Rethinking decentralised cooperation in a context of uncertainties and multiple transitions

observatorio
Cooperación descentralizada

Diputació
Barcelona

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Contents

Foreword

Over the last few years, we have become accustomed to living with words that define new concepts and situations that we could not have imagined when we presented the last study by the European Union-Latin America Decentralised Cooperation Observatory, resulting from the 7th Annual Conference held in 2019. Today, terms such as the so-called *new normal, pandemic, COVID-19, lockdown, collapse, complex emergencies or multiple transitions* are used on a daily basis all over the world. We are witnessing an unprecedented multiple crisis that, due to its global and multidimensional scope, exceeds all limits, shaking the foundations on which our societies have been built in recent decades.

We urgently need to think about how to build a new model of healthy and sustainable development that guarantees the life of the planet and of all the people who inhabit and will inhabit it. Faced with this reality, the Observatory wanted to focus on how to rethink decentralised cooperation in this context of uncertainties and multiple transitions. It is urgent to promote decentralised cooperation that contributes to another development model far removed from the one that has led us to the current scenario.

For this reason, the last annual conference (Barcelona, 29 June – 1 July 2022) was entitled "Rethinking decentralised cooperation in a context of multiple transitions". Over two and a half days we proposed to converse, debate and reflect collectively on what agenda, what modalities and with which actors decentralised cooperation should move forward and focus its efforts. We are convinced of the role that local governments play and have to play in a clearly interdependent and transnational world scenario. In this context, decentralised cooperation reinforces its key role in the advancement of transformative local public policies that prioritise the guarantee of all human rights, the life of people and the planet, reduce inequalities and advance towards global justice. And it does so by promoting cooperative relations between local governments under a horizontal logic of mutual trust, far removed from the North-South welfare, hierarchical and neocolonial approach. In addition, we are committed to inclusive decentralised cooperation, which advocates relational, collaborative and co-responsible management with all actors in the territory and its citizens.

Agustí Fernández de Losada and Felipe Llamas, representing the PHARE Territorios Globales association, were in charge of preparing a document that served as a starting point based on some initial guidelines, reflections and questions that sparked and inspired the debates that took place during the conference. On this occasion we were privileged to have very heterogeneous working groups involving over a hundred

professionals representing different sectors, entities and institutions: local and regional governments, global justice, social and solidarity economy and third sector entities, multilateral organisations, academia, networks of municipalities, activists and experts in decentralised cooperation. The conference began with a first round table discussion on "The necessary multiple transitions in the face of the current systemic crisis: just, digital, ecological, socio-economic and democratic transition", whose novel and provocative reflections encouraged group exchange and debate that took place through the workshops.

For all these reasons, it is a pleasure to present this study, which we have prepared with the help of PHARE, in which you can find many of the reflections that took place, some of the statements of many of the people who took part and the main conclusions and recommendations. In the last part of the study, you will find the recommendations specifically addressed to the Observatory that emerged from the conference and that we assume as our own challenges to guide our work and our commitment to courageous and transformative decentralised cooperation.

Finally, we would like to sincerely thank all the people who joined us at the 8th Annual Conference of the European Union-Latin America Decentralised Cooperation Observatory 2022, whose contributions were essential for the preparation of this publication and for the advancement of decentralised cooperation.

Pilar Díaz Romero
Deputy to the Presidency and Delegate
for International Relations of Diputació de Barcelona

1. Latin America and Europe in a context of multiple crises and shared challenges

The world has experienced multiple crises that have created highly disruptive and extremely complex challenges in recent years. These challenges place Latin America and Europe in a scenario of shared challenges, and create an obligation to seek solutions that meet the needs of their increasingly exposed and vulnerable citizens. When the conference of the Decentralised Cooperation Observatory was held in Montevideo in December 2019, it focused on inequalities, growing disaffection with the public sector, and a clear risk of a breakdown in the social contract. The global crisis caused by COVID-19 began a few months later, and just as we set foot on the road to recovery, a war broke out in the heart of Europe that is having global geopolitical consequences with major repercussions, including for local situations.

1.1. The pandemic and the war in Ukraine as factors multiplying vulnerabilities and setbacks in the rights agenda

The crises arising from COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine have aggravated the structural causes of public unrest and distrust in the public system, placing the social contract at risk. The recession experienced by economies around the world, and in Europe and Latin America in particular, has led to a scenario of social emergency that has increased vulnerabilities and sparked inequalities between people and territories. Meanwhile, measures to prevent the spread of the virus and to ensure public safety led to a worrying increase in authoritarianism in many countries. This dynamic may be aggravated by the rise of protectionism, which is stoking the conflict in the heart of Europe. All these factors are creating significant setbacks in the rights agenda.

