



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

SCHOOL OF GLOBAL STUDIES

Sustainability or a Waste?

A study of the impacts of the Basura Cero law on
the social sustainability of the cartoneros in
Buenos Aires

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Bachelor thesis in Global Studies

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Spring of 2013

Abstract

This thesis aims to investigate what implications that the environmentally oriented waste management law *Basura Cero* has on the social sustainability situation of marginalised waste pickers – *cartoneros* - in Buenos Aires. This aim is attempted through critical analysis of the results of interviews and observations conducted in Buenos Aires in the spring of 2013, and discussion of the findings in relation to the current sustainability debate. The results indicate that while the law is failing environmentally, it has contributed to the improved social situation for the *cartoneros* in the city. However, in light of sustainable development theorists from both mainstream- and critical camps, it becomes important to discuss if such changes represent long-term sustainability, or a solidification of neoliberal structures that through the discourse of sustainability justifies exclusion. In sum, the *Basura Cero* law does seem to have an impact on the social sustainability situation of *cartoneros*, an impact that in a short-term perspective is clearly positive, but in the long-term perspective can be questioned.

“To me, it was so cool to see these people that I see on the street, inside la Legislatura, with a microphone, talking about laws, it gave me goose bumps”.

- *Eugenia*

Thank you

A special thank you to our supervisors; Dr Jens Stillhoff Sørensen and Christian Tiscornia for valuable time and advice. To the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) for granting the Minor Field Studies scholarship that was instrumental in making this study happen. Thank you to all of the respondents who gave us time and effort, and to the students at UMSA who helped with interpretation and translation. A special thank you to our friends and translators, Luciana Costamagna and Eugenia Segovia, for your enthusiasm, flexibility, and unfailing optimism. We owe you.

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List of Abbreviations:

ARS: The Argentine currency, Argentine Peso.

CEAMSE: *Coordinación Ecológica Área Metropolitana Sociedad del Estado*, a semi-private waste-collection company in catering to the area of Buenos Aires.

CTA: *Central de Trabajadores de la Argentina*, worker union.

FDC: *Fundación Cambio Democrático* (Foundation for Democratic Change), NGO.

GAIA: Global Anti-Incinerator Alliance, Environmental INGO.

INGO: International Non-Governmental Organisation

Law 992: The *cartoneros* law of 2002.

Law 1854: The Zero Waste law of 2005.

MDGs: the UN Millennium Development Goals.

MTD: *Movimiento de Trabajadores Desocupados* (the Movement of Unemployed Workers).

MTE: *Movimiento de Trabajadores Excluidos* (the Movement of Excluded Workers), the largest *cartonero* cooperative in Buenos Aires.

NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation

SAPs: The IMF/World Bank Structural Adjustment Programs, a development strategy implemented during of the 80's.

UMSA: *Universidad del Museo Social Argentino*, Buenos Aires.

List of local terms:

Basura Cero: Translates into “Zero Waste” and refers to the waste management law that was passed in 2005.

Buenos Aires Province: The geographical area surrounding Capital Federal and Gran Buenos Aires.

Capital Federal: The centremost part of Buenos Aires and the judicial and geographical area affected by the Basura cero law.

Cartonear: the verb denoting the action of collecting waste.

Cartonera: female waste picker.

Cartonero: male waste picker, or general name for all waste pickers in Buenos Aires.

Ciudad Verde: the umbrella term for a public, environmentally promotional campaign in Buenos Aires.

Gran Buenos Aires: The geographical area of surrounding Capital Federal.

Porteño: A colloquial expression denoting a person from Capital Federal.

Vecino: Translates into “neighbour” and refers to the residential inhabitants in the city.

Villa miseria: Slum area or shantytown.

Introduction

The phenomena of marginalised people living off human waste on the edge of society, is one that can be found in many cities in the world. Discarded products of someone else's consumption have become the means of survival for people who lack other options, and this, we believe, tells us something about the age and global society we live in.

“*Con nuestro trabajo cuidamos el planeta*” (Mujer Cartonera) freely translates into “*With our work, we take care of the planet*”, and is the slogan of the *cartonero* cooperative El Ceibo in Buenos Aires. The *cartoneros* are one of many marginalised groups of people worldwide who collect and sell recyclable materials from household waste in order to make a living. As such, they represent the only recycling system currently operating in Buenos Aires. El Ceibo is one of many cooperatives that have been formed in the city in recent years and their slogan is a remarkable testament to the social and financial development that is taking place within this marginalised group. Informed by the sustainability discourse, an environmentally oriented law called “Basura Cero” or “Zero Waste” was passed in 2005, with the aim of restructuring the waste management system in the city and in which the work of the *cartoneros* was recognised. This essay will present a study in which possible effects of this law on the work of the *cartoneros* are investigated, brought into a discussion on human development, and on sustainability as a concept.

Following an introduction that will familiarise the reader with the *cartoneros* and the Basura Cero law, is a background section that contextualises relevant issues in the Argentine society today. Previous research is thereafter outlined along with the theoretical framework of the study, followed by the methodological section and a presentation of the results of our findings, and analysis. Concluding this essay, the reader will find a summarising discussion, conclusions, and suggestions for further research.

Who are the *cartoneros*?

For anyone who has travelled to Buenos Aires recently, a common sight encountered in all areas of the city is that of bags of waste piling up on the streets. This is where the citizens of the city leave household waste in order for it to be further disposed of by someone else. The streets are thus a halfway point in the lifecycle of commodities whose commercial purpose has been fulfilled, and that have now been transformed into what is commonly referred to as “waste”.

Similarly, for anyone who has visited Buenos Aires in recent years, it is equally difficult to escape the sight of people walking the streets with large trolleys or wagons, especially during night time. They are the *cartoneros* of the city; a vast group of people who make a part- or full time living on waste picking; collecting and re-selling recyclable materials from the household trash left by the neighbours - the *vecinos* - in the street. The name is derived from the word *cartón*, meaning cardboard, and refers to the collection of this common recyclable material. The name of the activity, to *cartonear* or to be collecting waste, has the same origin. The *cartoneros* roam the city and look for materials that can be reused or

recycled, such as paper, plastic, cardboard, glass and metal, which they then sell on to the industry sector. The work is heavy as well as hazardous and has historically gone unrecognised as the *cartoneros* have, for most part of the history of the activity, been under threat of criminal persecution from the side of the government (MTE, Chronopoulos 2006: 179, Whitson 2011: 1404f). The city of Buenos Aires has today an estimated 8 000-12 000 *cartoneros* and according to the city government they recover seven to eight percent of waste generated in the city (Government 1). Many working as *cartoneros* live in the outskirts of the city and commute via train or other transportation on a daily basis, while others live in metropolitan *villas miserias* – poor areas and shantytowns where housing, sewage systems, schooling, medical services and infrastructure are substandard or non-existent (GAIA 2008, Davis 2006). Author Mike Davis quotes a description of one such *villa* as “... *having the world’s worst feng shui: it is built over a former lake, a toxic dump, and a cemetery and in a flood zone*” (GAIA 2008, Davis 2006: 212 (italics in original)). For people in these areas, the ability to work as a *cartonero* can be vital and one of the only means of survival as they often lack insurance, social security and formal education. In addition to the 8000 - 12 000 *cartoneros* working in central Buenos Aires, another 40 000 - 80 000 are estimated to be working in the larger metropolitan area and the Buenos Aires Province (GAIA, Donde Reciclo, Government 1).

Basura Cero

The law Basura Cero, or Law 1854, is a multi-stakeholder initiative that sets forth a plan for the management of waste in the city of Buenos Aires, and was adopted as part of municipal legislation in 2005. It was designed according to the principles of Zero Waste, a movement turned concept picked up by environmental International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGO’s) across the globe, and that strives toward the redefinition, and eventual eradication, of the term “waste”. As expressed by the organisation Zero Waste Alliance, they promote; “... *a closed-loop industrial/societal system*“ in which all waste is reduced, reused, recycled and disposed of in a sustainable manner, as waste is seen to be a sign of societal inefficiency (ZWA 2013). It is also described as:

“... a philosophy and a design principle for the 21st Century. It [...] goes beyond recycling by taking a 'whole system' approach to the vast flow of resources and waste through human society [by] maximizing recycling, minimizing waste, reducing consumption and ensuring that products are made to be reused, repaired or recycled back into nature or the marketplace”
(GrassRoots Recycling Network 2008).

With these values forming the backbone of the law, it focuses on elimination of traditional waste by banning landfilling of recyclable and compostable waste by the year 2020 (CEDOM 2005, GAIA 2008, Greenpeace 2005, Greenpeace 2011). This includes a general reduction of waste generation, separation of recyclable- and non-recyclable materials, and recycling on a municipal level. The time plan is headed by three milestone targets for reduction of waste sent to landfills based on the number of tons managed by CEAMSE in 2004. These are: 30 percent

by 2010, 50 percent by 2012, and 75 percent by 2017. By 2020, burial of waste in landfills is banned completely and the targets of the law are to be fully operational and in place (CEDOM 2005, Whitson 2011: 1409). As explained by two driving individuals behind the law; one former member of the Global Anti-Incinerator Alliance (GAIA) and one Greenpeace leader, in the case of Buenos Aires, the process of creating the law was catalysed by the fact that two out of the city's three landfills were closed in 2004 (Greenpeace, GAIA 2008). This brought the municipal administration into a situation of stress to find an alternative solution, at which time GAIA and Greenpeace presented the idea of a Zero Waste law. As the city community was active against the opening of new landfills, the municipal government was desperate to find a different solution (GAIA, Greenpeace). Through a series of multi stakeholder meetings with representatives from civil society, the *cartonero* cooperatives, INGO's, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO's) and the government - , Law 1854, "Basura Cero", was created (GAIA, Greenpeace, Government 1).

The law also took on another form which is of special relevance in this study. The *cartoneros* were included in this new solution, as Basura Cero reiterated the rights given in Law 992, and went on to guarantee registered *cartonero* cooperatives "... *priority and inclusion in collection and transportation of urban dry solid waste*" (CEDOM 2005: article 43). Urban dry solid waste is the part of household waste that is not organic or compostable (Government 1). It also states that registered cooperatives have the right to governmental subsidies in form of finance and practical tools in order to further their environmental work. As with the Law 992, this was a major legislative recognition of the work of the *cartonero* movement and also meant its official inclusion in the municipal waste management strategy. One member of GAIA describes the inclusion of the *cartoneros* as follows:

"The strategy to implement the Zero Waste law includes working with the cooperatives, having them operate the Resource Recovery Centres to be built [...] It also provides funds for them to acquire capital goods. The law recognized that the cartoneros were here before this policy was adopted, and these are the people who know about the waste and how to recycle it." (GAIA 2008)

The legal document that constitutes the law is an extensive outline of prerequisites, objectives and practical details that cover all of the what, who and how's of transforming the waste management system (CEDOM 2005). The section that outline the role and rights of the *cartoneros* can be found in chapter 12, articles 43 and 44, where their right to priority and subsidies conditioned on the cooperative form are outlined. For a translation of these articles, please see appendix 1. A table outlining the main stakeholders and their interests in the law can be found in appendix 3.

Aim and research question

By investigating how the Law 1854 Basura Cero from 2005 affects an exposed group of people in the city of Buenos Aires, the *cartoneros*, we aim to employ this study in the purpose of contributing to the wider discussion of the concept of sustainability. The question herein asked is if and how new environmental legislation, with the purpose of restructuring the waste management system of the city of Buenos Aires, affects the possibilities for social inclusion, progress and thus social sustainability for the *cartoneros*.

Based on the aim and purpose described above, we formulated the following research question: *Has the Basura Cero law had any effect on social sustainability in relation to the work situation of the cartoneros in Buenos Aires, and if so, how?*

Contribution and relevance

There are two ways in which we hope this study will make a contribution. Based on a reading of available material on the subject of *cartoneros* and waste management in Buenos Aires (discussed further in previous research), we found a gap in the availability of studies relating to current conditions of the *cartoneros* and to how their situation is connected to Basura Cero. Our **primary and specific** aim is therefore to outline possible changes and effects that the Basura Cero law might have on the work situation of the *cartoneros*. Our **secondary and general** aim is to discuss how the possible changes might relate to the concept of sustainability. This general and more theoretical aim was formulated as we were also unsuccessful in finding research that in some way investigate or evaluate recent development regarding the sustainability-oriented Basura Cero law, or initiatives like it. The two ways in which we hope this study will make a contribution are thus complementary as well as interdependent, and relate to the general aim of the study.

This thesis work is carried out within the academic field of Global Studies, and connects to the subject through a focus on investigating issues of sustainability and social justice in relation to the marginalized *cartonero* group. The study also draws on issues of globalisation, as the situation of the *cartoneros* is conditioned upon international politics, modes of production and consumption, and also corresponds to that of many other such groups in major cities around the world.

Scope of the study

As the research question chosen for this study focuses on one particular legislative event in connection to a specific group of people, it naturally leaves out many important aspects of the surrounding context and of the law itself. The Basura Cero law and its practical mechanisms, possibilities, limitations and effects **outside** of where it intersects with the work of the *cartoneros* will not be included in this research, limiting the scope of this study. It should thus be kept in mind that the Basura Cero law might have other and differing consequences for other groups in society. Furthermore, the study is limited to the parts of the lives of the

cartoneros that relates to the Basura Cero law, hence leaving out other important aspects of the conditions of the *cartoneros*. Finally, the limitations of time and resources will inevitably leave more to be wanted from this research, as every interview and observation raises new questions and ideas. These limitations make this study narrow, but also allows for a necessary clarity of focus and a potential for deeper understanding of the situation at hand. For further reading on interesting issues and suggestions for further research, please see the last section of the discussion.

A historical, political and social contextualisation

As every country, Argentina has its own unique history that has shaped the existing social, environmental and economic circumstances in Buenos Aires. The latter part of the 20th century is an intricate narrative of industrialisation, neoliberal reform and societal crisis. In order to understand the contemporary situation of the *cartoneros* and the actors and interests involved in this study, a historical background will be given below, reflective of the issues we as researchers had to familiarize ourselves with before we began to approach the practical part of the study.

