#### BEECK CENTER FOR SOCIAL IMPACT AND INNOVATION

# DIGITAL INNOVATION IN LATIN AMERICA: ARGENTINA'S DIGITAL DRIVERS LICENSE

APRIL 2020 // BY MARGARITA ARGUELLO

Pit I



#### About the Beeck Center for Social Impact + Innovation

The Beeck Center is an experiential hub at Georgetown University that trains students and incubates scalable, leading edge ideas for social change. We believe impact at scale requires the courage to think and behave differently. Our work centers on investing in outcomes for individuals and society. We equip future global leaders with the mindset to promote outcome-driven solutions, using the tools of finance and data + digital. We convene actors across the public, private, and civic sectors to advance new tools, frameworks, and approaches necessary to achieve these outcomes.

#### About The Digital Service Collaborative

The Digital Service Collaborative (DSC) is a program designed to develop research around government digital services, create tangible resources for practitioners, cultivate the community of digital service leaders in governments to share and scale efforts, and explore policy considerations including ethics and privacy. The DSC team is based out of the Beeck Center at Georgetown University, supporting public and private sector efforts to responsibly share and use data to address some of society's most challenging issues and to support civic engagement with public institutions.

#### <u>About this Case Study</u>

This case study is based on several public documents and interviews with former members of the Undersecretariat for Digital Government of the Argentine Republic during the 2015-2019 administration.

Special thanks to Daniel Abadie, Analia Gil, Jonatan Ol Beun, Alberto Rodriguez Alvarez, Cori Zarek, Soledad Planes, and Vandhana Ravi.

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### Introduction

On December 22, 2019 Soledad Planes — a young professional working in Washington, D.C. — traveled to Buenos Aires to spend the holidays with her family. Upon her arrival, Sole, as her friends call her, realized that she had left her driver's license back in her D.C. apartment. Without any driving credentials, Sole was unable to get a car rental or drive her family's vehicle during her stay. Additionally, she felt uneasy about carrying her passport around with her to use as a means of identification to get into gated communities to visit her friends and family for fear of losing it.

As she paced around her family's home on the first day of her two-week stay in Buenos Aires, Sole remembered a news article she had read months ago — a digital version of the driver's license had become available to citizens for download on a government mobile application. She quickly looked up a video tutorial on how to download the application onto her smartphone. Within 30 minutes, she had a completely legitimate driving credential and identification document right on her screen.

Reflecting on her time in Buenos Aires, Sole admits "having that license saved me, the digital driver's license saved me. I was asked for documents in many places and I showed that license." While in Buenos Aires, Sole used the credential to drive around the city, and verify her age and identity at local stores, restaurants, and apartment complexes.

# "Having that license saved me, the digital driver's license saved me."

- Soledad Planes Natitve Argentinian living in the United States

This case study describes how the <u>Undersecretariat for Digital Government of</u> <u>Argentina</u> developed and launched the world's first digital driver's license and the key lessons they learned. From its inception, the digital license created a pathway for the digitization of all vital documents and improved the lives of the citizens. In the process, the digital services team overcame myriad challenges by always keeping the end-user in mind and building up the capacity of its internal teams. The digital driver's license was created and launched in an almost unheard of 65 days and, in its aftermath, opened the door for digital vehicle registrations, insurance policies and ultimately, national identification cards.

# Background + Context

Occupying 2,780,400 km<sup>2</sup> in the southernmost tip of South America, the Argentine Republic is the second largest country on the continent and the largest Spanish-speaking nation in the world. Politically structured as a federal system, the country is divided into 23 independent provinces and one autonomous city — the nation's capital, Buenos Aires. Each province, with the exception of Buenos Aires, is further subdivided into departments and municipalities. There are currently more than 2,000 municipal governments in Argentina that have jurisdiction over matters such as road safety, health, and education.