The economies of the two regions, which suffered from an unprecedented setback in 2020 and began to recover at an uneven pace in 2021, entered a period of severe tensions in the second half of 2022 as a result of the crisis arising from the war in Ukraine. Latin America and the Caribbean led the global economic recession in 2020. The region's GDP contracted by 7%, and despite a return to growth in 2022 (3.5%), the forecasts for 2023 point to stagnation at around 1.7%[1]. In the European Union, GDP fell by 5.8% (6.4% in the Eurozone)[2] and although the situation had recovered to pre-crisis levels by 2021, the major international financial institutions point out that the war is pushing

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1. IMF Blog. 13 October 2022. https://www.imf.org/es/Blogs/Articles/2022/10/13/latin-america-faces-a-third-shock-as-global-financial-conditions-tighten

2. https://es.statista.com/estadisticas/600201/crecimiento-del-pib-en-la-ue-y-la-zona-euro/

the economy into stagnation, with some countries at risk of entering recession by the end of 2022 and in 2023[3].

Inflationary pressures caused by the conflict in Ukraine have led to price rises far beyond the areas of energy and food, increasing production costs and affecting basic goods and services across the board. The European Union will end 2022 with an average inflation rate of 8.5%[4], while in Latin America it will be 14.6%[5], with countries such as Venezuela and Argentina in chronic situations that are difficult to remedy.

This context of geopolitical tensions, economic slowdown and stagnation and soaring inflation has led to a significant increase in the number of people living in poverty or extreme poverty in both regions. **This situation is particularly significant in Latin America, where economic inequalities are aggravated by unstable employment and by inequalities arising from dynamics of exclusion and discrimination**, which persist due to unjust economic, political and social structures. Estimates suggest that 33.7% of the population will be in poverty and 14.9% in extreme poverty by the end of 2022[6].

Image[7]. Income gap between the countries with the 10 highest and 50 lowest incomes (2021).

Top 10/Bottom 50 ratio

- 5-12
- 12-13
- 13-16
- 16-19
- 19-50+
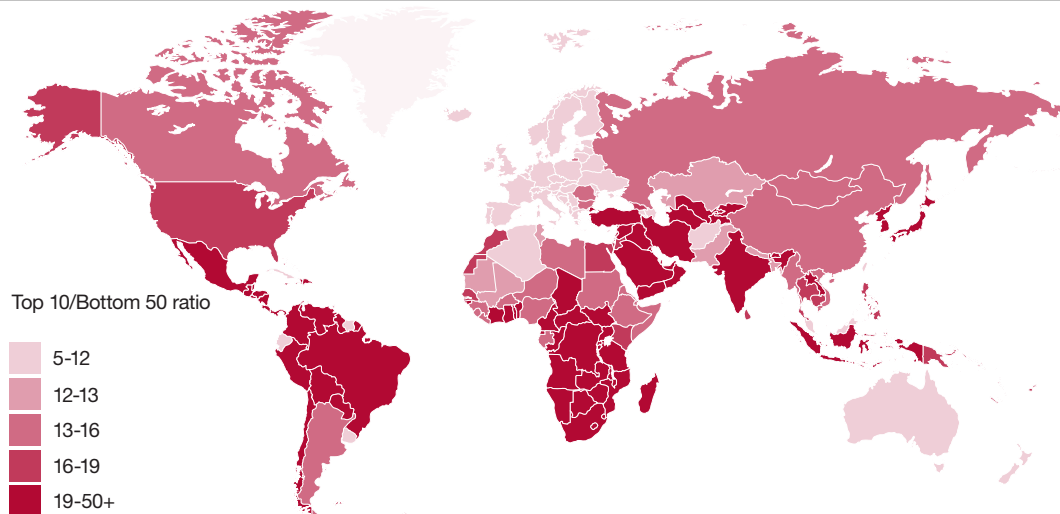
Interpretation: In Brazil, the bottom 50% earns 29 times less than the top 10%. The value is 7 in France. Income is measured after pension and unemployment payments and benefits received by individuals but before other taxes they pay and transfers they receive.
Source and series: wir2022.wid.world/methodology.