A note on Buenos Aires

The Autonomous City of Buenos Aires, more known as *Capital Federal*, has an estimated three million inhabitants (INDEC 1 2010). Every day these three million residents that are known locally as *porteños* are joined by an additional three million commuters, as Capital federal functions as the economic and cultural centre of the nation (Government 1). This brings the daily total of people within the autonomous Capital Federal area to six million people, and it is the waste of these six million that is at the centre of the Basura Cero law (outlined below). The larger metropolitan area, *Gran Buenos Aires*, has an estimated thirteen million inhabitants including those living in Capital Federal (INDEC 2 2010), and finally, enclosing the two inner areas is the Province of Buenos Aires, *Provincia de Buenos Aires*, bringing the total to an estimated 16 million inhabitants (INDEC 3). In this study, we have chosen to limit the geographic and demographic scope to only include the most central part of Buenos Aires, *Capital Federal*, as this is the judicial area affected by the Basura Cero law. When Buenos Aires is mentioned in this essay it is thus to Capital Federal we refer if nothing else is indicated.

A history of waste and the *cartonero*

Although most authors seem to agree that the number of people making a living as *cartoneros* has increased since the neoliberal reforms of the 90's (see more below), the term *ciruja*, denoting someone who collects waste, dates all the way back to the latter part of the 18th century. As Buenos Aires implemented its first modern waste management system around this time, communities and *villas miserias* which means "shantytowns", grew around the disposal

sites as waste scavenging could provide a small income. The activity has since then persisted throughout the years and have often functioned as a last resort for people of lower- or no income, if other jobs are scarce or not to be found (Whitson 2011: 1407).

The management of waste in Buenos Aires has since then been reinvented by different governmental constellations many times over, with subsequent effects for the actors and stakeholders involved. Prior to the military dictatorship of 1976-83, waste in Buenos Aires was disposed of in the outskirts of the city via landfills and incineration (Whitson 2011: 1407-8). In Capital Federal was common for each residential house to have its own incinerator for waste in the basement, which resulted in high levels of aerial pollution and buildings covered in soot and ash (Donde Reciclo, GAIA). The changes that came about as the military government implemented neoliberal reform and privatization in the early 80's meant a ban on incineration, centralization of waste management, and a mandate for waste to be buried in sanitary landfills. It also led to the formation of the currently operating semi-private waste management company *Coordinación Ecológica Área Metropolitana Sociedad del Estado* (CEAMSE). Created on the initiative of the state but run like a private corporation, CEAMSE was charged with the management of the sanitary landfills catering to Capital Federal and Gran Buenos Aires, as well as with the transportation of waste collected by private companies. A contract stipulated an obligation of the state to use its services, and for CEAMSE to be paid by ton for the amount of waste buried. Consequently, all waste was by law made property of CEAMSE which effectively made waste picking illegal and into an activity that had to be carried out under radar of both police and collection companies until the decriminalization in 2002 (see more below) (Whitson 2011: 1407-8). The antipathy that was created between these actors is still prevalent today and relevant in this study, as will be made clear later in the essay.

Scholars agree that the end of the military dictatorship lead to a slight surge in the number of *cartoneros* in the city of Buenos Aires. Another shift in government that was to last from 1989-99 marked, as one scholar describes:

“... a complete neo-liberal transformation, including the rapid and almost complete privatization of state companies, unrestricted financial opening to international markets, and pegging of the Argentine Peso with the US dollar on a 1-to-1 basis” (Chronopoulos 2006: 173).

These transformations took place during a short period of time and in a nation that had been previously marked by a vast public and social welfare sector, protectionist measures, and military dictatorships (Chatterton 2004: 549). Following what one author calls “*free market ‘shock therapy’*” (Chatterton 2004: 550), unemployment rates rose due to downsizing of the public sector and an industry that struggled under one of the strongest but most inflexible currencies in the world, making imports cheaper than domestically manufactured goods. The rate of international investment began to decline in the mid 1990's (Chatterton 2004: 550). In 1998, the country descended into a severe recession that marked the start of the crisis that

shook the whole Argentine society in the beginning of the new millennia (Chatterton 2004: 550).

The real and noticeable increase in people supporting themselves as *cartoneros* was the economic crisis of 2001 (Donde Reciclo, GAIA, Government 1, FCD, Whitson 2011, Chatterton 2004, Le Goff 2011). Rita Whitson, who writes about what she calls the “geographies of waste” in Buenos Aires (see more in previous research), describes the situation as follows:

“One of the most visible manifestations of Argentina’s political and economic crisis, which peaked in 2002, was the increased presence of informal garbage scavengers—or cartoneros—working on the streets of the country’s capital city” (Whitson 2011:1404).

The 90’s had been the decade when many lower- and middle class Argentines lost their jobs and were under- or unemployed, resulting in many falling under the poverty line and into the group that has been termed “the new poor” (Whitson 2011: 1407-8, Soraide Duran 2008:1-2 as seen in Le Goff 2011: 1). In 2001-2002 conditions became so volatile with unemployment rates exceeding 25% that there was a massive flight of foreign investors and capital, and the country entered into a full-blown economic crisis. Five million pensioners and middle-class Argentines lost their savings because of austerity measures that were introduced to try and limit the capital escape from the country, and six million of the working population were in the end of 2001 under- or unemployed (Chatterton 2004: 550). Social and political unrest ensued, with lootings, roadblocks, street battles and strikes that eventually lead to the removal of sitting President Fernando De La Rúa (Chatterton 2004: 550). In 2002, national poverty rates reached levels as high as 50 % (Whitson 2011: 1407-8), and there was a vast increase in migration from rural to urban areas (Chronopoulos 2006: 175). In the end of 2002 the Argentine Peso (ARS) was detached from the dollar and heavily devalued, and the price of imported basic materials such as paper and plastic skyrocketed (Chronopoulos 2006: 168). Not surprisingly, the amount of unemployed people who began to support themselves as *cartoneros* increased dramatically. Estimations claim an increase from 10,000 in Gran Buenos Aires in 2001 to 40,000 in 2002 alone (Whitson 2011: 1409), leading inevitably to a higher level of visibility of the activity. For many people, the appearance of *cartoneros* in all areas of the city, rich as well as poor, was the visible proof of the societal failure of a nation that had begun to climb the international ladder of economic success (Government 1).

The activity of *cartonear* was still effectively illegal at this time, as the *cartoneros* were gathering material that by law belonged to CEAMSE and the waste collection companies. This led to a period of unstable and at times violent relations between the police, the *cartoneros*, and the waste collection companies. *Cartoneros* were also largely viewed as a nuisance by the *vecinos*, as their mostly nightly work left the streets in a state of chaos with ripped and broken waste bags and litter strewn across the street as a result of the search for valuable materials (Chronopoulos 2006: 179). But the lack of work in the wake of the crisis

kept the number of *cartoneros* high and as their presence persisted, they were no longer possible to ignore.

In December of 2002, the *cartonero* movement saw its first legislative recognition as a law that is commonly known as “*the law of the cartoneros*” (GAIA, El Ceibo) was passed. This was a shift of massive proportion as Law 992 effectively decriminalised the act of *cartonear* and declared in its first article that the activity was to be seen as a public health- and environmental service to the city (for a translated version of Law 992, see appendix 2). It went on to state that to *cartonear* has environmental-, social- and economic benefits, and further mandated the creation of an official registry for all *cartonero* cooperatives in the city. All registered cooperatives would have the right to state-funded subsidies in form of advice and training in various areas, such as workplace health- and safety, sales negotiation and how to run a productive cooperative or micro enterprise (CEDOM 2002). Thus in one stroke, the activity went from being considered a criminal offence to being recognised as environmentally beneficial for the city. In effect, this was the first legal recognition of an activity that had been part of the city landscape since the 1800’s (Whitson 2011).

An important fact about the *cartonero* movement and perhaps also a reason for its relatively late recognition, is that their work has always been met with suspicion. Exclusion, stigmatization and prejudice is something that has historically and is still today very much connected to working as a *cartonero* for several reasons (Whitson 2011: 1404). Because of the nature of the activity; going through other peoples waste and mostly at night time, and the demographic profile of those who engages in it; mostly people from poor areas who come into richer areas to find recyclable waste, the general attitude toward *cartoneros* is fear, rejection and detachment. This became evident during and after the 2001 crisis as massive amounts of impoverished Argentines appeared within the affluent neighbourhoods of Capital Federal, and middle class people would watch with “*amazement and fear*” (Chronopoulos 2006: 179) and feel unsafe as poor people started frequenting their neighbourhood (Chronopoulos 2006). This prejudice had also, as described above, permeated *cartonero*-state relations until the Law 992 was passed, the effects of which still linger in this relationship today. Although relations have begun to normalise between the citizen and the *cartonero* with the time that has passed since the crisis, prejudice and stigmatisation is still a part of the *cartonero* work day (MTE). During our stay in Buenos Aires, this was most clearly exemplified in warning from a university employee of high rank in regards to the work we had set out to do: “*You have to be careful girls. These are dirty people, doing dirty work*” (Academic 2).

Politics

The figure of Eva “Evita” Perón, wife of Peronist party leader Juan Perón, is perhaps the image most associated with Argentine politics internationally as well as within the country (Chatterton 2004: 549). The figures of the Peróns remain vivid in the collective Argentinian memory and serve as a national rally point and political Peronism is still very much a force present in the Argentine political landscape today, albeit in multiple and reinvented forms. Originally associated with left-wing politics like workers’ rights, unions and social welfare,

the political scale of Peronism has evolved and now encompass both right- and left wing camps, and has among some of the socio-economic strata of the city become associated with *political clientelism* (Donde Reciclo, Chatterton 2004: 550).

The political situation in Buenos Aires during the time of this study was such that the municipal government and the national government were in opposition, with the national government consisting of the Peronist party with President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, while the mayor of Buenos Aires and the leader of the municipal administration being Mauricio Macri. Macri, described as a neoliberal (Donde Reciclo) who gained popularity and recognition through his previous ownership of Boca Juniors, the nation's most popular soccer team, lost in the 2003 mayoral election where the *cartonero*-question was one of the major campaign issues (Chronopoulos 2006: 171, 180). He had a much tougher attitude toward the people who had begun appearing on the streets *en masse* after the crisis in 2001 than did his opponent, sitting Mayor Aníbal Ibarra, who enjoyed the backing of the Peronist party. The Macri family business further owned a corporation called Manliba, a waste collection company that collected trash from about 54 percent of the city of Buenos Aires at the time. Legislation passed during the military dictatorship of the 70's still decreed the collection companies and CEAMSE to be paid by ton for waste collected, making the *cartoneros* a direct interference with profits. Macri stated in 2002 that *cartoneros* have "... a criminal attitude... [and] ...steal from the trash" (Chronopoulos 2006: 181), and promised that upon his becoming mayor they would be imprisoned for criminal behaviour. Ibarra had a softer tone, arguing that the issue was not one to be solved by police but by social reform and a reorganisation of the waste management system. Ibarra won the election but even before that, his administration passed Law 992 in December of 2002, formalizing the work of the *cartoneros* (Chronopoulos 2006: CEDOM 2002). Macri, who later emerged as the right wing strong man and won the mayoral election in 2007, is since having been re-elected in 2011 still in power. From what we have experienced during our stay in Buenos Aires, he has upon becoming mayor had to soften his attitude towards the *cartoneros*.

Previous research and theoretical framework

The phenomena of groups of people making their living by collecting the waste products of consumption society is, as previously mentioned, part of the urban landscape of many megacities today (see for example Vik Muniz documentary "Waste Land" (Muniz 2010), Davis 2006). The questions we might ask ourselves as social scientists are what these groups are a consequence of, whether and for whom change is desirable, if we as a global community have at our disposal the means of change and if we do, what those means are. The previous research and theory presented below are meant to contextualise the *cartonero* movement and dynamics, as well as the debate on sustainable development.

The term 'theory' in this paper denotes the tools by which we wish to contextualise the relevant issues on a more theoretical level. The theory presented below is thus meant to add theoretical context to the *cartonero* situation, as well as to the sustainability

debate to which we hope to contribute. This section thus relates both to the specific and to the general aim of the study, and also form the theoretical framework through which the findings are analysed and presented.

Previous research

In relation to the situation for *cartoneros* in Buenos Aires, we found that there seems to be a covering amount of academia on the history, background and constituting elements of the movement as well as of the situation of the same (see for example Chronopoulos 2006, Delamata 2004, and Hoffman et al. 2003), but none such very recent. These studies have informed both the background and the general aim of this study in the way that we have herein attempted to cover non-researched issues, such as the contemporary situation of the *cartoneros* and the development in relation to legislative change. The two articles presented below however share a common key ingredient of interest; an abstract discussion on the geographical qualities and circumstances regarding, in Paul Chatterton's article; *autonomy*, and in Rita Whitson's article; *waste*. They will together with the theoretical framework in the next section inform the analysis, as the study that we have undertaken deal with issues of primarily social and environmental sustainability, of which the two previously mentioned concepts form a part.

The first of these articles analyse the political, economic and organizational history of Argentina through the concept of autonomy. Chatterton narrate the circumstances that have led to the formation of movements such as the *cartonero* cooperatives while he examines the *Movimiento de Trabajadores Desocupados* (Unemployed Workers Movement, MTD), a large movement that reaches throughout the Province of Buenos Aires and who are pursuing projects of autonomy (Chatterton 2004: 551). His main purpose is to describe what he calls 'autonomous geographies', and how:

"... they are made and remade at three overlapping levels: the territorial, through the emergence of networked autonomous neighbourhoods which are selectively open and closed to translocal links; the material, through the development of a solidarity economy where immediate needs are met and work is redefined, and; the social, where collective action and daily practice helps constitute more collective, autonomous forms of social interactions"

(Chatterton 2004: 545)

He focuses on a part of MTD that is the *piquetero* movement and that emerged from the long and hard fought Argentine tradition of autonomous working class organisations (Chatterton 2004). Since the 1990's they have employed road-block tactics as a means of demanding work, food and benefits in the wake of the large scale neoliberal reforms that left the nation in economic ruin (Chatterton 2004: 546, 550) The narrative he weaves is one of a people that have become hardened by fighting for democratic principles and social justice during much of the nation's contemporary history, and of how the organizational form of autonomous civil society movements has been reverted back to recurrently during times of instability. The *cartonero* movement, much like the MDT, emerged from this need to provide services, food,

shelter, education and collective organisation within urban areas against the backdrop of state- and capital failure (Chatterton 2004: 551), and remain firm in their belief that autonomy is the tool with which a social change can be accomplished. Although the *cartonero* movement most often do not display any radical signs of opposition, this does not mean that the fight for autonomy is not still on-going. Chatterton outlines how such autonomous movements with the objective of securing basic needs might not be as outspoken in their discontent as others, but that this in no way means the element of opposition has faded: “...one has to look and listen very closely to hear the on-going quiet revolution when the dust settles after the street battles” (Chatterton 2004: 546). Autonomy as a constitutive element of the *cartonero* movement will be further discussed in the results and analysis section.

