

# **Mobilizing Expertise: The Role of Social Movements in State Knowledge Production**

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## **Abstract**

States count populations as accurately as possible to design and enforce public policies. However, state bureaucracies struggle to identify and count territories that are hard to “see,” such as informal settlements. To measure these populations, scholars have shown that states rely on nonstate actors. In this paper, I focus on how the process of constructing knowledge with nonstate actors also forces states to adapt their classifications, public policies, and institutions. By doing so, I challenge the idea that state knowledge awards enormous power to states, understood as the primary agents monopolizing symbolic power in contemporary societies. Instead, I propose that when the state *needs* nonstate actors such as social movements to produce knowledge, the process of knowledge production can also *empower* these same movements, helping them shape state institutions. I propose looking at legibility projects as collaborative processes of a network of expertise which gains leverage to negotiate their role in the policymaking process with the state. I investigate this process by examining the case of the National Registry of Informal Settlements in Argentina, in which a social movement, NGOs and the national government collaborated in a legibility project. I combine interview data, participant observation, and archival data to study how this joint process of knowledge production between institutions and nonstate actors shape both public policies and institutions.

## Introduction

States need to know how many people work informally and live in informal settlements if they want to implement policies affecting this sector. But since informality comprises social processes outside of state regulation, bureaucracies struggle to count and identify their living and working conditions. States measure their populations and territories with varying degrees of success, but how do states identify the boundaries and characteristics of populations and territories that are hard to “see” and measure? In 2016, following a successful strike by informal sector workers, the Argentine government collaborated with a social movement of informal workers (UTEP) on the creation of the first national registry of urban informal settlements<sup>1</sup> (ReNaBaP). Even though this country is considered to have a historically strong welfare state, until 2016, the state did not have any registry of informal settlements in the country nor accurate information about these neighborhoods’ socioeconomic and demographic characteristics (Miño and Carrara 2023). Producing knowledge about informal settlements allowed the national state to incorporate a new classification system, a new public policy focusing on the development of informal settlements, and a new law that allowed the state to intervene in “illegally” occupied land.

Scholarship on state infrastructure and legibility argues that bureaucrats and politicians categorize social reality to produce information and design public policies (Mann 1984; Bourdieu 1991; Rueschemeyer and Skocpol 1996; Scott 1998; De Souza 2021). This information allows states to intervene in social life (Tilly 1985). “Legibility,” a concept developed by James Scott (1998), refers precisely to the process of simplifying complex social realities to produce standardized knowledge for state institutions. This knowledge awards enormous power to states, understood as the primary agents monopolizing symbolic power in contemporary societies (Bourdieu 2014). However, we know less about how state institutions count and measure social things that lie outside of state regulation – despite not necessarily being illegal.

Literature on modern statehood (Mann 1984; Bourdieu 1991; Rueschemeyer and Skocpol 1996) overemphasizes the power that the accumulation of knowledge provides to state agents. States often govern populations even when institutional actors cannot classify or measure them

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<sup>1</sup> Although ReNaBaP differentiates between different types of informal settlements, for this article, I use the term “informal settlement” to refer to any type of informal housing. I consider informal settlements as a group of households lacking access to water, sanitation, sufficient living areas, structure quality, and land security. I use the category “informal settlement” rather than “slum” given the controversial connotation ascribed to the latter (Gilbert 2007; Garrido 2021).

(Loveman 2013; Quisumbing 2022; Cheong 2023). Moreover, society-centered approaches argue that the literature on legibility overstates the role of states, given that nonstate actors often collaborate in the process of knowledge production. For example, we know that NGOs and civil society actors help state agents collect information for the state (Emigh et al. 2016; Rodríguez-Muñiz 2017). However, less is known about how the interaction between state and nonstate actors shapes the state by creating new state agencies or changing existing ones. In cases where the state needs social movements and civil society organizations to collect data and produce information, we would expect these organizations to seek influence over public institutions. Thus, this article asks: How does the process of knowledge production between nonstate and state actors change state agencies?

In this paper, I direct attention to how nonstate actors and the state (co)produce information about informal settlements. I argue that when the state produces knowledge with nonstate actors, it can open the door for nonstate actors to access state institutions. Specifically by constructing an expertise network with leverage to construct knowledge and produce public policies for this sector. This collaboration between state institutions producing knowledge and nonstate actors has the potential to change or shape laws, policies, methodologies, cartographies, and the organization of bureaucrats' work. By relying on nonstate actors to produce knowledge, state institutions are forced to adapt to the structure of the expertise network and its strategies to collect data on the ground, often being able to access informal settlements. In turn, the co-production of knowledge allows the expertise network to advance its agenda and influence policymakers and politicians. By delegating the authority of producing knowledge to civil society, civil society can influence the production of public policies.

I focus on a case in Argentina, where the national government appointed a social movement representing informal workers (named UTEP) to conduct the first national registry of informal settlements (ReNaBaP) in 2016. Although the National Institute of Statistics (INDEC) had previously conducted national surveys, which collected data on informal settlements, bureaucrats did not identify the boundaries of these neighborhoods and, therefore, did not produce geolocated data. The identification of informal settlements led to the creation of a law to prohibit the eviction of people living in these neighborhoods and a new state agency dedicated to 1) the production of information and 2) the development of access to formal water, electricity, and sewage, and its integration to the formal city.

Based on interviews, participant observation, and archival work, I show that when state agencies and social movements co-produce information about populations that are difficult to measure, state agencies are forced to adapt their methodologies, measurements, and categories to these uneven territories. I show that when the state *needs* social movements to produce knowledge, the process of knowledge production can also *empower* these same movements, helping them shape state institutions and produce public policies.

### **Legibility Projects, State Agents, and Social Movements**

The sociology of the state has focused on the key role of maps and censuses in the formation of nation-states (see Anderson 2016 [1991]; Rueschemeyer and Skocpol 1996; Curtis 2001; Harvey 2006; Loveman 2013). The elaboration of maps and censuses requires identifying and classifying complex social realities. James Scott's famous concept of "legibility" refers to the act of translating illegible and complex social practices, territories, and populations into "standardized knowledge" (Scott 1998; Scott et al. 2002: 5). State simplifications not only describe a social reality or a population, but also allow governments to administer, regulate, and design public policies to reach those populations (Scott 1998; Loveman 2007; Rodríguez-Muñiz 2017; De Souza 2021). Since states use categories to identify and redistribute resources to citizens (Starr 1992; Curtis 2001; Bourdieu 1991, 2014; Zerubavel 1991; Steensland 2010; Lamont et al. 2014; Monk 2022), they simultaneously create incentives for individuals and groups to "adjust their self-descriptions and self-conceptions to fit the official ones." (Starr 1992: 273). Thus, even if citizens do not like state categories, they must accept them – in a demonstration of the state's monopoly over symbolic power (Bourdieu 2014). In this sense, the centralization of information, the classifications of individuals, and territoriality is the basis of state power (Mann 1984; Bourdieu 1991, 2014; Foucault 1980; Curtis 2001).

A different strand of literature argues that states have historically avoided categorizing and counting specific populations while at the same time have managed them. Recent scholars emphasize that states selectively choose which groups to "see" (Cheong 2023). For example, Loveman (2013: 331) shows that Latin American censuses during the 19th and 20th centuries did not count Asians and African-descent populations in their national censuses among countries with large indigenous and mestizo populations, because the state aimed to portray "the intrinsic

vitality and future promise of the nation” by selecting specific ethnicities and races. Also, Quisumbing (2022: 770) argues that the U.S. used “ambiguous classification of colonial subjects” to manage populations in the construction of the U.S. empire. Cheong (2023) defines omission as “the phenomenon of being left out of administrative apparatuses of the state, such as civil registers, identity management system, and censuses” (3). The omission of registering a population does not translate into a lack of management of this population. Similarly, governments do not need to count and identify informal settlements to govern these territories; instead, by not counting them, they can rely on violence to manage these populations. These examples show that the state can be more powerful by avoiding classifying a social group or territory.

