

ACADEMIC PAPER

A normative approach on lobbying. Public policies and representation of interests in Argentina

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Public policies and regulations need to broaden the voices represented in the deliberation and search for solutions to societal problems. The practice of lobbying is a legitimate and legal way to reach public decision makers in order to contribute to a more participatory and plural democracy despite its bad reputation. As a general characteristic, Latin America still has shortcomings in the development of participatory democracy. Due to the lack of an organized civic culture, resources, or ignorance, civil society does not usually use planned methods for an effective exercise of the right to petition public authorities and reduces its areas of incidence to sporadic demonstrations around specific issues. However, it is possible to recognize certain key cases promoted in Argentina by civil society organizations that have achieved their purposes, such as laws related to eating disorders, equal marriage, and assisted fertilization.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Public affairs is the area of public relations that focuses on the field of action in which lobbying is framed, a professional activity that defends the legitimate interests of groups or companies before public administrations and transparently transfers relevant information and knowledge about a sector, activity, or collective (Xifra, 1998, 2011).

In a terminological as well as conceptual approach, Ferrer (2014) warns that, although the words lobbying and public affairs are often used indistinctly, mainly in Spanish-speaking countries, they are not synonyms. To simplify, public affairs is more comprehensive because includes sectoral analysis and intelligence, lobbying itself, all dialog and communication with the different stakeholders of an organization and the construction of alliances, delimiting lobbying to the incumbency over the exercise of influencing a public policy or legislative initiative. When indicating the context in which the application of public affairs and lobbying strategies is necessary, Ferrer does not hesitate to include nonprofit organizations because their function is the legitimate defense of collective interests and the participation of civil society in political and regulatory processes.

In this sense, lobbying is a communicative strategy of public relations (Davidson & Rowe, 2016) whose specificity lies in the public receiving the message and in its purpose: to influence the spheres of competence of executive and legislative branches at any scale, international, national, state, or local. In this way, the practice of lobbying,

also referred to as representing interests, implies effectively influencing executive and legislative branches of different jurisdiction and becomes a legitimate and legal way to make the arguments of different sectors of society reach public decision makers, in order to contribute to a more participative and plural democracy, an aspect on which we will place particular emphasis later on.

1.1 | The contribution of lobbying to the strengthening of participatory democracy

Since the 1980s, Latin America has returned to the democratic path. However, in many cases, it has been reduced to the periodic call to elections and to the introduction of new constitutional mechanisms of civic participation, which have not been sufficiently promoted nor exercised by citizens. Consequently, as a general feature, our continent still has shortcomings in the development of its participatory democracy. Due to the lack of an organized civic culture, resources, or ignorance, civil society does not usually use planned methods and suitable channels for an effective exercise of the right to petition public authorities, right recognized in the Argentinian Constitution (Article 14) as well as in most Latin American countries and other democracies.

It is indisputable that governments have the power to decide on legal norms, administrative acts, and public policies. However, civil society should not delegate the development of a fairer and

prosperous society exclusively to its representatives. Castillo Esparcia (2011) complements this assertion by pointing out that one of the structural characteristics of the political system is that it is no longer possible to speak of the representative–democratic channel being the only, though most important, way for the elaboration and implementation of public policies.

Outside party structures, there are organizations that advocate the defense of collective rights that do not find an echo in the structures of representation. Galaviz (2006) argues that, in today's complex society, institutions of traditional (or spatial) political representation are no longer sufficient for the proper conduct of public affairs. For this reason, interest groups must be incorporated into public decision-making processes in a role of sectoral (or functional) representation that acts as a complement to traditional representation so that there are counterweights to guarantee that public affairs have the public interest as a horizon and are not co-opted by powerful influence groups to the detriment of the common good.

Thus, representative democracy moves toward instances of participation in order to promote the active involvement of the different sectors of society, with a greater or lesser degree of articulation and in representation of diverse interests, in the discussion and implementation of public decisions. In this sense, Castillo Esparcia (2011) refers that:

Structurally, democracy is linked both to social pluralism and to the participatory principle, i.e. both to a plural conception of social reality and to a social and political dynamic governed by the principle of citizen participation in public affairs (p. 92).

Politicians should promote the inclusion of the greatest number of voices and channels of participation in the search for effective consensual solutions to everyday social and structural problems. This could mitigate, at least in part, the discontent and distrust of society in the face of opacity in decision making that is evident in different latitudes and, in many cases, in crescendo. In this regard, Gutiérrez-Rubí (2014) points out that:

A new citizenship, increasingly critical and committed, is making its way. And it wants to have more influence in political action and in legislative processes, claiming its democratic protagonism in view of the fact that the general interest is no longer sufficiently guaranteed by the institutional architecture, nor by its elected representatives (p. 61).

