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# Best Practices Database

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## Rosario: The New Citizenship Landscape

*Argentina*

Best Practice

New for 2002

### Categories:

Children and Youth:

- 0-9 years
- 10 years to adult
- children's participatory planning and leadership development
- community support programmes
- environmental programmes with a youth focus
- health and nutrition
- recreational/ cultural programming

Architecture and Urban Design:

- affordable/ecological design
- green building
- historic preservation
- landscape design

Urban Governance:

- decentralization
- human resources and leadership development
- institutional reform
- metro/urban-wide government
- partnership development
- public policy

**Level of Activity:** Metropolitan

**Ecosystem:** River Basin

### Summary

The year 2000 attracted the attention of the world to Argentinean cities since they suffered from a myriad of problems. These include democratic unrest as well as grabbing of public places by private developers. Imagination and creativity are urgently called upon so as to improve life conditions by carrying out innovative activities that encourage the construction of a new idea of citizenship.

Equality of opportunities, common identity in a multicultural society and inclusion mean a new approach to citizenship. This new approach provides an understanding on new relations and opportunities for participation and lets us imagine urban planning as a landscape of life to be moulded collectively to create a "climate" of rich social interchanges and a more humane society to live in.

The Municipality of Rosario is carrying out the Municipal Decentralization Program and has created six District Municipal Centres that reduce bureaucracy and make management and assistance more effective. It also increases citizens' participation in social and urban development of their

neighbourhoods. In order to create institutional mechanisms of participation and to utilise the creativity of the new citizens, the Municipal Executive undertook the Project called Rosario: The City of Children in 1996. The project is based on the experiences of the Italian educator Francesco Tonucci and is carried out with the support of UNICEF Argentina. The programme is executed by means of the creation of Children Advisory Councils and of groups of Planner Children in the different Decentralization Districts for the urban planning and the design of public works. The right to be heard and to actively participate in the city transformation is guaranteed to all participants in these institutions. The identification of goals, problems and assesment of results achieved on the improvement of life conditions of the Children Advisory Councils and of the Groups of Planner Children were done through;

- 1) Participating in urban designs and in public works criteria (Childhood Farm, Children Garden)
- 2) Strategies of appropriation and recuperation of the public space for game and habitation
- 3) Campaigns that transform the habitat based on a concept of social ecology.

The heart of the matter is not to govern for the children but to govern with them in order to improve life conditions for the whole community. New citizens can help us to "put into action" a moving and revealing landscape of the public space.

The initiative questions:

1. Habitation of the public places by private individuals,
2. Appropriation of the public places,
3. Urban planning
4. Democracy

## **Narrative**

### Situation Before The Initiative Began

Rosario, a city with more than a million inhabitants, is faced with allocation of urban spaces to private developers, prioritisation of the commercial value of the city and not the idea of it as a place for multiple interchanges, democratic unrest and social problems. So as to make the city a place more conducive to live in, decentralisation is imperative. Decentralisation and participation of citizens become essential elements for new policies on public spaces to be effected. Urban planning is fundamental as well as public actions and policies that stimulate and favour the appropriation of public places to the citizens. The citizens who incorporate the new concepts of democratic appropriation can try to turn the society into a less violent one since the violence that rules the streets is often a result of lack of recreational space and facilities.

### Establishment Of Priorities

The programme of Municipal Decentralization aimed at improving conditions of life in our city and the Project "The City of Children" has as its priorities the following;

1. To institutionalise various fora where children, youngsters and adults can participate and identify themselves more with public space.
2. To offer citizens an opportunity to participate in urban planning, which is important in increasing the quality of life in the city.
3. To support the government's decision and the budget accounting allocation. These are important in the development of the project, as it is the basis of the process of decentralization.

The Objectives Are:

- 1- To institutionalize citizen's participation and encourage the involvement of children and youngsters through the Children Councils and Groups of Planner Children.

- 2- To push for a project design and for rightful appropriation of public spaces.
- 3- To create strategies for the initiatives which are both appealing for youngsters and adults.
- 4- To integrate Public Works Planning as a means to encourage civic engagement and made the City of Rosario as a model of new innovative practices for improving living conditions.