As of 2019, Argentina had approximately 44.9 million citizens and, despite a history of economic instability, is currently the second-largest economy in South America and the third largest in Latin America. As such, Argentina holds membership in the G-15 and G-20 major economies and is a founding member of Mercado Comun del Sur (MERCOSUR), a South American regional trade bloc that promotes free trade and integration among its member states of the Southern Cone. Argentina currently boasts some of the highest human development levels in the region as well as some of the lowest crime rates.<sup>1</sup>

President Mauricio Macri from the coalition movement called Cambiemos assumed office in late 2015 after winning a closely contested election resulting in the first-ever run-off ballot in Argentine history. A disruptor in many ways, President Macri was also the first candidate to be elected president since 1916 who did not subscribe to Peronismo — an extremely popular political movement based on the legacy of former President Juan Peron.<sup>2</sup>

Macri came to the presidency after two terms as mayor of the city of Buenos Aires where he made modernization and digitization central pieces of his administration. As president, his platform centered around reintegrating Argentina into the global economy but he first needed to mitigate the polarization that existed in his administration and broaden his support base. Thus, the Macri presidency opted for a strategy of digitization as a vehicle for "effective governance and citizen engagement."<sup>3</sup>

### Digital Services in Argentina

The Argentinian Ministry of Modernization's Undersecretariat for Digital Government envisions a future where digital documents completely replace physical documents and government becomes "simpler, clearer, and faster."<sup>4</sup> In designing this system, the team adopted a user-centered approach — one where services adapt to the users and where service delivery is unified and reaches citizens far and wide. This endeavor, however, has not been without constraints. On a national scale, the team

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>Central Intelligence Agency. (2019). <u>The World Factbook</u>. CIA.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Los Andes. (2015). <u>Mauricio Macri: El primer presidente desde 1916 que no es Peronista</u>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Filer, Weiss and Cacace. (2019). From City to Nation: Digital Government in Argentina 2015-2018. Bennett Institute.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Abadie. (2014). <u>Minimum Viable Government</u>. TedxMarDelPlata.

had to think about legislative barriers and interagency and interstate collaboration. They needed to be sure the services they introduced met the legal standards and that agencies were properly equipped to adopt and deliver digitized citizen services.

When President Macri took office in 2015, decentralized efforts to digitize government services in Argentina had been underway for years. The country's digital government agenda was fragmented and the national government had produced over 1,000 websites that were all built with different technologies, by different vendors, and provided citizens with little more than institutional information.<sup>5</sup> In order to counter these shortcomings and provide citizens with a more unified and highly personalized government experience, the Macri administration opted for a digital strategy that placed consolidation and user-centered design at its core.

### The Undersecretariat of Digital Government: Leading the Way on National Digital Transformation

Established in 2015 as part of the Ministry of Modernization, the Undersecretariat for Digital Government consisted of a diverse group of professionals recruited from various government agencies, many of whom were behind the successful digital transformation of the City of Buenos Aires.

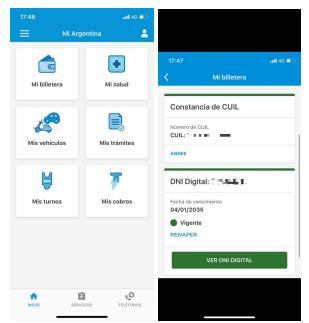
Much like its American counterpart the United States Digital Service (USDS), the Undersecretariat of Digital Government was structured like a "start-up" within the government. Its leadership emphasized the professionalization of the institution's internal teams in a way that would enable them to create their own cutting-edge products. However, unlike USDS, the Undersecretariat for Digital Government was not meant to provide direct support services or embed within other government agencies. Rather, it was created to play a more active role in the central digitization of government services and to unify these services within a single, centralized platform akin to the United Kingdom's Government Digital Service (GDS) which launched in 2011 with a "government as a platform" strategy.<sup>6</sup>

The agency moved a step closer to realizing this goal on February 3, 2017 when President Macri issued <u>Presidential Decree 87/2017</u>, giving the Undersecretariat for Digital Government and its digital services team absolute authority to create, house, and manage all digital services offered to citizens across the country. This meant that public agencies were not allowed to offer digital services to citizens on their own individual platforms. Instead, any digitization efforts had to be done through the central Undersecretariat for Digital Government and offered on the unified government platform.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Abadie. (2019). <u>Argentina's digital government 2019 update</u>. Personal Blog.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Filer, Weiss, and Cacace. (2019). <u>From City to Nation: Digital Government in Argentina 2015-2018</u>. Bennett Institute.