Despite being the most cohesive region in the world, inequalities are also highly evident in Europe. The richest 10% of the population accounts for 36% of the income and about 60% of the personal wealth[8]. In 2021, 95.4 million people were at risk of

3. OECD Economic Outlook. Interim Report September 2022. https://www.oecd.org/economic-outlook/september-2022/

4. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/en/

5. Inflation in Latin America. Statistical data. Statista. https://es.statista.com/temas/9175/inflacion-en-america-latina/#-topicHeader__wrapper

6. OECD et al. (2022), *Latin American Economic Outlook 2022: Towards a Green and Just Transition*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/3d5554fc-en

7. World Inequality Report 2022. https://wir2022.wid.world/

8. Ibid.

poverty or exclusion; that is equivalent to 21.7% of Europe's population[9]. This risk affects women (22.7%) to a greater extent than men (20.7%). Inequalities are also very important at the regional level, with significant differences like those between the South of Ireland, the richest region in the EU with a GDP per capita of €81,300, and Severozapaden, in Bulgaria, with a GDP per capita of €10,700, one eighth of the southern Irish figure.

But apart from those linked to income, the pandemic highlighted other forms of inequality that have taken centre stage. **Gender inequalities are having devastating social and economic consequences for women and girls**, reversing the limited gains that had been made in the areas of gender equality and women's rights. This situation also led to violations of the sexual and reproductive rights of women and LGBTQI+ people, and aggravated another scourge that was dangerously exacerbated during the COVID-19 lockdowns: violence against women and girls.

The pandemic aggravated other divides in addition to gender inequality. **The lockdowns ordered to prevent the virus from spreading widened the pre-existing digital gap**. More affluent sectors of societies, with greater access to technological devices and broadband systems, and professions requiring less face-to-face presence at work, have had many more opportunities for teleworking than lower income groups, which generally have more limited access to technology and connectivity, and more exposed jobs. This situation has also arisen in education, with limited opportunities for children from lower-income families. This dynamic and the gap it creates is becoming consolidated in the post-pandemic recovery process, as the digitalisation of the world of work and education has only just begun in most European and Latin American countries.

> "The pandemic has entrenched the inevitability of technological changes before we could fully understand their negative impacts. The pandemic has legitimised the private sector as the basic digital infrastructure. We seem not only to have accepted it, but we also seem to be happy with it. The digital infrastructure is in private hands."
>
> **Gemma Galdon**. Founder and CEO of Éticas Consulting.
>
> *Round table: "The multiple transitions necessary to address the current systemic crisis: a just, digital, ecological, socio-economic and democratic transition" (VIII Conference of the Decentralised Cooperation Observatory).*

However, the negative impact of digitalisation and technological disruption can be approached from other perspectives. "**Platform economies", in which activity sharply increased during the pandemic, have a very significant impact on the precariousness of certain sectors of employment.** Workers in areas such as culture, mobility and local commerce are suffering significant setbacks in their rights due to the business model adopted by the new technological giants. On an urban scale, these business models are closely linked to processes of gentrification and expulsion that lead to fragmentation and create highly vulnerable peripheries.

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9. Living conditions in Europe. Eurostat. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Living_conditions_in_Europe

All of these inequalities are exacerbated by global efforts to move towards climate neutrality. Indeed, the major consensuses aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions have a very significant impact on low- and middle-income countries which were unable to benefit from the processes of industrialisation and development, and are now forced to adopt measures that may hinder their progress. These measures can also create inequalities between sectors of society in rich countries, which do not have the resources to commit to climate neutrality in everyday areas such as sustainable mobility and housing. In this context, we are witnessing the emergence of phenomena such as green gentrification and energy poverty.

1.2. Digitalisation and the ecological transition: opportunities for a necessary transformation?

There is a global consensus on the **need to underpin the post-pandemic recovery process with a dual transition that on the one hand addresses the climate crisis, and on the other unleashes the full potential of digitalisation**. This dual transition must be just and at the same time the basis for the transformation of production and development models, and committed to the green economy, the added value linked to connectivity and the disruptive power of technology.

However, an increasing number of voices are warning against uncritical approaches to these transitions. As noted in the preceding section, many of the new inequalities that have appeared in recent years are related to the **gaps and inequalities created by the green and digital transitions**. It is also necessary to further explore and emphasise the **impact that digitalisation processes have on climate change**. The digital world requires huge energy consumption, as well as the use of highly sensitive materials and resources. This area is not subject to a great deal of oversight, which is not on the agenda, and which may be very important.

> "It is necessary to have a critical perspective on the concept of transition. For example, green energies and electrification in the North are based on extracting minerals in the South."
>
> **Xavi Martí**. Decentralised cooperation expert. Nadir Perspectiva.
>
> *Workshops (VIII Conference of the Decentralised Cooperation Observatory).*

The **recovery strategy promoted by the European Union** is based precisely on this dual transition. In July 2020, together with its ordinary budget, the European Council approved a stimulus package, **Next Generation EU**[10], which was endowed with 750 billion euros and aims to boost the recovery to make Europe greener, more digital and resilient. Apart from mitigating the pandemic's economic and social impact, the aim is to make European economies and societies more sustainable and resilient, and better prepared for the challenges and opportunities offered by the ecological and digital transitions.