Relatedly, Emigh et al. (2016) argue that state-centered approaches overemphasize the role of bureaucrats in designing and implementing censuses. Traditionally, research on state legibility was oriented to studying the role of state elites in knowledge production (i.e., Rueschemeyer and Skokpol 1996; Scott 1998; Scott et al. 2002). But more recent scholarship shows that nonstate actors influence states’ knowledge production by working as their collaborators (Mora 2014; Emigh et al. 2016; Rodríguez-Muñiz 2017). Nonstate actors fulfill an essential role in the production of classification schemes. For example, Mora (2014) finds that the production of the category “Hispanic” was historically built in collaboration between Latino civil rights leaders and the U.S. Census Bureau. The institutionalization of the category therefore involved not only state elites’ participation, but also activists and the media.

This literature emphasizes that the possibility of “counting” a population – and therefore making it “visible” – will depend on how individuals perceive state agents, because this perception will determine their compliance with or resistance to their registration. Producing knowledge by the state is laborious (Curtis 2001) and requires legitimacy (Loveman 2007; Rodríguez-Muñiz 2017; De Souza 2022). When civil society identifies legibility projects as illegitimate, citizens may attempt to boycott their registration (Loveman 2007). Similarly, De Souza (2022) argues that state agencies constructing legibility must legitimize their actions and goals to a broad audience (politicians, Congress, academia, social movements, and other public agencies). Scholars such as Rodríguez-Muñiz (2017: 389) characterize nonstate actors as “constitutive of state legibility,” because they are often a key piece in the legitimization of legibility projects. In other words, political struggles and historical processes shape legibility

because the state needs to legitimize why and how it will produce knowledge based on its relationship with a given population.

While the literature on the construction of knowledge by nonstate actors focuses on how they gain visibility, I will expand current findings by looking at how this co-produced knowledge can, in turn, shape the state. I argue nonstate actors produce knowledge not only to gain visibility vis-à-vis the state, but also to transform state institutions and shape public policies to favor vulnerable populations. A key process whereby social movements try to gain leverage is over expansions of the welfare state, especially in developing countries. Sociologists of development find that informal and precarious workers organize collectively in different contexts to gain recognition, access resources, and expand the welfare state (Heller 1999). In some contexts, precarious workers and marginalized populations often want to be seen by the state to leverage their demands. For example, research in India demonstrates that informal workers organized around the rhetoric of *citizenship*, rather than labor, to attract politicians' attention and negotiate social benefits (Agarwala 2013). In Colombia and Brazil, Black movements used different tactics to incorporate the Black subject into the state (Paschel 2016). In Argentina, during the neoliberal reforms of the 1990s, grassroots movements of unemployed and precarious workers emerged to raise their demands and secure their "political incorporation" (Rossi 2017). This bottom-up collective organization could potentially be leveraged by state agents to locate individuals within a specific territory, especially informal settlements.

By establishing coalitions with state bureaucrats to increase state legibility, I argue that nonstate actors can gain access to policymaking arenas to favor the same vulnerable populations that were invisible to the state in the first place. In sum, since the state needs the social movement to count and make populations 'visible', a window of opportunity is opened for nonstate actors to make specific demands and co-produce policies with the government. In some contexts, the production of knowledge can therefore allow nonstate actors to secure resources for marginalized populations.

### **The co-production of knowledge**

Embarking on a legibility project entails a collaborative process of knowledge production. The process of constructing facts is "a collective process" in which different actors and machines

intervene in making science (Latour 1987: 104). As a collective process, knowledge travels “inside narrow and fragile networks” (Latour 1987: 232), which are not homogeneous; instead, different elements shape these networks (i.e., scientific, technical, economic, political, managerial). Similarly, Eyal conceptualizes expertise as “a network that link together agents, devices, concepts, and institutional and spatial arrangements.” (2013: 864). An “alliance of expertise,” a concept coined by Stampnitzky (2023), refers to “a particular assemblage of knowledge, problems, and interventions” (1099) that, when formed, can produce expertise. Thus, when these alliances align, it is possible to accomplish expertise.

Since knowledge is a collaborative process, it is not only produced top-down; lay expertise fulfils a key role in scientific knowledge production (Epstein 1995; Collins and Evans 2002; Frickel et al. 2006; Meadow 2018). For example, Epstein finds that under certain circumstances, knowledge production allows social movements to “advance their own strategic goals within science” (1995; 409). Frickel et al. (2010) conceptualize “undone science” as the systematic nonproduction of data in research areas identified as beneficial for society by social movements and civil society organizations. I will expand on this literature by looking at the process of constructing knowledge at the meso-level – as a mid-level scope of vision - not only as a mechanism to make a demand or advocate for a cause but also by looking at how collecting data shapes state institutions.

The knowledge arising from the network has effects on the object studied. Latour (1987) argues that the actions of each actor involved in the process of science making transforms the object. By paying attention to the alliances made by different actors to construct a network of expertise, it is possible to understand the dynamic process of producing knowledge which includes the negotiations between different actors. My research builds on this literature by focusing on the construction of an expertise network which had to negotiate with different actors the construction of facts.

## **Data and methods**

This paper adopts a historical approach to study the effects of knowledge production between the state and civil society on state bureaucracies. Through process tracing and an interpretative

framework, I analyze the effects of consolidating a network of expertise and the data collection process on laws and public policies.

Argentina is a “paradigmatic case” (Ermakoff 2014) to study how the state can make populations and territories that are hard to “see” legible for bureaucracies. In some contexts, states face challenges to “see” populations and territories, especially where collecting and standardizing the information is difficult. In most cases, the construction of informal settlements does not follow the formal structure of a city, making it difficult for bureaucracies to measure the size of the houses, identify the streets, identify the number of households within an edification, enter the neighborhood to collect the data, among other factors. Therefore, the “unruliness” of informal settlements makes it a “paradigmatic case” to understand how states can produce knowledge about everything outside the state’s purview.

The study of Argentina is pertinent given that a high proportion of its population lives and works informally. In 2018, at least 10% of Buenos Aires’s population lived in informal settlements (Cravino 2018). Similarly, in 2022, ReNaBaP showed that more than 10% of the population at the national level lived in informal settlements, and from 2016 until 2022, the number of informal settlements grew from 4,000 to 5,687. In informal settlements, 66% of the population does not have formal access to electric energy, 90% does not have formal access to water, and 97% does not have formal access to sewage<sup>2</sup>. According to Argentinean scholars, it is difficult to compare historically quantitative data about informal settlements because 1) people in informal settlements do not want to be counted, and 2) the different ways in which data about informal settlements has been registered (Cravino 2008, Cravino 2018). According to Cravino (2018) there are different sources of quantitative data with limitations: 1) the national census, 2) academic studies, and 3) Techo. However, before 2017, there was no data about informal settlements at the national level.

