

Open Government Partnership – Argentina Action Plan

Pedro Janices and Natalia Aguerre
Oficina Nacional de Tecnologías de la Información
Av. Roque Sáenz Peña 511, Ciudad de Buenos Aires
(C1035AAA), República Argentina
(54-11) 4331-4962
onti@jefatura.gob.ar

ABSTRACT

In 2009, Iberoamerican countries signed the Charter of Citizen Participation in Public Administration. Well in advance in 2003, the Argentinean Government issued a decree ensuring freedom of information. Based on such decree and fulfilling the commitments assumed when subscribing the Charter, Argentina recently developed an Open Government Action Plan. This paper presents the background of the work carried out by multi-sectoral actors, including government agencies, universities, non-government organizations and citizens, for the development of such plan, as well as examples of the initiatives defined by the plan.

Categories and Subject Descriptors

E.0 [Data – General]: Data Standards; H3.5 [Information Storage and Retrieval – Online Information Services]: Data sharing; H3.7 [Information Storage and Retrieval – Digital Libraries]: Standards

H.4.2 [Information Systems Applications]: Type of systems – e-government applications; K.4 [Computers and Society]: Public Policy Issues; K.4.1 [Public Policy Issues]: Private Sector Transparency and Ethical Consumption

General Terms

Management, Design, Human Factors

Keywords

Open Government; Public Policies; Government Action Plan; Argentina Action Plan

1. INTRODUCTION

A recent document [1] about Argentina formulates:

"Information is power because is the basis of knowledge and this is crucial for action. Therefore, the refusal to provide information, concealment or distortion prevents certain realities to be known or disseminated. Indeed, governments of any sign naturally tend to manage the flow of public information, but this trend must be offset by a systematic requirement of transparency in governance by the citizens".

The statement above reveals that public information as well as transparency and citizenry are linked by a core value prevailing in all republican states which is the right to information.

Permission to make digital or hard copies of all or part of this work for personal or classroom use is granted without fee provided that copies are not made or distributed for profit or commercial advantage and that copies bear this notice and the full citation on the first page. To copy otherwise, or republish, to post on servers or to redistribute to lists, requires prior specific permission and/or a fee.
ICEGOV2013, October 22-25, 2013, Seoul, Korea
Copyright 2013 ACM 978-1-4503-2456-4/00/0010 ...\$15.00.

Constraining such right would mean denying the possibility to exert it and therefore denying a basic and prioritized human right.

The Iberoamerican Charter of Citizen Participation in Public Administration [2], approved by CLAD [3] in June 2009 and adopted in Portugal by the Iberoamerican Summit of Heads of State and Government in December 2009 was a milestone in the recognition of citizens' rights. The agreement also includes political commitments in this field, producing radical transformations in the way states and citizens interact, but also in public management.

Subscription to the Charter obliges the Iberoamerican governments to apply Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in processes enabling citizens to exercise their right to interact and communicate virtually with public administrations. Therefore, substantial promotion of e-Government development without restrictions or discriminations is required. Free access to information held by public institutions is a prerequisite to practice such participation; including accessing to files and records with pre-defined deadlines for government responses as well as receiving information in accessible formats.

The Charter creates a framework for the Iberoamerican States to adapt their guidance to the idiosyncrasies, history, culture, legal tradition and institutional environment of their societies. However, the document at any time used the term "open government" and in view of this is that we propose rethinking the concept and expand it to "open state." Originally proposed by President Obama when he took his first term in government, the "open government" idea is not compatible as we understand it in the Latin American or European context. Speaking of "government" is referring to the exercise of the political leadership of the states or the exercise of state power. Thus, we believe on the importance of analyzing the definition of the term and its usage. According to our understanding, talking about "open government" implies constraining the principles defined in the Iberoamerican Charter to the exercise of government and not the social, economic, political and coercive sovereign organization formed by a set of non-voluntary institutions that has the power to regulate the national life in a given territory. Extending the concept of "open government" to "open state" enables us to questioning why not to open the other branches of government or Non-Government Organizations recognized by the government in which the State has a share hold.

Regardless the discussion above, "open government" implies the possibility for citizens to acquire new roles in their relationship with the State, proposing a new social paradigm oriented to finding a full democracy founded on the rights of information, participation, association and expression on public issues. In summary, it refers to the general right of people to participate in governance, both collectively and individually.