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10. https://next-generation-eu.europa.eu/index_en

The framework of reference for the climate transition in Europe is the European Green Deal (EGD) launched in December 2019. The region is committed to a systemic and comprehensive transformation, which includes efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, food security, promotion of the circular economy, decarbonisation of the energy sector, smart and sustainable mobility and efficient building systems, among other initiatives.

In the field of digitalisation, apart from modernising its economy, Europe is seeking to leverage its assets in relation to its major competitors in the field of technology. Significant efforts are planned in terms of connectivity, guaranteeing broadband access for all operators in all territories, including the most peripheral ones. The primary objective is to promote intelligent development, based on the opportunities offered by the digital world to modernise and strengthen the various sectors of the European economy. Meanwhile, the focus has also been placed on key areas such as the cloud and data management, artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things and cybersecurity; as well as the digital rights agenda, or what is now termed technological humanism.

The situation in Latin America is different. It is undoubtedly one of the regions that is most vulnerable to climate change, with 13 of the 50 countries identified as being among those most affected by the global climate emergency. This high risk is disproportionate, bearing in mind that Latin America and the Caribbean is responsible for 8.1% of total greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, which is proportional to its share of the world population (8.4%) and slightly higher than its share of global gross domestic product (GDP) (6.4%)[11]. There is consensus on the need to move towards a green and just transition that makes Latin American society more resilient to climate change, and fosters more sustainable development.

> "…our cities are going to be forced to live with fewer resources and in more hostile environments – that is a fact. There will have to be an ecological transition. We are going to witness a process of globalisation and the relocation of our economies, in which whether we can deal with it from a democratic approach remains to be seen. Two ideas:
>
> 1. The idea of a limit: economic growth will have to be limited
>
> 2. Cultural challenge: Our quality of life will not depend on what we can buy, but on the collective mechanisms we can put in place to provide for ourselves"
>
> **José Luis Fernández Casadevante (Kois).** Expert in socio-ecological transition, GARUA workers' cooperative.
>
> *Round table: "The multiple transitions necessary to address the current systemic crisis: a just, digital, ecological, socio-economic and democratic transition". (VIII Conference of the Decentralised Cooperation Observatory).*

This transition must also favour the transformation of the region's energy matrix, which can help boost productivity, develop new economic sectors, create new jobs and improve citizens' quality of life, ensuring access to quality services. The region has enormous potential

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11. OECD et al. (2022), *Latin American Economic Outlook 2022: Towards a Green and Just Transition*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/3d5554fc-en.

in the field of renewable energies, which account for 33% of its total energy supply (compared to 13% worldwide), green hydrogen and biofuels. However, major efforts are still required in terms of technological investments to reduce dependence on imported products derived from fossil fuels (and reduce CO_2 emissions); and to ensure access to electricity for the 17 million people who still do not have it.

However, for all this to be feasible it is necessary on the one hand to mobilise additional resources and, on the other, to build consensus and move towards a new eco-social contract. Recent estimates suggest that a scenario with global warming of 2.5°C could cost the region between 1.5% and 5.0% of its GDP by 2050[12]. Addressing a scenario of this nature will require environmentally sustainable fiscal policies and the mobilisation of new financial instruments, including those linked to international cooperation. However, the mobilisation of additional resources will have no effect without a process of inclusive green transition that is open to active public participation. Taking into account that 68% of Latin Americans believe that climate change will be a very serious threat to their country in the next 20 years[13], the green agenda could be the element binding a new eco-social contract.

In the **digital realm**, although the region lags behind other parts of the world, and behind the most advanced and dynamic emerging economies in particular, the pandemic has led to a significant acceleration in the production and consumption sectors. A great deal of work on digitalisation has still to be done in the region, and it has huge transformative potential in terms of diversifying the economy, improving public services in sensitive areas such as education and health, and addressing the transition to climate neutrality. However, this positive evolution is closely linked to the use of mature technologies such as broadband, rather than the use of advanced technologies such as big data, artificial intelligence, machine learning and the Internet of Things[14].

There is also a great deal of work to do in the area of digital divides and on addressing the challenges that technological disruption implies for the rights agenda (privacy, disinformation, labour rights, exclusion of the least educated groups of society, etc.).