Consequently, a new empowerment of the public has been created, a recovery of democratic sovereignty on the part of citizens who feel that their representatives do not respond adequately to the challenges. If until very recently, according to Gutiérrez-Rubí (2014), citizens were immersed in what political science has called delegative democracy, whether due to a lack of time, knowledge, the capacity to have an effective impact, or the impossibility of gathering together collectively; today social technology—networks, platforms, devices—makes it possible to combat limitations and foster a civic protagonism in public issues to which the author confers a strong emotional component. This context gives rise to what the author calls *citizen lobbying*,

which to a large extent shares with traditional organizations the methodology of public affairs—knowledge of the environment and measurement of the influence of each actor in the political process, establishment of contacts with key authorities, generation of arguments, and information on the policy being promoted and its connection with the general interest—but adds intrinsic characteristics such as it is open and inclusive and shared and promoted through digital channels, among others. In spite of the optimistic outlook it presents, it does not fail to take into account that there are limitations in the capacity to turn mobilization into representation.

One of the pioneering handbooks in Argentina that contributed to the capacity of civil society organizations (CSOs) to influence the legislative branch has been sponsored by the Center for the Implementation of Public Policies for Equity and Growth (CIPPEC, in Spanish), a very well-known think tank. In her foreword, Baron explains how “civil society can get involved in the institutional system to defend the public interest” (CIPPEC, 2005; p. 13). Just to point out, it should be borne in mind that CSOs, including think tanks, prefer to use the term advocacy to refer to the influence over public authorities, which would presumably be justified in the attempt to differentiate terminologically from lobbying, which would be the representation of interests with corporate predominance.

In recent years, texts such as Astié-Burgos (2011) add the concept of cyberactivism as the expansion of opportunities to exert influence using new technologies that have turned out to be suitable alternatives for making themselves heard in the face of traditional structures, political parties and mass media, that is, Change.org where citizens ask to support and viralize different petitions and some of them finally reached to public authorities.

Academics and professionals emphasize the substantial contribution that lobbyists make to public policies processes. Ferrer (2014) hardly believes that it is necessary to understand that public actors have the obligation and need to attend and dialog with private actors. This need is rooted in the logic that a regulator of a public policy, as well as a promoter of a bill, cannot cover or know perfectly each of the matters that fall within their competence, being, therefore, necessary a dialog with stakeholders before, during and after the regulation and execution of the laws and policies under their responsibility. For its part, Ahuir (2014) alludes to the important social function of lobbyists to provide reliable information to legislators and executive authorities in order to carry out their function with full knowledge, shedding light on the issues they regulate in a sincere dialog between regulators and regulated. Egea (2014) argues in favor of the representation of interests, considering that “it improves the information available for the authorities to elaborate and implement public policies with greater knowledge of all options, benefiting society with better laws” (p. 168).

Undoubtedly, public affairs are becoming increasingly complex, and therefore, as more influential groups—a category that includes power and interest/pressure groups—participate, the public deliberative process is enriched by in-depth knowledge and know-how about the sector or area of social interest that is the object of regulation.

Given the fact that lobbyists want public policies and laws to be designed according to the particular convenience of the sector they represent, Galaviz (2006) points out that society also has the right to demand that this presentation of demands be carried out in conditions

that do not violate the democratic system. As a consequence of the generalized prejudices about lobbying, it is necessary to design legal mechanisms and conditions so that democratic practices and institutions are not put at risk. In this sense, the author recommends that it be carried out within a public deliberative process in which all stakeholders have access to public administration in an equitable way, warning that it is the elected authorities who at the end of the process will adopt the decision that in their opinion is more appropriate in their role as guarantors of the general interest and not as mediators of a convenient accommodation of interests. Therefore, Galaviz (2006) focuses on the relevance of plural participation by pointing out that:

Equity in access to parliamentary consultations and their institutionalization also improves the quality of public policies, because those who formulate them have not only more but also better opinions and proposals, due to the competition between arguments (...) A greater flow of information tends to generate consensus by allowing each group to clarify its proposals so that they are better understood, avoiding unnecessary and non-existent conflicts. Consensus is also favoured because it allows the flow of information to perform its convincing function and with it, the change towards closer positions (p. 50).