2. OPEN GOVERNMENT ACTION PLAN

Since 2003, Argentina embraced openness in government, as declared by the Iberoamerican Charter in 2009. Signed by President Nestor Kirchner, the Decree 1172/2003 [4] declared the opening of the information hold the State and the right of any citizen to access any type of information. The Decree also defines the conditions that State representatives must fulfill, including deadlines, to respond to enquiries formulated by the public or social organizations.

This decree paved the way for Argentina to start a cultural transformation in society and in the State. After the Decree cornerstone, the Government is working on the development of the proposed Argentina Open Government Action Plan together with the multi-sectoral actors. This plan is based on a process of consultation meetings conducted collaboratively and horizontally in line with the principles of open government. The activity was carried out in the framework of the Working Group of the Argentinean Digital Agenda for Open Government. Various actors participated in the activity, like government agencies, universities, and NGOs involved in the theme.

For the formulation of the Action Plan, a virtual forum was also enabled allowing open and federal participation. The aim of the forum and the Working Group was to exchange experiences and to define working lines and work proposals that were collected and considered as inputs for the formulation of specific public policies and actions, and later included into the Plan.

As a result of the initiatives described above, policies for the development of the Information Society are included in the Argentinean Digital Agenda, which promotes the establishment of a Multi-sectoral cabinet responsible for leveraging the potential and benefits of the Information and Knowledge Society. This tool enables implementing e-Government initiatives, deploying infrastructure, promoting digital inclusion, accessibility and technological development, all part of a comprehensive policy. Example initiatives include:

- *“Connect Equity” Program* - seeks to restore and add value to public schools aiming at reducing the digital, social and educational divides throughout the whole Argentine territory. The program includes the use of netbooks in both - the school and at home, so as to achieve an impact on the daily lives of families.
- *Open Digital Television* – aims at planning the transition from analogue to digital TV in order to ensure progressive and free adherence for all users. This program delivers an open service, meaning it can be seen throughout the country without making profit from the new services and benefits offered. Gratuity is guaranteed through the My Digital TV Plan.
- *GINGA* - is open software, created based on open standards, which facilitates the execution of interactive applications on any computer or TV receiver with digital tuner, regardless its brand or model. It consists of software applications that allow extending and complementing the information on the subject matter of the TV program that is been watched.
- *The Audio-visual Repository of Argentinean Universal Content (BACUA)* - is an easily accessible digitized network comprising audio-visual materials contributed by the different actors of local and regional audiovisual field. BACUA aims to provide audiovisual content of universal interest, both to the new dissemination channels as well as existing ones.

- *The National Telecommunication Plan “Connected Argentina”* - is a five-year strategic plan defining the infrastructure and telecommunications services for the entire country. Its main action pillars refer to public investments in infrastructure deployment, equipment and services having among its main objectives to reduce the cost of Internet broadband services, television and video, and to expand the delivery of such services based on equal terms to all inhabitants of the country.
- *“My Computer” Program* – promotes the production of high-quality computer equipment at a reduced cost favoring an increase in connectivity and renewal of existing stock. It also implements a policy aiming at building public and free training centers providing access to computers based on social fees proposed and managed by social organizations.

To carry out public policies that improve the quality of life of citizens, the Government has implemented courses of action in the field of e-government to improve public services. The various government portals are considered as the main tools to establish direct communication with citizens. Examples of such portals include:

- *National Ministry of Social Development Portal* [5] – establishes two-way online interactions with the public and provides access to public information from multiple channels (online form, social networking and free call center). Informational services include publishing information and public data about purchases and contracts, registry of audiences and organizations, procedural guidelines for accessing public policies, and training materials and information, as well as informational services using interactive maps geo-referencing over 1600 centres and organizations.
- *Social Security Administration Portal* [6] – publishes all information related to social security services. The portal design enables the visitor to access the most 15 accessed services in less than 3 clicks and complies with accessibility standards. The portal includes links to social media, including Facebook, Twitter, Flickr y YouTube, as well as to the Director’s blog.
- *Argentina Government Portal* [7] – one stop government portal containing official information about Argentina, and a directory of public institutions, among other information and services.
- *Argentina Shares Portal* [8] – one stop portal consolidating information and public policies from different Ministries targeted to the youth. It publishes information about fellowships, labour opportunities and special government programs offered as tools for them to build their future.
- *Prices in their Site Portal* [9] – website that enables to compare prices offered by big supermarkets.
- *National Educational Map Portal* [10] – a geo-referenced information system to manage and monitor educational programs.
- *With You on the Web Portal* [11] – a website providing informational and advisory services for children and youth about new technologies, and personal data protection.
- *Healthy Internet Portal* [12] – aims to inform and warn about children sexual exploitation over the Internet, but at the same time, bring peace through prevention and education.
- *Live Trains Portal* [13] – an application for mobile devices enabling users to consult about the arrival time of trains to the stations.

- *Citizen's Site* [14] – aims at further increasing the level of transparency of public management by providing access to public accounts. The site provides information related to the execution of the national budget, explained in simple and clear language.
- *Public Transport Portal* [15] – provides easy access to all information on the contributions that the National Government makes to the public transport system, including buses, trains and subways, specifying contributions for each of the lines and individual companies.
- *Argentina Purchases Portal* [16] – through the portal, public institutions can hire persons, cooperatives, and other organisms enrolled in a special national registry.
- *Tourist Information and Statistics System (SIET)* [17] – a tool consolidating a process of interactions between political and technical teams of the tourism sector in order to achieve effective management and interpretation of information towards tourism knowledge generation, aiming at a more efficient planning and decision making.
- *Local Government Portal* [18] – provides government authorities, officers and employees of more than two thousand municipalities, updates, training, statistics and case studies to support government tasks, provide inputs for decision-making and support the professionalization of municipal workforce.
- *ICIC-National Critical Infrastructure Cyber-security Information* [19] – promotes the creation and adoption of a specific regulatory framework that encourages the identification and protection of strategic and critical infrastructure of the National Public Sector.
- *National Survey on Access and Use of ICT (ENTIC) in Households and by Persons* [20] – provides information on the uses and disclosures of ICT by households and people in Argentina.
- *Argentine System of Legal Information (INFOJUS)* – provides open, unrestricted and free access to an extensive legal database.
- *Legislative Information (INFOLEG)* – a database of legal documents, it coordinates the collection and updating of national legislation, rules and interpretive history.
- *Public Hearing* – enables citizen participation in the decision-making process through an institutional space in which all those who may be affected, express their knowledge or experience and present their individual, group or collective perspective on the decision to be taken.
- *Management of Interests* – obliges government officials to publish the meetings they have with subjects whose object is to influence the exercise of their duties and / or decisions, usually known as lobbyists, allowing to exercise effective control over governance. The obligation applies from the President of the Republic to national director level.
- *Participatory Development of Standards* - through non-binding consultation, involves stakeholders and the public in the development of administrative rules and bills to be raised by the National Executive to the National Congress.
- *Open Meetings of Service Regulators* – allows citizens to participate in the board meetings of such entities so they can be informed about how decisions affecting users are made.
- *American Federated Network of Scientific Documentation Repositories* – signed in November 2012 by Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Chile, Ecuador, Peru, Venezuela and El Salvador, implements free and open Access to all scientific information and research produced by professionals financed by public funds.
- *Journal of Access to Information* - series of publications aiming at informing the public about information of general public interest, which in many cases was intentionally prohibited. The publications are delivered to public libraries across the country, with the aim of ensuring a massive reach. The first publication was the Mosconi Report, prepared by the technical team in charge of the operation of the company Yacimientos Petroliferos Fiscales (YPF). Currently the "Rattenbach Report" and the "Malvinas" book are being produced. They open arms forces' files about the South Atlantic conflict.
- *National Procurement Office* – ensures that public procurements are conducted in all stages in a context of transparency, based on the publicity and dissemination of the proceedings, through the use of ICTs so to increase the efficiency of processes and to facilitate access by the society to information about state management in recruitment and to ensure real and effective participation of the community enabling social control over procurements.