The second article, written by Whitson, focuses on the debates over place and value of waste in Buenos Aires that was brought into light after the events of 2001. She discusses how waste functions as a fundamental category for organising social space and argues for the redefinition of the concept of waste from only being “*matter out of place*” to a commodity of value, in order to transform the social relations and structures that continue to marginalize *cartoneros*, and also to de-value waste. She too offers a comprehensive guide to the political and economic history which led to the appearance of this group of people that became so intimately associated with the matter of their work, but also attempt an explanation as to how this happened. The association of the *cartoneros* with the material they work with depends on the fact that material, she claims, is defined culturally and symbolically as having value or lacking value - a quality that is transferred to the groups associated with it (Whitson 2011: 1413).

“The social and political relations of disposal, and the culture and economy that are established around this process, thus give meaning to waste and position individuals with respect both to one another and to the society that normalizes, sanctions, and regulates the process” (Whitson 2011: 1414)

Despite the fact that the industry and market around waste materials is blooming and that waste is intimately connected to every aspect of social functioning, the discursive construction of waste as ‘that which belongs elsewhere’ is what attaches it to the *cartoneros* (Whitson 2011: 1413-1414). Therefore, Whitson argues, it is critical to recognise and re-conceptualize the commodity potential of waste as a way of changing the social structures that by extension define *cartoneros* as ‘value-less’, and in this way end marginalisation. “*Waste*” she claims, much like undesired social groups one might add, “*does not exist outside of our definition of it*” (Whitson 2011: 1414).

Theoretical framework

Sustainable development

The Basura Cero law was, as previously mentioned, created along principles influenced heavily by the sustainability discourse, a discourse that is being debated on an international scale. The concept of sustainable development include the variables of a globalized market

economy, rapidly developing technologies, increased production and the spreading global acceptance that economic growth needs to meet global human needs of today without jeopardizing the life of future generations by using up natural resources faster than they can be reproduced. This narrative follows the most common definition of the concept, derived from the Bruntland Commission of 1987 (WCED 1987, as seen in Utting 2000: 1). To this, the ISO 26000 adds:

“Sustainable development is about integrating the goals of a high quality of life, health and prosperity with social justice and maintaining the earth’s capacity to support life in all its diversity” (ISO 2010).

Dissecting this definition, three interdependent pillars of sustainability can be identified: one *economic*, one *environmental* and one *social*. In order for development to be sustainable, it is necessary to find solutions where all of these three variables of the concept intersect. Finding the point within a project or a policy where they cross can be very complicated, as only a small window of sustainability can sometimes be found. A popular illustration of this delicate balance looks like this:

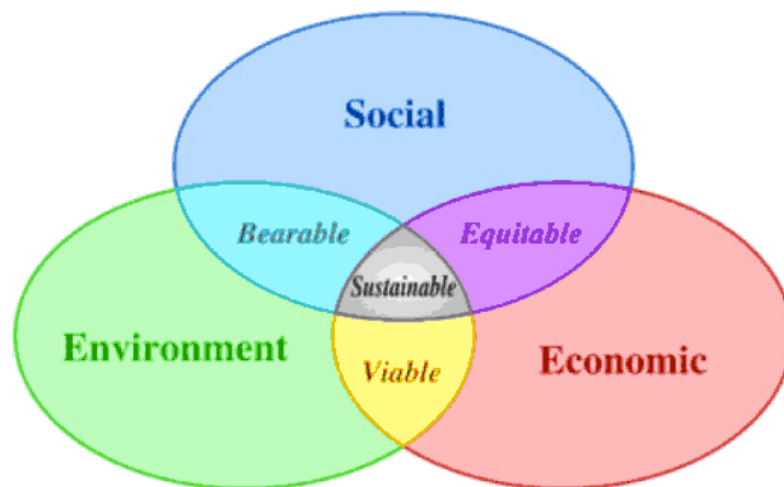


Figure 1: Intersection of sustainability pillars (Gardens 2010)

In this study, we have chosen to focus on how the Basura Cero law affects the work of the *cartoneros*, an aspect included in the social leg of the sustainability tripod. Although a debated concept, the definition of what social sustainability should be referred to in the context of this study is borrowed from several other definitions and includes the previously mentioned key parameter of social justice:

Social sustainability is a positive social condition of inclusion within a society where there is equal access to key welfare services, equal access to community life and democratic

processes, and equal opportunity of work, education, and recreation, all within the boundaries of sustainable development (adapted from Freeman 2011:70f; UNESCO 2003; UNHR 2012).

The importance of social sustainability, however, should not be forgotten or ignored in the shadow of the environmental or economic questions, because as argued by Haughton: “*the unjust society is unlikely to be sustainable in environmental or economic terms in the long run*” (Haughton, 1999, p. 64 as seen in Agyeman et al. 2002: 84). While the Basura Cero law is focused primarily on the environmental issues of waste management in Buenos Aires, the inclusion of the *cartoneros* in this law might result in intended or unintended changes of the social conditions for this group, the uncovering and analysis of which is the outspoken aim of this study.

Sustainable development on the international arena

The idea of the three sustainability pillars can be seen to underpin internationally recognised ideas and initiatives, such as the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDG's). As is becoming increasingly clear, the interconnectedness of the three pillars is thoroughly prevalent on all levels of the international development arena, and the MDG's are perhaps the most obvious and overarching example of this. The solutions to the identified global challenges therein suggested echo the profiles of these challenges; a kaleidoscopic mix of sustainable economic politics and social strategies in form of education and democratic capacity building in order to create sustainable development on a planetary scale (United Nations 2010). It is the idea that solutions for meeting the challenges we face as a global community on local as well as international level must stem from recognition of the interconnectedness of issues such as poverty, climate change and disease, in order to be able to come up with viable solutions in a plausible and efficient way. Academics such as Agyeman et al. write about the intersection of environmental quality and human equality, and point out how segregated countries lacking in social equity and justice are most often more environmentally “un-friendly” (Agyeman et al. 2002: 77ff). They also quote and agree with Middleton and O'Keefe who claim that “... *unless analyses of development begin not with the symptoms, environmental or economic instability, but with the cause, social injustice, then no development can be sustainable*” (Agyeman et al. 2002: 79).

Sustainable development as a problematic concept

Not everyone is convinced that the idea of sustainable development is solely a step forward in international development, but rather claim it to be the popular discourse of the time. Lafferty and Langhelle argue that “*just as every country and ideology after WWII wished to profile itself as 'democratic', we find the same trend today with respect to 'sustainable development'*” (Lafferty and Langhelle 1994: 29). Building on their theory, it can be argued that the way the development discourse is “popularised” and changing shape is detached from the needs and wishes of the people that are most commonly the desired subjects of

development; the poor. As argued by several authors in Sørensen, late 20th and early 21st century development efforts such as the MDG's, the World Bank's *Voices of the Poor* 2000 report and perhaps most debated the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) of the IMF and the World Bank are largely leaving out the need for industrialization as a means of development (Sørensen 2010: 69ff).

In the same book, Vanessa Pupavac discusses the influence of E. F. Schumacher's "Small is Beautiful" on the current development discourse, exemplifying the romanticised, non-material values she claim it to be saturated by. In the 1970's, Schumacher headed a wave of critique that washed over contemporary development agendas that promoted non-material values and capacity-building over industrialization. His ideas followed the view of materialism as an agent of corruption of human character. Pupavac describes how in this tradition, current definitions of poverty have moved away from issues of economic growth and income levels to instead encompass romantic ideas of non-material values (Sørensen 2010: 70). This is argued to be in the service of a capitalist paradigm that requires a portion of the population to remain poor for another to become affluent. She claims that this view, exemplified in Schumacher's ideas, severely underestimates and limits the scope of human ambition in that:

"... non-industrial models and their 'Teach a man to fish' slogan assume that the majority of people in the developing world want to be fishermen or farmers", and asks: "How did Schumachers model meet the ambitions of the potential Schumachers in the developing world?" (Sørensen 2010: 65).

She also discusses Amartya Sen and his theory on 'capabilities' (see below) as being one of few development theories that still mentions industrialization, but that it is to a marginal extent and that his theory is still flawed by the fact that it promotes attempts to improve capabilities of the poor within the existing capitalist paradigm, meaning the current market relations and modes of production. Contemporary, non-materialist notions of sustainable development remain, to her, a utopian idea (Sørensen 2010: 70).

Julian Reid is another author who picks a fight with the sustainability concept. He opposes what he argues is the neoliberal appropriation of sustainability, initially a critical concept, as a means of rationalizing and reinventing itself as the answer to the global challenges of today. This becomes relevant here, as the neoliberal changes in Argentina that we have described above are generally recognized to have set the stage for the financial crisis of 2001, resulting in a mass-appearance of *cartoneros* (Whitson 2011, Chatterton 2004, Chronopoulos 2006). Reid quotes author David Harvey on neoliberalism as being:

"...widely understood as a 'theory of political economic practices proposing that human well-being can best be advanced by the maximisation of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterised by private property rights, individual liberty, unencumbered markets, and free trade'" (Reid 2010: 86)

Reid argues that it follows from the idea of self-reliance and detachment from the state that the poor are being rationalized into giving up on the state as a source of improvement and instead encouraged by the sustainability discourse to be “*practicing the virtue of securing themselves*” (Reid 2010: 67). The entrepreneurship celebrated by neoliberalism thus corresponds with the local and autonomous small-scale solutions suggested within sustainable development. The concept he focuses on is that of ‘resilience’; the idea that the human species has a capacity to adapt to and prosper from radical changes in environment or nature, and that this is part of the solution of the international development challenge (Reid 2010: 76). Reid makes an argument for sustainable development having been appropriated by neoliberalism through the shift from a focus on human security to human resilience, and from a narrative of the biosphere as an extra-economic domain into an economy of services (Reid 2010: 72). He makes the point that the ecological reasoning that birthed the earliest conception of sustainable development has provided a well suited new narrative through which neoliberalism has been able to redefine itself as the answer to the problems that the sustainability concept highlights, and in the process, justify non-development for the poor. It is the adoption of ecological terms such as resilience that has enabled this successful merge of two seemingly opposing development-strategies:

“In one move ‘resilience’ has shifted from being a property of the biosphere to being a property of humanity, while in a second move ‘service’ has shifted from being an element of economy to being a capacity of the biosphere. Crucified on the cross that this double shift carves are ‘the poor’” (Reid 2010: 72)

Reid joins the ranks of theorists that view the implementation of neoliberal sustainability ideals in politics and policy as a kind of ‘biopolitics’; a concept borrowed from Michel Foucault and that implies the governmental or societal physical control of the bodies of the people (Börjesson and Rehn 2009: 49). Practically this means that an excluded societal group, such as the poor, may be encouraged to rely upon their own entrepreneurial ability to adapt to consequences of changes in society, such as environmental or societal crisis, instead of on the service of the state. This, claims Reid, goes hand in hand with the romanticised idea of community based, small scale self-reliance celebrated in the sustainability discourse, and the goal of continued accumulation of wealth, for some, inherent in a neoliberal tradition (Reid 2010: 76). Mark Duffield summarises the problem highlighted by this argument as follows:

“... under the rubric of sustainable development those populations existing beyond the borders of mass consumer society are expected to be self-reliant in terms of their basic economic, social and welfare needs. However, in a globalised world, self-reliance is in a state of permanent emergency” (Duffield in Sørensen 2010: 38)

Thus, as can be seen above, sustainable development is not an entirely unproblematic concept. Nonetheless, while it is continuously rejected by some critical social scientists, the popularity of the idea among bureaucrats and politicians cannot be unproblematically considered a way to take ‘the easy way out’. The fact that it is possible to problematise and even reject as an

analytical concept does not automatically render it unattractive as a normative concept and as an important and influential political idea (Lafferty and Langhelle 1994: 30). It's influence on the Basura Cero law is self evident, and thus make it an important theoretical concept in this study. Sustainable development will be further discussed in relation to the findings of the study in the end of this essay, especially in relation to whether the sustainability intentions of the law is being mirrored in the development among *cartoneros*.

Social Justice

The concept of social justice is an important constituent of social sustainability, and relate in a direct way to the situation of the *cartoneros* in Buenos Aires. Asef Bayat writes about excluded social groups in the periphery of society which he calls the urban subaltern, and of how the activism exhibited by these groups have changed from being radical and violence-prone into "*quiet encroachment*". He describes this concept as the "... *non-collective but prolonged direct action by individuals and families to acquire the basic necessities for their lives [...] in a quiet and unassuming illegal fashion*" (Bayat, 2000: 536). He also describes how, as a result of globalization, the double process of integration and social exclusion can be seen among the subaltern around the world (Bayat 2000: 533-534). The phenomenon is neither new to history nor geographically confined to one area he claims, but has been intensified by recent globalization and neoliberal reform. The deinstitutionalization and marginalization of the urban subaltern has increased alongside the development of the highly affluent, and he demonstrates this by describing how large groups of middle class, educated workers and students have been pushed to a life among the urban poor (Bayat 2000: 534-535). This is the contemporary narrative of Argentina and the *cartoneros* post-neoliberal reform. Other scholars have argued that while the poor in Latin America are *marginalized* in the sense that they are economically exploited and socially stigmatized, they are not *marginal*, as they both take part in the political system, and establish their own social movements that strive for social transformation and emancipation (Bayat 2000: 537-539, Huntington, Castells, Shuurman and Van Naerssen as seen in Bayat 2000). Nonetheless, Bayat argues that this activism from the side of the poor is unlikely to truly challenge domination; on the contrary, the government is likely to encourage such self-help as long as it is not outright oppositional (Bayat 2000: 545). He concludes by arguing that the urban subaltern, in their struggle to attain social goods such as health care and education for their children, are caught in a limbo between autonomy and integration into prevailing systems of power, and continued independence is therefore searched for within the self-created power structures and processes (Bayat 2000: 549).