Partial progress toward openness to collaboration and transparency of decisions has been made with the 1172/2003 decree of the Argentinian federal executive branch entitled *Improving the Quality of Democracy and its Institutions*. This regulation includes five instruments—public hearings, access to public information, publicity of the hearings of representation of interests, participative elaboration of norms, and participation in the open meetings of the regulating entities of services—with a view to a more participatory democracy and in the framework of a democratic reform for a country that was coming out of a crisis of representation post 2001. However, after 15 years, the mechanisms contemplated are limited in their scope and in their effective compliance. The only relevant improved was the Public Access to Information (27,275th Law) in 2016, which was subjected to numerous modifications as a result of the legislative debate and the participation of dozens of CSOs that made their contributions.

More than a decade ago, Pfeiffer (2006) prepared a detailed report on corporate lobbying in Argentina, which, unfortunately, has not been updated with the changes that occurred after more than a decade of Kirchnerist administration and the assumption of a new government in 2015. However, in general terms, the document is still relevant because not only was no progress made in regulating lobbying, but other suggestions made there have not been implemented. After analyzing the historical route of the public—private decades, Pfeiffer proposes a map of corruption risks with seven items. One of them alludes to the “lack of expertise and technical support from and to lawmakers”, an aspect that is also controversial in other nations of the world, as pointed out by Francés (2013):

The main reason why many lobbies have achieved such influence is that parliamentarians do not have sufficient resources to study issues in depth, and end up accepting stakeholder reports (p. 281).

We agree with Francés that in many Latin American countries, the imbalance between professional lobbyists contrasts with the hired public servants chosen, in many cases, based on criteria of clientelism and intrapartisan political favors in the administrative bureaucracy labyrinth. However, even if parliamentarians and officials had a suitable and sufficient team of advisors, lobbying would continue to be a legitimate and legal channel for transmitting sectoral demands to the public authorities.

1.2 | Successful initiatives undertaken by civil society organizations

Generally, organizations advocating for the defense of noneconomic interests—under the wide range of minority demands, for recognition of civic rights or environmental issues—have based their ad hoc political advocacy on an internal structure that is more informal and reactive than corporate associations. Castillo Esparcia (2011) points out that:

The causality and political incidence of associations is not exhibited as a regular mechanism, but is generated as a reactive initiative against the actions of other associations that may endanger the interests of their members (p. 175).

Faced with the insistence that CSOs are always in disadvantage compared with powerful interests, Francés (2013) criticizes the victimization that citizens assume to draw attention to the passive role they have often adopted, stating that “there are many citizens who perceive that there are no mechanisms to help them channel the defense of their interests, but neither are they very willing to build them” (p. 125).

Astíe-Burgos (2011) points out that, although it is valid to assume that lobbying is a suitable instrument to influence the decisions of governmental spheres and that it is within everyone's reach, the real impact of this influence requires numerous conditions that are not equally gathered among those who have the right to petition—powerful groups *vis* the broad spectrum of civil society.

In Latin America, the traditional public policy formulation was historically marked by the interaction between the personalism of the officials with the powerful groups. In Argentina, the Executive is the branch that usually prevails in making public policies; however, many of them require a law, which is why it is not possible to underestimate the importance of lobbying in the Congress. After the recovery of democracy since mid-80s, the political system became more open and the variety and number of pressure groups expanded greatly. Beyond the fact that traditional powerful groups—churches, trade unions, business entities, and among others—continue to exist, the representation of interests has become institutionalized and civil society has become stronger (Thomas & Klimovich, 2014). The following cases reaffirm this perspective, as they confront civil society to powerful groups such as health maintenance organizations (HMOs), the food industry and Roman Catholic Church.

These are three initiatives that were promoted and implemented by CSOs through a strategic lobbying plan *vis-à-vis* the national public authorities and that allowed the sanction, enactment, and regulation—partial in some case—of national laws that today regulate eating disorders, the possibility of marriage between people of different genders, and the obligation to provide assisted fertilization services by HMOs

in Argentina. These cases are framed in what some specialists call under different labels such as civic lobbying (CIPPEC, 2005), citizen lobbying (Gutiérrez-Rubí, 2014), or social lobbying.

