

The Mediator's Dilemma: Clientelism Or Political Representation In Argentina's Political Landscape

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Abstract

The article aims to examine and question the category of “clientelism” in its instrumental meaning , in light of the empirical study of the activities of political mediators in a province in northern Argentina. Through a qualitative methodological approach, the daily activity of leaders with different elective positions is studied . It shows how the role of mediators not only involves individuals and particular groups, but also social and territorial collectives, the object of the distribution of public goods that produce collective benefits. It is argued that the choice of the recipients of the goods hardly coincides with the simple cost-benefit evaluation that the instrumental notion of clientelism supposes , since it rather implies a work of reconstruction and production of the specific problems of the members of the electoral bases . The way of distributing resources is filtered by the person of the mediator .

Keywords : clientelism; political representation ; political mediators; Argentina.

Introduction

The activity of political mediators, brokers or middlemen has been studied mainly through the category of “clientelism”, which involves the distribution of goods and services in a particularistic and personalized way towards the so-called territorial

“bases”, in exchange for their electoral recognition , in the form of “votes”, in a relationship of unequal exchange derived from the privileged position of the mediator in terms of access to the distributed resources – although lower or higher levels of inequality can be observed . In contemporary literature , the notion of clientelism has adopted a use increasingly linked to its instrumental dimension, which has been questioned and made more complex by different authors, pointing out, for example, either the dimensions of political representation (Auyero , 1997, 2001) or the moral aspects involved (Frederic, 2004; Vommaro and Quiros, 2011).

This criticism has led to the recovery of the conceptions of clientelism, as formulated by previous studies , which considered the affective and moral dimensions (Wolf, 1966; Pitt-Rivers, 1954; Campbell, 1964 ; Scott, 1976), as well as a discourse or narrative that assumes the existence of egalitarian relationships, guided by selflessness (Foster, 1963; Briquet, 1995; Mauss , 2009), ¹ as constitutive of clientelistic relationships, giving them meaning and legitimacy .

Client relationships involve the simultaneous exchange of different types of resources : on the one hand, instrumental and economic resources , as well as political ones (support, loyalty, votes, protection) and, on the other, promises of reciprocity, solidarity and loyalty. According to Eisenstadt and Roniger (1984), both types of resources are never exchanged separately, but always in some combination that includes each of them , in a kind of “ package deal ”. The authors especially recover the Pitt -Rivers approach , which observes the moral equality involved in the patron- client relationship, beyond the differences in power. relationships coexist with their definition in terms of mutual intimacy , moral and emotional obligations - as well as other interpersonal relationships. ²

This article is situated in this conceptual line and proposes a discussion with contemporary works that, in some way, have ignored the non- instrumental dimensions of clienteles relationships.

It is debated with the instrumental perspectives of political exchanges, based on a dichotomy between material goods and programmatic goods - worldviews, ideology, party identification, general conceptions about national and local politics . Explicitly or implicitly, different studies on clientelism or those that use this category in its instrumental sense ³ (Cornelius , 2004 ; Brusco , Nazareno and Stokes , 2004 ; Stokes et al . , 2013 ; Gibson and Calvo , 2000 ; Calvo and Murillo , 2004 ; Nichter , 2008 ; Epstein , 2009 ; Schröter, 2010) assume that material goods replace programmatic ones (Kitschelt and Wilkinson , 2007 ; 2012) .

The division between material goods and programmatic goods (Kitschelt and Wilkinson, 2007; 2012) contrasts clientelist ties between citizens and politicians with programmatic ties , when representatives produce goods according to universalist criteria that are accessible to all voters , regardless of whether or not they voted for them. Clientelist parties are based on particularist ties, which they create through the distribution of material goods and the control of their voters' behavior, as opposed to programmatic parties, which establish ties with the general public or with general categories of people through the free offer of programmatic goods (Brusco , Nazareno and Stokes, 2004).

In contrast to this view, it is argued that , even when the circulation of goods is carried out in a particularistic and personalized way , mediators do so according to

² The elements of interpersonal obligation – loyalty, reciprocity, attachment □□between patrons and clients can be very strong or very weak – as in modern political machines – but they are present (Eisenstadt and Roniger , 1984) .

³ Some works refer specifically to “ vote -buying ” (Brusco , Nazareno and Stokes , 2004), considered as a dimension of clientelism in which money or, more commonly, minor consumer goods are offered to voters in exchange for their electoral support. Lodola (2010) differentiates two main forms of vote buying: the personalized offer of material goods and the allocation of monetary resources through social assistance programs .

programmatic criteria and general political visions . It is shown that the tasks of mediation and representation carried out involve both particular and collective problems, involving individuals, as well as social and territorial groups, the object of the distribution of public goods that produce collective benefits. Thus, the vision that the political mediator is exclusively devoted to the resolution of particular and individual problems, which involve only minor consumer goods , becomes more complex . At the same time, it is suggested that, beyond the type of good distributed, mediators always play a role as representatives and implement their own political “program .”

The above calls into question the capacity of the category of “clientelism” as a tool to identify a special type of political link, clearly differentiated from others, or suggests the need to reformulate the concept, so that it allows for the identification of these “ programmatic” or symbolic aspects that are always present.

As an empirical reference, the mediation activities of various political leaders with elected positions in Santiago del Estero , a province in northern Argentina whose political dynamics have been interpreted , in academic studies and in the media , from the category of “ clientelism” are studied .⁴ The case is significant for studying political relations in contexts in which the ruling party controls a large part of the provincial economic resources , in an economic structure whose main employer is the State .⁵

The work of political leaders is analysed in their simultaneous role as mediators and representatives. The activity of political mediators is never limited to reflecting the objective problems and preferences of their bases, but rather they transform and retranslate them in different areas from where they originate, contributing to their production⁶ and even creating new demands where they do not exist (Laclau, 2005).

A qualitative methodological strategy was chosen and in -depth interview and non-participant observation techniques were used , thus addressing the mediation tasks of three provincial deputies , one national deputy , one vice - governor, three mayors and two councilors. The intentional selection of leaders with different elective positions

⁴ Politics in the “Argentine north” appears to be clientelist and authoritarian, as opposed to the democratic politics of more socioeconomically developed districts. For academic studies on provincial politics, see : Gibson (2005, 2012), Gervasoni (2010, 2011), Giraudy (2011). On the media, see, for example: the articles in La Nación (2010) and DERF (2011), in which the governor of Salta responds to the statements of a national political leader on the poor quality of the vote in the poorest provinces. Specifically on Santiago del Estero, see: La Nación (2013), which refers to the “traditional clientelism of the north of the country”; La Voz (2013); La Nación (2012) and Clarín (2010), where the former governor Juárez and main leader of provincial Justicialism is characterized as the “face of clientelist politics .”

⁵ In 2009, the proportion of public employees per thousand inhabitants was 50 , which is higher than the total proportion for the country , which is 45 per thousand inhabitants. This has not changed substantially in recent years, since in 1990 it was 45 and in 1999 it was 48 per thousand (Secretariat of Provinces, Ministry of the Interior, 2013).

⁶ It is in the nature of representation that the representative is not a mere passive agent, but must add something to the interest he represents (Laclau , 2005) .

It allows us to show how, beyond the formal competencies of each position, they carry out similar tasks , which involve territorial mediation activities .

The research on national legislators in Brazil (Bezerra, 1999) and France (Abélès, 2001) is taken as a reference . These studies study the daily activities of parliamentarians and point out that they are not limited to their formal powers . As representatives of their electoral bases or their constituencies, they deal with different types of requests, relating to territorial groups, requests of a particular nature and also individual cases.