## Strategies

To include children, youngsters and adults in the process of defending, recuperating and in allocation of Public Spaces; The idea of defending and recuperating public places in The Municipality of Rosario warrants government programmes and, at the same time, it is an effective device to facilitate the equality of opportunities.

The Children Advisory Councils and the Groups of Planner Children have embarked on several initiatives including

- Common well, universe of values that influence in the execution of the whole;
- Urban patrimony to be created preserved and/or reconstructed;
- Territory of the people where interchange is to take part and also habitation and where the neighbours feel is proper;
- Effective and plural set of services;
- Memory and construction of identities;
- Scenario of democratic culture (this is through expressions, ways of political participation, fields of social interchanges);
- Natural and cultural environment;
- Set of juridical rules, that protects the citizens' public sphere. These rules are interpreted from the universe of rights.

## Mobilisation Of Resources

**Human and technical Resources:** The resources first came from the Executive Department of the Municipality and also from the Legislative department. Later personnel like university trainees, UNICEF Trainers, University Professionals and Technicians were hired. Human and technical resources were also obtained from voluntary and Non-Governmental Organizations.

**Financial Resources:** Financial support came from; State Budget, UNICEF, FAE (Fund of Educational Assistance) as well from other companies and institutions.

## Process

**Institution Creation:** Children in Children Advisory Councils are elected by their peers in their district in a democratic voting process that takes place in every school, club, church, public library, etc. They have a two-year term, in which they have periodic meetings with the Municipal Cabinet (Executive) and the Municipal Council (Legislative). They have weekly meetings organised as workshops where ideas and suggestions are made. They choose a central idea in each period. They work hand-in-hand with the Intergovernmental Committee of the project "The City of Children". The children also have meetings with the neighbours, non-governmental institutions and the press so as to sensitize on the initiatives being carried out.

The first Children Advisory Council was held in the first decentralised District (Northern Area). The council developed its activities in an old Railway Station (Embarcaderos Station). The group comprised of children from different communities and from multiple social sectors, as well as children from migratory communities (families from other provinces, children of the Toba indigenous community, etc.). The central idea of their work in 1997/1998 was WHAT IS PUBLIC AND WHAT IS PRIVATE? During its term the First Children's Council:

1. Worked towards the recuperation of the Parana river bank, which was occupied by private firms

with no title deeds (today it is the "Cohabitation Bank");

2. It recovered 25 squares and 432ha. of green space that are now magnificent river bed balconies;
3. It was approved by the Legislative Power and organized the Game and Cohabitation Day;
4. Throughout its activities, it put into practice the Mummy and Daddy Care Programme (up to now 12,000 children from 80 city schools took part).

The children embrace the central idea, "What is Public and what is Private?" They do this through Posters and Campaigns (there were 2,000 posters made by children) in the homonymous contest.

Northern District Second Children Advisory Council: They held office and co-ordinated activities from July 1999 to December 2000. They worked hard for the institutionalization of the Game and Cohabitation Day celebration. During their meetings they brought in the concept of using games as a means of communication. This led to both children and parents proposing that game fairs be held in different public parks once a month. The Council produced a video where the children took "the city as a communicative place" as the key theme. The aim was to recuperate the memory of those places that constituted this big city called Rosario, the places that show parts of the history through urban tracks. Another one of the activities was the "Day of Radio and Television in favour of Children" - instituted by UNICEF - Rosario joined by ordinance No. 6872, from 1999. As a consequence, the children participated in local media programmes.

Northern District Third Children Advisory Council: They started working in March 2001 and they will remain in those positions until December 2002. Upto today, they have organised two game fairs and the new edition of the Game and Cohabitation Day. They also participated in the initiatives of the Western Children Advisory Council. By the end of 2001, they will hold a signature campaign called "Everybody for Peace", joining the idea of several artists from Rosario who had started the campaign before.

Western District First Children Advisory Council: They worked from June 2000 to December 2001. This District is a zone that is faced with irregular settlements, scarcity of green spaces, deep social problems, unemployment and migrating groups who settle down in Rosario looking for a better life. To face this problematic situation, the children decided to work on an innovative project, based on "beauty as a right": The Green Line, as a metaphor of a social ecology. The main aim of this group is to create green places so as to improve habitation and to integrate the neighbourhoods of the district "in a green line" - public flowerbeds, trees, squares. They held many activities within the community such as: partnership development, the initiation of projects in different schools, the publication of informative material, the organisation of days of "Journeys of Afforestation", cleaning land and streets, gardening the flowerbeds of the avenues that cross the district, etc.