Another theory of social justice that in alignment with the sustainable development concept calls for a change in the way we measure development, is economist and development theorist Amartya Sen's theory on human *capabilities*. As opposed to measuring welfare in GDP per capita, Sen, along with many other scholars such as Michael Cuthill and Martha Nussbaum, suggest a more individualistic, yet less materialistic, take on social justice and personal freedom. He promotes a focus on the capabilities of the individual in every given society or situation (Collste 2004: 178-279). Instead of measuring how much more or less

money a person earns over a year, the capabilities concept deals with what options and means are available to the individual in order for them to, under the conditions of individual ability and ambition, reach personal goals and development. The term capabilities is thus described as what allows every person to influence and control their own situation, variables that depend on economic, social and political arrangements within the society or situation (Sen 2005: 53, Collste 2004: 141). The theory of capabilities promotes the freedom for each person to have access to the means of achieving their preferred way of life according to personality, ambition, talents and interests, and as such take into account the diversity of human beings and societies when 'doing' development. The state, argues Sen, as well as society in general, plays a large part in strengthening and safeguarding the capabilities of the individual, and for societal institutions to be organized in such a way as to allow their realisation (Sen 2005: 53, 75, Collste 2004: 141, ft). Thus, instead of measuring development in fixed and inflexible ways that fail to account for value outside of the material and of human diversity outside of the generic, capabilities represent a theory of development more aligned with all three pillars of sustainability. For a suggestion of what these values or criteria might look like, see for example Nussbaum as seen in Collste (2004: 178-179).

While this theory is often criticized as a vague and imprecise tool for measurement of social justice, the capabilities theory can be argued to be a more realistic and flexible approach in measuring development in comparison to, for example, GDP per capita (Collste 2004: 176-179, for critique of the concept, see Mabolock 2008: 49). Sen argues that what affects the sense of personal development are social- and environmental conditions, social relations and other factors reflecting social sustainability (Sen 1999: 74, consistently in Sen 2005, and Cuthill 2009). Thus Cuthill, Nussbaum and Sen all argue that to achieve an individual sense of autonomy, freedom and development, the right to take part in civil society, to be engaged in government and allowed to influence the circumstances by which we live, are all basic conditions for sustainable development.

Method

Metatheoretical points of departure

The assumptions at the base of this research cannot easily be placed within either of the ontological or epistemological dichotomies. They are instead to be found somewhere between an essentialist and anti-essentialist ontology, as well as somewhere in between a foundationalist and anti-foundationalist epistemology. This eclectic point of departure means that empirical data will constitute a major part of the base for analysis, discussion and conclusion, as we perceive it to be a valuable source of and form of knowledge. The relation between empirical results, theory, and analysis will be outlined further in the analytical methodology-section. Despite the extensive use of empirical material we acknowledge that we as researchers, as well as our interviewees and other key sources, are parts and products of

various social structures that make our research aim and question stem from current scientific and social paradigms. This does, however, not justify us working only with postmodern thought, or mean that we in a discursive theory-fashion reject truth outside of language (Gilje and Grimen 2007: 105-116, Bergström and Boréus 2000: 228-233, for a discussion on ontological and epistemological variations, see for example Jørgensen 2010:15-17, Collins 2010, Carlsnaes 1992 or Bergström and Boréus 2000: 162 - 165). Rather, we consider positivist- and post-positivist approaches to research as complimentary, and a mixed and non-fixed metatheoretical base as the only way in an attempt to reach both width and depth in this study. While realising that some may think eclecticism makes for a less structured or less clear cut base for a study, we have through previous studies and experiences come to think of diversity as strength, and eclecticism and flexibility as a prerequisite for this kind of work. In keeping with these assumptions, the methods we have chosen to use are varied and adhere to different scientific traditions, and are described below.

Methodology

In keeping with the metatheoretical assumptions described above, a variety of qualitative and some quantitative methods were thus chosen in order to answer the research questions. We have primarily employed the techniques of conversational, semi-structured interviews of both informant and respondent character; participatory- and non-participatory observation, and elements of document analysis. Our key sources have been the stakeholders involved in making, passing, implementing and enforcing of the Basura Cero law, as well as the law itself, and a few other key legislative documents. We have also gathered information via everyday observation in the city and in communication with residents.

In order to render the broad research question manageable and structure the methodological work, we chose to operationalise the main research question into two sets of sub-questions as seen below. The first organising category for these is “Basura Cero”, in which the questions have had a methodological function and have constituted a general base for interview guides, observational notes, and document analysis. The findings pertaining to these questions and methods will be presented under “Results”. The second one is termed “Sustainability”, and the question in this section have informed the analysis- and discussion parts of this essay, and ideas and arguments inspired by this question will thus be presented under those headlines.

Operational research questions:

Basura Cero:

1. Why was the law created?
2. How was it created and by whom?
3. For whom was the law created?
4. Which aspects of the law have been implemented?

5. Has the subsequent changes had any effect on the work of the *cartoneros*?

Sustainability:

- o How can the expected impact of the law on the work of the *cartoneros* be interpreted to in relation to sustainability?

Selection

The research herein presented was carried out in Buenos Aires during two months in the spring of 2013. Having compiled a list of key stakeholders and actors we wished to interview, meetings were arranged by establishing contact via e-mail or telephone. The initial aim was to conduct semi-structured interviews with up to 15 *cartoneros* as their experience of change in connection to the Basura Cero law is the primary focus of this study. We also intended to interview cooperative leaders, governmental representatives, INGO's and NGO's who had connections to the law or to the *cartonero* movement. However, this aim had to be altered during the course of the study as difficulties arose concerning interviews of *cartoneros*. In order for us to talk to *cartoneros*, who commute from Gran Buenos Aires or the Province into Capital Federal to work, we had to seek them out during work hours. Because of the general security situation in the city, it turned out that the interpreters we cooperated with were unwilling or unable to meet with *cartoneros* in the street and at nighttime. We were only successful in conducting shorter informal interviews of this kind on two occasions, and without translators. These occasions are described further below. We also had to cancel a daytime meeting with a cooperative leader because of unwillingness from translators to enter the area in which the cooperative office was located, due to security reasons. These circumstances severely limited our possibilities to interact with, observe and interview the people in the focal point of our research. We did, however, attempt to mitigate this unplanned shortcoming by increasing our list of other interviewees and field visits, a complete list of which is available in appendix 6. We hypothesized that the number and character of the interviews carried out would be sufficient to achieve what Esaiasson et al. terms "*theoretical saturation*" (authors translation), meaning that the possible cultural categories and themes hopefully derived from the interviews would be exhausted (Esaiasson et al.: 2012: 229, 259f).

Interviews were thus selected, planned and limited according to availability, practicality, and relevance, except for on the two previously mentioned occasions. These short and opportunity-based interviews were unplanned respondent interviews held with a total of ten randomly selected *cartoneros* on the street while they were working, and were purposely kept short in order to not take up too much of the respondent's time. The selection of *cartoneros* for interviews was randomized as the main purpose of these interviews was to get an appreciation of the knowledge among regular *cartoneros* about the Basura Cero law.

Further, we were in contact with seven of the twelve[1] cooperatives in the city as we were unable to contact the remaining five. Four cooperatives replied, but we were unable to work with two due to issues related to our translators. Thus we worked mainly with Cooperativa El Ceibo (El Ceibo) and Movimiento de Trabajadores Excluidos (MTE). These two cooperatives operate centrally in Capital Federal, were involved in the process of creating

the law, and were the ones who were most responsive in terms of willingness and interest in contributing to this study. While MTE is the largest cooperative in Capital Federal with 2000-3000 members (Government 1, Donde Reciclo, MTE), El Ceibo is the oldest and operates a Green Center with the help of their 67[2] members. As the law is written in such a way that it addresses *cartonero* cooperatives, we chose to focus on them as primary stakeholders.

Conversational, semi-structured interviews:

The choice of using semi-structured conversational interview derives from the nature of the purpose of the study which corresponds to two definitions from Esaiasson et al.; 1) the aim to investigate how people perceive their own world, and 2) to develop theoretical or conceptual understanding (Esaiasson et al. 2012: 53f). We also believed that the possibilities for flexibility and informality offered in this method would be beneficial for the purpose of this study and in the context of its execution.¹⁶

The interviews were planned and carried out in accordance with the suggested steps outlined by McCracken (1988: 29f), which focus on immersion into previous research, acknowledgement and outline of the researchers own preconceptions on the area, and the construction of a comprehensive interview guide. Subsequently, in order to structure the interviews, the broader research questions listed above were dissected and broken down to more specific and manageable questions. These were then grouped in themes to form an interview guide for each interview (see appendix 4). Most of the interviews contained questions of both informant- and respondent character and were recorded when deemed appropriate and when consent was given. All in all we conducted 12 conversational, semi-structured interviews, one group interview, 3 informal conversational interviews, and 7 successful field visits. Some interviews were in English and some in Spanish with the help of translators. We were lucky and grateful to be able to employ the help of interpretation students from the Faculty of Modern Languages at Universidad del Museo Social Argentino (UMSA) on site in Buenos Aires. The interview key is available in appendix 5.

Observation:

Participatory and non-participatory observation was also conducted on several occasions in order to complement the other methods. Participatory observation was primarily carried out in connection to the field visits, described below. Non-participatory observation was employed formally on two occasions which were municipal gatherings on issues relevant for this study, to which we were invited. Observation was also ongoing throughout our stay in the field of research which meant two months of living in Buenos Aires and coming in contact with waste, issues of waste and the *cartoneros* on an everyday basis. The benefits of observational methods coincide of course with our motivation for using it: they offer the possibility to register issues that respondents might be blind to or omit due to their everyday nature, or due to political or other sensitivities. In this study, we consider observation as a primary source of information, and Esaiasson et al. describe the method as especially suitable when in search for processes and structures that may be difficult to express verbally (Esaiasson et al. 2012: 303ff).

We planned a number of field visits to relevant locations and events, most of which we were able to carry out. The ones we failed to go through with were a visit to the at the time only operational landfill catering to Buenos Aires, Norte III; to the Green Center of Barracas, one of two such establishments in the city; and to the offices of CEAMSE. These visits did not happen because of practical reasons despite far gone plans, and at times, despite knocking on the doors at the locations. These field visits offered opportunities for both observation and conversational interviews. The ones we were able to carry out were as follows:

- “*Comisión Basura Cero*”: We were invited as observers to attend one of the open meetings of the official commission in charge of monitoring and furthering the implementation of the Basura Cero law. Participating in this meeting were representatives from three *cartonero* cooperatives (El Ceibo, MTE and Del Oeste), representatives from the government, as well as NGO representatives and interested citizens.
- *Green Center of cooperative El Ceibo*: We had the opportunity to visit the Green Center built and operated by El Ceibo and take a tour of the facilities, observe the separation and meet some of the workers. We also got to see the work that the cooperative is doing by not only reselling the recyclable material, but also with developing new products using these materials.
- “*Mujer Cartonera*”: Another open meeting we were invited to attend concerned the discussion of a new legislative proposal to give priority to *cartoneras* (female *cartoneros*) for state contracting of waste management services. Attending were representatives and workers from many of the cooperatives in the city (Del Oeste, MTE, El Ceibo, and cooperatives mainly connected to the union *Central de Trabajadores de la Argentina* (CTA)), local politicians, representatives from the government, NGO representatives and interested citizens.
- *El Ceibo office in Paraguay Street and participatory observation of cartonero work in the Palermo neighborhood*: In addition to their Green Center, El Ceibo has a small office in the street of Paraguay in the Palermo neighborhood which we were able to visit on several occasions. We also had the opportunity to go with a long term *cartonera* on her morning route in the neighborhood.
- *Feria “Puro Diseño”*: The design fair with a name that translates into “Pure Design” was held during several days in La Rural exhibition hall in Buenos Aires, and among the designers participating were cooperatives El Ceibo and MTE who exhibited their own products made from recyclable materials. Examples of such were notebooks, keyrings, coasters, lampshades, wall clocks, and cases for laptops and smartphones.

Document analysis:

The law Basura Cero is a legal document at the center of our research. As the aim of the study concerns effects of the implementation of the law and not the law itself, however, we have foregone the choice of performing any kind of text analysis of the document. What we have done instead is, in readings of mainly Basura Cero but also other legislative documents such as Law 992, to incorporate elements of document analysis in accordance with the methodological guidance of Esaiasson and Bergström and Boréus on how to relate to qualitative texts (Esaiasson et al. 2012: 210ff; Bergström and Boréus 2000: 24ff). Their recommendation include being aware of the nature of secondary source material (see more below) and the necessity of critical thinking. The document sources have been used as a means of providing background information, to review logics of argumentation, triangulate information, and identify discrepancies between different sources.

Secondary data, language and methodological limitations

Secondary data in form of government statistics and information from INGO's has been used in order to further complement the research, although with an acute awareness of the issues of corruption and misrepresentation that exist in the country (Transparency International 2011). These issues are widespread in Argentina and inevitably affect the validity of secondary public information, a problem we have endeavored to mitigate by way of attempting to triangulate information as far as possible. The same issue has been kept in mind during conversations and field visits, especially where government representatives were present. We have considered information derived from interviews and field visits as generalisable to the opinions of the department of which the respondent is a representative, unless the context has indicated or they themselves have specified it to be a personal opinion.