The concept of mediator used refers to a political position and function , rather than to a specific political figure situated at the base of the political hierarchy . The study is not limited, therefore, to local actors and considers those who occupy different positions between the “centre” and the territory. In this sense, the text differs , to a certain extent, from the academic literature in terms of identifying who the “ mediators” are, although at the same time it is convergent in that, according to the empirical study carried out, the political leaders studied carry out territorial mediation tasks similar to those described in

the literature . In this way , both a councillor and a provincial and even national deputy build their political support in a certain territory, which involves personal contact with their electoral bases – something that is also observed in the case of mayors. The work even includes a vice - governor , who despite the hierarchy of his position , personally contacts citizens from different neighbourhoods, in order to build his territorial political base .⁷

The article chooses to speak of political mediators and not of patrons, as it is considered more pertinent to account for relationships of a more egalitarian nature than those involved in patronage relationships , in a context of electoral competition and in which mediators do not control resources nor hold a monopoly on access to them⁸ (Scott , 1972 ; Silverman , 1977 ; Eisenstadt and Roniger, 1984) .

⁷ This approach differs on one point from that argued by Stokes et al . (2013), who observe different types of political behavior depending on the positions held in the party, such as party leaders and intermediaries . The aim of this article is to show that the distribution of goods is always simultaneously material and programmatic, which is an aspect shared by political mediators regardless of the position they hold. However, at a later stage , with a larger number of cases , it would be relevant to study the differences between the ways of exercising the role of mediators, according to the different types of resources that leaders possess depending on the position and hierarchy they occupy in the party .

⁸ Unlike intermediaries, the role of patrons is critical and exclusive (Silverman, 1977). Scott (1972) argues that the patron is by definition of a higher rank than his client, since he operates with resources that he himself owns or controls directly ; the figures of middle - man or broker do not specify the relative status of the actor with respect to others in the transaction and function as agents without controlling the thing transferred . In turn , the same author identifies variations, nuances, in the balance of power between patron and client, according to the services that the latter can provide and the degree of need of the former, and observes how the introduction of competitive elections in Southeast Asia increased the pressures to distribute tangible benefits downwards, reversing the balance of exchange so that it favored clients more than before (Scott, 1972). In contrast, patronage relationships are based on a strong element of inequality and power differences, in which the patron monopolizes certain positions of crucial importance to clients. (Eisenstadt and Roniger, 1984).

As for the goods involved in the exchanges, the classification proposed by Offerlé (2011) is used, according to the origin and destination of what is offered. The author differentiates between private and public goods, as well as divisible and indivisible goods, obtaining four categories, of which two are used : those that classify public goods , 9 being able to identify the divisible ones (personal favors, decorations, public aid, administrative or elective positions, threats of dismissals) and the indivisible ones (offer of political aid , public policies) .

Finally , it is important to place this work within the framework of studies on clientelism in the Argentine case , a topic that received impetus from the transformations that political parties experienced in the new democratic period that began in 1983 and, fundamentally, from the process of neoliberal economic reforms of the 1990s. Peronism will be the party that receives the greatest interest , from the transformation of the forms of connection with its electoral bases , which is increasingly associated with the circulation of state assets .

Auyero (1997, 2001) has studied the role of Peronist mediators, observing a transformation of Peronist identity that is increasingly linked to assistance and problem - solving . The growing importance of clientelist ties as a way of relating between Peronism and its electoral bases will not mean the disappearance of ties of a symbolic nature , but rather a transformation of their very nature .

Levitsky (2003) has described how the Justicialist Party redefined its relationship with the labor movement, transforming the mechanisms of participation of the unions and replacing them with ties to territorial organizations based on patronage . Its mutation into a clientelist party allowed it to adapt to the processes of deindustrialization and market reform of the 1990s in Argentina .

The dismantling of wage relations , a product of neoliberal reforms, meant that a mass of citizens began to live in conditions of poverty and precariousness , increasing their

participation in political subsistence networks. Through the figure of the “hunter,”¹⁰ Merklen (2005) has addressed the increasingly pragmatic political behavior of the popular sectors, coexisting with their status as citizens¹¹ – which is built on their territorial registration and a certain

⁹ In Offerlé's (2011) categorization, two categories of private goods are also observed: divisible ones – money, private jobs, health goods – and indivisible ones – collective favors or threats of collective sanctions.

¹⁰ Individuals act “according to the model of the hunter, who travels through the territory and institutions in search of a ‘good’ prey: a job, a subsidy, something to steal or sell” (Merklen, 2005: 86). This figure is opposed to that of the farmer, who can foresee the future and organize his resources accordingly, as a result of a stable participation in the world of work, typical of the wage-based society, which is entering into crisis as a result of market reforms (Merklen, 2005).

¹¹ This article does not specifically analyse the participation of “clients” in political networks, but their conception as “citizens” is a priori consistent with the conception of mediators as political representatives.

form of relationship with the State, marked by conflict over the distribution of social assistance (Merklen, 2005).

These transformations can be inserted into a more general phenomenon, whereby it is increasingly common for political parties to become governing parties, as their bases and bureaucracy lose relevance, ceasing to be mediators between the State and society to become actors integrated into the State (Katz and Mair, 1997). These transformations have been observed in the case of Argentine political parties (Scherlis, 2009). For this reason, it has been considered that the links between partisan actors are of a clientelist nature (Scherlis, 2009), so that behaviors mediated by material rewards would take the place of partisan identities.

The empirical evidence presented comes from a context in which the ruling party controls a large part of the provincial economic resources and the way of doing politics is

especially geared towards facilitating access to state resources. Likewise, it is a context in which party identities no longer seem to be the main organizers of the provincial political space (Ortiz, 2009), as shown by the access to government, since 2005, of a front led by a governor from the Radical Party , but which includes among its main allies most of the members of the Justicialist Party, which had governed the province since 1983. In this sense, the contribution that is intended to be made is to show that, even when party traditions lose relevance as the main organizers of politics, this does not imply the absence of programmatic links, even if state assets become the main bargaining chips in political relations .

In short, the hypothesis or argument presented can be formulated as follows : the distribution of public goods by political mediators is always guided by symbolic and/or programmatic criteria, and the dimension of political representation is always present . The first part of the article seeks to show that their action is not limited to solving individual and particular problems , but also collective ones – although not in the way assumed by the abstract category of citizenship, but linked to specific social groups and territorial collectives . The next section develops the second part of the argument, showing that, beyond the type of good – divisible or indivisible – and the type of beneficiary or collective – , its distribution is always by programmatic criteria . Towards the end, the implications of the development carried out in terms of the category of “clientelism” are reflected upon in order to identify a special type of political link and the need to reformulate it.

The daily activity of political mediators: between the individual, the particular and the collective A study of the daily activities of various political leaders from different towns in the province of Santiago del Estero shows that much of it consists of acting as intermediaries between different citizens or groups of citizens and various state departments at the local , provincial and even national levels . They play the role of information transmission belt , facilitators of procedures and guarantors of the channeling of public resources to citizens. The role of mediators involves both the attention of individual “cases” and participation in the provision of services and the execution of public works. In his study on the role of a “puntero” in the Metropolitan Region of Buenos Aires, Besana (2014) observes that , in contrast to the literature that has defined clientelism by the individual nature of the favors granted, it has built its prestige and influence in the neighborhood from which it comes by being a fundamental piece in the provision of basic collective services. He questions whether this is an atypical case, but concludes that the provision and distribution of these services in the region studied has historically required the participation of local leaders in the poorest sectors.