To implement this research, I draw from interview data, participant observation, and archival work collected between June 2022 and December 2023. First, I conducted 80 interviews with bureaucrats (from ReNaBaP, INDEC, and the Ministry of Social Development), political elites, members of UTEP, members of Techo, and Caritas. The interviews ranged from 40 to 140 minutes and were conducted in Spanish in Buenos Aires. I identified directors, coordinators at

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<sup>2</sup> Techo. 2022. *Mirada y Analisis*. Registro Nacional de Barrios Populares. Actualizacion 2022. <https://argentina.techo.org/renabap/>



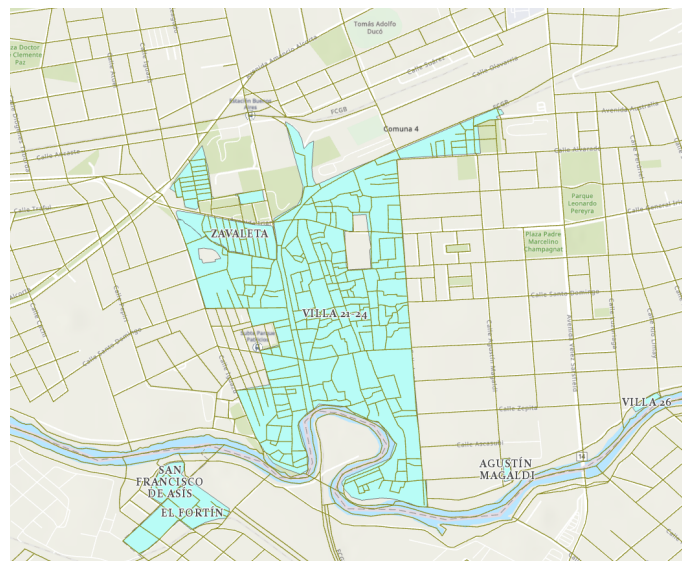
ReNaBaP, INDEC, and the Ministry of Social Development to interview, as well as UTEP's leaders and members. Also, I relied on a "snowball" sampling strategy (Weiss 1994) to contact staff of state agencies, UTEP, and the NGOs.

In my interviews, I focused on understanding whether the social movement provided a new classification scheme to understand informal settlements, how information about informal settlements helped social movements gain leverage to negotiate with the state, and how social movements and the state collect data about informal settlements. Although interviews were essential to my analysis, it was necessary to distinguish what my participants said from how state agents implemented these policies. It was crucial to triangulate interview data with participant observation (Jerolmack and Kahn 2014).

I conducted 13 months of ethnographic observation in Buenos Aires by observing "back-door" science-making (Latour 1987). My observations included 1) *events* organized by experts and state bureaucrats on how state officials and social movements collect data about informal settlements, 2) the *process of data collection* in informal settlements between state bureaucrats and UTEP, 3) *meetings* in which social movements designed a survey and analyzed data collected in informal settlements, and 4) *trips* with state officials and social movements to verify in-situ if a specific territory was included or not as an informal settlement in ReNaBaP. I accompanied state bureaucrats and members of UTEP to collect data in informal settlements. Specifically, I walked with them to survey each family representative and social leader. In most cases, I went with an enumerator to conduct the survey. It was common for enumerators to conduct the interviews in pairs or to have more people present in the data collection process to oversee the process and provide security. Also, verifying if an informal settlement was included in the registry entailed going in a rented car to a neighborhood in Buenos Aires to identify if a reported informal settlement fulfilled the classification of informal settlement. Coordinators were experts in identifying cues that provided information about the connection to electricity, access to water, sewage, precarity, and land security. I heard them discuss specific characteristics signaling the access to water, electricity, and the presence of sewage. However, it can be challenging to determine if people are connected to the formal infrastructure or if it is even working properly. Therefore, this required ReNaBaP's coordinators to interview a broker or social movement in the neighborhood to gather more information.

Entering informal settlements in Buenos Aires is not always the same experience because different types of neighborhoods compose a fragmented universe. Argentine scholars and the state largely agree that there are at least two types of informal settlements (“*villas*” and “*informal settlements*”) with different characteristics (Almansi 2009). “*Villas*” are more densely populated by immigrants from Paraguay, Bolivia, and Peru, and these neighborhoods are more likely to be within Buenos Aires city. On the other hand, informal settlements are located on the city’s outskirts and are less populated, usually composed of small houses. While “*villas*” are more accessible to identify given the structure of the neighborhood (smaller houses, narrow streets, a construction that does not follow the pattern of the rest of the city), informal settlements are more difficult to identify given that the construction of the neighborhood tends to imitate the grid of the rest of the city (the blocks are demarcated, the houses have between one and two stories, etc.). By looking at the external characteristics of the neighborhood or a satellite image, it is not always possible to identify an informal settlement. Therefore, it is necessary to collect in-situ information to corroborate that the state classification is accurate. The image below illustrates the difference between an informal settlement map (highlighted blue area) and the formal city.

**Map N 1 – Informal settlements next to the formal city**



Source: Own elaboration based on ReNaBaP and INDEC’s data.

Finally, I also analyzed documents from different state institutions, such as the Ministry of Social Development, ReNaBaP, the Congress, the national archives, and institutional websites. I analyze all the laws and social programs designed for informal settlements at the national level before 2016, and I compare them to the decree, law, and social program developed between the state and the social movement after 2016. Specifically, before 2016, two laws and two social programs were developed for informal settlements, which were largely unsuccessful (Abed 2019). In addition, I collected internal documents, guidelines, and training material to understand how this policy was implemented. Finally, I paid attention to debates in Argentina's National Congress to identify patterns regarding how the exchange of information influences the creation of new decrees, laws, and state agencies. More specifically, I focused on analyzing how specific pieces of information (such as the number of people, the location, and the living conditions, among other topics) are used to persuade politicians and policymakers to incorporate new classifications, design public policies, and create state agencies.

## **Findings**

In this section, I show how the social movement and the state embarked on a legibility project that affected the public policies for informal settlements. The legibility project required the consolidation of a network of expertise which gained leverage to negotiate the production of data and the design of public policies. Specifically, I demonstrate that by becoming essential for producing knowledge for the state, the social movements gained leverage to produce a Decree, a Law, and a state agency.

I will divide my findings into four main sections. The first section will focus on how the government's political style opened a window of opportunity for the social movement to embark on a legibility project. The second section will present the consolidation of an expertise network to construct and collect all the data, demonstrating how the government needed the social movement and NGOs to produce the data. The third section will explain the process of knowledge production, focusing on the classification system, methodology, and data collected. The final section will focus on the process of negotiating and producing public policies. Specifically, I focus on how the classification system, the methodology, and the data collected affected the public policies for informal settlements. By delegating the data collection process to

civil society, social movements were able to produce and shape laws, policies, and the organization of a new state agency.

### *Government's Political Style*

The political style of Macri's government incorporated the expertise of the private sector and lacked an understanding of the dynamics of social movements. Mauricio Macri was elected president with a political coalition representing Argentinean elites with a strong connection to traditional right-wing parties and corporate sectors (Vommaro and Morressi 2015). Although Macri had previous experience in the public sector, the newly elected president relied on CEOs to fill key positions in the government<sup>3</sup> (Canelo et al. 2018; Gene 2018). The president divided the Cabinet into a Political and a Technical position. The Technical Chief of Cabinet oversaw the performance of the different ministries at the national level, while the Political Chief of Cabinet was in charge of the government's political relations and communication. Macri selected Mario Quintana, a successful Argentinean CEO, to perform as the Technical Chief of Cabinet, given his experience in management and as a consultant at McKinsey & Company. Quintana incorporated into his office experts in economics to increase the performance of the Ministries. However, his technical staff did not know about the dynamics of the social movements or the conditions of vulnerable populations:

"I had to work at the government next to Mario [Quintana] coordinating different Ministries. And it was super interesting to see how we lived in fragmented worlds, this is the truth, and it was not the government's fault, completely fragmented worlds. We had in the Ministry of Production excellent people working, excellent economists, and beyond what these guys did as policy, the analysis they conducted to understand the Argentinean production was good, they studied different sectors, etc. However, they studied the top half of the Argentinean economy. (...) And all these weird stuff in which all these people were involved, Juan Grabois' friends, what the fuck, nobody understands what the fuck it is, it is similar to the informal economy, but is not the same. Because the popular economy has a language that constructs a type of organization to understand these topics." (Interview with Strategic Coordinator for the Chief of Cabinet)

Since social movements were important actors in the Argentinean political field, which had "produced fundamental effects on public policy" (Garay 2007, 303), the president assigned a sector of the government to deal with these actors, specifically, the Ministry of Social

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<sup>3</sup> 70% of the state officers of the Cabinet (Jefatura de Gabinete) came from the private sector and had experience as CEOs (Canelo et al. 2018).