Although both researchers have an advanced knowledge of the Spanish language, we have chosen to work with interpreters on several occasions in order to minimize possible misunderstandings due to dialects, jargon and slang. We have also employed the help of translators when dealing with certain documents and other written accounts, but have also taken the liberty to translate some simpler and non-technical texts ourselves.

One of the most evident limitations of interview based research is the dependency of the researchers on the respondents' willingness to offer up time, effort and honesty. We mostly attempted to conquer the obstacle of availability by adapting to the wishes of the respondents concerning place of meeting and time, but unfortunately failed to meet such requirements on some occasions. This was a limitation felt most acutely in this study as several key interviews, as previously described, did not come to pass due to our inability to manage such requests, most often because of personal safety issues and the safety of the interpreters we were working with. Other limitations of this method include the intimate and possibly sensitive nature of the type of conversation and topic, which we attempted to mitigate through open-mindedness, sensitivity, and by trying to form a relationship of trust with the respondents. We also sought respondents' informed consent to use the information provided, and made sure they were aware of how their accounts may be used in the research. We also

guaranteed anonymity if wanted, and the ability to withdraw consent after a given interview (Esaiasson et al. 2012:257).

Ethical considerations

As student researchers coming to Argentina from Sweden, with the varying power positions of developing vs. developed, Global South vs. Global North or uneducated vs. educated that this may entail to the various actors that we met during our research, and also subconsciously to us, we took great care not to indicate any such dichotomies that might affect the situation or information provided. For example, we took care not to use academic jargon in order for conversations to run freely and comfortably, and also paid careful attention not share any previous knowledge or indicate what type of answers we were looking for. The employment of methods like observation and interviews demand consideration of issues such as awareness of time shortage and busy everyday lives of respondents. Hence, in order not to take up valuable time during work hours from our respondents in the *cartonero* group, we tried to keep interviews on the street very short. Further, we decided not to offer any kind of compensation for the interviews in order to ensure as far as possible that the respondent was there as a result of their own interest. We made sure to meet respondents at places they had chosen and felt comfortable with, often in public spaces or private offices.

An ethical issue that became clear to us during the study was our position as perceived ‘professionals’. While we always made clear that we are students and have no expertise or practical experience of waste management or sustainable development, our presence was misconstrued at two occasions in the form of us being presented as ‘researchers’. While neither of these two events are likely to have any long-term consequences, it made more acutely aware of the great importance of taking into careful consideration the footprint we leave behind in an area of study.

Method for analysis

Following a method that Esaiasson et al. present for the analysis of material derived from conversational interviews, we have chosen to categorize and summarize our interview material according to the operationalised questions outlined above, in order to detect general patterns. As Richard Fenno (1990) describes it, it is a process of presenting *anecdotes in plural*, by which he means that patterns are found by moving from single stories about the individual experience of the situation, to more general descriptions of the situation as a whole. This summary of the material derived from the interviews is meant to expose general patterns through the comparison of individual answers (Esaiasson et al. 2012: 272). In accordance with the chosen analytical method and as many of our interviews are of both informant- and respondent character, the “Results and Analysis” section is divided into two segments (Esaiasson et al. 2012: 269). The first two headlines, that corresponds to the first two of the operationalised questions outlined above, denote the following material as being of mainly informant character. This information to a lesser extent constitute the base for the analysis than does the following three headlines, corresponding to operational questions 3, 4 and 5,

under which the information is of respondent character. To clarify, information about events and issues leading up to the formation of the Basura Cero law are presented under questions 1 and 2, while information on stakeholder motives, and events and issues that have become relevant since the law was passed is presented under questions 3, 4, and 5. This in accordance with the analytical method and in order to clarify the nature of the findings presented.

We have chosen to use interview material in this way as the purpose of this study includes the enhancement of the understanding of the concept of sustainable development. In order to question this concept through the practical example of the Basura Cero law, it would be misguided to base our conclusions purely on the analysis of previous research on the area. It should nonetheless be said that we do realize that the choices we have made regarding previous research as well as respondent selection are coloured by our academic pre-understanding as well as our personal and academic backgrounds. By instead mapping the experiences of people directly related to the Basura Cero law, exposing patterns of experienced implementation and finally connecting this to previous research and theories within the same research area, we hope to contribute, albeit to a limited extent, to the development of sustainable development theory (Esaiasson et al. 2012: 254-255).

Results and Analysis:

In this section we present and analyse the results of our study. The analysis is informed by the previous research and theoretical framework outlined above, and the findings are structured according to the operational questions that formed the categories for analysis of the material. Each headline contains the relevant results from both interviews and observations in the same section. The two first headlines that relate to the first two operational questions that were outlined in the method present results of mainly informant character, and have thus not been analysed to the same extent as has the results in the following three sections. Also, as only all of the findings **combined** will form the narrative of the *cartonero* relation to the Basura Cero law that we wish to mediate, analytical emphasis will be placed on the last section.

1. Why was the law created?

According to most of our sources, the Basura Cero law was created due to popular demand on a successful resolution of the waste management crisis that had been ongoing in Buenos Aires since the 90's (GAIA, Government 1, Donde Reciclo). The contaminating effect of the landfills was becoming clearly visible in some of the most marginalized areas of the city in terms of deteriorating health among citizens and of the environment (Greenpeace, Donde Reciclo). In 2003 and 2004, existing landfills were reaching their bearing capacity and were marked for closure, which created pressure on the municipal government to arrange for another solution (GAIA). Plans for new landfills were rejected by protests from the residents in the affected areas as issues of health and safety had surfaced through the media and by help of environmental INGO's, creating a consciousness of the negative impacts of landfills.

Environmental NGO's in the city also actively opposed these plans and worked with residents to stage protests. In the years of 2003 and 2004, Greenpeace presented the idea of Zero Waste as an alternative to the opening of new landfills, and lobbied actively for such principles to be the foundation of a new waste management solution (Greenpeace). Joining them were other NGO's also prompting for sustainability to be factored in, meaning also an inclusion of the only at that time functioning system of recycling in the city: the *cartoneros* (Greenpeace, GAIA). Further, the abundance of natural resources available in the country, as well as the economic journey that, despite several crisis, had made the nation a top economic player in Latin America, had resulted in that the city government was interested in advocating a modern and forward thinking, environmentally conscious image (Government 1). As there for some time has been a lot of international focus on environmental challenges, and several other megacities in the world have implemented various kinds and levels of sustainability principles in their waste management legislation, this was a possibility to create such an image (Government 1).

The INGO's involved in the making and passing of the law believed the city to have enough resources to reach the Basura Cero goals and saw a win-win situation in that the city would save money by having to take care of less waste, while the *cartoneros* would make money by selling recyclables, and the environment would benefit from this development as well as from the bans on incineration and landfilling (Government 1, GAIA, Greenpeace). With time however, the difficulties surrounding the implementation has reduced the hope of involved INGO's. As the Zero Waste principles has proven difficult to accomplish in the context of contemporary Buenos Aires, one source states that a general goal of recycling 50 - 60 percent of waste generated in the city seems like a more realistic goal (Donde Reciclo). The answers we received on this issue show that there was a wish and a need from the city government, civil society, NGO's and *cartoneros* alike, to reform the old waste management system. If we look at the stakeholder interests analytically, it is possible to investigate this further. The expressed wish from NGOs like Greenpeace and GAIA to avoid a solution that would mean more of the same environmental degradation as had followed from the previous system is, considering the environmental profiles of the organisations, rational and understandable. Presenting an alternative along the lines of contemporary sustainability discourse was seen as an opportunity to improve the environmental situation and at the same time offer a solution that would be economically favourable in a long term perspective. Additionally, with the expected consequence of increased recognition of the *cartoneros*, the suggestion of the Zero Waste alternative seems to encompass all three of the pillars that make up the base for sustainable development. It is however also possible, via the reasonings of Pupavac, to imagine that other and more technocratic alternatives that were better suited for the circumstances of Buenos Aires might have been overlooked or neglected in favour of the information based, producer oriented solution suggested. No such solutions were however mentioned in the interviews.

2. How was the law created and by whom?

As the need for a new waste management system that handled a majority of waste *before* it ended up in landfills became evident, INGO's like Greenpeace, WWF and GAIA, as well as NGO's like *Fundacion Cambio Democratico* (Foundation for Democratic Change, FCD) lobbied for an inclusive process in creating such a solution (Greenpeace, GAIA). The municipal government and the Department of Ecology together with GAIA and Greenpeace decided to gather stakeholders from various parts of society in order to collectively create a viable plan. Invited were environmental- and other NGO's, *cartonero* cooperatives, CEAMSE, representatives from the waste management companies and University representatives (Government 1, GAIA). It should be mentioned here that all of our sources agreed that the independently working *cartoneros* were not included in this process as they are not an 'entity that can be communicated with'. By way of collective effort and with many parties having to compromise with their wishes, Basura Cero was finally drafted (GAIA). The INGO's managed to rest the law on Zero Waste principles, partially mimicking similar models of Zero Waste legislation passed in New Zealand, Australia and the US (Whitson 2011: 1409). It passed on municipal level and became incorporated in legislation in 2005, while the major part of the implementation work began after it was passed in the national assembly in 2007 (Government 1).

To summarise, all of the interviewees attest to the fact that the law was the result of a successful multi-stakeholder collaboration, although as we shall see in the following section, they differ in opinions on the successfulness of the law itself. Reviewing these statements analytically, the description of the process of the creation of the law that these findings describe, seems to us to be consistent with what Robert et al. argues is a prerequisite for sustainability: "*To successfully implement sustainable development, professionals, experts and the general public need to be engaged*" (Robert et al. 1997: 79). The general ambition of horizontal inclusion seems also consistent with Chatterton's description of societally and historically desirable democratic principles (Chatterton 2004: 551). The inclusive process is also mirrored in the law (see appendix 1) and represents in itself the successful consolidation of multi-stakeholder interests and wishes. The initiative thus seems to have originated from a 'sustainable process' which adds weight to the sustainability ambitions outlined within it.

3. For whom was the law created?

Again, all of the interviewed stakeholder groups agreed that the Basura Cero law was created to address the growing problem of waste that has for some time been a fact in Buenos Aires. Consequently, the problems that follow issues of waste in forms of pollution of water, air and land, and of the effect this has on people's health, were also to be mitigated through the successful implementation of the law. In this sense, the law can be considered to have been created for the citizens of Buenos Aires, who had through protests and other democratic channels shown their dissatisfaction with the previous system. However, if we attempt to view the law through the eyes of the stakeholders involved in creating it, we will also find an array of more specific beneficiaries and motives.

The want and need of the city to function as a role model for the rest of the nation, as well as political strategy, were put forward as a rationale behind the creation of the law (Government 1, Greenpeace, Amartya 1). The law and the standards and goals it sets are ambitious, a point on which all of our sources agree, but they differ in the opinion on whether it is overambitious or not. Those who argue that the law has been flawed from the start by targets that are impossible to reach given the conditions present at the time of its creation, claim that passing such a law was part of the political strategy of the previous city government (Government 1, Amartya 1). Some of our sources claim that the previous administration saw an election loss coming, and with waste management being a hot topic in the city, they would in passing a law that would be near impossible to live up to set a difficult stage for the coming administration (Government 1, Amartya 1).

From the point of view of Greenpeace, the main motive for being involved in the creation of the law was environmental, as this is the primary focus of the organization (Greenpeace 2006). However, they were also aware of that their goal of environmental improvement coincided with the social goal of the *cartoneros*: inclusion and recognition. Thus in the process leading up to Basura Cero, Greenpeace and the *cartoneros* were working for the same goal, which was less burial of waste and more recycling (Greenpeace). Even though the *cartoneros* were viewing their work as primarily beneficial for their own economic survival, they were also "... *maybe without realizing*" (Greenpeace), creating a platform for the NGO's and the *cartoneros* to meet and unite around environmental waste issues. Greenpeace thus wanted to promote functioning cooperatives in the formation of the law. The process of formalization of cooperatives had to some extent already started before 2001 and accelerated with the passing of Law 992, and cooperatives that worked in a "*serious manner*" (Greenpeace) had gained the respect of the *vecinos* in the areas where they worked. They also made more visible, and thus elevated, the work they were doing by wearing uniforms and by working with new forms of collection that avoided littering the streets. Greenpeace thus saw an opportunity to further promote the "*good work*" being done by these cooperatives, and also to strengthen their organizations and political position by introducing it as part of new waste management legislation. Thus, from the side of Greenpeace, the law was created to improve the environmental state of the city as well as the social situation of the *cartoneros* – two goals that according to this INGO went hand in hand (Greenpeace).

For the cooperatives of *cartoneros* who participated in the formation of the law, it was seen as another step in formalizing their work and getting legislative recognition for the service they do to the city. As expressed by several sources, the goal of the politically active *cartonero* cooperatives is to be granted the status of civil servants. This would mean full access to the societal structures from which they are now disconnected (El Ceibo, Donde Reciclo, GAIA), and would guarantee *cartonero* workers the same social security as is today granted the workers who sweep the sidewalks or clean the parks: salaries in accordance with union agreements, social welfare benefits, and societal recognition for the service they provide. Combined with the progress achieved in the Law 992, being a recognised part of the new waste management system would mean further legal recognition of their work as an environmentally valuable service, which would in turn give the cooperatives more leverage vis-à-vis the state (El Ceibo, Donde Reciclo, GAIA). Thus, this was the motivation for

participating in the process of the law. Law 1854 came to state the rights to priority and inclusion of the *cartonero* cooperatives when dealing with the dry solid waste in articles 43 and 44 (see appendix 1), thus providing legal tools for them to claim their right to inclusion, subsidies in form of tools and benefits, and priority in handling recollection and recycling (CEDOM 2005).

“*We are sending [the cartoneros] to that destiny forever and we are not that kind of country.*”
(Government 1)

The answers outlined above indicate that the Basura Cero law was created for the entirety of the city of Buenos Aires, as a mean to several ends. Specifically though, it seems to have been the motives of mainly the city government, NGO’s and *cartonero* cooperatives that drove the development. Considering these main stakeholders motives analytically may however reveal ulterior motives.