Through the Digital Agenda Forum (Foro de Agenda Digital, FAD) the Government promotes citizen participation, transparency and access to public information involving the State, civil society organizations and main actors from various fields committed to these issues. In the Forum, stakeholders define by consensus the most important issues in their areas by sharing experiences and proposing work action plans in order to be taken up in the production of specific public actions and public policies. Examples of such initiatives include:

- *Argentinean Network of Participatory Budget* [21]– a public tool supporting, promoting, strengthening and extending the participatory budget practice.
- *Community Integration Centres* - are public spaces of community integration, built throughout the country, for the meeting and the participation of different actors working in an inter-sectoral and participatory in order to promote local development towards social inclusion and improvements of the quality of community life.
- *Commitment Program Citizen Charter* – its main objective is to improve the relationship between public administration and citizens, especially through the quality of services it provides. The program contributes to administrative simplification, e-government development, sustainability, innovation, participation, assessment, employee participation and involvement, improved management systems, transparency and accountability

3. CONCLUSIONS

In order to facilitate access to public information, promote active government transparency and provide excellent services, the Government has included the following initiatives in its agenda: 1) Digital Signature, 2) Public Argentinean Software, 3) National Programme for Critical Infrastructure and Cyber Security Information and Healthy Internet; 4) Electronic Procurement System, 4) Paperless Administration, 5) Extended ICT Survey, 6) Creation of Public Data Portal, 7) Open Government Best Practices Manual, 8) New Procedures Portal, 9) State Maps, 10) Training Plan for Access to Public Information, 11) Matrix of Data Processing, 12) Bill for the Judicial Reform, 13) Federalization of the Digital Agenda Working Groups, 14) Public

Data Hackathon, and 15) Citizen Commitment Letter Improvement Program.

From the State perspective, optimizing the information about its outcomes means making its management more transparent. Therefore, every effort made to increase or improve the quality of information should serve to improve the coexistence between citizens and the set of institutions that have the authority and the power to establish the rules governing a society, along with those other agencies and binding companies.

4. REFERENCES

- [1] Plan Fénix, “El Derecho a la Información: Una Vieja Asignatura Pendiente”, 2012, Facultad de Ciencias Económicas, Universidad de Buenos Aires.
- [2] CLAD, “Carta Iberoamericana de Participación Ciudadana en la Gestión Pública”, available at: <http://www.clad.org/documentos/declaraciones/carta-iberoamericana-de-participacion-ciudadana>, 2009.
- [3] Centro Latinoamericano de Administración para el Desarrollo (CLAD), www.clad.org
- [4] Poder Ejecutivo de la República Argentina, Decreto 1172/2003, available at: <http://www.boletinoficial.gov.ar/Inicio/Index.castle>.
- [5] National Ministry of Social Development Portal, available at: www.desarrollosocial.gob.ar
- [6] Social Security Administration Portal, available at: www.anses.gob.ar.
- [7] Argentina Government Portal, available at: www.argentina.gob.ar
- [8] Argentina Shares Portal, available at: www.argentinacomparte.gob.ar
- [9] Prices in their Site Portal, available at: www.preciosensusitio.gob.ar
- [10] National Educational Map Portal, available at: www.mapaeducativo.gob.ar
- [11] With You on the Web Portal, available at: www.convosenlaweb.gob.ar
- [12] Healthy Internet Portal, available at: www.internetsano.gob.ar
- [13] Live Trains Portal, available at: www.trenes.minterior.gob.ar
- [14] Citizen’s Site, available at: www.sitiodelciudadano.mecon.gov.ar
- [15] Public Transport Portal, available at: www.mininterior.gob.ar
- [16] Argentina Purchases Portal, available at: www.argentinacompra.gob.ar
- [17] Tourist Information and Statistics System (SIET), available at: www.siet.desarrollo.gob.ar
- [18] Local Government Portal, available at: www.gobiernolocal.gob.ar
- [19] ICIC-National Critical Infrastructure Cybersecurity Information, available at: www.icic.gob.ar
- [20] National Survey on Access and Use of ICT (Entic) in Households and by Persons, available at: www.indec.gob.ar
- [21] Argentinean Network of Participatory Budget, available at: <http://www.rapp.gob.ar/>
- [22] Argentine System of Legal Information (INFOJUS), available at: <http://www.infojus.gob.ar>.
- [23] Legislative Information (INFOLEG), available at: <http://www.infoleg.gob.ar>.