Development<sup>4</sup>. The government wanted to “to build consensus and negotiate, and in some way, to include these actors in the political game, and in fact we had people from Grabois working at Casa Rosada [...]”<sup>5</sup> Thus, the government chose dialogue rather than confrontation with social movements. 2016 represented the most convoluted year in Macri’s mandate, with 431 events of protest against the government (Natalucci et al. 2023). Matias Kelly, the Sub Secretary of the Ministry of Social Development, argued in an interview that “our political capital is proximity.”<sup>6</sup> Although the government recognized there was a problem with the informal sector, they did not know what to do in practice. For example, the Technical Chief of Cabinet argued in relation to ReNaBaP that “the ideas about how to move forward concretely, [...] came from mixed teams, and we had periodic meetings with representatives of all de organizations, Caritas, Techo, national government, and social movements.” The government needed to build a dialogue because they 1) needed to negotiate with social movements, and 2) did not know what to do with all that sector that they did not understand.

The government’s decision to embark on a legibility project with a social movement was strategic. The sector of the government dealing with social movements aimed 1) to build alliances with social movements, and 2) generate data about a constituency that had been largely neglected by Peronist governments. In this context, the social movement’s leader presented to Quintana a document with a “proposal” which included the elaboration of a national registry among other demands related to informal settlements. Specifically, the document proposed the “Elaboration of a provisional national census of informal settlements and urban slums without formal land tenure.” Therefore, the creation of a national registry of informal settlements did not arise from a consensus within the government. Rather, it was the result of the negotiations of two main actors, Juan Grabois and Mario Quintana. Initially, Quintana and Grabois’s main idea was the elaboration of a survey to identify all informal settlements. The government was interested in knowing “scientifically what happens with every person in our country.”<sup>7</sup> Eventually, the policy grew, and key actors from the government got involved in the public policy.

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<sup>4</sup> Within the government two perspectives about how to manage social movements coexisted. On the one hand, the Ministry of Social Development, Carolina Stanley, aimed to build trust and dialogue with social movements, on the other, the Ministry of Defense, Patricia Bullrich, relied on the police to confront these actors.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with advisor of ANSES’s Secretary.

<sup>6</sup> Interview Matias Kelly for Newspaper La Nacion. <https://www.lanacion.com.ar/politica/divide-al-oficialismo-el-control-de-las-protestas-sociales-nid1933944/>

<sup>7</sup> Marcos Pena, Political Chief of Cabinet.

The elaboration of the national registry was an initiative presented by the social movement to the government which echoed with specific actors in the government but not all of them<sup>8</sup>. The involvement of a sector of the state with Peronist social movements generated tensions within the government and the political party. For example, there were conflicts between the Ministry of Security, Patricia Bullrich, who was opposed to negotiating with social movements, and the Ministry of Social Development, Carolina Stanley. The Sub Secretary of the Ministry of Development argued that “We were severely criticized in political terms for opening the game to the social movement, but we did not invent them, they were already in the territory [...]” Similarly. The strategic Coordinator for the Chief of Cabinet, argued:

“What Mario did was an adventure, and many people in the government looked at him as if he was doing something weird. [...] Mario [...] was basically who invented RENABAP *influenced* by Juan Grabois. Later, more actors got involved in the project such as the President, the Ministry of Social Development, ANSES, and others [...]” [Interview with the Strategic Coordinator for the Technical Chief of Cabinet]

In fact, when state officers consulted INDEC, in charge of collecting and producing information at the national level, about the possibility of conducting a national census of informal settlements, the institution did not have a definition of what an informal settlement was and did not consider that it was a priority of the institution to collect data about informal settlements<sup>9</sup>. According to the Chief of Cabinet<sup>10</sup>, INDEC lacked the tools to conduct a census of such characteristics for several reasons: 1) enumerators faced difficulties accessing informal settlements, 2) INDEC presented a budget that the government considered “too expensive,” and 3) INDEC’s timeline could not finish the task before Macri’s presidential term ended.

A common thread that brought the government and the social movement together was their Catholic faith. Several members of the government’s political coalition were Catholics who participated in charity organized by the Church to help vulnerable populations. Specifically, the President had a relationship with Pope Francis which he considered “a moral leader for me”<sup>11</sup> and with whom he met twice in person in 2016. In addition, UTEP’s leaders were Catholics and

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<sup>8</sup> It is important to note that the government had a different program managed by the Ministry of Housing - without the participation of social movements – named Pro.Cre.Ar designed to give accessible loans to vulnerable populations to buy their own houses.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Mario Quintana, Technical Chief of Cabinet.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Mario Quintana, Technical Chief of Cabinet.

<sup>11</sup> Press Conference on October 15<sup>th</sup> of 2016. <https://www.lanacion.com.ar/politica/los-temas-que-trataron-mauricio-macri-y-el-papa-francisco-durante-la-reunion-nid1947394/>

had a strong relationship with Pope Francis. For example, Grabois in 2015 exercised the role of consultant for the Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace in the Vatican. Since 2014, Pope Francis has organized the “World Meeting of Popular Social Movements”, in which social movements from around the world and UTEP have participated. UTEP follows Pope Francis main religious tenets: land, roof, and work. Therefore, the elaboration of a national registry aligned with Pope Francis’ ideas about providing housing for all people living in Argentina.

The different tensions that coexisted within the right-wing government opened a window of opportunity for the social movement to advance their political agenda. The political coalition wanted to incorporate a technical and expert style to the management of the government, which led them to incorporate successful business owners, economics, and experts in the cabinet. However, the government also needed to manage the social movements, with whom they did not have any relationship or understanding of its dynamics. A sector of the government decided to use the dialogue and build trust with social movements to change the Peronist tradition of clientelism. In this context, the government decided to conduct the national registry of informal settlements with a social movement. Religion was a key ingredient to bring together polar political actors and promote trust among each other.

### ***The Construction of an Expertise Network***

The elaboration of a national registry of informal settlements required the construction of an expertise network. The social movement and the government built an expertise network based on “patchworked trust” that is, trust constructed by pieces of a broader network. The incorporation of different actors in the expertise network ensured their mutual reliability. According to the Strategic Coordinator for the Technical Chief of Cabinet “the *piqueteros*, the ones like Grabois, they are complicated people, instead, CARITAS, the Catholic Church, Techo, they have some sort of credibility in some segments. The credibility was constructed in pieces.” The social movement and the government required other “pieces” to build a “patchworked trust” and embark in a project of knowledge construction. The Technical Chief of Cabinet argued that it was a “the most scandalous aspect” of ReNaBaP was the collaboration in a policy with a “social movement which generally are politically aligned in opposition to our government.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with Technical Chief of Cabinet.

