from the supervision units, “I do have more responsibilities but not more control over the school. I have to report everything I do, and believe me just everything needs the signature of someone else” (ELMSPNo.6). It is interesting to note that although school administrators recognized they have more responsibilities, they did not claim more control over curricular issues and teacher selection and appointments. Certain resignation with the system organization is evident from their comments.

⁷⁶ This point was also pointed out by other studies. See Dussel and Thiested (1995) and Cigliutti (1993).

According to the chief supervision office, the provincial administration is in the process of getting the school administration more control; however, they believe there is still a long way to go, “schools are still very dependent on us. The reason is that we are coming from a very hierarchical organized system . . . but we want to solve the less possible issues at this administrative level” (ELMCINo.5).

School-community Collaboration

The data obtained in La Matanza shows a limited connection between the school and the community other than the *Peronist* intervention in the distributions of some resources. Some school actors mention the role of some neighborhood and Catholic organizations working independently in assisting the local community. “In this region of Matanza we can hardly succeed with the primary responsibility any school has to educate. It would be impossible for us to concentrate our attention on something else. Besides, we cannot open the school too much . . . if not we have the *unidad básica* controlling the school” (ELMSPNo.11). This statement coincides with the accounts of the socio-political environment of this district.

The supervisors report more school-community collaboration in the wealthiest and central counties of the district, where the school organizes activities open for community participation: festivals, fairs, and exhibitions. In some cases, neighborhood associations facilitate their gyms for the organization of those activities. In general, the purpose of those festivals and fairs is to collect monies for the school cooperative and the school cooperative is in charge of the organization of the activity. Both directors and

supervisors also reported some collaboration between the school and the municipal health centers, particularly in activities that foster health awareness, disease prevention, or vaccine campaigns. District supervisors also mentioned that some technical schools organize internships with local industrial companies. However, these activities are part of the school curriculum.

Other accounts show that school-community collaboration is still perceived in relation with the traditional channels of school assistance and finance through the local school council and the municipal administration, although today that interaction is very limited. It is interesting that the answers received about participatory actions between the schools and the community cannot escape the financial or welfare side of it. School administrators, supervisors, and teachers do not associate school-community relation with curricular or extracurricular activities nor with school decision-making aspects.

It is important to note that the actors in this district do not identify those private foundations that are mentioned in Vicente López as actively involved with the schools. The reason for this absence could be either that those organizations are not collaborating with schools in La Matanza or that school actors do not identify those organizations as part of *the whole community*. My impression is that the depressed district of La Matanza is not a good commercial target for those foundations where their image can be easily commercialized. Besides, the role those foundations play in Vicente López their role is accomplished in La Matanza by a number of NGOs that are in close association with the *Justicialista* party.

Conclusions

The cases presented in this chapter give an account of how the outcome of decentralizing initiatives were conditioned not only by the provincial system restructuring reform but for the most part by the socio-political environment of the districts. External environmental pressures have affected the distribution of responsibilities, influences, and participation patterns in these two public school districts in the province of Buenos Aires, Argentina, promoting differential outcomes. These differential environmental factors prove to moderate the effects of current efforts to decentralize education in Argentina.

Recent decentralization and reform attempts were designed at the national and provincial levels under the premise that first, reforms will follow, and second, they will result in uniform implementation patterns and outcomes. What these cases show, on the contrary, is that the premise cannot be assumed. Policies that tended to decentralize and generate a more accountable system of education in Argentina may meet relative success in some environments, but may also be completely unsuccessful in others.⁷⁷ The underlying idea here is that within the confines of general societal characteristics, socio-economic and political environments continue to determine the actual game in town and proving a mixture in reform implementation.

In Vicente López a *managerial-efficientist model* led by a strong caudillo was put in place. Through this model that relied on informal practices carried out by municipal agencies or local organizations such as Fundación Empresaria, Major García was not only able to succeed politically but to cope with the new requirements and the

⁷⁷ Student of organizational environments clearly proved this point, though for other contexts. Among those are Di Maggio and Powell (1983), Meyer and Scott (1988), Hannaway (1993).

inefficiency of the provincial administration. A relatively successful collaborative web was established between the local school council, the municipal government, the provincial education supervisor's units, and school and local organizations. It is interesting to note that this success did not reach the school internally in fostering much participatory practices. Teachers and directors rarely found themselves sharing influences, exchanging ideas about instruction, or employing cooperative learning. In those schools that those activities were observed, although the less, were those school institutions that did experience previous autonomy from the national administration or their organizational structure facilitated that type of activities—as was the case of those institutions under the *proyecto 13*.

In La Matanza, on the contrary, a *traditional-chaotic model* was observed. This model was implemented through a local informal organization, the Justicilistas clientelistic safety-nets, which although not successful in terms of the education reform requirements, it was advantageous for the more immediate needs of the district and the Justicialista movement. In this case, the chaotic organization of the party leadership and its internal competition did not encourage collaboration among the different local administrative units, the local school council, the municipal administration and the supervision unit, nor between the school and the traditional neighborhood associations, but by the association linked with the unorganized party structure.

In both cases the absence of in school collaboration may be understood by the concentration of control by the provincial administration of almost every aspect of school life while downsizing responsibilities of the daily school operation to the district and

school level. Perhaps teachers' overload and job instability and overburdened school administrators in routines that are not particularly of educational concern prevent them from establishing cooperative school practices.

In both cases, although with different outcomes, the new mandated and implemented educational requirements have been adapted to keep the status quo. It is evident from the finding of this study that the state-society relations pretended by national and provincial official administrative strategies did not translate into decentralization of power and democratic participation. However, one question still has to be answered. To what extent do the characteristics of local civic participatory practices also explain these diverse outcomes? This is the task assigned for the next chapter.