1.3. The decentralisation agenda to address fairer and more democratic transitions

Before the outbreak of the systemic crisis arising from COVID-19, analysts in both regions highlighted the need to move beyond the logic of austerity and **to enhance governments' capacity to promote more efficient and results-oriented public policies.** This argument was made in a context heavily defined by corruption. The pandemic and the war in Ukraine have simply underscored this approach, and the need to rethink the social contract. The current scenario of multiple transitions (health,

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12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

14. CEPAL (2021), *Tecnologías digitales para un nuevo futuro*, United Nations, Santiago, https://www.cepal.org/es/publicaciones/46816-tecnologias-digitales-un-nuevo-futuro

economic, social, environmental and geopolitical) poses critical challenges that determine not only the mitigation of the impacts of the crisis but also the way in which the recovery process is approached, with a commitment to the transformation of production and development models.

Against this backdrop, **cities become the spaces where these crises are expressed most forcefully.** During the pandemic, they accounted for a large proportion of infections (85% according to recent estimates), and had the most heavily affected economic sectors (local commerce, tourism, culture, etc.) and the most vulnerable individuals and groups. The current economic slowdown and inflation have not improved the environment in which they operate. The policies promoted by their governments are therefore crucial not only for mitigating the impact of all the above, but also in planning for recovery.

Indeed, there is a consensus that **local governments must play a central role in some of the areas considered vital in the post-pandemic recovery and in overcoming the crisis arising from the war.** They account for a significant percentage of public spending[15] —33.4% of total public spending in Europe[16] and 26% in Latin America[17]— and their areas of responsibility place them in a privileged position for addressing unavoidable challenges such as transforming local productive systems, tackling the digital transition, moving towards climate neutrality and caring for the most vulnerable groups. Their proximity to citizens also makes them key players in restoring trust and consolidating democracy through more participatory forms that encourage citizens' empowerment.

> "The consolidation of democracy involves the role of the local sphere, public participation and political pluralism. A gradual political disaffection is taking place in Europe, and local governments have a key role to play in restoring confidence".
>
> **Nacho Martínez**. Head of Studies and Advocacy, Intermón Oxfam. Professor, UCM
>
> *Round table: "The multiple transitions necessary to address the current systemic crisis: a just, digital, ecological, socio-economic and democratic transition". (VIII Conference of the Decentralised Cooperation Observatory).*

Reinforcing their institutional and operational capacities is crucial for moving towards a sustainable, resilient and just recovery. **Promoting decentralisation processes that enable local governments to operate with clear competencies, efficient governance mechanisms and reinforced capacity for investment is a major challenge in both Europe and Latin America.**

However, decentralisation seems to be experiencing worrying setbacks in various countries in both regions. The pandemic and the current geopolitical tensions

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15. This refers to the wide range of subnational governments.

16. OECD (2018), Subnational governments in OECD countries: Key data (brochure), OECD, Paris, www.oecd.org/regional/regional-policy

17. IDB (2022): *Panorama de las relaciones fiscales entre niveles de gobierno de países de América Latina y el Caribe.* Axel Radics, Francisco Vázquez, Noél Pérez Benítez, Ignacio Ruelas. IDB Monograph; 936.

have stimulated recentralising impulses, and the questioning of structural principles of the state, such as subsidiarity and local and regional autonomy. In the name of greater coordination, some national governments have become involved in areas of competence assigned to subnational governments in the realms of education, health, social protection and even urban policies. In Europe, the situations in countries such as Hungary and Poland are very worrying, and how the situation will evolve in Italy remains to be seen. In Latin America, local democracy is heavily threatened in countries such as El Salvador, Nicaragua and Venezuela; although it is also true that there are scenarios with opportunities in Brazil, Colombia, Chile and Costa Rica. The latter two countries have begun very interesting regionalisation processes with strong transformative potential.

At the same time, and on a global scale, an increasing number of voices are raising the alarm about the **process involving the depoliticisation of local administration**. Narratives linking local governments and elected officials to the pragmatic management of citizens' needs and interests reject the ideological and political dimension of the challenges that arise at local level. The **technocratic "solutionism"** that is becoming consolidated as a doctrine in local public administration does not take into account the values, approaches and priorities that must guide the process involved in the formulation and implementation of local policies, and which constitute the foundations of democracy.

In a **context of polarisation**, European and Latin American societies are caught between democracy with liberal values and nationalist populism. In Europe, the extreme right has taken power in countries such as Hungary, Poland and Italy, and has a strong influence in France, Sweden, the Netherlands and Spain. In Latin America, despite the fact that we are witnessing a change in the political cycle in which progressive options will once again lead the region, democracy continues to be under threat in various countries, and national-populist authoritarianism is gaining significant shares of power. The electoral victories of Lula (Brazil), Petro (Colombia) and Boric (Chile) were over candidates from the extreme right, and by very narrow margins.