UTEP, as a social movement with no expertise in conducting surveys, needed to learn how to count informal settlements. Therefore, Grabois decided to incorporate the technical support of Techo, given its previous experience in conducting a study about informal neighborhoods in ten provinces of Argentina between 2011 and 2013. Techo is a nonprofit organization dedicated to constructing temporary houses for people living in informal settlements in Latin America. Given the Catholic identity of most of its members, Techo and UTEP's leaders and members knew each other from previous social projects organized by Pope Francis in informal settlements. Techo's previous investigations identified the geographic localization of informal neighborhoods in ten provinces<sup>13</sup> but they did not have data at the national level<sup>14</sup>. While Techo's members were hesitant about working with a right-wing government, they trusted UTEP's leader, Juan Grabois, with whom some members of Techo had a close relationship given their previous collaboration with Pope Francis in social projects. According to Agustin Algorta, "even if we were working with a right-wing government, there was the church and other organizations more left leaning, [...] at the end it was kind of neutral, because you had [political actors] from both sides [...] the different sides [of the political spectrum] were involved."<sup>15</sup>

The third organization that was incorporated was Caritas, a Catholic association with a strong presence throughout Argentina's provinces. The incorporation of Caritas fulfilled two goals: 1) to include a religious institution in contact with the Pope that worked as a broker between the government and the social organization, and 2) to ensure access to informal settlements. Bringing the Catholic church into the equation provided legitimacy to the public policy in the eyes of the government, because it was not a project developed by "some crazy social movements"<sup>16</sup>. Moreover, Techo and UTEP felt more confident by bringing the Catholic church because "it is easy to betray UTEP or Techo, but it is harder to betray the Catholic church"<sup>17</sup>. They could frame the project as conducted by the government and social movements under the purview of the church. Second, UTEP and Techo did not have a presence in all the informal settlements throughout the country, and both organizations acknowledged that it was

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<sup>13</sup> Argentina has 23 provinces.

<sup>14</sup> Techo did not finish the census at the national level, given the lack of resources.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Agustin Algorta, coming from Techo, ReNaBaP's Coordinator from 2018-2023.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Agustin Algorta, coming from Techo, ReNaBaP's Coordinator from 2018-2023.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Agustin Algorta, coming from Techo, ReNaBaP's Coordinator from 2018-2023.



difficult for state officials to access an informal settlement without knowing anybody there. Building an alliance with Caritas was important because most urban slums and informal settlements have at least one chapel that is connected to Caritas.

However, Caritas was skeptical about participating in a state project with Macri's government, given their Peronist political affiliation. The relationship between UTEP's leaders and Pope Francis influenced the decision. Specifically, Pope Francis appointed Juan Grabois in 2015 as a consultant for the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. In addition, Caritas is an organization with a strong presence in informal settlements throughout the country, and their religious project aligns with the recognition and identification of these neighborhoods. One of the representatives of Caritas argued that the unique opportunity to participate in a project between two opposed social forces from the Argentinean society (UTEP and the right-wing coalition in the government) convinced them to join the new social project (Garcia Monticelli and Pastoriza 2023).

The social movement and the government had to trust each other to construct the national registry and provide legitimacy to a public policy that was in the making. Initially, the organization of the national registry of informal settlements (ReNaBaP) was informal given that it was not under the scope of a law, decree, or formal public policy. The social movements started to work at Casa Rosada, the government's house, under a new program named the Social and Community Projects Area (ASCP) within the scope of the Chief of Cabinet. The government initially employed only six people from UTEP and Techo as national coordinators. As the project started to scale up, experts and members from different organizations were incorporated into the project.

The consolidation of ReNaBaP illustrates an assemblage of expertise which required legitimacy at the meso-level, they required to build trust among themselves and in front of other state agencies. As the government's coordinator of ReNaBaP argued, "Techo contributed with the methodology, while the social movement (UTEP) contributed with the capillarity; these organizations were in the territory and provided the project's viability."<sup>18</sup> The government provided the resources and legitimacy at the meso-level to collect data of informal settlements at

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<sup>18</sup> Interview with government's coordinator of ReNaBaP, Florencia Nigro, 2016-2018.

the national level. On the other hand, the social movement and the NGOs ensured that the state was going to be able to collect the data within each informal settlement.

### **Process of knowledge production: classification, methods, and data collected**

The process of knowledge production reflected the structure and expertise of the network. The different organizations fulfilled a key task in ensuring the process of data collection. First, Techo provided a classification and methodology to collect data in informal settlements. Second, the social movement provided the “capillarity” that ReNaBaP required to access every informal settlement and convince people to answer the survey. Third, the government provided resources to fulfill the task (a budget, an office, access to state information, among others). In addition, the type of data collected by ReNaBaP allowed the government to identify social beneficiaries of conditional cash transfers. Since it was not a national census, it was possible to collect identifiable data. Moreover, the social movement considered that it was necessary to tie a conditional cash transfer to the data collected in the informal settlement to ensure people’s willingness to provide their information.

ReNaBaP divided the country into 16 regions and assigned a group to each region in charge of collecting the data. The reasoning behind dividing the country into these regions was related to the social movements’ presence in the territory. UTEP’s organizations and other social movements allocated each region to a social movement based on their presence in the neighborhood and knowledge about the area. According to an official document, 13,000 neighbors across the country worked as enumerators and surveyed half of the population in the country in six months (Mino and Carrara 2023). Enumerators used shirtfronts with the logo of UTEP, Caritas, Techo, and the state agency in charge of distributing cash transfers and social programs (ANSES). The social movements and NGOs decided not to include in the shirtfront the name and logo of the original state agency in which this policy was originally developed (the technical Chief of Cabinet) given that people would be more skeptical about providing their information to Macri’s government. This was also a negotiation with the government, Agustin Algorta mentions that “the government wanted to put their logo, but no, there is no way you’ll

put your logo, let's use ANSES logo instead.”<sup>19</sup> Using ANSES's logo legitimized the data collection process.

To start identifying informal settlements it was necessary to devise a definition of what they were. ReNaBaP used Techo's definition of informal settlement: a neighborhood with at least eight<sup>20</sup> families living adjacent to each other, where there is no access to at least two formal services (water, electricity, and sewage), and more than half of its population does not have property rights. Techo's definition had been discussed, adjusted, and used in previous studies conducted by this organization in the Province of Buenos Aires and Cordoba. This definition was tailored to identify informal settlements experiencing precarious conditions in Argentina<sup>21</sup>. The threshold of eight families was discussed among members of the social movements and NGOs. It was important for them to have an expansive classification that could include most of the informal settlements that existed in the country. Other institutions such as INDEC and local governments questioned the validity of using a broad threshold.

ReNaBaP incorporated Techo's methodology to find and delimit the boundaries of informal settlements. The methodology entailed using satellite images, Google maps, or local governments' maps paired with in situ observation. Teams of two people were sent to find informal settlements. As a state official puts it, they were “*villa* hunters.” In their trips to “hunt” informal settlements, ReNaBaP teams went to places where they knew or thought an informal settlement was located. They entered the neighborhood in a car or by foot and started to look for cues that confirmed if the settlement was informal or not<sup>22</sup>. Other academic studies or state agencies collecting data about informal settlements relied on local governments' official data. However, Techo's methodology did not rely solely on official numbers, rather their methodology entailed “going [to each neighborhood] to corroborate everything, collect all the information and corroborate it in the territory [...] If we said that an informal settlement existed it was because

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<sup>19</sup> Interview with Agustin Algorta, coming from Techo, ReNaBaP's Coordinator from 2018-2023.

<sup>20</sup> The use of “eight families” for the definition does not correspond to a technical decision, rather it is a random number used by Techo. However, ReNaBaP's bureaucrats consider that it is important to include as much neighborhoods as possible in order to not to leave families outside of the registry.

<sup>21</sup> In Argentina some upper-class neighborhoods located in the outskirts of the city could be considered informal, because these are new urbanizations in which people do not have property rights, and access to formal water and sewage, those areas could be also classified as “informal settlements.” However, these neighborhoods do not present any sign of precarity.