1.3 | Law for the Prevention and Control of Eating Disorders (26,396th Law)

Since 1989, dozens of bills had been presented to regulate the care of people suffering from obesity, but successively, they lost parliamentary status. It took almost two decades for the Senate to consider different bills that were merged and studied in six committees. The bill contemplated, among other aspects, declaring obesity, bulimia and anorexia diseases; the establishment of healthy kiosks in educational centers; the obligatoriness of HMOs of facing integral treatments for patients in their nutritional, psychological, clinical, pharmacological, and surgical dimensions; the signage of a label on foods and beverages with the legend on the prevention of the consumption of sugar and fats; and the gratuity of bariatric surgeries for morbidly obese people. Due to the repercussion, it would have on profitability and/or changes in management and production; it is foreseeable that there were sectors that opposed, mainly, the companies that provide health services and the Coordinator of the Food Products Industries (COPAL, in Spanish). After its approval in November 2007, 50 votes in favor and one against, in the following year, the House of Representatives focused on its study in two committees. When it reached the plenary session, it was approved—135 votes in favor and 30 against—with modifications, making it necessary to return to the Senate, which rejected most of them, and the law was approved in August 2008. After that, the executive branch objected some articles, and due to the impossibility of the Congress to insist with a qualified majority, the obesity law, as it was labeled by the media, was published. To date, many aspects of the law have not been enacted.

The fundamental pillars of the advocacy strategy were based on indirect lobbying, displacing the typical direct lobbying actions. During the years before and after the legislative procedure, a large audience channel broadcasted the program in reality show format, *Cuestión de Peso*, hosted by Alberto Cormillot, a doctor specialized in nutrition and eating disorders. Repeatedly, from a program of massive reach and headed by a very popular opinion leader, the attention of lawmakers and officials was drawn to the imperative need to pass the bill. The cause was massively gaining followers and called for two major mobilizations in front of the Congress under the slogans *Hug Congress* and *Take Action*, which involved thousands of citizens, many of them belonging to the Association Against Obesity (ALCO, in Spanish), a CSO that has more than a hundred self-help groups across the country and of which Dr. Cormillot is its founder.

1.4 | Law amending the Civil Code (26,618th Law)

The bill that proposed enabling same-sex marriage was promoted by the Argentine Federation of Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, and Trans (FALGBT, in Spanish), a newly created institution at the time, which also had as a secondary objective to position itself as a more inclusive federal collective against the historic representation of the Argentine Homosexual Community (CHA, in Spanish), which proposed a bill on

civil union. Since 2007, bills had been presented but lost their parliamentary status until in 2009, two bills were merged in the House of Representatives, which had the signature of numerous legislators as coauthors and a note of support when the 15 authorized signatures had been surpassed. Its study was carried out in a plenary session of the Committees on General Legislation and on the Family, Women, Children and Adolescents. Without quorum in successive opportunities, perhaps because the ruling party (Front for the Victory) decided not to participate before the visit that was scheduled for those dates by Argentinian president to the Vatican, it was not possible to continue. The following year, 2010, there was a new composition of the chamber in which the Front for Victory lost its status as a majority parliamentary group. For a few weeks, there was no quorum for session because the opposition was interested in proposing other legislative issues, such as modification of income taxes. After an agreement between the parliamentary groups promoted by the FALGBT, it was decided to convene a special session and approval was achieved with 126 votes in favor, 100 against, and four abstentions. Months later, the Senate, after promoting public hearings in different provinces, issued three reports: the majority for the rejection of the bill, one in minority for the approval, and another for the civil union that was turned down. In July, the bill was approved without modifications—33 votes in favor, 27 against, and three abstentions. Less than a week later, a great call was made to celebrate the act of express promulgation by President Fernández de Kirchner, resulting Argentina to be the first country in Latin America to enable equal marriage.

The strategy promoted by FALGBT was successful because direct and indirect lobbying techniques were systematically and complementarily employed. With a strategic vision, the CSO understood that if direct lobbying was not emphasized, the battle that was won in public opinion could be lost in the legislative labyrinth. Thus, in addition to meeting with lawmakers from across the ideological spectrum, they were provided with documentation with talking points/key messages and survey, which showed that the majority of the population was in favor of the bill, as well as a guide of frequently asked questions on controversial issues that both citizens and journalists might ask. The legislators of the historical parties were persuaded with arguments reminiscent of similar emblematic laws extending rights to minorities that they supported, that is, to the Justicialism the female vote, to Radicalism the impulse to the divorce law. In addition, support was mobilized through social networks, massive events, and press conferences were organized; the support of opinion leaders was obtained; requested publications were published, and, perhaps the most unusual aspect, the collaboration of some producers of fiction for television was obtained to include in the scripts love affairs between people of different genders, breaking away from the stereotypes that until then had been used to characterize gays and lesbians.