The Childhood Farm: This is a 5-hectare space with some flora and fauna. The farm connects nature and culture, theory and practice, and integrates children, youngsters and adults in the building of a new "ecological thought". It is a learning process in democracy about human rights, arts and respect for cultural differences.

The Children Garden, the machine to imagine: The First Children Advisory Council's Cohabitation and Game Day was held here. It is a permanent space for people of all ages. It pays homage to the person's creation and imagination and challenges both logical and creative children operations and their physical possibilities. It doesn't separate body - mind, nor mind - action. It offers games, adventures, mysteries, constructions and poetry. The Children Garden is a non-formal educational programme for girls and boys, families and schools.

The neighbours of Rosario recognise the City of Children as an important instrument with high impact and enormous capacity of attracting citizen participation actions for the city's transformation. The New Citizenship in action is changing the democratic consciousness, life conditions and the city of Rosario Landscape.

Results Achieved

The following is a quantitative and qualitative evaluation about the actions, programmes and campaigns developed for the project:

Changes in the process of decision-making: The creation of the Intergovernmental Committee and the possibility of particular Children Advisory Council's projects, show that horizontal programmes are more efficient than ranks and divisions. This way of operating has been useful in reinforcing the idea that the social field, together with secretaries of Public Health, Social Advancement, Planning and Culture must work together in these kind of experiences such as forming a Social Cabinet. Public Works must be aimed at serving citizens, at the appropriation of public spaces and at improving life conditions based on their opinion and participation. The Children Garden and the Childhood Farm are evidence of this.

Improvements in the co-ordination and integration of different actors, Organizations and institutions:

a) Game and Cohabitation Day: the incorporation of the idea of game as an instrument to participate, interchange and give sense to common life, is reflected in a permanent growth in the solidarity of local institutions that integrate each other to organise celebrations in the different city neighbourhoods. Since 1998 until 2001 the number of adherent institutions increased in number allowing for institutionalization of this day. Thus, 120 institutions celebrated this day in 1998 while in 2001 there were more than 350. The enthusiasm and mobilisation generated by this day impelled the realisation of Game Fairs, which are periodically held in city squares and public spaces. The members of the Children Advisory Councils, their parents, members of the Recreation and Sports Direction, the Youth Centre and district institutions, all work together in organising for the day.

b) Green Line Campaign: schools, shops, neighbourhood institutions and citizens participate in an active way by initiating innovative actions aimed at improving the habitat. They came up with initiatives like, day's journeys of afforestation, cleaning land and streets, gardening the flowerbeds of the avenues that cross the district, etc. These actions are organized with the Gardening Workshop, integrated by disabled children and youngsters who are dependent on the Public Services Secretary of the Municipality of Rosario.

c) Mummy and Daddy Care Program: 12,000 girls and boys in the 4th and 5th year EGB (Basic Education), from 80 city schools have been trained in the sharing and practice of civic rights and obligations. They have realised upto today about 100,000 moral fines to those who park their cars in recreation places such as green spaces, public gardens, crosswalks and double files in front of schools.

d) Godparent Campaign (Net of the Childhood embrace): 2,000 godparents participated devotedly in this campaign, taking new civic and community concepts in relation to childhood and urban security. They aimed at increasing capacity of mobilisation of social resources so as to realise the main aim.

e) Cohabitation River Shore: due to the actions between local state, social Organizations and inhabitants this public place was recuperated from private individuals who were using the space illegally. The recuperation of the public place is still a strong message to the citizens about the valuation and importance of common good over the commercialisation and specialisation of space.

f) "What is Public and what is Private?" Campaign: girls and boys from different city schools produced 2000 posters on this theme. The exhibition was visited by 5000 citizens who also participated in debates about the change in the state-society relationships.