<sup>22</sup> It is important to know that the strategies to identify informal settlements improved over time. Today, ReNaBaP relies on satellite images, google maps, and has a standardized manual to identify informal settlements. However, they still consider it mandatory to do in situ observations to confirm the characteristics of the informal settlement.

we had visited it.”<sup>23</sup> Since the data collected did not depend on the information that local governments produced about informal settlements, ReNaBaP was able to autonomously identify informal settlements based on their observations and system of classification.

In practice, this often entailed looking for irregular connection to electricity, water, and sewage. The practice of looking for cues to identify formal connections was often an effective way of identifying the level of formal access, because bureaucrats did not have to rely on local governments, national state agencies, or private companies in providing the information. To standardize the process of identification, ReNaBaP elaborated an “Urban Diagnosis Manual”. This manual provided tools to characterize the neighborhood using five parameters: a) the identification of regular and irregular access to water, electricity, and sewage, b) the characterization of the urban infrastructure (public lighting system, road pavement, house materials), c) the access to public services (school, police, hospital), c) the assessment of risk (environmental risk), and d) property rights. The manual included pictures to differentiate between irregular and regular access to basic services, between adequate urban infrastructure and the infrastructure commonly seen in an informal settlement, and the environmental conditions that are considered a risk (see Appendix). Finally, the manual provides tools to interview people regarding property rights and the menace of eviction.

To conduct the census of all people living inside an informal settlement, ReNaBaP sent enumerators to all informal settlements to survey each household. ReNaBaP developed an app to conduct the survey and systematize the information for this task. INDEC uses physical surveys to collect data for its surveys and census, which historically took a long time to process. Therefore, to differentiate itself from this institution, ReNaBaP designed its own app to collect the information and geolocate the data.

The first step to conduct the survey was establishing contact with activists and social brokers from the neighborhood. People living in vulnerable conditions are subject to eviction and scams, making them more reluctant to provide information to a person they do not know. Legitimacy was therefore fundamental. Otherwise, as a ReNaBaP coordinator argued, people would think it was a “scam, because these neighborhoods are too *manhandled*, many people come with promises and then go, and *do not leave anything*.” (Mino and Carrara 2023: 57). It

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<sup>23</sup> Interview with Agustín Algorta, coming from Techo, ReNaBaP’s Coordinator from 2018-2023.

was important for enumerators and social movement's members not to lie or make promises that they could not fulfill later on.

Therefore, to ensure people will respond to the census, the government and the social movement decided to link data from the survey with the list of beneficiaries of one of Argentina's most critical conditional cash transfers, the Universal Allowance per Child (AUH). By doing so, RENABAP and ANSES decided to ally to identify children who were not receiving the AUH. Therefore, when people asked about the purpose of the survey, activists collecting data answered it was to identify if they were receiving the transfer. UTEP officials argue that although ANSES knew that some populations were not receiving this conditional cash transfer, they did not know how to identify them, given that they did not have a formal address. According to UTEP, the information collected in the survey identified 7000 children who were not receiving the AUH.

The type of data collected involved identifiable data about every person living in an informal settlement. Unlike national surveys, which collect anonymized data, ReNaBaP decided to collect the addresses, names, and identification of every person living in an informal settlement to crosscheck this information with conditional cash transfers. Although it was not stated explicitly, the state agency was counting people not only to better grasp the number of residents and their characteristics but also to register every person. The personal data allowed the social movement to create a database of beneficiaries of social policies.

### ***The Effects of Knowledge Production Over the State***

The construction of a network of expertise and the data collection process allowed UTEP to negotiate with the state and design a new public policy and a law with a different approach to manage informal settlements. The collaboration between the state and the social movement allowed the latter to endorse a new approach to manage informal settlements. Specifically, the state moved from designing policies to provide individual property rights to designing programs focusing on the social and urban integration of marginalized neighborhoods. The network of expertise managed to design a public policy about informal settlements focusing on 1) the construction of infrastructure, 2) the suspension of evictions, and 3) the provision of some level of property rights. The provision of property rights was possible given that ReNaBaP collected

identifiable data about people living in these neighborhoods. In this section, I will show how the creation of a new classification scheme and the use of specific data about informal settlements allowed the social movement to negotiate the design of a new law and public policy with the state. Without the previous stage of knowledge production, it would have not been possible for the social movement to negotiate and produce public policies.

*The Creation of a National Registry, a Law, and a New State Agency*

Between 2016 and 2019, during the process of data collection, the state and the social movement negotiated three main things: 1) the institutionalization of the registry (2017), 2) the national law of informal settlements (2018), and 3) the creation of a new state agency dedicated to the management of informal settlements (2019). Neither the government nor the social movement foresaw that counting informal settlements would lead to the creation of a new state agency and policy for informal settlements. But the social movement’s goal was not to “count the poor for Macri”<sup>24</sup>. Rather, throughout the process of data collection, the social movement gained leverage to negotiate with different actors within the government, the incumbent party, and the opposition, the institutionalization of a new classification scheme<sup>25</sup>, a new methodology to collect data in informal settlements, and a public policy to manage informal settlements. The following table illustrates the three different phases which include: what the social movement had to do, what they gained (benefit), and how it changed the state.

**Table N.1 - The effects of the negotiations between the social movement and the state**

<b>Phases</b>	<b>Role of Social movements</b>	<b>Benefit</b>	<b>Changes in the State</b>
<b>First phase (property rights)</b>	Identifying neighborhoods and counting half of the population living in them.	Creation of Property Certificate for all people living in informal settlements.	Register the private properties and people living in informal neighborhoods Decree N° 2670/2017 which formalized ReNaBaP as an official registry
<b>Second phase (property rights)</b>	Finish counting all people living in informal settlements across the country.	No evictions of informal settlements for a span of four years.	Law of Property Rights N° 24.374 to expropriate the land occupied by informal settlements.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Fer Mino, Director of the Secretary of Social and Urban Integration (SISU).

<sup>25</sup> I will refer to a classification scheme or system as the identification of distinct categories.

<b>Third phase (development of infrastructure)</b>	-	-	Creating the Sub-Secretary of Urban and Social Integration (SISU) & allocation of resources for the new development program.
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The *first* political agreement between the organizations and the government was that once 50% of the population living in informal settlements was surveyed, the state would sanction a presidential decree to institutionalize the national registry. Before sanctioning the Presidential Decree N° 258/2017 the registry was recognized only as a survey conducted for a special program developed by the Chief of Cabinet. The Presidential Decree was important because it recognized ReNaBaP as an official registry of all the private and public property in which informal settlements were located. Also, the Decree acknowledged that the national registry registered all the people living in these neighborhoods.

The Decree N° 258/2017 incorporated Techo’s definition of informal settlements used to collect data in informal settlements in their previous surveys. This was a step forward towards the construction of legibility by incorporating a classification scheme to accurately identify the conceptual and physical boundaries of an informal settlement and the people living within it. Unlike previous laws and social programs designed for informal settlements, the Decree N° 258/2017 incorporated a clear definition of informal settlement. During the nineties, the national government issued three laws which did not define informal settlements, rather they mentioned “irregular settlements” or “occupied territories,” without providing a clear definition<sup>26</sup>. These laws did not provide a list of informal settlements that were going to be affected by the law. Therefore, the expertise network provided different resources to construct knowledge about informal settlements. In fact, a report conducted by Techo in 2013 relies on the exact same classification as the one used in the Decree. In this sense, the social movement and organizations not only had authority to bargain with the state, but also the capacity to produce the public policy.

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<sup>26</sup> The Law of Public Territory N° 23.967, the Law of Property Rights N° 24.374, and Law of Property Rights N° 24.374. The Law of Public Territory N° 23.967 issued in 1991 referred to informal settlements as: “land belonging to the National State (...) which has been occupied by permanent houses or that are available to develop social housing.” Similarly, the Law of Property Rights N° 24.374 issued in 1994 focused on establishing a regime of property rights regularization to all “occupiers that prove the public, pacific, and continuous possession for more than three years [...] of urban property used as a household.” Again, this law does not define who is an occupier, nor it relies on a national registry.