2. The agenda of decentralised cooperation in a context of multiple uncertainties and transitions

But how does decentralised cooperation fit into this context? What can it contribute? To what extent can relations between local governments in Latin America and Europe contribute to a more efficient approach to this scenario of crisis and multiple transitions in which cities play a determining role?

The context described in the preceding chapter presents decentralised cooperation with the challenge of rethinking the role it has to play in the coming years. This challenge is even more complex taking into account the transformation of the frameworks for international cooperation, with the emergence of new actors and the reduction in Official Development Assistance.

Decentralised cooperation is one of the cornerstones of international action by local governments. This should be considered irreversible, and it has become particularly important in recent years due to the international acceleration of urbanisation processes, and the local dimension of some of the main challenges linked to globalisation.

But apart from recognition, in order to be relevant and add value, decentralised cooperation must be able to set an **agenda that addresses the shared challenges faced by Latin American and European local governments today, and contributes to defining effective solutions** that lead to improvements in citizens' quality of life, the prosperity of societies and the preservation of the climate and biodiversity. **This agenda must address the recovery process as an opportunity to rethink the social contract and democracy from the local level, moving towards the necessary transformations.**

> "The decentralised cooperation agenda must be politicised".
>
> **Juan Pablo Muñoz**. Terranueva. Ecuador.
>
> *Workshops. (VIII Conference of the Decentralised Cooperation Observatory).*

This document proposes an agenda to guide decentralised cooperation as it addresses the major issues that frame the context of recovery and multiple transitions. It specifically proposes:

- Addressing inequalities based on the rights agenda and feminism.
- Promoting a green and just transition from the local level

- Moving forward in the digital transition for more efficient and fairer management of local challenges

- Promoting another economy to address new productive logics that are more sustainable and respectful of local circumstances.

- Moving towards a democratic transition that restores decentralisation to the centre of the process
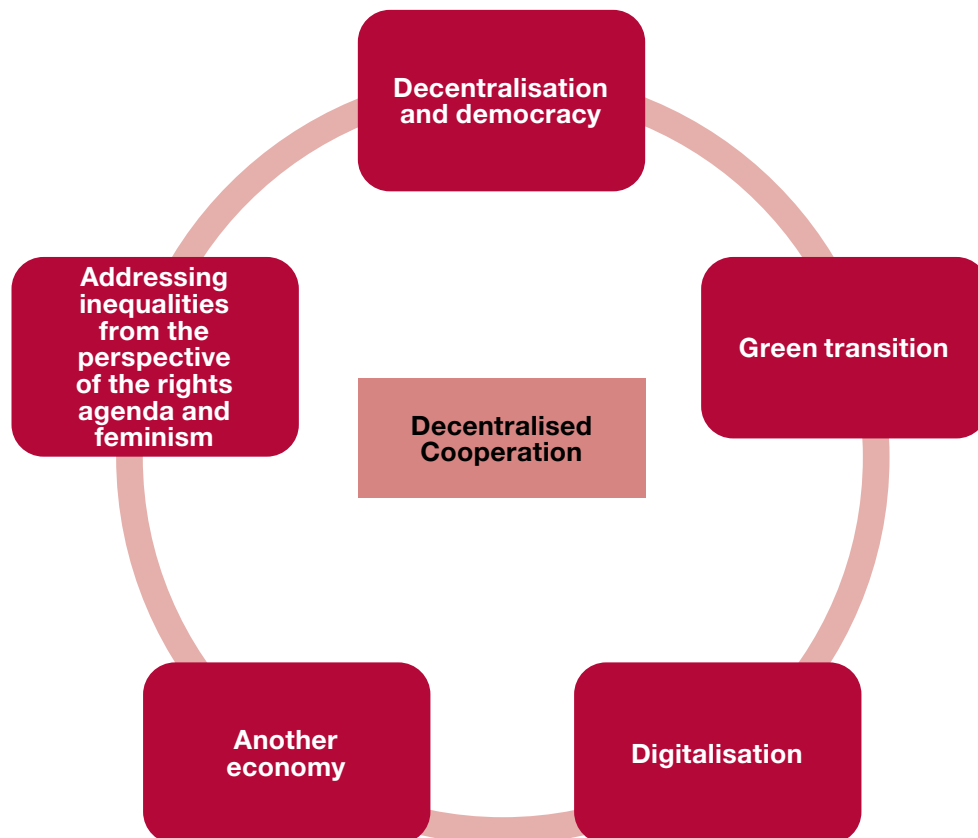
Source: Compiled by the authors

These are closely linked issues that must be addressed in a holistic, comprehensive manner, breaking down silos and ensuring coherence between the initiatives implemented to address them.