1.5 | Law on Comprehensive Access to Medical-Assisted Reproduction Procedures and Techniques (26,862nd Law)

Better known as the law of assisted fertilization, its purpose was to include in the Compulsory Medical Program (PMO, in Spanish)

comprehensive access to medical-assistential procedures and techniques of medically assisted reproduction, whether of low or high complexity. As in previous cases, there were attempts to pass the bill in previous years, but it was not until 2012 that it was admitted to the House of Representatives and approved in June with 169 affirmative votes and seven abstentions. The following year, after being studied in different committees, it was dealt with in the Senate, being approved with 60 votes in favor and two against with several modifications. Returning to the House of Representatives the following month, the result was 204 affirmative votes, one negative, and nine abstentions. Subsequently, the Executive enacted and regulated it.

Three CSOs were the driving forces, which carried out direct and indirect lobbying actions. One initiative to highlight was the mobilization to the Congress under the slogan “*The march of empty strollers. For the children we cannot have,*” as well as the mural and graphics that the artist Milo Lockett made supporting the cause of *empty bellies*. As in the first initiative, the main opposition groups were the HMOs to which the Roman Catholic Church was added—coinciding with the second example analyzed.

The three cases show that there is no identical formula of which is the most effective alternative to obtain the approval of a law of interest to civil society because in the examples outlined, the strategy was based on different combinations of direct and indirect lobbying. Furthermore, numerous specialists (Astié-Burgos, 2011; González Sánchez, Rodríguez Caamaño, & Rodríguez Caamaño, 2008; Hula, 2002, among others) point out the strategic relevance of joining and articulating efforts by building ad hoc coalitions. However, it is not always convenient to act in alliance and Hula (2002) focuses on this aspect analyzing when groups are more likely to prefer coalition-building strategies and when to act independently in order to promote public policies. In this sense, the first two cases, obesity and equal marriage, were under the leadership of a CSO, and the third one, assisted fertilization, chose to join efforts among several organizations.

1.6 | Lobbying regulation is necessary but not sufficient

If the right to petition public authorities is a universal right that guarantees and legitimizes lobbying, why would there be a need to legislate its exercise? At the same time, does a law of representation of interests per se guarantee a more pluralist and participatory democracy?

Before outlining some answers, we apologize that space limitations not allow a comparative analysis of current legislation, that is, United States, Peru, Chile, Canada, and Australia, and suggest issues that should be considered in comprehensive legislation, as well as the consideration of the phenomenon known as revolving door and about the convenience of raising the minimum penalties for bribery and influence peddling.

Categorically, we agree with Egea's assertion that lobbying is “the greatest enemy of influence peddling” (Egea, 2014; p. 166). However, its incorrect association with this crime and with bribery persists in the social imaginary. Probably, the political scandals, with wide repercussion in the media, as well as the stereotypes spread from the

audiovisual entertainment industry, such as House of Cards, Casino Jack, Miss Sloane, and the Argentinian series *The Lobbyist*, could have contributed to activate the debate about how to regulate the public-private relationship within each country. This is how Veksler (2015) understands it, who points out that most lobbying regulations were the result of scandals involving lobbyists, although DeKieffer (2007) adds that they were promoted by CSO in order to ensure transparency and accountability in the political system. For its part, Galaviz (2006) provides his vision of the challenges and precautions surrounding the regulation of this activity:

Prevent malpractices and excesses that can occur in lobbying, without limiting the right to express to interest groups and without depriving legislative bodies of the flow of information or other benefits of lobbying (p. 125).

In Argentina, more than a hundred bills were introduced because of the restoration of democracy, although none of them prospered. Since 2016, the Executive has opened a round of consultations in which we participated and presented a bill to the Congress for consideration but 2 years later still remains under study. Faced with this panorama, legislating is a necessary but not sufficient alternative in Argentina to differentiate those who legitimately and professionally influence the public authorities from those who resort to the delivery of money, gifts, extortion, cronyism, exchange of favors, or any other illegitimate and harmful modality for democracy. For this reason, we understand that it is healthy and auspicious that, before giving rise to a national law, a broad and plural process of deliberation and diffusion is initiated about which are the legitimate tools and processes for its exercise without leaving aside, as Davidson and Rowe (2016) postulate, the affectation of the public interest.