For his part, Zarazaga (2015) finds in the efficiency and immediacy of the mediators to execute social policies and in the perception that clients have of them as a credible source of resources to satisfy their most urgent needs, the explanatory variables of the support that they give to them in the dark room , ¹² thus questioning the notion that clients comply with the clientelist pact because the leaders monitor how each of their followers votes (Stokes, 2005) .

Observation of the daily activity of political leaders with different positions shows that, beyond the formal responsibilities of their position, they carry out mediation tasks that include particular matters of individuals and divisible assets, as well as collective social problems, which involve assets classified as indivisible. It is noted that the same mediators differentiate between personal or individual issues and general or collective issues.

In parallel to his legislative tasks , a provincial deputy originally from the city of

Tintina requests works and services from the provincial Executive Branch , such as the repaving of a local route , which goes from the town of Otumpa to Tintina, all within the department.

¹² In this work we do not specifically investigate the reasons why clients comply with the clientelist pact , but it does provide knowledge that may go in the direction outlined by Zarazaga (2015). Although it is not identical, the author 's approach to mediators as efficient social effectors is consistent with the consideration of their role as political representatives who carry out a program that tries to adjust to the preferences and interests of those they represent.

Moreno, to which his city belongs. Although he requested this work through the legislative channel, he maintains that it was “the Executive” that “ got it for me ”. Thanks to his mediation work , a work was carried out that benefited the population of Tintina –and the Moreno department- as whole . In addition to the infrastructure works , the deputy deals with individual requests :

Yes, they call me “ Taco”, even the governor calls me “ Taco”. So people come there , I ’m standing on the sidewalk , they say to me : “Hey, Don Taco, you don’t have 10 pesos, I have to play the raffle today .” Or , “I need some for my little one who has run out of milk.” A remedy. I manage remedies, I also go; for example, the other day the national deputy got me a box of medicine, I went to the doctor, I made the doctor see him so he could give it to him [...] I got some for the different health posts in Aerolito, Gatica and Tilo Viejo, three different towns . It’s a help (interview with provincial deputy).

In his work on the National Assembly in France, Marc Abélès (2001) explains that parliamentary work is only one aspect of the life of a deputy whose task is twofold: he must defend the interests of the community he represents and promote his constituency as much as possible. He must also deal with singular cases. As for the provincial legislators studied , the logic is very similar .

A deputy from the city of Loreto considers, as part of her “function”, activities of a “social” nature –which involve divisible goods and activities that are for “the people ” –

which involve the circulation of indivisible goods :

So, I go and someone tells me: “I can’t revoke the little room, give me a bag of cement”, I give them a bag of cement; or, “I don’t have money to buy a bag of food ”, well , all those things. Other times the problem comes that sometimes they don’t have the money to travel, they are with sick children, so we get them an appointment, we bring them , so they can see the doctor or if they have to undergo some long-term treatment, we see how we get them the medication. In other words, it is the social part that we attend to there and always generating things that are useful to the people . Maybe in this case , for Friday , through the grenadier regiment , we have made the connection that the mobile library of San Martín will go (interview with provincial deputy) .

A mobile library on the figure of José de San Martín is an example of indivisible public goods , which the deputy classifies as for the “people”. The deputy has promoted the formation of a textile cooperative and another for construction. With the second, they organized a fishing festival , the Festival del Dorado, on the bridge of the Dulce River , in Loreto, thanks to which the city has been included in the tourist circuit of the province, after the improvement that it implied in the area of the river bank. With the textile, they promote projects such as the manufacture of white smocks for hospitals, an initiative developed with resources obtained from the Local Assistance Center (c al) – belonging to the Ministry of Social Development of the Nation . 13

The deputy has also promoted the formation of a non-governmental organization (ONG) called “Camino y Progreso”, based in Loreto, through which she has obtained resources from the provincial Ministry of Production , with which she “ MANAGED ” the delivery of mixers and kneaders for all the “ rosqueteras ” of Loreto . The rosquete is a typical sweet food and this city is considered the “national capital of the rosquete”. In this instance, she participated jointly with the mayor : “We made a note, asking the Ministry of Production , the mayor signed it , I, the director of Culture , brought it here to the minister, and well, he managed it” (interview with provincial deputy). It is the mayor

who has the formal powers to facilitate the circulation of provincial resources; in the local vocabulary, “ he has the pen”.

In parallel to these types of activities, the deputy continues to work in canteens, where she takes care of tasks that she herself describes as domestic and that involve divisible goods :

I always go and pay a visit to the girls in the canteens, sometimes : “Oh, something is missing , I broke the skimmer , the ladle ” [...] it is very domestic, it is very domestic , I tell you , but I love it. Sometimes they tell you “we don’t have cups” and she, the councilor, who is like my staff, brings them, because she is in charge of everything. The girls in the canteen say that they don’t have cups, well, tell her that the cups will come soon, so I go from here taking the cups to the canteen. The girls in the canteen say that they don’t have milk today, go, get the milk from this side, take it to her. That is why I tell you that what we do is very personalized and very domestic , but it is our function . I don’t know if it is the function, but it is what I like to do and what I have always done (interview with provincial deputy) .

Mediators respond to problems related to individuals or to collectives and groups, which involve divisible and indivisible public goods (Offerlé, 2011). They also make a similar differentiation, not so much as a theoretical reflection but with respect to the practical effects of classifying problems of different nature, as “recipes and empirical rules” that guide the usual and routine actions of daily life (Schutz, 2008). A deputy from the city of Bandera distinguishes her legislative activity from “the social part ”, from “day to day ” , in reference to the resolution of particular or individual problems , which involve divisible public goods : “So , well, this is the day to day and one

¹³ The Local Care Centers (c AL) are part of the Ministry of Social Development of the Nation , “ dedicated to direct attention to the community and the direct articulation of social policies for local development” (Ministry of Social Development , 2003) .

"We provide permanent help in the social aspect. From providing wheelchairs , to providing financial aid , both for health and emergencies , to accompanying relatives when they bring their sick people here to the regional hospital , in every sense, providing financial support to people " (interview with provincial deputy).

He also promotes the implementation of public works in his territory, together with the mayor , from the same political party :

Yes, I am involved in everything, in all municipal management. I move a lot of projects here to the mayor. Many things that he tells me : "Look at this file ." And how many files I have taken out , both from him and from the one from Cuatro Bocas, constantly managing him. Sometimes accompanying him in the signing of the requests (interview with provincial deputy).

Among the projects promoted together , the deputy mentions a bus terminal and a new hospital , for which she "moved files" together with the hospital director and the mayor. Like other deputies, she does not see the Legislature as a place to obtain works ; she considers it better to request them from the Executive Branch.

A striking fact , revealing the relationship that the deputy maintains with her place of origin, is that , during the time that she is in the provincial capital – seat of the Legislature – she lends her house to the police officers assigned to Bandera whose accommodation has not yet been resolved. The action of the mediator thus contributes to the provision of a public service , such as security, even with private resources , such as her house.