Moreover, Congressmembers justified the importance of the new Decree during the debate in Congress by mentioning the 4,416 informal settlements identified by the registry to explain the need to create a new decree that targeted this population. It is important to note that during debate nobody questioned the validity of the information collected. Using a number to motivate the reasoning behind the Decree, was a powerful tool used to dimension the characteristics of the social problem in the country. The definition used for informal settlements was

“all neighborhoods commonly called villas, informal settlements, and informal neighborhoods that were built using different strategies of occupation, presenting different degrees of precarity and overcrowding, without access to at least two formal basic services, such as electricity, sewage, and water, and without property rights or access to land, with a minimum of eight grouped families living contiguously” Decree N° 258/2017

One of the main goals of the Decree is to provide some level of legal recognition that a family is the rightful owner of their household. The new Decree provided residents with a legal document (Property Certificate) to prove that a family had been living for a certain amount of time in the house. In other words, a Property Certificate (PC) recognized that a family had been living in a specific property located within an informal settlement. Given that ReNaBaP collected non-anonymized data about people living in informal settlements, it was possible to create a property right certificate. The collection of specific data about people in informal settlements allowed the state agency the possibility to provide an accurate identification of the location of the property, the people living within the house, and an address.

This document was crucial because every person living in a neighborhood classified and registered as an informal settlement by ReNaBaP was now entitled to a PC. The PC was a legal instrument that recognized the existence and veracity of the house's address. With this document, families could access a tax and employee identification numbers, providing access to public education and health. Furthermore, this document was a proof of residence that allowed people to demonstrate that they lived in an area where a school was located. Before, people would use addresses outside the informal settlements to apply for jobs or get a social security number. Although the PC did not recognize land tenure, it also worked as a recognition of property possession.



The *second phase* entailed the negotiation of a bill for informal settlements. The informal agreement was that if UTEP finished identifying informal settlements and surveying their populations, the government would present a national law in Congress to protect people living in these neighborhoods. The social movement and the government agreed to write the bill together, but it would be the government's party that was in charge of presenting the initiative in Congress. In May 2018, the Ministry of Social Development presented the bill at the Deputy Chambers and used data collected by ReNaBaP to discuss the "historical debt" the national government had to informal settlements<sup>27</sup>. In October 2018, the new Law of "Socio-Urban Integration of Informal Settlements" was unanimously approved by the Senate after one hour of debate. The incumbent party had the majority in the Deputy Chamber and the second majority in the Senate in Congress. Therefore, it was important to convince Congressmembers from different political parties to vote in favor of the law.

The elaboration of the bill was a negotiation between the government, ReNaBaP, the NGOs and the social movements. The negotiation of the bill was a "give and take of negotiations to move forward with what had been agreed."<sup>28</sup> While UTEP wanted to create an independent state agency overseeing the social and urban integration of informal neighborhoods, the government did not agree. The government located ReNaBaP within the purview of the Agency of the Administration of State Properties (ABBE). However, ReNaBaP was rapidly relocated to the Ministry of Social Development for political reasons. Specifically, the government created a Secretary of Urban and Social Integration (SISU) in the Ministry of Development to oversee 1) the registry of informal settlements and 2) the development of informal settlements. Members of ReNaBaP argue that the Law presented in Congress was what they could negotiate with the government; however, they were confident that during the debate Peronist Congressmembers would improve the law (Algorta and Aranovich 2023).

The new Law relied on the previous Decree's classification system and registry to shape a new public policy for informal settlements. Purposely, this Law proposed four main innovations from previous laws and public policies: 1) it focused not only on property rights, but also on the urban and social integration of informal settlements through the design of a

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<sup>27</sup> <https://www.infobae.com/sociedad/2018/05/16/el-gobierno-presento-el-proyecto-para-la-urbanizacion-de-las-villas/>

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Agustin Algorta, coming from Techo, ReNaBaP's Coordinator from 2018-2023.

development program for informal settlements; 2) it declared all informal settlements (located in public and private property) subject to expropriation; 3) it prohibited the eviction of informal settlements for four years; and 4) it proposed the creation of a budget to implement the construction of infrastructure to access water, electricity, and sewage. Unlike previous laws and policies developed during the nineties, which focused solely on securing property rights, this new policy focused on improving the living conditions within these neighborhoods by developing infrastructure to access formal water, sewage, and electricity. Therefore, based on the previous Decree and information gathered with ReNaBaP it was possible to create new public policy.

The new Law provided a legal tool to intervene in informal settlements. Expropriating all public and private land in which informal settlements were located was almost impossible to complete, because the expropriation required dealing with different levels of government, different bureaucracies at the national level, the individualization of all the houses within an informal settlement, and the identification of their rightful owners. In my interviews, members of ReNaBaP expressed that the expropriation of informal settlements was “unfeasible”<sup>29</sup> given the amount of time it would require, the resources required to pay public and private owners, and the different bureaucracies involved in the process.

However, UTEP and ReNaBaP's bureaucrats considered this Law vital because it allowed the state to intervene in public and private lands considered "irregularly occupied."<sup>30</sup> Before this Law, if the national, federal, or local government wanted to build infrastructure in an informal settlement, the property owner could act against the state for intervening in an "illegally occupied territory." Therefore, the law worked as a legal tool to allow the national state to intervene on public and private property where informal settlements were located. In addition, this legal tool allowed the government to suspend all evictions for four years. Similarly, private companies providing electricity, water, and sewage would not bring their services to neighborhoods occupying informally or “illegally” private property. A neighborhood could not ask private companies to connect any service provision to their neighborhood.

During the process, government state officials, members of ReNaBaP, Caritas, and UTEP, had to convince Congress members to vote in favor of the law. Members of ReNaBaP

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<sup>29</sup> Interview with Legal Coordinator ReNaBaP.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Legal Coordinator ReNaBaP.

argue that depending on whom they had to negotiate with, they would present themselves as representatives of the national state or as members of NGOs and social movements protecting vulnerable populations. They presented the information collected by ReNaBaP to the different political forces. It was essential to use the original statistics collected by ReNaBaP to give visibility to a social reality that had historically been ignored. Also, they met individually with Deputies to debate the extent of the law.

To argue in favor of the Law of Socio-Urban Integration of Informal Settlements, Congressmembers used information collected by ReNaBaP during the debate. Specifically, they relied on the 935,000 families and the 4,416 informal settlements that the law would benefit. For example, Senator Bullrich mentioned the “935,000 families that for the first time will have an address and will be able to say: ‘we are the owners of a home’.” A Senator aligned with the incumbent political party explained: “Why do we want to know [informal settlements]? Why register [these neighborhoods]? Far from stigmatizing, we are making visible a problem that affects more than 4000 neighborhoods (...). Transforming this project into law means to stop looking to the side (...).” Congressmembers used this information to make a marginalized population visible and legible for the state.

In addition, far-right Congressmembers agreed that formalizing individuals’ property tenure incentivizes private owners to participate in the formal private sector. Jose Luis Espert, a free-market politician, wrote an article in an Argentinean online newspaper explaining his decision<sup>31</sup>. In the article, he used ReNaBaP’s numbers to illustrate that the law does not go against private property; rather, it acknowledges a historical problem, creates an expropriation regime to compensate private owners, and creates a special legal regime for land property. Espert recognized that the law was an opportunity to develop private owners with the possibility of becoming autonomous individuals integrated into the formal economy and market.