### Mi Argentina



The Mi Argentina mobile app.

In 2017, the Undersecretariat for Digital Government launched Mi Argentina, a mobile application that allowed citizens to create their own digital profiles to manage a variety of citizen services from their mobile devices.

In order to use Mi Argentina, a free app available for iOS and Android devices, individuals create an account using personal information including name, date of birth, Unique Labor Identification Code (CUIL), similar to the U.S. Social Security Number, email address, and password. The user must then validate the account using the unique identification number shown on their national ID card. Once the account is set up, users are able to log onto Mi Argentina from their mobile devices or their desktops using their CUIL number and password. The app employed strong encryption and security measures to protect this valuable information.

The digital service team believed users would find value in this product because it allowed them to easily store and access all of their vital documents and public records and manage their public services from a unified platform. In its initial stages, the Mi Argentina dashboard offered users access to various citizen service accounts such as social security and other entitlement payments. By logging onto the app, users could manage these services, set up notifications, keep track of due dates, and access their transaction records.

Accessible through mobile devices and on the web, Mi Argentina quickly became an indispensable tool for the more than 600,000 citizens who used it monthly to keep track of their social security benefit payments.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Jaimovich. (2018). <u>Cómo funciona Mi Argentina, la app para hacer trámites rápidos desde el celular</u>. **beeckcenter** 

By mid-2018 Mi Argentina's user base had grown to 2.4 million users, but in spite of these initial victories in uptake and design, Mi Argentina had not yet reached widespread use. Its user base, although loyal, was heavily concentrated in niche services.

#### The Catalyst

With an impending presidential election coming up at the end of 2019, Abadie's team knew that they needed to move quickly to ensure a potential change in government would not compromise their vision of digitizing government services throughout the country. President Macri's reelection was anything but guaranteed — he had won a closely contested election in 2015 and the country was now facing a financial crisis that led the administration to take the highly unpopular decision of seeking a loan from the International Monetary Fund.

The digital service team decided that in order to perpetuate their vision, they needed to make Mi Argentina indispensable to citizen's lives and, by extension, to any incoming administration. User uptake was key at this point — they needed to add a service to Mi Argentina's repertoire that would take it beyond the niche markets where it was operating.

Additionally, given the short time frame they were working under, Abadie's team also needed to make sure that this service would not present any major legislative barriers and could be built and deployed quickly.

### The Transformation Opportunity: Driver's Licenses as an Indispensable Resource



Argentina's Digital Driver's License. Image from Argentina.gob.ar

The ideal opportunity presented itself when the Highway Security Agency, the centralized agency in charge of road safety, approached the digital service team to collaborate on the creation of a mobile application for its law enforcement agents. The initiative was part of a broader modernization effort by the Highway Security Agency and involved creating an app that would streamline traffic stop procedures and create a unified digital record of citations. The agency's goal was to improve internal processes and help its agents generate and access information.

The digital service team knew that having the support and buy-in of the government agencies involved would be key to the project's success, so they proposed a mutually-beneficial solution: a digital driver's license that would be added to the Mi Argentina dashboard.

The digital driver's license was an optimal solution to Mi Argentina's problem of user uptake because it had the potential to reach citizens far and wide in a way that none of the other Mi Argentina services had done before. More importantly, it was something that most people had and understood. For this reason, there was no room for failure. It was crucial for Mi Argentina to offer a service that would build up momentum for digital services and generate demand for the unified government platform, both among the general public and across the government agencies that provide these services.