Although these are deputies who represent the province, they behave primarily as representatives of a territory, the main object of their political mediation tasks. This is explained by the fact that one of their main merits for accessing the position is their representation in the territory of origin or political activity, which generally coincide (Ortiz, 2012). A logic similar to that observed by Abélès (2001) on the National Assembly in France is noted , for whose access "localism" constitutes an essential fact

and, then, once in office , the “terrain” commands the behavior of the deputies. The informal activities of the legislators in favor of their territorial bases have been considered in negative terms from a normative point of view , associating them with the practices of “ pork barrel ”, a term of American origin that refers to the use that members of Congress make of public funds in an unofficial manner to benefit a particular group of citizens in exchange for electoral support or donations for the campaign. Instead of considering informal tasks of territorial mediation in terms of a deviation from norms , it is possible to affirm , as Levitsky and Helmke (2006) maintain , that they can generate positive effects in terms of representation . In the case of the activity of legislators in Honduras, it has been pointed out that, although the electoral incentives to represent local interests are weak – due to the system of representation In the closed - list proportional election system , legislators from poor rural areas promote laws that benefit local voters thanks to established norms of clientelism . In the absence of the informal institution of clientelism, rural localities would likely be ignored entirely (Taylor-Robinson, 2006). Like provincial legislators, beyond his formal powers , the vice - governor acts as a representative and mediator of a territory, the provincial capital , of which he wants to become mayor. The role of mediator, in the positional sense used, is susceptible to being played even by leaders who are usually associated with the political center, such as the vice-governor.

The vice-governor visits the neighborhoods, talks with the residents, “raises” their demands and “complaints” and then “provides solutions.” Although it is not his responsibility as vice-governor, he makes claims to the municipality or the corresponding provincial department, requesting the construction of sewers, asphalt, lighting, asphalt, school scholarships, on behalf of the residents of the neighborhoods he visited. By virtue of his political hierarchy, the vice-governor has a greater reception of his requests among the provincial ministers.

The “actions” carried out concern both private individuals and groups, generally in the

neighborhood. The members of the vice-governor 's political group differentiate between these types of demands. At one of the neighborhood meetings, a neighbor asks for nylon and sheet metal for her home and her request is forwarded to a leader who deals with " social issues," which includes " housing issues " and the lack of wheelchairs , among others .

The mayors, with their own resources to respond to the various demands of their territorial bases, also act as political mediators.

The daily life of the mayor of Beltrán is fundamentally marked by the "administrations" he carries out for the municipality. One of the requests that he can "solve quickly" is that of balls and trophies for a soccer championship organized by a local club . In that case, he travels to the provincial capital on the same day and buys them , or requests them from the provincial Sports Undersecretariat .

The issues for which he contacts provincial officials generally involve assets classified as indivisible; for example, public works projects, such as refurbishing a plaza. With them he "manages" the "larger projects," while to obtain balls for a championship he contacts others of a lower hierarchy.

The mayor is concerned about both the "larger projects" and the "things that people come to ask you for here," referring to personalized requests that involve goods classified as divisible. For this last type of request, he goes to the Undersecretary of Social Development , which, he explains, "is the one that provides you with the sheets, mattresses , merchandise , plastic rolls, social assistance" (interview with the mayor). The procedure consists of citizens submitting files to the social action area of the municipality, which certifies that they actually need, for example, the sheets. In parallel to this process , the mayor is asked to provide the information to the municipal social action department , which will certify that they actually need, for example, the sheets. institutional worker, also "attends" requests personally, from individuals who approach the mayor's office:

I leave here , I go out here to Beltrán and there are always people waiting for me, money for the ticket, for some medicine and I tell them , you have to come and talk to the social worker , she will ask you for the papers to present. You have to do the paperwork there , no , people don't get used to it, people come to the mayor (interview with mayor) .

The mayor differentiates the situation in which he is asked to travel to the provincial capital to see a sick relative – which he resolves with personal resources – from another in which he has a sick relative in Buenos Aires, a trip of much greater cost . In this last case , he summons them the next day to the municipality, where they give the beneficiary an order for a round - trip ticket , by virtue of an agreement with a transport company .

In one of the main cities of the province, such as Termas de Río Hondo, with an economic development driven by tourism , it is expected to find large infrastructure works . In a context of an influx of national resources to the province and to the municipalities in particular (Lodola, 2011), during the governments of Néstor Kirchner (2003-2007) and Cristina Kirchner (2007-2011 and 2011-2015) works were carried out such as the renovation of the waterfront, the airport, the racetrack, the Tara Inti Nature Reserve. Also the remodeling of the main park, the construction of the House of Culture, the inauguration of a public hot springs spa, the paving of three hundred blocks and the implementation of a comprehensive sewage system.

Carrying out large-scale projects does not exempt the mayor from the tasks that other political leaders classify as “social” and that involve divisible assets. He himself acknowledges this and it is possible to observe it in his daily routine:

Here it is not only a task of taking care of the city in terms of its infrastructure, but we are also concerned about the cultural and social aspects . We help many people move to Buenos Aires for different health problems. We help people with everything that has to do with health care, we help them get prostheses, etc. And then, trips abroad in the case of

people who are going to compete, like Lucía Moyano, who has already competed not only at a national level , but internationally; or the boy Cano who also competes at an international level. And all the possibilities I have to reach people in terms of music , art , everything that has to do with culture , is very important (interview with mayor).

As in other municipalities, the methodology of “attention” to citizens who seek solutions from the mayor is observed.

From what was observed in the "waiting room " of the municipality of Termas , it is worth highlighting the variety of issues and problems of the citizens, in terms of their territorial origin and social. ¹⁴ A couple of merchants inquire about the conditions for a new gastronomic venture . But also a group of women from the interior, from the department of Río Hondo, complain about relatives who went to work in the sugar harvest, in the neighboring province of Tucumán; without economic success, they wanted to return to Santiago del Estero , but they did not have the means. The mayor planned to send transport for the people and, at the same time, trucks from his lumberyard company to transport the furniture . Regarding the use of private property for public purposes , he says: “ Well, we make an exception. We sacrifice a little and we see, but we have to help the people ” (interview with mayor).

The presence of the “exception,” the urgency and the resolution of problems that involve divisible assets and particular groups of citizens and individuals coexist with large infrastructure projects and policies that benefit the local community as a whole . This is also seen in the case of those who occupy local legislative positions .

Among the projects approved by the City Council , a city councilor mentions the adherence to the law for people with different abilities , a national law to which they have joined as a municipality, on their personal initiative. He describes at length how the city is not prepared for the movement of those previously called “disabled,” the lack of ramps, the failures in the adaptation of means of transport . His work has consisted of tasks of coordination with transport entrepreneurs , with the organizations in charge of

controlling the building and with the “ beneficiary group .”

In addition to the duties of a legislative office , the councillor performs “social assistance ” tasks

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I try to help as much as possible, to the extent of the funds we have , but I help a lot with bus tickets . For example, people come and say: “Look, we have to go to Garrahan, I have to send my son ¹⁵. ” I give them to them and in my private forum I think: “Is he lying to me? Is he not lying to me? Has he asked somewhere else? Surely he has asked somewhere else .” But of course, he asks me today, and when is his turn? And tomorrow. And well, I have to make the decision. And then one says, go ahead. I prefer to be wrong because of excess, than not to believe a person (interview with councilor).

The councillor deals with the problems of private individuals, especially those who request to travel to Buenos Aires for health reasons . As president of the Deliberative Council , he has access to the administration of resources, such as funds to grant subsidies, an aspect of the functioning of the legislative body that is not well known and which, strictly speaking , does not correspond to his formal powers.

¹⁴ Although it is one of the main cities, Termas is located in a region with a dispersed population , with infrastructure deficiencies , in which this town is one of the few urban references (Territorial Strategic Plan , 2008).

¹⁵ Refers to the “Prof. Dr. Juan Pedro Garrahan” Pediatric Hospital, the main public hospital dedicated to pediatrics in the country, located in Buenos Aires.