The wish of the municipal government of the city of Buenos Aires to proliferate itself as being aligned with the international environmental focus, opens for the not entirely implausible possibility that the creation of this ambitious law was simply meant as a show for the galleries. Combined with the arguments of Pupavac, a romanticized idea of non-materialist and small scale development embedded in the reigning neoliberal paradigm; this Zero Waste suggestion from influential NGO’s like Greenpeace and GAIA might have been the perfect opportunity for such proliferation. Additionally, the possibility of a political “setup” by the previous administration who passed the law would further explain the seemingly disparate states of theory and reality.

From the same critical perspective, it is equally plausible to question the way that NGO’s interpret the *cartonero* movement. If autonomy and small scale entrepreneurship are viewed as prerequisites for creating sustainable development, then the *cartonero* movement represents the textbook example. This fact combined with the profiles of participating NGO’s might have clouded the unsustainability of the *cartonero* situation as a whole.

The pressure on the government to accept a *cartonero* inclusive solution asked for by cooperatives and NGO’s, and to some extent from civil society, is of course also a major incentive, as democratic governments tend to want to please their constituency. In an interview with a governmental representative, he voiced what he thought was many *porteños*’ feelings about the initial mass-appearance of the *cartoneros* after the crisis in 2001. He claimed there to be a lot of anger about the situation and that the *cartoneros* served as a stain on the self-image of the *porteños*. The unfairness of the situation that this group had been forced to revert to was not compatible with the image of a country rich in natural resources and with historically strong unions and welfare services. The government representative remarked: “*Cartoneros are not bad people, they are a bad sign*”, and: “*We are sending them to that destiny forever and we are not that kind of country*” (Government 1). He was the only

one of our respondents who remarked on the unsustainability of the *cartonero* situation as a whole, the general lack of attention to which surprised us somewhat. Thus, it is also possible to add the external, as well as internal, pressure brought about by the reminder of the state- and societal failure that the *cartonero* exclusion represents, as one of the main motives for why the government was positive towards the idea of a Basura Cero Law.

If we turn our analytical gaze towards one of the groups that the law does not include directly, we find the individually working *cartoneros*. The fact that cooperativization is what the city government demands in order to interact with the *cartoneros*, and the fact that individually working *cartoneros* seem to be ignored by the state, can be interpreted as an indicator of a desire from the state to institutionalise *cartoneros*. If we look at the *cartoneros* as a group that has achieved a level of autonomy outside of the societal system, then the cooperative form that is a condition for reentry *into* the system, as a way to break this autonomy. Further, the promised benefits that can be gained by leaving this autonomy, in accordance with Chattertons definition, may be interpreted as a way for the government to retake control. It is not unplausible that the sheer mass of the *cartoneros* represent a potentially problematic political situation, especially as it is a movement that was created as a reaction in diametrical opposition to the state and the system that failed them.

Further, the way that the law is phrased, by design leads to disadvantages for individual *cartoneros*, as the subsidies therein allocated offer benefits only to those who choose a cooperative form of organisation. As an example, the rights to the dry solid waste materials within the different waste management zones in the city belong exclusively to the cooperatives, making the individual *cartoneros* unable to claim a turf and achieve some level of routine. As a consequence, this might also create antipathy between cooperatives and individual *cartoneros*, further deepening the rift between these two sides of shared ambition. While it is not necessarily a calculated effect from the city government, this can further be interpreted as a strategy in creating incentives for *cartoneros* to join cooperatives and be reinstitutionalised into the state system.

4. Which aspects of the law have been implemented?

“The government does not implement the Basura Cero law; I do”
(El Ceibo Field Visit)

Practical implementation

According to one representative from Greenpeace, the implementation work has not gotten further than to the first of what she perceives as three steps outlined in the law. Attempting to reduce “*unnecessary consumption*” and rethinking the way materials such as plastic and glass are used, has partially been accomplished as a first step. Where for example plastic bags in supermarkets used to be free, they are now clearly marked with a *Ciudad Verde* logo, are reusable, recyclable and cost a small sum. The second step would have been to organize a

fully functioning and citywide system of separation of dry- and wet solid waste, and the recollection of the same. This has not yet been accomplished, as only parts of the city are covered by “*properly functioning*” (Greenpeace) cooperatives. In areas where cooperatives cannot handle the full amount of dry solid waste or do not exist, the waste collection companies with an agenda that does not include recycling take over. The third step would have been to get more Green Centers operational, “*at least one in each commune*” (Greenpeace), in order to facilitate growth of cooperatives and a safe and professional environment for the *cartoneros* to separate and repackage the collected material. At the moment, there are two operational Green Centers in Capital Federal, one in Retiro and one in Barracas (Greenpeace, Government 1, Donde Reciclo).

Despite what seems to be a dismal outlook on implementation, there are evidence of practical attempts at implementing the Basura Cero law. As we arrived in Buenos Aires in April of 2013, one of the first observations of change that one of the researchers witnessed in comparison to previous visits, was of black and green waste containers with the label “Ciudad Verde”, positioned in various places in the central neighborhoods of the city. The idea with the containers is that *vecinos* will separate waste at home instead of leaving it on the street for the *cartonero* to sort, and thus rid the streets of piles of waste, smell and pestilence. At the time of writing, however, the green containers that are meant to hold recyclable materials and which are meant to be emptied by the *cartoneros*, can only be found in small numbers and in a few areas of the city, while the black containers, designed to hold wet waste and that are meant to be collected by the collection companies, are much more common (Government 1).

Cooperatives have been given keys to the green containers situated in their areas and have the right to access the recyclable materials therein, making the containers one of the most tangible efforts of mitigating compliance with the law. The project has however, according to several sources, not been working as anticipated (Government 1, Amartya 1, El Ceibo). For one, the lack of informational campaigns explaining what the containers are intended for and how they work, along with citizens showing a lack of interest in waste separation, has meant that mixed waste end up in both containers and that no, or very small scale, separation is happening (Government 1, Comisión Basura Cero). While the government believes that the Basura Cero law has made people more aware of the need for recycling, recent polls show that most *vecinos* care very little about recycling and reuse (Government 1, Government 2, Comisión Basura Cero). In sum, while the government and the commission agree that they prefer the function of the green containers over that of the black ones, at the time of writing there seems to be no difference between them apart from their color (Corcuera, Comisión Basura Cero). Thus, even though the containers and the recent improvements described above can be seen as an attempt to implement the Basura Cero law, the progress is slow and riddled with difficulty and conflict.

Another example of implementation that the government wishes to highlight is the opening of the above mentioned Green Centers (Government 1). As described before, there are currently two such centers in use, one of which was established by El Ceibo without help from the government (Greenpeace). Unfortunately, all different stakeholders spoke of that there is a presence of local mafia within these centers (Government 1, Amartya 2, Donde

Reciclo); an interesting question of which the further research unfortunately lies beyond the scope of this paper.

On the social and economical side, the government has partially lived up to the promise of the law in terms of provision of subsidies to the cooperatives (GAIA, Government 1, MTE). El Ceibo and MTE both stated that they have received waste collection trucks, financial help, uniforms, access to childcare services, healthcare services and transport services (MTE, El Ceibo). Although these subsidies are not always what was expected or requested (MTE, El Ceibo), they do represent a partial attempt at implementation. Another respondent claimed that the implementary strategy of the government only consists of providing the cooperatives with the minimum amount of subsidies that is needed to comply with the law. This included, according to the respondent, intentionally giving cooperatives trucks where the warranty has expired. This way the government have no responsibility when the trucks break. She also stated that “*they [the government] only give the minimum, but on the other hand they are the first ones to give them [the cartoneros] something at all*” (Donde Reciclo). A government representative refuted this, saying that there is no point in giving the cooperatives trucks when they are not used for their intended purpose, alluding to what he claimed were recent thefts of cattle in the Province in which cooperative trucks were said to have been used (Government 1). Thus the compliance with the law in regards to subsidies consists of a give-and-take dynamic between government and cooperatives, but it is possible to conclude that some aid is reaching the *cartoneros* as promised.

The current plan of action from the side of the government in order to comply with the law seems to be to construct new Green Centers and expand access to the already existing ones. This is a goal set to be reached by the end of 2013 but seems unlikely to be reached on time or even in the near future, as residents do not want treatment plants to be placed in their neighborhoods (Government 1).

Implementation - a failure?

As can probably be derived from the information outlined above, an unfortunate yet common response to the progress of the law that we encountered many times during interviews was that it has not been implemented to any larger extent, and that the forecast for future implementation looks grim. The 2010 and 2012 recycling and non-landfill burial targets of 50 and subsequently 75 percent have not been met. Instead, the amount of waste that has been going to landfills has increased (GAIA, Government 1). In 2010, waste management was the largest single point of public expenditure in Buenos Aires, and amounted at the time of this study (2013) to approximately eight percent of the city budget (FCD). The economic effects that a more efficient system such as the one outlined in the Basura Cero law would have if it was fully implemented, are thus potentially enormous.

Most of the NGO representatives that we spoke to were of the opinion that the law is not being implemented due to lack of political commitment and due to misallocation of resources (Greenpeace, GAIA, Donde Reciclo, FCD). The representative from Greenpeace claims that “*The law is not utopian. If you look at the numbers you can see that the money is there; failure is due to lack of political incentive*” (Greenpeace). She illustrated her point with a monetary example: every year, the process of collecting and burying waste is given three

billion ARS in the city budget. Environmentally focused political measures that include the work of *cartoneros*, receives the considerably smaller amount of three hundred million ARS. She claims that this misdirection of resources and the lack of commitment to a political agenda of sustainability, is the obvious reason for the law not being fully implemented (Greenpeace). The massive amounts of resources that are evidently being pushed toward waste management, as described above, is both a testament to the severity of the situation and also serves to support the argument of misallocation.

According to many, implementational failure depends mainly on the lack of political decision and ambition (GAIA, Donde Reciclo, FCD, Greenpeace, Amartya 2). Others blame the rigorousness and extreme ambition of the law for having caused implementational frustration, and consider the original standards of the law to be so high that they are unattainable. The same sources also claim that that stakeholders such as Greenpeace did not take into account the unpreparedness of the citizens and that the law was not adapted to the Argentine context (Amartya 1, Government 2). There is also a feeling among some that the many stakeholders and interests involved have made it a difficult law to implement (Government 1, Government 2). Thus, explains one government official, Basura Cero was built on a much shakier ground than similar projects in other places of the world and was still the most ambitious legislative initiative of its kind. An NGO worker stated that: “*Greenpeace applied [Zero Waste] models that were not adapted to the context*” (Amartya 1) and one government representative claimed that Greenpeace knew that the law was unrealistic and are now “*prisoners of their own work*” (Government 1). The same respondent stated that he had heard of no other place with this kind of law and has through his official contacts in other cities such as Los Angeles, Mexico City, New York, and Sao Paulo been told that the idea is crazy. “*We would never do such an idiot thing as set up a public goal*” (Government 1). In his own words, Buenos Aires became the “*stupid guy*” (Government 1) who signed an unrealistic Zero Waste law and also made the setup for failure very public. The solution to the city’s waste management system is in his opinion a technical and industrial one. He also commented on the effort to include the twelve cooperatives in the waste management system as being a mainly institutional effort, but that the attempt is not going as hoped: “*This is not recycling. This is a naïve attempt to do social inclusion, and we are all part of it*” (Government 1).

“Seven years later, we are in an even more critical situation because of the failure of implementing the law” (Greenpeace)

As can be seen in the results described above, the environmental progress of the law is considered to be small, non-existent or by some even reversed. While attempts at implementation can be seen in projects such as the green and black (dysfunctional) waste containers, the ambition to build new Green Centers, and the small charge on plastic bags and glass bottles, the overall amount of recycling seems to have decreased (GAIA, Government 1, El Ceibo).

Our first reaction as researchers to the attempt of ‘containerisation’ of the city was that the government was trying to ‘contain’ the very activity of *cartonear* by making it less visible; an activity that is inherently built upon the appropriation of public space (Chronopoulos 2006). Thus we were un-baffled when we learned that the attempt to clean up the streets was coolly received by the majority of the *cartoneros*. The preference of conducting the work on the streets and door-to-door was prevailing and justified as being the best way of creating a relationship with the *vecinos* upon whose cooperation they depend, as well as for informing the public on the benefits of recycling. Lending the perspective of Bayat, this reluctance to hide away the nature of their work can be seen as an expression of the long term, quiet and nonviolent activism that he argues has become the weapon of the urban subaltern. As a visible manifestation, the *cartoneros* serve the purpose of reminding the public that there is poverty in the midst of affluence; rejection alongside inclusion; and waste at the end of every line. Their inclusion into municipal legislation, while still remaining a marginal group, further relates to Bayats arguments regarding the neoliberal and globalisation-spiced double movement of integration and social exclusion that has become the limbo of the urban subaltern.

5. Has the subsequent changes had any effect on the work of the *cartoneros*?

“They are not kicking them out any more” (GAIA)

Again, we have found that most of our sources agree. It seems that there have been several important changes for the *cartonero* workforce over the last couple of years, but many argue that these are the results not only of the law but of several factors combined. As one respondent put it: *“The cartoneros have more tools to access the formal system and a lot is different for them, but it is not enough by a long shot [...] all of these changes are the result of a long, long struggle”* (GAIA).

Cooperatives and the *“free cowboys”*

One of the most noticeable changes is the emphasis that has been put on the cooperative form as a condition for inclusion into the formal waste management system. Although the model of organization differs between the cooperatives and while it is hard to estimate, most believe there to be 4000 - 6000 *cartoneros* working for cooperatives in some way and about the same amount who work independently, or as *“free cowboys”* (Government 1), within Capital Federal (Government 1, GAIA, Greenpeace). Although cooperation between the state, cooperatives and collection companies is not always smooth (to say the least), the cooperative form of organization has, according to many, helped consolidate the voice of the *cartoneros* in the formal room (GAIA, Donde Reciclo). Without some form of unification and organization, it would have been hard to demand the changes that have now been possible to enter into legislation (GAIA). In connection to the passing of Law 992, the city was divided into zones in which the responsible cooperative has the right to, and responsibility for, all solid dry waste (GAIA, Government 1, MTE, Greenpeace). This is the first time that *cartoneros* have signed a

contract to take care of all recyclables within an area (MTE, Greenpeace). This formal responsibility helped facilitate the creation of more trusting relationships with the *porteros* as well as with the *vecinos*. *Cartoneros* were from then on to return to the same streets and houses and were thus thought to be able to enjoy the benefits of recognition and acceptance (MTE, Government 2).