### Physical Driver's Licenses in Argentina

Traditionally, each individual municipality in Argentina is in charge of issuing driver's licenses and specifying the documents and fees required to obtain them. In 2010, legislative reform consolidated more than 1,800 different versions of the driver's license that existed across the country into a single National Driver's License, or Licencia de Conducir Nacional (LCN), under the jurisdiction of the Highway Security Agency.<sup>8</sup> As of 2018, more than 86% of municipalities had adopted this unified version of the driver's license.

In order to apply for a first-time driver's license, citizens go to their local citizen services office and present their national ID card, the Documento Nacional de Identidad (DNI), criminal background checks, and documentation proving that the applicant is physically and psychologically fit to drive. Additional requirements and documentation vary by municipality.

Once a municipality issues a driver's license, it is a valid credential for driving vehicles anywhere in Argentina and all of the other MERCOSUR countries.<sup>9</sup> For citizens, one of the main pain points with the driver's license is the hurdle of requesting a duplicate in case of loss or theft. The process differs by municipality, but is generally considered costly and time-consuming.

For instance, the <u>City of Buenos Aires</u> required that citizens first obtain a certificate proving that they have no pending traffic tickets, this is called the Certificado Nacional de Antecedentes de Transito (CENAT). Citizens must submit a form <u>requesting this certificate</u> at their local municipality and pay a fee of 180 Argentine Pesos (approximately USD \$9). Once the certificate is issued, citizens submit the request for the duplicate license with their municipalities at a fee of 797 Argentine Pesos (approximately USD \$35). The process takes approximately 10 days.<sup>10</sup> In a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Autoblog. (2010). <u>Licencia Nacional de Conducir: se lanzó el registro único para todo el país</u>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> MERCOSUR. (2018). <u>Turismo</u>. Asuncion.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Buenos Aires City Government. (n.d.). <u>Duplicado de Licencia de Conducir</u>. Buenos Aires.

country where an estimated 32% of the population lives below the national poverty line, these figures can be prohibitive.<sup>n</sup>

For law enforcement agents, the major drawback of the distributed system of issuing driver's licenses province by province was the inability to quickly generate a unified, national digital record of traffic stops that could be easily accessed. Given the consolidation efforts the Highway Security Agency was pursuing, they were also seeking a unified database that offered information on the traffic records of citizens from across the country in a central place.

### How Does the Digital Driver's License Work?

With the dual goals of making it easier and cheaper for drivers to have valid credentials and for the national government to centralize driver records, Undersecretary Daniel Abadie's digital service team designed a digital driver's license that citizens can easily access through the unified government platform of Mi Argentina.

In order to make a swift transition for users, the team of technologists and designers opted for a digital driver's license that coexists with its physical counterpart. This means that citizens must first possess a physical driver's license in order to obtain the digital version. Additionally, citizens need to sign up for a Mi Argentina account which is validated using a passport-style photograph (even a selfie could work) and front and back pictures of their National ID card (DNI). The data is automatically sent over to the National Registry of Persons (RENAPER) so that it can be compared to the data that already exists in the database<sup>12</sup>. The system then returns the information back to the app and access is either granted or denied to the user. This guarantees that users will not be subject to identity theft and that the service will be housed in the unified platform.<sup>13</sup>

The digital license generates a unique QR code law enforcement can scan to confirm the validity of the credential during traffic checks. On their end, law enforcement officers are equipped with an app that allows them to access the information they need from the users to perform these security checks and create records of all traffic checks.

The digital service team also made sure that the new system allows for traffic checks to be conducted in the absence of internet connectivity since users may not have internet access all of the time. To address this problem, they included a system in the Mi Argentina app that updates the QR code whenever the mobile device is connected to the internet. Mi Argentina carries out this process automatically and it does not require any action from the user. Once the QR code has loaded onto the mobile device, it can be accessed offline at any time.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> World Bank. (2019). <u>Argentina 2019 Data</u>, World Bank.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Ministry of Modernization, Ministry of Interior (n.d.) <u>System of Digital Identity</u>, Buenos Aires.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Abadie. (2018). <u>Gobierno como Plataforma</u>, Personal Blog.

