



## Research Paper

### Communication, Public Policies and Environment

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**Abstract:** This is a reflection that links the triad Communication, Public Policies and the Environment in the province of San Luis, Argentina. In Latin American academia, the treatment of the communication-environment binomial has been little explored.

**Keywords:** Communication, Public Policies, Environment, Democracy

#### Introduction:

The environmental and ecological information constitutes a journalistic specialization that supposes a certain training of the journalist in its topics and assumes the existence of a public interested in its problems. The role of communicators in this field should be to broaden the public interested in environmental and ecological issues. For this, the information-producing organizations must have an adequate strategy that uses different alternatives and channels and that, through plain and simple language, promotes communication and knowledge among citizens.

This requires reflection for action within each state environmental organization that, after adopting the

decision to provide adequate information to the public, guides its efforts to build a communication strategy linked to its public.

#### Democracy and Information

In democratic societies, governments must make their actions, public policies and budgeting options transparent on various topics that should interest citizens such as the economy, the environment, the health system, and so on. Possibly, the degree of political information of the contemporary citizen has a direct impact on their forms, quality and intensity of participation. Informing citizens how public revenue will be collected and what it will be spent on is the task of civil servants in modern democracy. All institutions, both private and public, need to communicate in an organized, strategic and coherent way. The definition of the interlocutors, the message that will be sent to them, the tools and actions chosen to transmit that message and the deadlines to consider, are all essential elements in the construction of a successful institutional image. Communication is a management tool

and, as such, it must be planned, it must be aligned with the organization's objectives and it must be assigned a specific budget with specific tasks and their subsequent evaluation. In the private sector this institutional communication is called "corporate communication" and in the public sector it is "government communication" (Amadeo, 2016, p. 157).

Riorda defines government communication as "a method through which a democratic government tries to make its purposes or orientations explicit to public opinion in order to obtain support or consensus in the development of its public policies" (Riorda, 2006, p. 7).

Communication enables and establishes synergies between the change of the environment and the transformation of the representations of the world (Serrano, 2009), by becoming a strategic component of any activity precisely because it is an important link between both functions. Communication is also a constitutive dimension of cultural life, since "culture exists and lives to the extent that it communicates" (Martín-Barbero, 2008, p. 14).

A government must govern with public policies, since it is the sum of public policies and must aim for a citizen to judge their action. It may be that a policy works well and that it has social impact, but if the people have a bad predisposition for the government in general, this is a fact that affects the consensus of the government. Political communication must aim to sustain the government through a general government project (Amadeo, 2016).

An approach to government communication on environmental matters is proposed aimed at promoting, on the one hand, organized

participation, the elaboration of collective agreements, the democratic construction of decisions, consensus and the action of the different actors directly involved in sustainable management, of forest ecosystems, and on the other, to detonate processes that promote meaning and social understanding regarding environmental problems, which allows the experience of building and valuing the equitable relationship between people as a condition of sustainability (Aparicio Cid, 2016). The communicational competence linked to environmental communication management in organizations aims to generate a concrete communication intervention with the purpose of causing changes towards healthier and less harmful habits for the environment for its different internal and external audiences.

The Catalan sociologist Manuel Castells (2001) establishes a distinction between Environment and Ecology:

- Environment: refers to those issues that concern collective behaviour (either from discourse or from practice) with the aim of correcting the harmful interrelationships between human beings and their natural environment.
- Ecology: comprises a system of approaches, theories that consider humanity as a member of a broader ecosystem on a planetary scale, which requires interdependent and continuous dynamic balances.

It is increasingly common for government organizations to include issues related to environmental care in their media relations agenda and, furthermore, these issues are inserted into broader policies that include the sustained development of each country, region and country, city of belonging.

## Argentina

Argentina has a federal institutional political system in which three levels of government coexist: the national, the provincial and the municipal. The sub-national is made up of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires, 23 provinces and more than 2,000 municipalities (Hernández Trillo, 2015, p. 27). The main normative formulation of environmental policy is carried out in Argentina at the national level in the laws of minimum protection budgets, which are recognized at the constitutional level after the constitutional reform of 1994, where priority issues have been selected on which floors were established minimums for the entire territory in different government administrations from 2002 to the present (Julia and Cubero, 2019).