Decentralised cooperation can and must play an important role in addressing these challenges with collective action in the territory, based on solidarity and global justice.

2.1. Addressing inequalities based on the rights agenda and feminism

The public policies implemented by local governments to address inequalities and promote the rights agenda are particularly important. **They are able to map vulnerabilities, they know the gaps that exist, and have the legitimacy to lead processes**

that involve social actors. Their policies not only assist the most vulnerable groups, but they also work with a rights-based approach to create structural changes in key areas such as housing, immigrant integration, gender equality, employment, the care economy and non-violence. In a scenario with scarce resources, major obstacles and limitations in regulatory frameworks and unclear competencies, European and Latin American cities have shown significant resilience and a capacity to innovate.

In Europe, the proliferation of socially innovative initiatives during the years following the 2008 crisis and more recently the COVID-19 crisis has paved the way for new practices of social inclusion and democratic innovation at a local level. These include **policy co-production initiatives between local governments, social organisations and citizens** in cities such as Antwerp, Brussels, Milan, Naples, Newcastle and Cardiff. Cooperative relationships have developed between local administrations and social actors in these cities that have contributed to mutually reinforcing their capacities for social impact. **The wave of solidarity and cooperative initiatives that emerged in response to the COVID-19 crisis has created a new window of opportunity for implementing political strategies for urban social transformation, based on egalitarian values, public participation and approaches aimed at consolidating democracy.**

There are also **pilot programmes for guaranteed minimum incomes**, such as the B-MINCOME project[18], in Barcelona; housing policies which have led to 60% of the population living in social housing in cities such as Vienna; and the use of inclusive urban planning tools (social urbanism) in cities like Berlin, that seek to ensure social diversity in certain neighbourhoods through access to social housing.

Latin America, on the other hand, has been in need of social innovations for many years, and they are very often organised by civil society in an increasingly strong partnership with the governments of some cities. Inadequate regulatory frameworks, inefficient governance and insufficient resources mean that there is no alternative. Major projects include **PILARES**[19] in Mexico City and the **REACTOR** project[20] in Montevideo, an urban laboratory guided by the Collaborative Urbanism research and extension group in the Faculty of Architecture, Design and Urbanism of Uruguay's University of the Republic, which aims to bring urbanism closer to local processes of empowerment, and the co-construction of collective proposals in the creation of the city.

In this context, **the gender agenda, the rights of LGBTQI+ groups and the care economy** have also assumed a central role in the local environment. Local governments in both regions have taken measures to incorporate the demands of the feminist agenda into their public policies. There is recognition that women's political participation and leadership are key factors in democratic and inclusive governance. And that the presence of female leaders in decision-making processes enhances the quality of the policies that are implemented, as they tend to be focused on the sustainability of life, rather than on other interests. In addition to gender equality, there is a broad-based approach to life and people. At

18. https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/bmincome/es/
19. https://pilares.cdmx.gob.mx/inicio
20. https://www.reactoruy.com/proyecto-reactor

this point, the care economy becomes important. An example of this is Bogotá, which has implemented the **District Care System** to recognise the work of caregivers and ensure they have access to welfare rights and conditions.

"The care crisis is not a pandemic crisis, it is a structural issue, it should be a central, structural issue. It is essential in municipalities, because they are responsible for everyday life and care, which is fundamental if we are to be able to talk about democracy. These issues should not only be discussed in mayoral forums, but also in other broader spheres. The need for a public policy on care."

Amanda Alexandrian. Expert and member of Almena, a feminist cooperative.

Workshops. (VIII Conference of the Decentralised Cooperation Observatory).

In addition to the innovations undertaken in this area by local governments in both regions, some networks have made efforts to place the rights agenda and feminism at the centre of their work. An example of this are bi-regional platforms including the Ibero-American Union of Municipalists, which has organised the Ibero-American Platform of Gender Agendas; and the Union of Ibero-American Capital Cities, which has created spaces for local governments to exchange experiences to reinforce public policies with a gender perspective.

Other initiatives include the launch of the **Iberian American forum for female mayors and councillors**, organised by Barcelona Provincial Council, the Government of Mexico City, the Mayor's Office of Bogota and Montevideo City Council. The Forum is conceived as a political alliance between various Latin American and Iberian local governments led by women, for creating spaces for meeting, reflection, exchange, training and advocacy to improve feminist leadership and moving towards a new municipal development able to construct local policies from a rights-based approach which contributes to building a new model of equitable, equal and sustainable development.