A councillor from the city of Termas receives people in the same building where he carries out his legislative work; he explains that his work has a “social aspect”. A woman appears with her ten- year-old son, who suffers from epileptic seizures and needs medication . The mother cannot afford the cost or the trips to the hospital in the provincial capital. The municipality of Termas has not “solved the problem” for her , because although she does not have social security , her son could have access to it through his father, who refuses to associate him due to family conflicts. In this situation, not contemplated by regulations, the

woman cannot access the medication . The councillor has initiated a “process” at the provincial level , where there is a social program or “aid” for those who do not have social security . He acts as a transmitter of information about the provincial program and the procedure to remove his son from the father’s social security . In the meantime, he uses his own social security to buy the medication for him, a solution that he frequently uses . In cases where the amounts are smaller , the councilor uses his personal resources . In the legislative chamber he receives a man who needs

vitamins and he gives her the money. This is how he resolves the cases that he classifies as “fortuitous”.

The resolution of “urgent” problems , through “exceptional” mechanisms, involving the circulation of divisible goods, with particular groups of citizens and individuals as beneficiaries, is part of the function of political mediators, in parallel with tasks involving collective goods and beneficiaries .

The realities described show that the response from formal political bodies is insufficient or ineffective or is not sufficiently “rapid” – hence the importance of “streamlining procedures”. The particular “actions” carried out by mediators make it possible to fill the gaps left by formal bodies and even – it could be hypothesized – complement public policies at different levels .

The “individual” actions of mediators sometimes contribute to the implementation of public policies aimed at a broad public. The “collective” nature of the representation task of the mediators studied is especially visible when they become a link in the chain for the implementation of public, national or provincial policies. Without the formal power to act as managers of these policies, many play that role.

Given ^{the} difficulty of solving all the needs from the provincial State, the deputy of Loreto considers it necessary to promote the organization of citizens to generate their own resources . That is why , as mentioned , she has promoted the formation of an NGO , through which they have received A national level program called “ Banquito

Solidario ” . 16

¹⁶ This is a social program of the Ministry of Social Development of the Nation , aimed at promoting social inclusion through the development of individual microenterprises with small loans that can be granted based on a joint guarantee . It was launched in 2002 and its implementation was carried out through various NGOs (Iucci , 2012) .

We hold group meetings, with people who really want to do something and don't have the financial means to do it. So we form groups of five people and we do, let's say, group therapy for a month , two months, so that they get to know each other, get together , start to have affection, and then we do a procedure to give them a loan so that , well, the one who knows how to make empanadas, the one who knows how to make bread, makes bread [...] so that they can get by , because it's impossible for everyone to have jobs . So we give them tools so that they can start to become independent and have a better quality of life (interview with provincial deputy).

Non-governmental organizations and cooperatives are a means of obtaining resources for those who do not control the local Executive Power. Through legal status, it is possible to access social programs and “download” national and provincial programs. For example, the “Banquito Solidario” and the “Plan Manos a la Obra”:

17
We have worked a lot with NGOs to support national projects . We have channeled the Solidarity Bank with that, we have also received delivery of work tools , we have delivered ovens and mixers, sewing machines, fryers, freezers (interview with provincial deputy) .

Through territorial mediators, who, for example, “report” who may be the beneficiaries, the implementation of national social policies is channeled. Their participation in the articulation of national policies has been part of a transformation in the implementation of social policies in recent years. In the Ministry of Social Development of the Nation, the principle of “territorializing” welfare policies begins to prevail, bringing its policies closer to the local space, in the search to make up for the historical lack of territorial structure

typical of national welfare bureaucracies (Perelmiter, 2012). From a perspective situated at the national level , territorial mediators act as an “ unpaid human resource in the local implementation ” (Perelmiter, 2011: 143) of national policies . Far from being an exception , the activities mentioned above are not an exception are recurrent and systematic.

The deputy of Bandera has taken actions to facilitate the processing of the National Identity Document (DNI) , organizing the transportation of those interested to the capital

¹⁷ The “Manos a la Obra” Plan , also promoted by the Ministry of Social Development of the Nation, consisted of “training and technical assistance aimed at small productive economic units, individual or collective, in the activity sectors of the different regions of the country , of the entrepreneurs and workers who comprise them ; providing ' economic - financial support for the purchase of supplies , materials , and equipment ' ” ; with the objective of becoming “ a support system for local socioeconomic development initiatives aimed particularly at low - income sectors ” (Ministry of Social Development , 2003).

provincial and contacting the administrative manager to make an appointment. Evaluates the changes in the national policy regarding the DNI , highlighting how its processing became easier and faster. National political issues are included in the description of their daily political activity , linked to the territory of origin, but never separated from broader programmatic issues , a question that is explored in depth in the following section . The same deputy was in charge of “doing the paperwork” necessary for groups of women from her town – and surrounding areas – to access a pension without contributions, a benefit granted by the national government through the reform of the pension system in 2005, which was known as the “housewives” pension. ¹⁸ The deputy ’s work consisted and consists – it is a permanent task – in initiating the process and procuring the resources to transport the beneficiaries to the provincial capital to sign the necessary documentation : “ the only thing they did was come that time and expected to collect at home.” These are women belonging to low - income and elderly sectors , for whom traveling was difficult .

The tasks of permanent and systematic mediation described above facilitate the implementation of public policies that concern categories of citizens or rights holders. National deputies also act as mediators between citizens and social groups of the represented province and different national departments ; taking advantage of the fact that it is located in Buenos Aires, the headquarters of the national public administration . In parallel to his duties as a legislator, a national deputy for Santiago del Estero fulfills the function of “ speeding up procedures” and “ moving files,” for example, in the an - s es (National Social Security Administration). If there are citizens from Santiago del Estero who have processed non- contributory pensions , 19 making the claim through a national deputy increases its chances of being executed quickly: “Of course, that ’s why , that ’s why I tell you that we have our benefits . A note comes presented by the national deputy , they sign you of course, they know who you are and they speed things up ” (interview with national deputy).

In his role as “manager” at the national level –which is how he represents his role and how he is seen by the politicians who are in the province: “as someone who is in the Nation”–, he collaborates with the mediation tasks of other political leaders, the municipal commissioners , 20 whom he helps on their visits to Buenos Aires:

We do all these kinds of management at the national level and we accompany some commissioners who come here , because I tell the commissioners , all those who

This reform allowed people who were of the required retirement age but were missing years of contributions - which total 30, with the right to the minimum pension - ^{to} obtain a retirement benefit .

¹⁹ Benefit that is accessed mainly due to old age, disability or being a mother with seven or more children .

²⁰ Municipal commissions are localities or urban centers with up to 2,000 inhabitants .

I cross, because they make arrangements here in Buenos Aires, the office is theirs , they come; he attends to them, here we get them, because many do not know what Buenos Aires is, how they are going to manage, we help them from here , they have to make notes, maybe they need notes, he gets them the cheapest hotel , we try to accommodate

the situation for them, that they do their management, that they take their management to their people (interview with national deputy).

Mayors also act as mediators between the territory they represent and the national levels of politics .

The mayor of Beltrán contacts officials of the central government, looking for works for the municipality. The “trips to Buenos Aires” are part of his regular routine . Through the Secretary of the Environment of the Nation, he has managed to carry out a project to improve the treatment of urban solid waste, for which he formed a consortium with other nearby municipalities , with which they managed to “lower the funds from the Nation”.