On the other hand, Veksler (2015) offers an approximation to answer our second question, by stating that there is no unanimous conclusion in the academic world on the effects of lobbying regulation. After mentioning a series of methods, elaborated by other authors or organizations, with their respective indexes to measure the strength of regulation in this matter, he comes to the conclusion that one elaborated by the Center for Public Integrity constitutes the most comprehensive and appropriate quantitative method to analyze the legislation of lobbies in the jurisdictions that have regulated them. However, its criticism is that the method is focused on measuring what the law explicitly stipulates but does not take into account how the effect is diluted by not measuring the application of the law. Once warned in this regard, it is necessary to avoid *copying and pasting* foreign legislation that could be difficult to comply with and/or leave loopholes for noncompliance depending on our political culture and, in particular, the prevailing public affairs culture, concept described by Harsanyi and Schmidt (2012).

1.7 | Summarizing, a normative approach beyond the legal framework

Within the framework of lobbying studies from a comparative perspective, Kanol (2015) is based on Schmitter's classification of interest representation systems. In this sense, in countries with a corporatist

interest representation system, there is a structure and hierarchy of relations between interest groups and the State in which few groups—typically representatives of the business world and trade unions—are deliberately included in the process of making public policies. By contrast, in countries with pluralist interest representation systems, there are opportunities for all groups to mobilize and influence public policy. However, the author cautions that this does not mean that all groups have equal access to public decision makers and/or equal influence over public decisions. Recognizing the differences between the two systems, Kanol suggests avoiding the use of a dichotomous variable by opting to suggest degrees/scales and even pointing out that this may change in the same country over the years.

In this context, in which Kanol (2015) warns of the difficulty of identifying whether a country responds to one or another system, it would be pretentious to affirm—in the absence of empirical studies that can support it so far—that Argentina can be categorized as a pluralist country. However, we can predict that it is emerging with at least a promising horizon based on some auspicious aspects: strengthening of think tanks and CSOs as valid interlocutors in the process of public policy making, alternation between parties and the offer of new graduate courses to train professionals in the field. Consequently, some facts—of which we have only reviewed three cases—could be an indicator that Argentina is on the way to pluralism, or at least that it is on a higher level than 10 years ago, given that the traditional institutions, such as the powerful industries associations, the unions, or the Roman Catholic Church, have been joined by influential groups with more limited reach and less trajectory but equally effective and that have managed to impose in the media and political agenda their demands, modifying the legal framework and public policies in representation of their interests.

González Sánchez et al. (2008) question lobbyists when they say that:

Those responsible for organizational communication are challenged to close the gap between the possible and the desirable, and the recommendation is to use lobbying processes as an alternative for achieving social objectives and organizations, without detriment to human well-being, but, above all, with a high level of social responsibility (p. 96).

In conclusion, it is not a matter of denying the existence of the legitimate exercise of influencing public policy makers in representation of the most diverse interests but of promoting and maximizing the channels of political participation of all the stakeholders involved in a pluralist society. Public policies and regulation need to broaden the voices represented in the deliberation and search for solutions to societal problems.

Academics, lobbyists, opinion leaders, journalists, the ruling class—which includes politicians but also businessmen and trade unionists—and CSOs have an important role to eradicate unfounded prejudices around lobbying, and, from there, lay the groundwork for efficient legislation that is transparent and accountable about how each actor exercises the right to petition before the authorities and how they weigh the influence they receive when making binding decisions.

We agree with Davidson and Rowe (2016) when they state that the practice is entering a period in which it must be understood how

it can support democratic legitimacy, starting from bringing the concerns of the citizens to the decision makers. In a much specialized study recently carried out in Great Britain, the authors argue that the highest level of consensus among the professionals involved the positive contribution of lobbying on a social scale in terms of improving the quality of legislation and public policy.

All this, paradoxically, takes place in a context in which lobbyists and their professional bodies have failed to generate confidence in the activity because it is still perceived to the promotion of corporate interests.

The strategies and techniques are very rich and diverse such as direct and indirect lobbying—through the citizen mobilization (grass-root lobbying), through the setting of topics in media (media lobbying), through the systematic use of social networks, (cyberactivism) or with the adhesion of opinion leaders who get engaged (grasstop lobbying). All of them must be continuously validated by a practitioner who is recognized as a public servant (Davidson & Rowe, 2016) who carries out its work for the benefit of organizations of any sector of activity and, above all, of the democracy.

As a corollary, we share with Thomas and Klimovich (2014) that so far not much has been written about interest groups and lobbyists in Latin America. Without being pretentious, we hope that this work has contributed to regional production by pointing out, with three concrete cases, how lobbying is being expanded and professionalized in Argentina outside the classic corporate structures.

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