The participation levels reached in all the actions described above, are valid indicators for the evaluation of the following changes in the population behaviours and attitudes:

- Critic reflection around the changes in the state-society relationship;
- The perception and valuation of public space as a common territory and also patrimony of citizens (children and adults);
- The incorporation of the idea of game as an instrument to encourage participation, interchange and to

give sense to a common life;

- The appropriation of a new civic and community concepts in relation to childhood and urban security, attitude changes around motorists-walkers relationships;
- The collective searching and the decision to put into action, innovative solutions for a better life quality;
- The revaluation of historical places and facts in order to contribute to pride in the city's heritage.

## Sustainability

The "City of Children" Project has lasted a long time through many generations. Political decisions, budgetary allocations, and the creation of Intergovernmental Committee are the bases for its sustainability.

**Financial sustainability:** The municipal budget and UNICEF ARGENTINA support the project. Different sponsors helped to make concrete some of the planned actions and events. There are also volunteers in permanent collaboration with the project.

**Social and cultural sustainability:** Children Advisory Councils and the Groups of Planner Children have demonstrated an ideal place to plan the city. They have worked at gender equality and integration of children with different abilities. They constitute a true school of democracy where they respect and promote the differences and possibilities of each person. Another factor that guarantees the sustainability of the project is the permanent training of personnel. Council workers, graduated children, parent groups, teachers, architects, engineers, social workers and other trained professionals, constitute all the people who worked at the project.

**Environmental sustainability:** The project helps to modify the aims of the Strategic Plan of Rosario to involve environmental management. Rosario is faced with a new social ecology, a new attitude as regards human rights and environmental preservation. For that purpose, permanent public spaces were established - Childhood Farm, The Children Garden - where game, nature and democratic participation are experienced. A new behavioural pattern is instilled so that culture and nature are able to coexist in harmony. A conscious attitude about taking care the environment, modifying consumer patterns so that they don't use non-renewable resources has also been created. These are fundamental aspects for new generations.

## Learned Lessons

- a) State's decentralization work had a positive impact.(Intergovernmental Committee)
- b) This three years experience has demonstrated that an interesting set of ideas that touch social life from a more human and more sensitive point of view. The ideas constitute a high impact and efficacy device to call attention and to open the democratic consciousness of many social actors. New life conditions are based on really strong ideas that respect the people's imagination, but they exist only if they are activated in the territory and people can experience, enjoy, live and discuss them.
- c) Children and youngsters are not real actors until they attain their full legal age but have the right to look at things from a non-stereotyped position, contributing to public policies and with private institutions. Citizenship is not a set of formal rights, in this field there exists a New World opportunity so as to generate rich social interchanges, but only if the adult world stops believing in semblances.
- d) Urban development is a great tool in creation of a new society if developed with the participation and consent of the different social actors. Urban planning and public works must be found in life stories, must become human landscapes, social life landscapes.

## Transferability

- Participation in Mayors for Peace Award (UNESCO) and other gatherings.

- Participation in different meetings and the 'day's journey': round tables of Educating Cities in Argentina, Latin America and Europe; meetings in Argentinean and Latin American Cities Strategical Plans, All municipalities that promote similar projects (Friendly Cities of the Children); Health Municipalities (OPS;OMS); meetings organized by the Urban Programme.
- Contacts with Non-Governmental Organizations devoted to environmental and political management.
- Advisory to other Argentinean cities, members of the Mercocities system and of the "Rosario Sister Cities Net" interested in the development and execution of the project.
- Development of Training courses for students, teachers and government agents all over Argentina.

## Key Dates

- 1) July 18th, 1996: Foundation: Institutional Creation. Association and budget accounting allocation. The Municipal Mayor undersigns together with UNICEF Argentina, an arrangement to carry out the experience The City of Children in the city of Rosario and by means of decree 'No' 1422/96 he creates the Intergovernmental Committee (one representative by government area) to avoid bureaucratic practices and to warrant technical support both to the Children Advisory Council and to the Groups of Planner Children.
  
- 2) August 8th, 1997. : Children Right to Speak. In an old Railway station properly arranged for this purpose ( Embarcaderos Station) the First Children Advisory Council of the Northern District, with a heterogeneous social formation and gender balance, starts to work every Saturday.
  