## Public Policy

Public policies are related to different variables that each author highlights from the perspectives that focus them and thus "each public policy is shaped by the institutions, the organizational environment, the legal framework, the political and economic conditions and the social values at stake, this list also adds the speech" (Cejudo, 2010 p. 93). Arellano Gault and Blanco point out those public policies in a democratic framework are:

"those legitimate government decisions and actions that are generated through an open and systematic process of deliberation between groups, citizens and authorities in order to resolve, through specific instruments, the situations defined and constructed as public problems" (2013, p 27).

From a conceptual dimension, to understand what public policies are, it is necessary to differentiate two concepts that do not have a translation in Spanish: Politics (politics), policies (policies). The first comprises power relations, electoral processes, and confrontations between social organizations with the government, while the second refers to actions, decisions and omissions by the different actors involved in public affairs. "When we speak, therefore, of "Public Policy ", we are referring to" processes ", "decisions ", "results "(...), but without this excluding conflicts between interests present at all times, tensions between different definitions of the problem to be solved, between different organizational and action rationalities, and between different evaluative scales and perspectives. We are therefore facing a panorama full of "powers" in conflict, confronting and collaborating before specific options and courses of action (Lindblom, 1991, p. 7, Julia and Cubero, 2019).

Today, on the one hand, governments, beyond their size, seek to strengthen these procedures by promoting good environmental governance in the face of the growing demand of citizens to participate in decision-making that affects their environment and, on the other hand, advertising and the transparency of government acts constitute a fundamental pillar in democratic institutions, whose institutional quality rises to the extent that citizens can receive complete, truthful, adequate and timely information. Governments seek to strengthen their communication processes in the face of the growing demand of citizens for information and participation.

### Environmental Communication

In the search for initiatives to improve environmental communication, as part of the public policies of a government, it is good to ask: - What information on the environment does the government offer? - Through what means? - Is there interaction between government and citizens on environmental issues? What is citizen participation in environmental issues? (Quiroga, 2019). Government communication recreates government management and issues of ecology, environment and climate change are sensitive to an increasingly proactive and participatory citizenry. Usually, the management of the democratic state requires the dissemination and communication of quality public information to its citizens.

It is about that all citizens can have access to information through all the procedures that serve to make public management transparent, through the dissemination of information by multiple means, communicative exchange, guaranteeing the protection of personal data, fostering accountability to citizens, improving the organization, classification and handling of documents and contributing to the democratization of society.

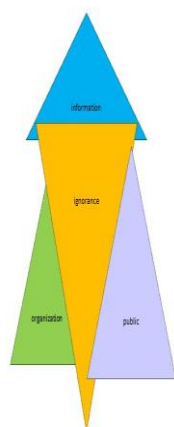
Environmental issues are sensitive for the press and citizens. On the other hand, we understand the society-nature relationship as a complex, conflictive and dynamic nature relationship, since society and natural conditions are always in the process of transformation. Society has different social actors with particular interests (state, companies, organizations, etc.) amidst political, economic and cultural factors. The society-nature relationship is dynamic because societies in each historical period have transformed the natural environment in various ways to obtain

the necessary elements to survive. The conflict between society and nature occurs when the different social actors have different interests or signify in different ways about natural resources. These bids build conflicts where the participating actors fight for their presence on political and media agendas.

Environmental communication is closely linked to environmental education. We understand the task of educating as teaching guidelines for responsible behaviour to those who do not have certain information. In this line, environmental communication is nothing more than transmitting, from a specialized point of view, information about the environment to citizens. With communication and environmental education, people are trained with a critical sense, participatory and involved in what happens in their environment, and contributes to facilitate decision-making and the step to action, essential to stop the deterioration of the planet. Environmental communication allows citizens to obtain basic information and, also, learn to search for more data to better understand what happens in the environment. With greater awareness, people can decide how they are involved to protect it, in relation to changes in habits and attitudes that impact the environment, especially in relation to consumption. Our way of consuming is one of the points that we must transform to become a sustainable society. Environmental communication goes far beyond the simple dissemination of content related to the environment. It has the same objective as environmental education, to which is added an informative, awareness-raising and transforming function. Sustainability must be perceived as an

aspiration that we can achieve through social transformation and responsible consumption. What better way to work to achieve this as communicators and citizens than by taking charge of the communication of projects committed to the environment?