Comparatively higher wages and the access to benefits described above are the most recognized advantages of joining a cooperative (GAIA, Government 1, MTE). According to one of the leaders of El Ceibo, her weekly wage rose from 20 - 30 pesos per week to 500 pesos per week upon joining the cooperative in 2001 (Government 1). With wages varying from 1100 to over 2000 pesos per month (MTE, El Ceibo), the quality of living could be greatly enhanced through joining a cooperative (GAIA). Several respondents also stated that since the *cartoneros* started wearing official clothing, the social recognition they receive as workers has decreased prejudice and made people “*less afraid*” (El Ceibo, Segovia, GAIA).

Nonetheless, not everyone agrees on that the shift from an individual- to a cooperative work form is solely positive. Staying outside the cooperatives can be explained with the same rationale used to explain why some people choose to start their own business rather than working for a firm; it can simply mean more individual freedom, less risk of workplace conflict and the opportunity to work on individually preferred hours and areas (Donde Reciclo, Government 1). The cooperative requirements for memberships differ as a result of their various structures, ranging from merely coordinating transportation to working as a small business enterprise. One respondent spoke of the requirements of a cooperative as going against the nature of the activity, as to *cartonear* has historically been carried out individually and as a complement to other part time jobs like construction or house work. Therefore, the codependence and routinized conditions of a cooperative is not something that has been inherent in the activity and tradition of *cartonear*, and may be one reasons to why the formation of cooperatives was not more common before legislation begun to demand it. It should also be added that while a representative of the administration of MTE claimed that most *cartoneros* are aware of the Basura Cero law, our observations in the streets indicates the opposite (MTE, Cartonero CTA, Cartoneros MTE).

From the governmental side, it is believed that some *cartoneros* choose to stay independent because of a resentment toward a system that “*fucked them over*” (Government 1), and the cooperatives are, through being the preferred form of organisation from the side of the government, seen as part of that same system (Government 1). Conclusively, the formation of cooperatives seems, despite shortcomings and difficulties, to be appreciated by most stakeholders. One governmental representative stated that the organization of *cartoneros* into cooperatives is the most important change brought by the Basura Cero law (Government 1). Nonetheless, a representative from MTE hypothesised that this change might have happened anyway, but the law became a tool that allowed for a quicker process (MTE)

Attitudes, time, and inclusion

Respondents also claimed that the Basura Cero law has led to positive changes in the attitude of the local population and that the waste management issue is more talked about now (GAIA). However, other factors that have been mentioned when discussing such recent

changes is time and perseverance. This was particularly the case when discussing the changes respondents reported to have noticed on the improvement in attitude from the *vecinos* in the neighbourhood where they work on a regular basis. A longtime member of cooperative El Ceibo answered that she believed these factors to be more important than the law itself. The positive change she could see with Basura Cero is that the *vecinos* can demand of the *portero* to separate the waste of the building which makes her work easier (El Ceibo). Other respondents also mentioned the positive effect of the *cartoneros* having been present in the city on a larger and more visible scale since the 2001 crisis, and given the 10 years that has passed since then, become a natural part of the city landscape (MTE, Donde Reciclo).

We observed, on several occasions what we interpret to be an ongoing, inclusive process of the *cartoneros* into the formal room. On a field visit to a meeting of the Basura Cero Commission charged with monitoring and furthering the implementation of the Basura Cero law, the multi stakeholder presence seemed in itself a physical embodiment of a democratic process (Comisión Basura Cero). The meeting agenda revolved around a governmental presentation of what was currently being done to try and reach the targets for reducing landfills and the speakers were thus mainly governmental representatives. However, present were also representatives from MTE, Cooperativa del Oeste, and El Ceibo, as well as NGO's and some citizens who were there to voice their concerns regarding the waste management of the city. A testament to the severity of the situation were long and heated discussions, revealing clashes of stakeholder interests, and political antipathy.

In another meeting we had the opportunity to visit a legislative proposal in *La Legislatura*, the Buenos Aires city Legislature, regarding the suggested priority of *cartoneras* in state waste management contracts. Present were representatives from the same organisations as at the meeting of the Comisión Basura Cero, but with a majority of the attending being *cartoneras*, again showing the increased access of the *cartoneros* to democratic channels. *Cartoneras* as well as female politicians reserved a majority of the speaking time at the meeting (Mujer Cartonera). Despite the seemingly amiable atmosphere, one of the leaders of El Ceibo as well as a representative of another cooperative expressed their antipathy toward the perceived inactivity of the state, with statements such as “*El estado es el enemigo!*” which translates to “*The state is the enemy!*” (Comisión Basura Cero). El Ceibo is one of the cooperatives that have received subsidies such as trucks, funds and clothing from the state, but the feelings of resentment created by the unfulfillment of the goals and promises of the Basura Cero law are very much evident in the cooperative-state relation. At another occasion, the same El Ceibo leader remarked “*The government does not implement Basura Cero Law; I do*” (El Ceibo Green Center).

“To me, it was so cool to see these people that I see on the street, inside la Legislatura, with a microphone, talking about laws. It gave me goose bumps” (Segovia)

Summing up this final section of the results; through mapping the hitherto attempted projects of implementation, we believe a valid interpretation of them to be that of environmental and economic failure, and social success. The environmental goals of the law are agreed upon by all interviewed stakeholders, to be unimplemented and unaccomplished. The promise of the

law for the *cartoneros* however, in provision of subsidies and in the priority and inclusion in the waste collection and recycling, has as outlined above been partially, albeit not incontestably, fulfilled. For the government, the failure to implement the Basura Cero law environmentally has led to unfulfillment of the economic advantages that are embedded in a full implementation of the law, and thus the social aspect seems to be the only part that has gained momentum and lead to any substantial form of change. This interpretation raises two critical points of observation regarding the purpose of this study:

One is that the change for the *cartoneros* has been one of both material and non-material values. The subsidies provided has come in the form of practical, material tools to further efficiency and safety of the work, but also in the form of basic rights to social services that function as a springboard for further personal development. What we see is thus a positive social result in line with the theories of both Sen and Pupavac, if their respective arguments concerning development are simplified to represent non-material and material values respectively. The combination of material and non-material benefits have thus in this case proven successful, to a point. It should be mentioned that several sources were of the opinion that these changes were not direct effects of the law but of a long and ongoing struggle for *cartonero* recognition and inclusion (MTE, El Ceibo). We have however, in the course of this study, come to view the Basura Cero law as a part of this ongoing struggle and an important legal victory within it. Through our analysis we believe ourselves to be able to claim this correlation by having been granted an insight into several stakeholder perspectives, which categorised and analysed have revealed this ‘larger picture’.

Another critical observation is that, in the case of Basura Cero, the successful development along one pillar of the sustainability concept has not been conditional upon the same development of the two others. In other words, the implementational failure of the environmental aspects of the law do not necessarily nullify the positive social changes that these results bear witness of. This observation, however, raises questions regarding the concept of sustainability. Is development sustainable only given that the values of all three pillars are realised to some or full extent? And can development initiatives, be they projects or policy, private or public, that only focus on or accomplish development within one of the pillars be called ‘sustainable’ at all? These are questions that we in this study do not have the capacity, expertise, resources or time to explore further, but that we nonetheless claim to be important for the furtherance of the understanding of the sustainability concept.

The final analytical dimension we wish to apply to the results is revealed if we apply the critical arguments of Reid and Pupavac combined. If we assume for a moment their position of regarding the world as being thoroughly overrun by a neoliberal agenda, and the Basura Cero law as an expression of the sustainability discourse within it and along the parameters outlined by Reid, a plausible interpretation is that the 992 and 1854 laws constitute a solidification of the neoliberal structures that through the discourse of sustainability justifies exclusion. The positive social changes outlined above have indeed taken place, but within the frame of a more extensive and problematic social situation. The improvements accomplished via the Basura Cero law offer both material and non-material well-being within the current situation, rather than tools to pursue more sustainable lifestyles. In line with Pupavac’s

critique of Schumacher's idea that "Small is Beautiful", it can be considered limiting to assume that everyone wants to be a fisherman, or in this case a *cartonero*, simply because this has previously been the only option for survival. The celebration of the autonomous, small scale and self-reliant that Pupavac views as informative of international development, in combination with the neoliberal rationalisation of the benefits of entrepreneurial initiative, are thusly made visible. By including the *cartoneros* in the waste management solution and providing them with benefits and also responsibilities conditioned upon the cooperative form, they are locked within the prevailing structures that marginalised them in the first place. Fighting the battles and cherishing victories of legislative inclusion might be obscuring the unsustainability of the greater situation in what is really being legally cemented: the existence of a marginal group on the edge of consumer society as a result of societal dysfunction. In this way, it is possible to question the meaning and implications of the sustainability concept within a neoliberal agenda.

A final discussion

"[The government] *wants to hide the waste, I want to make it very visible*" (Donde Reciclo)

Based on the findings presented above, we have come to the conclusion that the Basura Cero law has contributed to changes for the work of the *cartoneros* in the form of cooperativisation, and political and legal recognition and inclusion. Despite what can only be called an implementational failure, the environmental focus of the law seems to have given the *cartonero* cooperative movement an instrument for furthering their societal and political position. By redefining themselves as environmentalists in service of a more sustainable society, they have been able to consolidate the *cartonero* voice as a further step on the path of claiming social justice and equity.

As has been described above, the Basura Cero law is an environmental, multi stakeholder initiative that is far from fully implemented, and yet, the perhaps most visible consequences of the process leading up to its formation as well as the work it is currently commissioning, are mainly social. To *cartonear* is today to be performing a civil- and environmental service to society which was an unthinkable description before the changes that have come about since 2001. The *cartonero* cooperatives have been able to claim their service to the city as being in line with waste management legislation and to use this environmental claim to further their political position vis-à-vis the government. In redefining the own movement from being a purely need based activity to an environmentally promotional service to the city in accordance with legal standards, the *cartoneros* have been able to transform their presence in the formal room from *reactive* to *proactive*. The possibilities and momentum for positive change and development within the movement have never been more open. In this way, it is possible to interpret the recent positive changes along the lines of Sen's capabilities theory.

Access to democratic channels and tools of both theoretical and physical form enable those willing to move beyond the boundaries of social prejudice to do so, and to develop the kind of work that is possible within the field. The environmental profile of the law that the *cartoneros* were included in has thus aided in the improvement of their social position.

Although these changes seem at first glance to be only positive, it is, as exemplified in the analysis, also important to lift our gaze and view the changes on a larger scale. In many ways, the *cartonero* movement embodies what Bayat describes as the new and quiet activism of the urban subaltern. Having been pushed under the poverty line as a result of global flows of production and economic reform, the *cartoneros* have been deinstitutionalized and marginalized. But it is also possible to interpret the situation in the way that they were never really *marginal*, in the sense they interacted with market flows and were visible and remarked upon by a whole city as a physical embodiment of a failed societal structure; the visible proof of economic crisis. The *cartonero* antipathy towards the state that failed them and the system that let them down still vibrates in statements like “*The state is the enemy!*” (El Ceibo Field Visit), a testament to the continued celebration of an autonomy that by conditions of cooperativisation might slowly be slipping away. The *cartonero* movement has through the organizational form of cooperatives created a new political presence in Buenos Aires, a presence that is now, because of the potential destabilizing and oppositional force it harnesses, in the process of being reinstitutionalised. The incorporation of the cooperatives into the care of the state through the registry and through the dependency on subsidies created by the 992 and 1854 laws, breaks with the image of an autonomous, civil movement that strives for social transformation and emancipation. In this we find the very essence of biopolitics.

However, as the cooperatives are lifted from the outermost rims of society, a new urban subaltern is revealed. Still left in a limbo between autonomy and state-provided welfare, are the individually working *cartoneros*, lacking official channels and collective voice. This subgroup is still working quietly outside of democratic processes and on the periphery of consumption, and as those willing to conform to the cooperative form are reintroduced to the inside of society, it is those of smallest means and weakest voice that remain autonomous. If the concept of resilience serves to encourage the urban subaltern to look to themselves rather than to the state in times of crisis and need, then the changes found within this study can be said to be contributing to a solidification of the neoliberal structures that through the discourse of sustainability justifies exclusion.

If we borrow for a moment the theoretical lense through which Reid views the concept of sustainable development, yet another dimension of the implications of recent changes emerge. We might ask ourselves: is a vast group of people living on the scraps left by consumer society and on the bottom of the social scale really what we want to call *sustainable*? Is this a situation that should be cemented by law? Are these changes for good really being achieved within a greater context of an unsustainable situation, and is the celebrated entrepreneurship and resilience of this group only an internalised neoliberal discourse in disguise? Reviewing the situation with a critical mindset, it may be argued that the concessions being made from the side of the government serve to satisfy the *cartonero* cooperatives enough not question the unsustainability of their situation. Lending a metaphor

from Hans Abrahamsson, these positive changes can be interpreted to be happening within a larger and still deteriorating sustainability situation, like that of a smaller elevator ascending within a larger elevator, that is all the while going down (Abrahamsson 2008).

Conclusions

To answer our research question, we can conclude that **yes, the Basura Cero law has, in combination with time and within the context of the *cartonero* struggle for inclusion, affected the social sustainability for *cartoneros* in Buenos Aires in a seemingly positive way.** This conclusion is however only applicable to the condition of the *cartoneros* that are members of cooperatives. The positive social change we have found is of both material- and non-material character; as access to basic rights such as income, work safety, and health care have improved. The organization of *cartoneros* into cooperatives seems to have been an instrumental part in securing these rights, but also the way by which approximately half of the *cartonero* workforce is left in exclusion. In regards to social inclusion, improvement is less visible and while many of the stakeholders that we interviewed replied that the situation has improved, *cartoneros* still appear to be a marginalised group. It is well worth noting, however, that the improved social sustainability of the *cartoneros* has occurred *within* a situation that is at large still seemingly unsustainable.