In creating this new version of the driving credential, the digital service team produced an Application Programming Interface (API) connecting Mi Argentina with the Highway Security Agency's databases. This access allowed the digital service team to link the users' authenticated Mi Argentina accounts with the appropriate driving records. In this way, Mi Argentina displays the correct driver's license on the user's account using the Highway Security Agency's database, but without taking ownership of the data. In other words, the API allowed the digital service team to use the database, while keeping the Highway Security Agency's jurisdiction over it unchanged.

### Advantages of the Digital Driver's License

Although the digital license is designed to coexist with its physical counterpart, it does not have to. The major advantage of the new driving credential is that it allows people to drive, obtain car rentals, or otherwise produce valid identification even when they do not have their physical license with them. Since the digital driver's license has the same legal validity as the physical one, users no longer have to go through the drawn-out and costly process of requesting a duplicate in case their license is lost or stolen. They can continue to use the digital version and it is treated as equally valid as the physical one.

For the Highway Security Agency, the digital driver's license and its accompanying traffic check system offers the ability to easily generate and access data on traffic stops and driving violation records in a centralized manner.

## Challenges and Objectives

### Navigating Legal Barriers Through UX Design

Once the digital service team developed a project that could help them broaden the reach of Mi Argentina, they needed to make sure that the service was something Argentinians would want to use. Abadie and his UX (user experience) team came up state-of-the-art design ideas they knew would make for an improved experience for drivers. These proposals, however, would entail a drawn-out legislative process.

Instead, they opted for a design that was almost an exact replica of the physical license, allowing them to implement the project without the legislative hurdles by merely amending existing administrative orders. The first was to add a provision to the Highway Security Agency's <u>Disposición 39/2019</u>, the administrative action that consolidated the many provincial driver's license authorities into the consolidated national license. This new provision granted the same legal validity to the digital format of the driver's license that the physical National Driver's License has. Additionally, a change to <u>Presidential Decree 87/2017</u> granted the Undersecretariat for Digital Government unique jurisdiction over the user interface that offers access to the digital driver's license.

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By minimizing the physical changes to the license, the digital service team was able to encourage user adoption and inspire trust in the new product. This approach also allowed for less burdensome administrative changes for faster approval and implementation.

### Working with the Highway Security Agency

The next step in the process to get digital licenses to drivers was to collaborate with the government agencies involved and make sure they had the capacity to adapt to the new system. Abadie's team recognized the project's success depended on its ability to access and make use of the Highway Security Agency's data.

In addition to the citizen-facing Mi Argentina app that includes the digital driver's license and accompanying QR code, the digital service team also created a custom application for law enforcement officers to use during traffic checks. The law enforcement app incorporates the API that grants access to the Highway Security Agency's database and is equipped with a QR code scanner that allows officers to verify the validity of the driving credential.

The Highway Security Agency took the lead in purchasing the necessary electronic equipment for law enforcement officers to conduct traffic checks using the new app and they made sure that their agents were properly trained on the new system.

#### Regional Validity

The Argentine Republic is party to the <u>1949 Geneva Convention on Road Traffic</u> whose major provision allows citizens to use an international driving permit for up to one year in any country that is a signatory of the agreement, which currently covers 4 countries. The other MERCOSUR countries — Brazil, Uruguay, and Paraguay — are the exception to this norm. In these countries Argentinian citizens can drive using their regular Argentinian credential without any time limits.

This causes the digital driver's license to be limited in use in locales where law enforcement agents are not properly equipped to verify the validity of the digital credential. For this reason, the digital driver's license in its current state cannot be used outside of Argentina. However, according to Abadie its deployment has encouraged the governments of the trade union to collaborate in modernizing and digitizing their own traffic check systems.