Figure: The imperfect triangle



An idea to think about the communicational strategy and the public is the metaphor of the imperfect triangle. At the base, the organization and the public, and in the middle misinformation, ignorance and ignorance. At the top of the triangle, the information that is produced. This is an incomplete suggestion in communication terms, but it allows us to think about how much there is to develop and build links between environmental organizations and citizens.

### Legislation on the environment in San Luis

On the Argentina Ambiental website (<http://argentiniambiental.com/legislacion/san-luis/>) we can see some legislative initiatives of the province of San Luis.

Law 1023 - Promise of Environmental Care (2020) implies the express

commitment of students in the care and conservation of the environment. The promise formula will be established each year by the Enforcement Authority and must contemplate, in addition to the environmental characteristics of each region of the Province, the following: understanding of the environmental concept, members of the environment, the severity of the problems that affect it and the importance of environmental care for the quality of life of present and future generations.

Meanwhile, Law 1007 on the Promotion of Mountaineering and Protection of Trails of Historic Use and Paths of the Sierras (2019) indicates that "Mountaineering" should be understood as a sport and activity of cultural and socio-recreational interest, recognizing its influence and contribution positive in exploration, scientific, environmental, educational and human development tasks. The rule in its Article 2 recognizes the "Mountaineers" as athletes, their freedom to decide to carry out their practice independently or associated and that their activity is governed by the following principles: a) Respect nature and care for it; b) Respect the idiosyncrasies of the inhabitants, their beliefs and culture; c) Respect fossil and archaeological relics; d) Respect one's own life and that of others with a commitment to collaborate as much as possible.

Law 9841 refers to the Water Master Plan 2012-2025 (2013). The Art. 2 said that the administration, protection, use and care of water are declared a priority and strategic state policy for progress and economic-social inclusion, in harmony with development. The Art. 4 refer that is stated that the Inter-ministerial Commission must formulate an Annual Executive Plan, understood as the operational and strategic



expression of the policies defined in the Master Plan. It will include the activities planned for the entire year, and must be reported to the Provincial Legislature on April 1 of each year.

Forest Activity (2011) is about current legislation indicates that forest use is understood as the rational use of the forest resource, destined to obtain wood in all its forms and by rational use to that which does not generate processes of degradation of the environment.

Law 9851 on Genetic and Biochemical Resources of Provincial Biological Diversity (2013) establishes in its Article 1, the public domain of the Province of San Luis on the heritage and genetic and biochemical resources, whether aquatic, terrestrial or aerial, of the local wild biodiversity established in its territory. In its Article 2, it says that all scientific and technical organizations, both public and private, that carry out projects that involve the study, commercial or industrial exploitation and use of the genetic and / or biochemical resources of the Province, must have the prior authorization from the Application Authority.

### **Environmental information**

Environmental communication promotes social decision-making processes on the management of ecosystems involving the actors related to a particular problem, the appropriation of responsibilities of groups that benefit from these natural systems and the cooperation of key actors and the population. In general, in order to negotiate solutions and influence the policies that affects this problem, deepening the search for sectorial agreements (Aparicio Cid, 2016). All public information that is available and has a guiding and

educational sense is beneficial or useful for citizens. Environmental information is a particular type of government information and offering it is an essential requirement for the exercise of citizenship. On the other hand, informed citizen participation is also a mechanism for integrating the concerns and knowledge of citizens in public policy decisions that affect the environment. The wealth of perspectives and dimensions that converge in the construction of the notion of environmental communication opens up multiple possibilities to establish a conceptual definition based on the value given to certain attributes or components (Aparicio Cid, 2016)

The website of the Secretary of State for the Environment and Parks of the San Luis government (<http://www.medioambiente.sanluis.gov.ar/>) and the laws in force show initiatives that are currently being carried out by the governmental body such as the Inspection, Environment Program, Provincial Parks, the Provincial Mining Directorate and the Recycling Agency.