Another successful project was the purchase of a van to transport children to a special school in Forres, a nearby city ; for this purpose, the mayor presented a project to the Committee of Programs for People with Disabilities of the Ministry of Social Development of the Nation:

We have children here, thirteen children, who go to a special school here in Forres, in another city, between Fernández and Beltrán. So these children go when they can, when When it rains they don't go, when it's cold they don't go, because the parents who don't have money for the ticket don't go. So through that we have managed to obtain funds from the Nation for the purchase of transportation (interview with the mayor).

Through the mayor , resources from national programs reach the territory he represents .Territorial mediators not only embody individual and particular demands , but also facilitate the implementation of policies aimed at a broad public . Their actions are never devoid of programmatic aspects, beyond the type of goods distributed and their recipients .

Mediators and political representation :

the programmatic aspects of mediation activities

In their daily tasks , each territorial mediator develops and implements a particular “program” that materializes in a certain use of public resources . In the search for

political support , it is not a question of obtaining any type of resources and distribute them not in any way, but in the way that the representative considers necessary or important, according to his knowledge of the territory and his general political orientation. In a work where he recovers various notions of clientelism, Schröter (2010) associates the different possibilities of electoral mobilization with different scopes in the representation of interests : in the programmatic campaign promises , a clientele of voters of national scope is appealed to , and in patronage and vote buying, the scope of representation of interests is reduced. A similar assumption underlies the dichotomy between clientelist ties , which rest on particularistic bonds , and programmatic ties , which are established with the general public or with general categories of people (Kitschel and Wilkinson, 2007; 2012).

In contrast to this, it is possible to argue that, beyond the type of good and beneficiary (individual, group, collective), mediation activities are carried out according to general political considerations . The mediator always acts according to considerations about citizens in general . The will that is represented is always that of a sectoral group and the representative must show that it is compatible with the interest of the community as a whole (Laclau, 2005), in some way, “universalizing” this particular will .

The deputy of Tintina obtains resources and “does things” for his town through a development society , where he develops activities for the benefit of the city 's youth , which he presents in the terms of a political program:

There are many young people in the area who finish secondary school and want to start a tertiary career , whatever , and they don't have access because their parents don't have enough money to be able to send them to study. So, dealing with this commission to get scholarships is so important today, because I believe that studies should be the most important thing today , today without studies, without a degree you get nothing [...] These kids need to be supported, young people need to be supported, encouraged to study and that is what I am doing with the Tintina development society.

But there are secondary schools, tertiary schools, there is no suitable career [...] everyone graduates as a teacher and there are many teachers, thousands and thousands of teachers who do not have work, because they cannot find another alternative career (interview with provincial deputy).

The deputy relies on his particular knowledge of the territory, which allows him to establish priorities among the “needs” of the citizens. The specific situation in Tintina could be generalized to the province, where “everyone graduates as a teacher” and then cannot find work, making it necessary to promote the study of alternative careers. Obtaining resources for his territorial bases also bears the personal mark of the deputy's social career. As a resident of Tintina, as a young man, in order to carry out his secondary studies he received a scholarship to attend a technical school in Córdoba and graduate as an automotive mechanic. The mediator is never a mere translator of established preferences and objective demands, but acts as a representative whose action involves elements related to his background, his experiences and his opinions on general policy. The particular /general dichotomy also fails to account for this complexity.

Gurza and Zaremborg (2014) find in the creative capacity of political intermediation not a way out of the dilemmas of universality and partiality, but a way to deal with them. The discussion about the universal or “elevated” and the particular or “mundane” of representation loses prominence, with a positive view on the qualities and types of intermediation. Like every representative, there are “personal traces” in the way the mayor of Pozo Hondo carries out his duties. Born in Salta, he grew up in Pozo Hondo, where he arrived with his family when he was one year old, which is why he defines himself as “almost born, a native of Pozo Hondo.” There he attended primary school and secondary school in the provincial capital, where he followed the orientation in cooperativism and mutualism, which, he explains, led him to “commit to social issues” from an early age. Once in power, the mayor uses his knowledge of cooperativism, which he uses to promote the formation of a water cooperative. Water scarcity is one of

the most serious problems in the province, he points out, in agreement with the diagnosis

Number of provincial and national officials : ²¹

Due to the lack of public works, there was a lack of investment, there was no drilling. And all that was changing; we drilled in the areas, there are finished works, works to be finished, drilling in the town, we expanded the networks, more than 8,000 meters, pipes, it almost doubled, we have our system of administration and distribution of resources through a water cooperative , which almost doubled the number of partners (interview with mayor) .

The mayor frames his achievements in a political orientation : “a project, which was to be inclusive, to be hyper- social , a movement that produces, that generates participation and listens to what people wanted .” It is , in principle, about carrying out the requests of the citizens in the neighborhood meetings during the campaign, which in addition to the water shortage , “revolved around the works , that we had no streets, we had no lighting, we had no schools , colleges, there was no work, everything revolved around that . ” The fulfillment of campaign promises marks the policies of different leaders, such as the mayor of Beltrán , who highlights the increase granted to the municipal staff and keeps the note of the request that , at the time , the employees made him .

²¹ “The most serious and relevant problem in most of the provincial territory is that of water for people and production, when there is a lack of it, most of the time, and when there is an excess as well” (Territorial Strategic Plan, 2008).

The mayor defines the salary increase in terms of the return of a right to municipal employees , since they had never had it in the previous four years . Although it is not an obligation, since mayors are autonomous in that sense, the municipality has been supporting all salary increases made by the provincial government . It is about honoring

the commitments made in his annual message .

The mayor outlines other milestones of his administration, describing his government program . He includes the construction of a complex for waste treatment, in a political orientation that differentiates him from previous municipal administrations: “Another thing that we have bet a lot on is this, the environment, which was also an issue that was not given importance here in our area.” And other measures taken are related to culture : “We are strongly committed to culture . We have this little boy, he is from the folkloric dance academy and he has become national champion of malambo in Laborde, where the national malambo championship is held , all categories , and he has become national champion this year” (interview with mayor).

Folk dances have been promoted and free music shows have been held . The promotion of cycling is another of the policies that the mayor highlights from his administration, something that “ is new for us” as a sport in Beltrán, which has been reflected in the participation in the Argentine championship for minors and youth. The formation of the municipal choir has also been promoted, based on the initiative of “young people” of the town and of whose performances he keeps photos. The aforementioned policies are part of a conception of how local development should be :

And well, this is also being promoted a lot here, everything that is sports , culture , dance, etc. Because we believe that by strengthening these issues we will grow, you can build construction , curbs , asphalt , but if you don't grow [...]. If you don't grow as a community, you will spend 20 years in the same situation, you will continue to have people asking for a carton of milk, a packet of noodles (interview with mayor).

In relation to the problem of local development, in a context in which state resources are central, opinions on their administration are relevant and form part of the “ programmatic agenda ” of the leaders. The mayor of Termas highlights his policy of administrative and economic order – in contrast to the “disorder” of previous administrations – and emphasizes how this earned him the support of the governor to carry out public works. He

explains how his experience as a businessman helped him to be “up to date with everything” after two and a half years of management, thus leaving his mark on the period. Evaluating the budget as insufficient, he reduced the municipal staff, thereby reversing his predecessor's measure of hiring workers. The mayor emphasizes that the salaries of all employees are paid on time, as well as the accounts with the different suppliers. Likewise, he has been able to reestablish the relationship with the Secretariat for Programming for the Prevention of Drug Addiction and the Fight against Drug Trafficking (Sedronar), interrupted by a subsidy that was never executed; a central achievement in his programmatic agenda: “The more our youth have access to sports, culture, education, the further away we have them from drugs. That is why it pains me to have a very good relationship with Sedronar” (interview with mayor). By virtue of his training as an accountant, the councillor and president of the Deliberative Council of the provincial capital held technical positions in the provincial and municipal public administration, where he acquired extensive experience in budgetary matters. He is also a university professor of the subject “Public Treasury and Finance” at a provincial university.