In relation to the theoretical aim of the study, we aimed to further the discussion on sustainability as a concept and tool for development. Here we can conclude that the law is unquestionably failing in its environmental goals. However, the positive changes in the social situation of the *cartoneros* raise questions on what really constitutes sustainable development, and of how we should interpret and relate to smaller changes for good within a larger and less sustainable situation. Our own, personal, opinion on this point is that these smaller changes should not be trivialized or discarded, but learned from. While we recognize the potential risk of reproducing hegemonic power structures by locking disadvantaged societal groups into 'self-help' situations, the fact that the sustainability of the societal situation as a whole is failing should not nullify or devalue the improvement that does occur within.

Suggestions for further research

A major subject that we were unable to cover in this study but that we would want to continue researching is the dynamics of the differentiation between individual *cartoneros* and *cartoneros* in cooperatives. The social development curves for these two groups look very different and would thus constitute an interesting and important topic for further research. Naturally, the topics of corruption and criminality that we have not been able to herein explore are difficult but imperative to investigate, as they may severely affect the possibilities for sustainable change within the context of Buenos Aires. Further, in an interview with a government representative, we were told that HIV infection in the *cartonero* group is at a

shocking 40 percent (Government 1), which deviates significantly from the level of infection of the rest of the population. We have chosen not to use this data as we have not been able to verify it, and the issue lies beyond the scope of this paper, but this is an issue in need of extensive further investigation.

Theoretically, discussing the complexity of the concept of sustainable development, we believe that more research is needed on whether and how policies such as the Basura Cero law produce sustainable development. The questions on sustainability that are raised in this study and that are discussed above also concern whether development is sustainable only when the values of all three pillars are realized to some or full extent, and if development initiatives that only focus on or accomplish development within one of the pillars can be called 'sustainable'. These are some of the issues and ideas that working with this study has raised, and we hope that they may inspire new and creative research for us to read in the future.

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Appendix 1: Articles concerning cartoneros in law 1845, translated

Below is the translation of the articles of Basura Cero that relate to the cartoneros, translated. The text is translated by two students of interpretation from the Faculty of Modern Languages at Universidad del Museo Social Argentino (UMSA), Buenos Aires.

Integrated Solid Waste Management Act 1854

Chapter X

Publicity campaigns

Article 39.- The City grants the implementation of publicity campaigns to clarify and inform, which must be sustained over time, with the purpose of encouraging the city's inhabitants to change their habits, and the benefits of waste sorting, separate collection of solid waste, recycling and reusing, without prejudice to the provisions of Act 1687 and Article 3 of Act 992.

Chapter XII

Incentives

Article 43.- Priority and inclusion will be guaranteed to the urban recyclers in the process of dry solid waste collection and transportation, and also in the activities carried out in the waste selection centers who, according to Act 992, must adapt their activities to the requirements established in this act, under the rules set by the regulation, fostering their adaptation and in agreement to the different levels of organization they may possess, with technical and financial assistance programs under the Executive Branch.

Article 44.- The City will adopt the necessary measures to establish credit lines and subsidies for those cooperatives of urban recyclers registered in the Registro Permanente de Cooperativas y de Pequeñas y Medianas Empresas (REPyME) [*Permanent Register of Cooperatives and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises*]. These credits and subsidies must only be allocated to the purchase of capital goods destined to the main purpose of their activities according to what is determined by the Budget Act.

Appendix 2: “The law of the *cartoneros*”, Law 992

Below is the translation of law 992, also called “The law of the cartoneros”. The text is translated by two students of interpretation from the Faculty of Modern Languages at Universidad del Museo Social Argentino (UMSA), Buenos Aires.

Act 992

The Legislature of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires sanctions as law

Article 1. - It is declared as a Public Service to Urban Hygiene Services of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires.

Article 2. - The Executive incorporates recyclable waste collectors to separate collection in the current urban health service.

Article 3. - The provisions of the preceding article shall be made in anticipation of the fulfillment of the following objectives:

- a. Designing a Comprehensive Management of Urban Waste in the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires, to allow recovery of recyclable and reusable material, and override indiscriminate waste burial in landfills as final disposal.
- b. Prioritizing the allocation of work areas, considering the pre-existence of individuals, cooperatives and mutual society.
- c. Coordinating and promoting along with other jurisdictions and official agencies, actions of cooperation, joint plans and procedures that lead to optimize and improve the purpose of this Act, creating economic processes that include collectors.
- d. Designing a plan of source separation of domestic waste
- e. Implementing a permanent educational campaign to raise awareness among people of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires on the following points:
 1. The favorable impact generated by the activity of recovery and recycling in its environmental, social and economic aspect.
 2. The benefit entailing the separation of **waste at source** and/or prior to final disposal, thus facilitating the collectors’ work and contributing to the cleaning of the city and to care for the environment.

Article 4.- Create the Registro Único Obligatorio Permanente de Recuperadores de Materiales Reciclables [*National Single Mandatory Permanent Register of Recyclable Materials*]. The authority responsible for making the registry will provide enrollees a credential to be used during the development of their activity and provide work clothing, gloves and adhesive reflective material. The equipment is intended to make the collection resemble to that of the urban hygiene system. (As text article 1 of Act 2,146, 2587 of BOCBA 15/12/2006)

Article 5.- Create the Registro Permanente de Cooperativas y Pequeñas y Medianas Empresas [*Permanent Register of Cooperatives and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises*] related to the activity.

Article 6.- Action and training programs to all those enrolled in the Register referred to in Article 4, in order to protect the health, hygiene and safety at work during the period of the activity, as well as to promote proper planning of the activity, preventing its development to infringe upon the cleanliness and hygiene of the City. Programs should be designed taking as axes the following points:

- a. Training and advisory for the establishment of future cooperatives or other productive microenterprises.
- b. Advisory to negotiate their products and provide information on all the material recovered for a possible recycling.
- c. Specific health program for enrollees and their families.

Article 7.- Article 6 of the Ordinance No. 33,581 and article 22 of Ordinance No. 39,874 are repealed.

Article 8.- The delivery and/or marketing of any food waste from any source is prohibited.

Article 9.- This Act comes into force on the day of its publication in the Boletín Oficial de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires [*Official Gazette of the City of Buenos Aires.*]

First Transitory Clause: The Executive Branch shall inform this Legislature within ninety (90) days, the studies to implement integrated management of municipal solid waste, in which the various forms to be used are specified.

Second Transitory Clause: The implementation of this Act during the term of current contracts may in no case reduce the quality or performance of the service rendered by the dealers.

Article 10.- Communicate, etc..

Appendix 3: Map of stakeholders

Below is a simplified, visual representation of the main stakeholders connected to the laws well as indication of their main interest in and around the law.

	Type of stakeholder	Aim with the law	Long term aim of stakeholder or organization	Intended short term effects of the law on/to stakeholder	Actual short term effects of the law on/to stakeholder	Hypothetic long term effects?
Municipal government	Government	Solve waste management crisis; improve city environment	Better conditions in the city; to conduct politics that lead to re-election	Reform of waste management system, implementation works; successful resolution of waste management crisis	Partial waste management reform; no successful resolution of WM-crisis; provision of some subsidies to CC	Realization difficult?
Greenpeace	International NGO	To provide sustainable waste management for environmental protection; formal inclusion of cartoneros in said system	To work for internationally improved environment and democracy	Improvement of city environment and inclusion of cartoneros	No or small improvement of city-environment; successful formal inclusion of cartoneros	-
GALA	International NGO	To ban incineration of waste in Buenos Aires	Promote public health and protection of environment through promotion of principles and policy of non-incineration of waste	Improved city environment through non-incineration legislation	Improved city environment through non-incineration legislation	Incineration might become alternative for new WM-solution?
Other NGO's - Fransisco - Carolina	National NGO, civil society	Environmental protection; formal inclusion of cartoneros in sustainable waste management system	Facilitate and promote democratization processes; social inclusion, and environment	Successful democratic process leading to improved environments and formal inclusion of excluded workers	Successful democratic process leading to formal inclusion of excluded workers	-
Cartonero cooperatives	Non-recognized workforce	To be recognized, included and prioritized in sustainable waste management solution	To sustain and improve economic livelihood; to gain recognition, status and benefits as and of civil servants	Improved working conditions; improved formal and social recognition; improved wages	Improved working conditions; improved formal and social recognition; improved wages	Improved conditions for reaching long term goal?
Independent cartoneros	Non-recognized workforce	Did not participate	Sustained economic livelihood	Inclusion of independents into cooperatives (fr. from other stakeholders)	?	?
Citizen of Buenos Aires	Citizen, civil society	To have a clean and safe city-environment	To have a clean and safe city-environment	A clean and safe city-environment	City environment slightly improved	Further reform of WM-system to get used to

Appendix 4: Interview guide

Below is an example of a generic interview guide compiled from all of the different guides adapted for each interview. Questions were asked where applicable meaning that all of these questions were never asked in the same interview. The generic term 'organisation' represents either cartonero cooperatives, governmental agencies, INGO's or NGO's. When respondents did not represent an organisation, questions were adapted to such a context.

Example:

Theme 1 – Personal questions

- Name?
- Position within the organisation?

Theme 2 – the Organisation

- What is the purpose of the organisation?

Theme 3 – The Basura Cero Law

- Who created the law?
- Was your organization involved in creating the law? If so, were you involved personally?
- What was your and/or the organisations role in creating the law?
- What were initial interests of your organization in the creation of the law?
- What were initial aims and goals of the law for the city of Buenos Aires?
- What were initial aims and goals of the law for the *cartoneros*?
- For whom was the law created?
- Whom does the law affect?
- Who ensures, furthers or monitors compliance with the law?
- In your own opinion or the opinion of your organisation, what are the results of the law so far?
- How do the realities of the law today correspond with the initial aims and goals of your organization, of the city of Buenos Aires, and of the *cartoneros*?
- Why has the law not been implemented?
- Will or has any changes been made to the law?

Theme 4 – The *cartoneros*

- How many *cartoneros* work in Buenos Aires?
- How many *cartoneros* are affected by the law?
- Was the situation of *cartoneros* taken into account when the law was created, and if so how?
- Were the *cartoneros* participating in the creation of the law? How?
- Do you believe that the situation of the *cartoneros* has changed since the law was passed, and if so, how?

Appendix 5: Interview Key

Academic 1 – Informant interview with academic with eight years of experience of studying the cartonero phenomenon

Academic 2 – Conversation with University Employee

Amartya 1 – Informant and respondent interview with a representative from the NGO Amartya

Amartya 2 – Informant interview with former leading person of NGO Amartya

Cartonero CTA - Interview with individually working male cartonero connected to the labor union CTA. Street in Villa Crespo

Cartoneros MTE - Group interview with nine (seven male, two female) cartoneros connected to MTE. Street in Palermo

Comisión Basura Cero - Meeting of the Comisión Basura Cero

Donde Reciclo - Informant and respondent interview with representative of NGO Donde Reciclo

El Ceibo - Informant and respondent interview with a leading person of Cooperativa El Ceibo

El Ceibo Green Center – Field visit to the El Ceibo Green Center in Retiro

FCD - Informant and respondent interview with a representative of Fundación Cambio Democrático (FCD)

GAIA – Informant and respondent interview with a former member of GAIA and a driving force behind the Basura Cero law

Government 1 – Informant and respondent interview with a politician with a high position within the environmental policies of the city of Buenos Aires

Government 2 - Informant and respondent interview with representative of the city government working closely with cartonero cooperatives

Greenpeace - Informant and respondent interview with representative of Greenpeace and driving force behind the Basura Cero law

MTE - Informant and respondent interview with representative of Movimiento de Trabajadores Excluidos

Mujer Cartonera – Meeting ‘Mujer Cartonera’ between cartoneros, academics and politicians

Segovia – Student of Interpretation, Faculty of Modern Languages at Universidad del Museo Social Argentino (UMSA)

Appendix 6: List of Interviews and Field Visits

Interview 1

Informant and respondent interview with a former member of Environmental INGO Global Anti-Incinerator Alliance (GAIA). Driving force behind the creation of the Basura Cero law

Interview 2

Informant and respondent interview with a representative from of NGO Amartya

Interview 3

Informant and respondent interview with a politician with a high position within the environmental policies of the city of Buenos Aires

Interview 4

Informant and respondent interview with former member of NGO Donde Reciclo

Interview 5

Informant and respondent interview with a representative of NGO Fundación Cambio Democrático FCD

Interview 6

Informant and respondent interview with representative of Movimiento de Trabajadores Excluidos (MTE)

Interview 7

Informant and respondent interview with representative of the city government working closely with cartonero cooperatives

Interview 8

Informant and respondent interview with a leading person of Cooperativa El Ceibo

Interview 9

Informant and respondent interview with representative of Greenpeace. Driving force behind the Basura Cero law

Interview 10

Informant interview with academic with eight years experience of studying the cartonero phenomenon

Interview 11

Interview with male cartonero on the street in Villa Crespo

Interview 12

Group interview with nine (seven male, 2 female) cartoneros on the street in Palermo

Interview 13

Informant interview with former leading person of NGO Amartya

Conversation 1

Meeting with academic who wrote his thesis on the cartonero phenomenon

Conversation 2

Conversation with our translator Eugenia Segovia

Conversation 3

Meeting with academic of high rang

Field Visit 1

Meeting of the Comisión Basura Cero (CBC)

Field Visit 2

Visit to the el Ceibo Green Center in Retiro

Field Visit 3

Meeting 'Mujer Cartonera' between cartoneros, academics and politicians

Field Visit 4

Participate in the waste picking round of an El Ceibo member. Palermo neighborhood.

Field Visit 5

Visit to the office of cartonero cooperative El Ceibo. Paraguay Street, Palermo Neighborhood

Field Visit 6

Visit to the design stalls of cartonero cooperatives MTE and El Ceibo at design fair Puro Diseño

Field Visit 7

FAILED visit to the office of *Coordinación Ecológica Área Metropolitana Sociedad del Estado* (CEAMSE)