The Inspection program groups together Environmental Impact, Hazardous Waste and Agrochemicals.

- The Environment Program regulates fishing permits, biodiversity, the Morro Basin, Renewable Energies and the Awareness Policy.
- The Provincial Parks Program. The website highlights that “provincial parks, with their careful landscape design, allow you to relax and enjoy nature, in the middle of the urban environment. These pleasant green shelters offer you recreation, events and proposals for all tastes and ages”.
- The Provincial Mining Directorate brings together current legislation,

administrative forms and administrative fees.

- The Urban Solid Waste Recycling and Treatment entity whose objective is the administration of the different plants and transfer centers in the province of San Luis, Argentina.

### Public Hearings

The Regulation of Public Hearings for environmental issues establishes in its Article N° 1 that "any natural or legal person may participate in public hearings, prior registration in the Registry enabled for this purpose. Article N° 2 states that "legal persons participate through their duly accredited legal representatives or proxies, admitting only one speaker on their behalf". In Article 3 the norm says that "at the hearings there may be an audience, which will be made up of those people who attend the hearing without prior registration, being able to participate by formulating a question in writing, with prior authorization from the President of the hearing, in accordance with the provisions of Article 14. In Article 4 the rule states that "the convening authority may by itself, or at the request of the participants, invite witnesses and experts, national or foreign, to participate as speakers in public hearings, in order to facilitate understanding of the subject matter of the hearing ... Article 5 states that "the Ombudsman of the Province, the officials of the Executive and Legislative, provincial and municipal Powers, as well as to witnesses and experts. Exhibitors must communicate to the convening authority their intention to participate in order to enable the complete preparation of the agenda". The norm does not allow the direct participation in the character of

exhibitors of the citizens, since it supposes that these are represented by the authorities.

### Conclusions:

Despite good intentions, public information on the environment offered by the government to citizens is still scarce and their main communication channels are the website of the Secretary of the Environment and Parks of San Luis and the website where they are concentrated national level the environmental provisions of each province

(<http://argentinambiental.com/legislacion/san-luis/>)

It is also the official media such as the government news agency (ANSL) that sporadically expose news about the environment and ecology of San Luis. There is little and poor interaction between government officials and citizens on environmental issues. On the one hand, the government does not provide more information and on the other hand, it does not promote the participation of citizens in public affairs, in a general framework of apathy and disinterest.

These issues, briefly examined at the local level, are part of the global theme and agenda. Local problems are often global problems and the processes of cultural globalization also raise questions and strongly affect the local dimension in a more connected world.

Citizen participation on a wide variety of issues in general, and on environmental issues in particular, is quite poor and limited. Citizens today are more concerned about the COVID 19 pandemic, job loss, falling wages, rising inflation in Argentina, etc. The website of the Secretary of State for the Environment and Parks of the government of San Luis and the laws in

force, show initiatives that are currently carried out by the government body such as the Inspection, Environment Program, Provincial Parks and the Entity of Recycling. However, it is increasingly common for organizations to include issues related to caring for the environment in their agenda of relations with various publics and the media and, furthermore, these issues can be inserted into broader policies that encompass sustained development of each country, region and city. Communicational competence linked to environmental communication management in organizations generates a communication intervention aimed at promoting changes towards healthier habits for the environment and broadens the knowledge of citizens. Promising lines of action for engagement with the public, even absent in government initiatives, are social responsibility campaigns, social marketing strategies, opinion polls; feasibility and environmental feasibility analyses; the design and management of environmental communication strategies and plans; environmental management models; action programs with the community; institutional environmental quality audits; communication campaigns on environmental issues; among others.

The road is not simple or easy. The academy must generate more concepts and tools so that the administrators of the environmental organisms can build and guide their communication strategies aimed at providing more information and knowledge to the citizens. And from the communication also promote the interest and participation of citizens in environmental and ecological issues. Societies in which citizens participate in public affairs are closer to producing

progressive transformations in their communities.

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