- 3) April 23rd, 1998. : Habitat. Life Scenarios. Upon the First Children Advisory Council initiative the Honourable Municipal Council of Rosario (according to ordinance 6581/98) states the first Wednesday of October as the Game and Cohabitation Day . This celebration becomes a device of high social impact as regards the citizens' appropriation of public places. The number of institutions that organized their own celebrations are increasing year by year: in 1998, they where 120 and in 2001, more than 350 institutions joined this celebration.
  
- 4) July 16th 1999. : Recognition and Spreading of the Experience.: The Mayor of the City of Rosario is awarded in the city of La Paz, Bolivia, the Honourable Mention UNESCO "Mayors for Peace" due to the Project "The City of Children" and the reach of its innovative practices to create new conditions of peace and cohabitation. The Program is made known in organizations of Mercocities, Universities, Meetings of Sister Cities, Institutional Lawcourts, etc. The project extends and reaches Western District, starting its work the First Children Advisory Council of the mentioned district, which will impel the "Green Line" Campaign.
  
- 5) November 30th, 2001: The cohabitation land With the inauguration of the Children Garden and the Childhood Farm the project became a systematic public land policy, creating multiple habitats for meeting, game and social ecology.

## References

From a great quantity of articles we have chosen 13 journalistic papers as reference. Selected papers, regional and national press:

- 1) The Children Garden, open and ludic place to start enjoying - Fernanda Gonzalez Cortinas, Rosario 12 Newspaper - Rosario, December 1st, 2001
- 2) Children planted trees in Avellaneda Street - El Ciudadano & La Region Newspaper - Rosario, November 18th, 2001
- 3) Northern district children and adults opened the door to play - Isolda Baraldi, La Capital Newspaper - Rosario, July 3rd, 2000
- 4) A Celebration for adults who feel like children - Fernanda Blasco, El Ciudadano & la Region Newspapers - Rosario October 7th, 1999.
- 5) Rosario Distinguished for being good for children - Alicia Simeoni, Rosario 12 Newspaper - Rosario July 18th, 1999.
- 6) Rosario thinks about children - Veronica Podesta, Para Ti Magazine - Capital Federal June 18th, 1999.
- 7) A Children Farm 40 minutes far - Carina Bazzoni, La Capital Newspaper- Rosario December 8th, 1998.
- 8) When the Game made Rosario citizens happier - Laura Vilches, La Capital Newspaper - Rosario, November 1st, 1998.
- 9) Rosario Pupils gave their opinion on public spaces - La Capital Newspaper - Rosario, July 21st, 1998.
- 10) Rosario is the first city that celebrates the Game and Cohabitation Day - Pedro Squillacci, La Capital Newspaper - Rosario, April 26th, 1998.
- 11) The City From The Children's Point Of View - Jorge Brisaboa, Clarin Newspaper- Capital Federal, August 31st, 1997.
- 12) Rosario promotes the City of Children - Fernando Sabbiani, La Maga Magazine - Capital Federal, July 23rd, 1997.
- 13) Rosario's Mummy and Daddy-Care program to put traffic in order - Alicia Simeoni, Pagina 12 Newspaper- Rosario, June 28th, 1997.

## Contact

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**Type of Organization:** Local Authority

## Partners

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**Type of Organization:** International Agency (Multilateral)

**Type of Partner Support:** Financial Support

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 Argentine Republic.

Tel: 0054-341-4802334.

**Type of Organization:** Local Authority

**Type of Partner Support:** Financial Support

**Financial Profile**

Year	Municipality: (City of Children Project "Public Work Childhood Farm")	UNICEF Argentina	FAE:
1997	US\$150.000	US\$ 33.500(Supplying, urban signposting, instructions, leaflets and in the sensitisation area)	US\$460.000 (public work "Childhood Farm")
1998	US\$ 150.000	US\$26.900(Printings, trainers and design consultants, in the educators coordination, in the audio-visual and video area)	US\$550.000(public work "Childhood Farm")
1999	US\$ 150.000	US\$ 6.000 (Fee payment to researcher on work about the Posters Campaign "What is Public and what is Private?"	US\$641.245 (public work "Childhood Farm")
2000	US\$560.000	Nil	US\$275.000 (public work "Children Garden")
2001	US\$550.000	Nil	US\$340.508 (public work "Children Garden")

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