The Undersecretariat for Digital Government, for its part, is offering its technical expertise in digital services to the other governments in the region and hopes to make the digital driver's license a reality across all of MERCOSUR in the future.

### Results

### Roll-out Strategy

Argentina's digital driver's license launched on February 12, 2019, becoming the first of its kind to be launched by a national government. Upon its release, people across Argentina were eligible to download the digital license. All they needed was a valid driver's license and the Mi Argentina app.

According to the Undersecretariat for Digital Government, **Mi Argentina received** an average of 200,000 visits per minute on the first day and within one month the app had registered 1 million new users.

#### User Feedback

As part of its design, the digital driver's license allows users to provide feedback on the proper use of the digital driver's license system. In this way, the Highway Security Agency is able to provide further training to its officers to improve service delivery. In nearly six months of operation, however, fewer than 30 cases of misuse have been reported and only one of those resulted in the wrongful confiscation of a driver's car. In this case, the feedback system redirected the user's report to the local authorities who then made sure to correct the problem and compensate the user.

### Digital Services and Mi Argentina Today — The Legacy of the Digital Driver's License

The digital driver's license is well on its way of accomplishing its mandate of opening the door to the digitization of additional vital documents and incorporating them in the unified platform of Mi Argentina. On July 10, 2019 — only five months after the launch of the digital driver's license — the digital service team added the digital versions of vehicle insurance and registration cards to the Mi Argentina repertoire.

In September 2019 numerous new services were made available on the Mi Argentina platform including nautical licenses, aeronautical licenses, cargo inspection records and national ID cards (DNI) — the ultimate service of mass consumption. By early 2020, 50,000 users had already downloaded the digital DNI and over 3 million people were using the Mi Argentina app every day. These numbers are expected to grow as more services are added to the platform<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Abadie. (2019). <u>Argentina's Digital Government Update</u>, Personal Blog.

## Lessons Learned

### Offering Services of Mass Consumption

Offering a service of mass consumption allowed the government of Argentina to grow its repertoire of digital services. Before launching digital driver's licenses the services of Mi Argentina only reached a limited audience of niche services. On the day that the digital driver's license was made available, Mi Argentina saw traffic of 200,000 clicks per minute and within a month the app had gained more than one million users. This allowed the digital service team to gain momentum — it became easier to offer more and more services. Additionally, this gave Me Argentina and the team behind it notoriety and generated demand for digitization of services across government agencies. In Abadie's words, "government agencies want to be part of Mi Argentina, we don't have to go and seek them out."

### Keeping the Knowledge In-house

Throughout this process, the Undersecretariat of Digital Government made the strategic decision to professionalize and trust its internal teams of technologists and not delegate any steps of the process to outside vendors or consultants. In this way, the team had a final say in all decision-making and kept its own priorities at the top. Additionally, this ensured the knowledge would stay in-house.

The result was a highly professionalized team of technologists and sophisticated platforms that now allow the Ministry of Modernization to make additions to its repertoire of digital service in a swift manner.

#### Technology as the Driver of Legal Processes

The process of digitizing driver's licenses Argentina's Undersecretariat for Digital Government pursued a "build it and they will come" approach. True to their start-up nature, they first designed a product that prioritized user needs and once that had been accomplished, they determined what would be the legal requirements to use it and how to navigate those.

#### Digital Services and Regional Integration

The unique dynamic that exists amongst MERCOSUR countries regarding driver's licenses has allowed Argentina to put the initiative of digital services at the forefront of MERCOSUR's <u>common digital agenda</u> and encourage cross country collaboration in digitization efforts. In this way, technology can be used as a vehicle to strengthen the economic and political integration efforts that are underway in the region. Moreover, Daniel and the team he leads made the decision to release all of their code on GitHub so that any government can build off of the Mi Argentina platform to create a citizen dashboard.

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