However, Congressmembers disagreed about the legitimacy of the list of informal settlements registered at ReNaBaP. During the debate in the Senate, members of the provinces of La Pampa and Formosa expressed their disagreement with including some neighborhoods in the registry. For example, Congressmembers representing the province of La Pampa stated: “We have a problem with the inclusion of two informal settlements that should not be included in the

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<sup>31</sup> <https://www.infobae.com/opinion/2022/10/18/usurpaciones-nunca-mas/>

annex of the Law.”<sup>32</sup> Another Senator, Daniel Lovera, argued that “we don’t know the criteria [used to conduct the registry] nor the actors in charge of conducting the surveys.”<sup>33</sup> Lovera considered that the registry was not serious and it was irresponsible. In private negotiations, Congressmembers of La Pampa asked ReNaBaP to remove the two neighborhoods they did not want to be included in the registry in exchange for voting in favor of the Law<sup>34</sup>. However, members of ReNaBaP argued that they did not accept this condition, given that they had used an “objective definition” to develop the sample.<sup>35</sup> Congressmembers from La Pampa argued that their province had a different development program designed for the two neighborhoods located in public territory,<sup>36</sup> and the recognition of these neighborhoods as part of ReNaBaP would not allow them to continue with their program. In the case of Formosa, the Senator considered that some of the neighborhoods included in the registry did not fulfill the definition requirements<sup>37</sup>. Congressmembers were in a dispute to exclude some neighborhoods because they wanted to have more control over their subnational territory.

Since the Law declared all informal neighborhoods included in the registry subject to expropriation and of public interest, local and federal governments had less margin to intervene and manage these neighborhoods. For example, the local government was not able to sell “occupied public territory”, nor develop a different public policy from the one designed by the national law.

The *third phase* entailed the creation of a Sub-Secretary of Social Integration (SISU) in charge of implementing a new policy for urban development, which had indirect effects over the organization of state institutions. The construction of this state agency did not involve a negotiation with the social movement in exchange for a specific benefit for people living in informal settlements. In 2018, the government formed the SISU in charge of developing 1) an urban development program of informal settlements and 2) the collection of data about informal settlements (in coordination with ReNaBaP). While the government created the SISU to organize the public policies to enforce the Law of informal settlements and manage ReNaBaP, it did not

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<sup>32</sup> Intervention Senator Durango.

<sup>33</sup> Intervention Senator Lovera.

<sup>34</sup> Interview Agustin Algorta, member of Techo working at ReNaBaP.

<sup>35</sup> Interview Juan Manuel D’atolli, member of Techo, working at ReNaBaP.

<sup>36</sup> Intervention Senator Lovera.

<sup>37</sup> Intervention Senator Gonzalez.

have an actual budget or resources to execute the urban development program. It was not until 2019 that a new progressive government allocated a budget to enforce the new public policy and started to build infrastructure in informal settlements and allowed to create conditional cash transfers to people living in informal settlements to improve their houses.

In 2018, the government named a member of the incumbent political party as the Director of the SISU. While the new Director incorporated personnel to enforce the urban development program, he also maintained the personnel from UTEP, Techo, and Caritas who had been collecting data for ReNaBaP. As an outcome, the SISU was composed of members of ReNaBaP answering to the social movements and NGOs' guidelines, and the new staff responding to the government's political agenda. As a consequence, the new staff hired by the government's Director and members of ReNaBaP did not work with each other to implement the new policy. The consolidation of this new state agency allowed the government to demonstrate that they were developing public policies for a constituency that Peronist governments had largely neglected, and at the same time, it allowed the government to continue the dialogue with the social movements.

Designing a law and a public policy tied to a national registry was necessary because the numbers provided by UTEP played a crucial role in securing resources. The social movement and the NGOs consider that providing specific data on the number of people who live in informal settlements, identifying how many informal settlements exist in the country, and knowing where those neighborhoods are located, legitimizes the demand for resources to design a public policy for informal settlements. Even if the data produced does not accurately portray the reality of people living in informal settlements (undercounting or overestimating), it is essential to produce numbers that can be used politically to advocate for the development of informal settlements.

This section illustrates that the social movement gained leverage to negotiate with the government to incorporate a classification system to identify informal settlements, a new approach to integrate informal settlements, and legal tools to intervene in areas previously neglected by the state. Moreover, the process of data collection had effects on public policies. Specifically, it provided a new classification system, a new methodology, and a new set of data that allowed the creation of a Property Certificate to protect people living in informal settlements and the allocation of conditional cash transfers. Producing data about informal settlements was

crucial for convincing key government and Congress actors that this population existed and required specific policies.

## **Discussion and Implications**

This article analyzes a legibility project of populations and territories that are hard to “see” given that they lie outside the purview of bureaucratic arrangements. While most scholars have focused on how bureaucracies construct legibility, I propose looking at its effects on laws, public policies, and state agencies. By developing an in-depth case study of Argentina, I demonstrate that the process of building legibility does not only affect the population and territory that is identified and measured, but also laws and public policies for these sectors. An expertise network working within state institutions became a key actor in the process of constructing knowledge about informal settlements and the design of public policies for this sector. The process of collecting data becomes a window of opportunity for social movements to negotiate with state officials the design of public policies, laws, and the structure of the state agency. These negotiations with the government shaped a new perspective to manage informal settlements that crossed political party lines. Therefore, I argue that legibility projects are opportunities to transform the state.

Studying the construction of legibility as an expertise network has broader implications for the sociological study of the role of social movements in the expansion of the welfare state. Like the case of São Paulo (Bradlow 2022), in Buenos Aires city, governments did not prioritize the redistribution of public goods for citizens living in informal settlements. Thus, the embeddedness of the state in civil society was crucial for the redistribution of public goods. However, I show that the fragmented nature of state bureaucracy opened a window of opportunity for a social movement to negotiate with key state actors. My study demonstrates that social movements not only demand the redistribution of public goods, but can also actively participate in the production of public policies. The expert network provides the classification schemes, expertise, methodology, and crucial data to produce policies for these sectors.

By looking at the construction of an expertise network, it is possible to understand that social movements are not always coopted when they work from inside the state, but they rather gain leverage to produce policies that lie within their scope of expertise. In Argentina, the state

required the social movement to conduct a national registry of informal settlements. While the institutionalization of the social movement in the state can be understood as their co-optation (Tarrow and Meyer 1998), my research suggests that to understand why social movements are not coopted, it is important to look at how these organizations become a network of expertise indispensable for the process of managing these populations. By adopting this framework, we can understand why and when social movements can also govern the state.

My findings have consequences for the sociological study on the effects of technology and data collection on societies. The market develops sophisticated methods to collect data on individuals which creates a system that stratifies individuals based on economic behavior (Fourcade and Healy 2016). While the market owns the data collected its effects on the lives of individuals is dire. These systems of stratification affect individuals' access to credit and adequate housing. My study is in dialogue with this literature by showing that the actors involved in the process of data production matter to understand the effects of knowledge on individuals' lives.

My article contributes to the literature on urban inequality and segregation in the United States and globally. Urban scholars find a rise in the "urban crisis" in the United States and throughout the world where low-income populations experience increasing segregation in cities (Florida 2017, Garrido 2021, Musterd et al. 2017, Sampson 2019). Historically, in developing countries processes of urbanization were accompanied by the exclusion of large portions of citizens from access to land and public goods. In the absence of housing policies for less-privileged populations in modern cities, people embarked on the self-construction of their own houses and neighborhoods (Holston 2008) which were categorized as informal or "illegal". The analysis of how states see and classify populations living in informal settlements, and how civil society sees the state, is crucial to understand the decision-making process of housing policies (Levenson 2022). Often these territories and populations are "black boxes" that states and the private sector do not want to "see." This case illustrates that organized civil society can produce crucial knowledge about territories that are difficult to identify to design specific policies for this sector in dialogue with these populations.