Given this background, it is possible to understand his opinions on the administration of resources by the legislative body, for example, on the way in which travel subsidies are assigned. He does not question the power of the Deliberative Council to grant them, but rather the lack of a system of verification of requests from beneficiaries and of coordination between different levels of government:

I think that this system is not well-oiled at a general level in the province, that is, because I think that not all people have to go to Buenos Aires or come to the City Council or the municipality, when Public Health should have an immediate solution for that. Because a doctor is the most appropriate person to say, well, no, look, you can treat that here, go to such a place so they can treat you there, or look for a place if an immediate referral is necessary, but make the referral and give people the means to go

. If there are people who do not have resources, they must be given them. And there are really many people without work (interview with Councillor).

His transition from “technician to politician,” as the councilor himself explains, has taught him that “many times two plus two does not equal four in politics ” and that “behind the numbers that the State handles are the people.” Likewise, consistent with his profile, he is working on a system that allows better control over the way social aid is distributed:

It is very difficult. I am sure that perhaps he has gone to the municipality and asked the mayor or he has gone to Public Health and asked there or he has asked the governor . But , of course, we do not have a system and that is the shortcoming that we should have. I am just now making a system to see if the person is not asking me for it today , or tomorrow his son (interview with councilman).

The councillor rejects the subsidy policy in general, considering it more appropriate to promote productive micro-enterprises:

It should be controlled, I think that a lot of money is spent on subsidies in the country. And above all, it is not spent appropriately. Because the subsidy that people ask for and are used to is the subsidy , which has been traditional , the small pot , or something to eat or money to pay the electricity bill , which they do not have for electricity, sometimes people come with the electricity bill and say: “Boss, I can’t pay the bill .” But, of course , as I tell them , but I don’t solve anything for you , I solve it for you for a month. But what happens is, the person does not have a job, he comes to ask the municipality for a job so they can appoint him . But it is also true that the municipality has a limit, as does the State and there come the deficits and there comes the monetary emission. The correct thing would be... and that is what I want to do now in the deliberative council, to create an office for micro-enterprises, for very small things. That is to say, we would have to complement this with a small school or a group of trainers, with personnel and with suitable people , with engineers and technicians . To fix an air conditioner, a person who teaches how to fix an air conditioner (interview with Councillor).

The role of the State in the provincial economy is treated as a problem by most of the leaders studied , who are concerned about the generation of alternative sources of employment in the face of the State 's inability to absorb the demand for work .

In his tours of the provincial capital's neighborhoods, the vice-governor not only takes up existing demands, but also proposes new issues on the neighborhood "agenda," for example, job training activities and subsidies for micro-entrepreneurs. In fact , he then "makes arrangements" so that different citizens have access to loans for micro-enterprises; it could be said that "employment" is one of the axes of his "program ." He explains that what is at the root of the unemployment problem are the training deficits : " Perhaps they were not able to train, they already have their family" and that it is not possible to respond to unemployment with state employment: " It is not possible to have a contract for everyone." He reports on a municipal public project, with cooperation from the national government , for the construction of sewers, which requires sanitation technicians for home connections , for which he is making an agreement with the provincial university to train labor . Not only is employment on his agenda; the vice-governor addresses the different problems that emerge during his visits to the neighborhoods: flooding, lighting, asphalt, housing, personal documentation issues , drug addiction , oral hygiene , dengue . He promises that “ actions will be taken ” with the corresponding public departments and insists on the importance of having “confidence” that he will comply: “You are tired of politicians who lie .” As with any programmatic proposal , there is a risk of not complying, which is why the vice-governor does not “promise” public employment for all and thus preserves his credibility.

The then candidate for provincial deputy , originally from Bandera, toured the territory asking for support for the then candidate for governor, at a time when "they could not do it"

many promises” due to the uncertainty about her victory. The accession of a Bandera

political leader to power later influenced the adoption of measures that favored her territorial bases. The municipal commission of Cuatro Bocas ²² was created –where the deputy grew up–, which was a demand of its inhabitants , which implied the possibility of “ achieving things”, such as rural electrification of the entire town.

Some of the works “that were coming out for Bandera” include the creation of a special school, the construction of housing, rural electrification which, together with the paving of roads, represents for the region “in the economic part, an incalculable benefit ” ; as well as the installation of cereal companies in the area. Although it is not possible to determine the specific role of the deputy, she has acted as a channel for transmitting demands : “One brought the requests that people actually made, as a representation that one has here .”

One pending issue, he says, is water, which he has conveyed to the governor. He also highlights improvements such as the purchase of two high-value filters and the provision of a 24 - hour running water service (previously they had only four hours a day).

Based on the problems observed in her territory, the deputy is interested in and deals with issues related to the provincial economic development. At the same time, it is the inclusion in general problems that gives legitimacy to the “ particular” issues .

In parallel to the problems mentioned, the deputy also deals with the “day to day” aspects of what she considers “the social part ”, which is also not devoid of a programmatic -ideological dimension .

One of the main functions of the political mediators studied is to “speed up procedures ” , taking into account the time and money it takes , especially for beneficiaries from the interior of the province. For example, to obtain a wheelchair , the deputy takes to the provincial capital “all the patient’s requirements , and of course, I don’t make them come, I sign it , I take responsibility, we take it and deliver it to the place” and makes the request to the Ministry of Social Development. Another type of activity that requires permanent mediation work is the delivery of medicines. The zero cost of the

procedure for the beneficiary stands out, who perhaps pays a symbolic sum of money for the freight that transports the goods obtained by her action, who thus becomes a kind of public manager. Normally these are patients without social security, those are the priority cases: “You generally do it for people who have nothing, those are them, that is your function.” The MP identifies her role with addressing the needs of the most unprotected.

22 The creation of a municipal commission means that localities with fewer than two thousand inhabitants have a government. This facilitates the implementation of various measures beneficial to the locality, since among other things it implies having a budget.

Although the “solved problems” involve particular individuals and small groups, through the provision of material incentives tailored to their personal needs, as Kitschelt and Wilkinson (2012) point out when referring to clientelist ties, mediators inscribe the disbursement of resources in general rules, as in programmatic ties. “People who have nothing,” “the most unprotected,” those with “urgent” problems, suppose the practical construction of a category of rights-holders with which mediators establish their priorities and guide their action. In his study of Brazilian parliamentarians, Bezerra (1999) discovers the importance of requests of a particularist nature coming from those he considers to be his electoral bases. Practices normally described as corrupt or illicit are perceived by them as legitimate, as long as they are not aimed at obtaining corrupt benefits, but are part of the tasks of representing territorial bases.

The mayor of Beltrán tries to respond to all kinds of demands, but there are formal limitations, mainly due to the existence of the Court of Accounts, a control body. For example, the Court does not allow him to pay public services to private citizens, such as the electricity bill, a demand that appears recurrently. Since these are expenses that are not accepted in the quarterly statements to the body, sometimes they are answered with personal resources or are reported as another type of expense. Citizens who urgently request financial help to travel for medical reasons or in the event of the death of a family

member do not always have the necessary documentation to justify these expenses before the Court of Accounts, such as the medical referral : “ In these cases of extreme urgency I make the little order, you collect the tickets and when they come from the company to collect , as we have the person 's file , I have to pay them , and well,

We pay him . And the accountant wants to kill us ” (interview with mayor).

Informal procedures , with a stability and systematicity similar to the formal ones, are objectified in a kind of informal bureaucracy. The mayor has payment vouchers for those people who are not registered with the Federal Administration of Public Revenue (AFIP) . These are “ exceptional expenses ” ; for example , when A group of high school students requests money to organize their graduation in a club . Despite not being able to report this disbursement regularly, since the students cannot invoice as a civil society organization or as a company, there is a standardized procedure, with its papers, which are filed and consulted to keep track of what has been paid .

Tasks carried out beyond formal attributions are part of the tasks of representation of territorial bases (Bezerra, 1999) and not only do they not erode the programmatic dimension of representation , but they can generate positive effects in that direction (Levitsky and Helmke, 2006). And , as has been shown, all of them have a programmatic dimension .

Conclusions

In studying the activity of political mediators, one of the objectives was to overcome the dualism between clientelist and programmatic ties, which presupposes the existence of citizens and politicians who act according to particularistic considerations , while others do so according to “ideological” or “programmatic” reasons. The aim was thus to reconstruct the peculiarity of political practices from their own rationality or legitimacy and not from their distance or deviation from an ideal model.

The political task of the mediators studied is related to particular problems , which means “addressing” specific demands and requests whose beneficiaries are people and small

groups in a certain territory. But the observation of their daily activity also shows that a large part of it revolves around issues that concern vast social groups and involves public works and services, goods classified as indivisible. In their own practice, the same leaders establish an analogous classification. The “ collective ” nature of the representation task of the leaders studied is especially visible in cases where they become the necessary link for the implementation of public policies, both national and provincial. The way in which the recipients of the goods –divisible and indivisible– and the resources to be distributed are chosen is hardly comparable to the simple cost -benefit assessment that the instrumental notion of clientelism supposes; rather, it implies a work of reconstruction and production of the specific problems and demands of the territorial base. The way of distributing public goods is also filtered by the person of the mediator, who guides the allocation of resources in the way he considers best, establishing priorities based on his knowledge of the territory he represents and general policy orientations. The particularities of the territory represented by the mediators largely influence the configuration of their “programmatic agendas.” And, at the same time, the inscription of the particularities of the demands in general political problems and conceptions legitimizes the demands of a citizen, a social group or a territorial collective. The particularistic elements of a clientelist relationship are present. We find ourselves in an intermediate between the poles particularity/general, in a relationship crossed by “universal” elements, but of a different type to that presupposed by the normative concept of citizenship – which supposes impersonal links between abstract categories of citizens and representatives or decision-makers of public policies.

To a certain extent, mediators are observed to consider the other in terms of their respective personal properties, rather than in terms of general universal categories²³ (Eisenstadt and Roninger, 1984). The particularities of the members of their territorial base, just as the particularities of the mediator as a person, by virtue of his career and values, and as a political representative, influence the way he exercises his role.

Personal and individual elements coexist with an orientation, if you will, “ideological” or programmatic, converging in decisions such as, for example, promoting a development society to obtain scholarships for tertiary studies or requesting the execution of works that favor the economic development of a region. The majority evaluates that state employment is insufficient to respond to employment problems, so they seek to promote productive micro-enterprises. Political leaders differentiate themselves from others by their “programs”, by the way they manage resources or “order the accounts” and promote sports, culture or the environment.

The dimension of political representation is always present and seems to transcend the type of goods that circulate, as well as the group represented – individuals, groups or broader territorial collectives.

In the circulation of goods, “ideological work” is continually invested in order to establish or maintain current collective preferences, even when it is a matter of “revealing” and solving specific problems, such as lighting in a peripheral neighborhood. It is difficult to establish a sharp distinction between clientelist and programmatic exchanges (Kitschelt and Wilkinson, 2007; 2012). The programmatic dimension is present even in the distribution of “minor consumption” goods or divisible goods, carried out in terms of general rules, criteria of urgency and social priority.

The question of urgency, the problems of unprotected citizens – without social security, without resources to travel to a hospital – seem to mark an important part of the work of political mediators, who are thus guided by the practical construction of a category of beneficiaries, which, again, can be inserted in an intermediate of the particular-general continuum, insofar as it is associated with specific citizens of a given territory. This can be interpreted, at the same time, as part of a political sensitivity, as well as a certain “moral” that guides the action of the mediators. The “moral” dimensions present in the definitions of clientelism developed above are displayed in the mediators’ discourses on their activity. They present criteria for classification and even

hierarchization between actions directed at individual and collective beneficiaries; in a way not very different from that present in academic literature, although marked by the particularities of political practice. For example, the city councilor has a critical view of social aid granted without “control,” although he considers the response to urgent social problems as part of his political work. Likewise, most of the mediators are concerned about the limits of the State to distribute social aid and generate employment, with a positive assessment of the generation of resources and employment through alternative means . In turn , in line with the approaches on an egalitarian dimension as a component of the clientelist relationship , it is possible to affirm that it is derived from the relations of political representation established between “clients” and “mediators”. Insofar as it contemplates the flow of preferences from those represented to the representatives, it contains a “ down-top ” element that comes into tension with the hierarchical dimension derived from the access to public resources by the mediator – also constitutive of the clientelist relationship. Focused on the egalitarian dimension, the work has not delved into the hierarchical and vertical aspect of clientelist relationships . The personalized forms of distribution of public resources described are those that allow political mediators to build their personal political power , which is based on inequality in access to public resources with respect to “ clients ”. A study on the logics of political competition in the political space addressed would allow us to delve deeper into the causes of the predominance of the personalized and hierarchical exchange relationships between politicians and citizens . This article has made some contributions to the conception of clientelism, so that the definition attempted at the beginning can be reformulated as follows : clientelism involves the distribution of goods and services of different types – divisible and indivisible– to citizens –conceived with different degrees of particularism and generality–, guided by the personal considerations of the mediator and the particularities of the beneficiaries and, at the same time, crossed by political and moral considerations of a general order, in a relationship of unequal exchange derived from the

privileged position of the mediator with regard to access to the distributed resources , although lower or higher levels of inequality may be observed, but with an egalitarian dimension inherent to a relationship that is at the same time one of political representation . Consideration of the dimension of political representation, inherent to clientelist relations , implies the need to redefine the notion of political machine , as it has been used, for example , to study Peronism in Argentina. Coinciding with the diagnosis that party identities have weakened as the main explanatory variables of political ties and that state assets become central to them , it is important to take into account the changes in the symbolic and ideological aspects of political ties , rather than proclaiming their disappearance . Furthermore, considering that the power of political machines is based on the socio - territorial insertion of its members (Stokes, 2005), within the framework of highly personalized relationships –which explains the efficiency to distribute goods according to the needs of the voters–, it is possible to hypothesize –as this is an unexplored aspect in the article– that its electoral strength lies in the qualities of political mediators as political representatives, rather than in their control and sanctioning capacities. Finally, it is possible to affirm that , by questioning the distinction between clientelistic and programmatic ties , this article has made a contribution in the sense of discussing the importance of the electoral strength of the political machineries . the differentiation between politics carried out in national spheres and those more closely linked to the “territory”. Just as the actions of well-known politicians in the national sphere can be analysed using the same principles as those who act in “ small communities ” (Bailey, 1971), the actions of unknown politicians – or those known only within the framework of the territory in which they act – can be approached using the same characteristics as those used to analyse great national political leaders, reconstructing the programmatic aspects of their actions, present in all decisions , beyond the scale of their recipients , their representatives.

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