"Women's rights have been a central issue in the world of cooperation and solidarity. A global retreat is on the way that will put the agenda of women's bodies at the centre. Sexual and gender diversity must be on the agenda."

Laia Franco. Head of the Office of Equality Policies. Barcelona Provincial Council.

Workshops. (VIII Conference of the Decentralised Cooperation Observatory).

One of the consequences of the increasing inequalities and vulnerabilities in the two regions is the increase in different types of **urban violence**. Many of the most violent cities on the planet are in Latin America; and much of this violence is directed towards women, whose vulnerability is accentuated by variables including age, origin, sexual identity and/or orientation, skin colour, type of cohabitation, social class, religion and physical or intellectual capacities, among other factors.

But it is also in cities where solidarity networks and local strategies emerge which make it possible to address the problem of violence through more assertive and resilient approaches to urban governance. Cities can and must be **territories of peace**.

The **World Forum on Urban Violence and Education for Coexistence and Peace**, which will be held for the fourth time in Bogota in 2023, is a leading space for local governments, civil society organisations and academia to collaborate and exchange experiences, and is aimed at creating a joint process for debate, reflection and the construction of joint solutions that foster urban environments capable of ending expressions of violence.

Finally, the decisive role played by local governments must be emphasised so that **human mobility, the right to migrate, to move and to seek refuge** – which will be accentuated in a scenario with multiple, climatic, economic and geopolitical crises – takes place with full respect for human rights. Cities are becoming a place for reception and refuge within the growing global migratory process. Recent examples are the initiatives by many cities in Colombia to provide care for the Venezuelan diaspora, and the reception process for refugees fleeing the war in Ukraine in European cities.

"We have not talked enough about the humanitarian crises arising from the war and the climate crisis. Many refugees will arrive, and municipalities will need help, especially small municipalities. This issue must be reinforced in the decentralised cooperation agenda, because it is the municipalities that will have to deal with it."

Paulina Astroza. Expert. Professor of International Law. University of Concepción. Chile.

Workshops. (VIII Conference of the Decentralised Cooperation Observatory).

Issues that can be addressed through decentralised cooperation:

- The right to the city
- Social cohesion and balance in the city, consolidating the principles of shared responsibility and inter-territorial solidarity, remedying inequalities, shortcomings and deficits in infrastructures and public services.
- Public participation in improving quality of life through their social movements and civil society. Encouraging public-social, public-community and public-private cooperation to generate synergies to benefit the city.
- Promoting a feminist agenda and the participation and economic and political empowerment of women.
- Identifying and addressing the structural causes of discrimination, inequalities and different forms of violence.
- Promoting gender justice that guarantees freedom from all forms of gender-based violence and the full exercise of the sexual and reproductive rights of women and LGBTQI+ people.
- The development of participatory approaches involving civil society and local communities for the construction of peace.
- Territories of peace and the promotion of peace and non-violence.
- Human mobility, the right to migrate, move and seek refuge, with full respect for human rights.

2.2. Promoting a green and just transition from the local level

Cities, their governments and the actors operating in them play a key role in addressing the transition to climate neutrality. They implement policies in key areas including transportation, renewable energy use, energy efficiency, urban planning, waste management, access to water and sanitation, and the construction of housing. These policies are essential for reducing CO_2 emissions, decarbonising the economy, adapting societies to climate change and mitigating its effects. However, many of them go further, by placing climate sustainability at the centre of their strategies for local economic development; and placing climate justice and resilience at the centre of their priorities.

> "When we talk about ecological transition, the challenge is to make policies within the material limits; and this has a geopolitical dimension because we are located in the privilege of this dimension (extractivism). The international logic of extractivism as a logic of power must be at the centre of the concept of ecological transition."
>
> **Pablo Martínez Osés**. Expert. La Mundial Collective. Spain.
>
> *Workshops. (VIII Conference of the Decentralised Cooperation Observatory).*

European cities' commitment to the fight against climate change has a long history and is accompanied by very important innovation ecosystems. Good examples of this are **policies to promote sustainable mobility and reduce emissions** – such as the Low Emission Zone and the "superblocks" in Barcelona and the 15-Minute City implemented by Paris and being adopted by other cities such as Prague, those that focus on **energy efficiency in buildings**, such as the district heating system promoted by Stockholm as part of its strategy to become a fossil fuel-free city by 2040, and those that aim to promote post-pandemic recovery based on a commitment to the **green and circular economy**, such as the Circular Amsterdam 2020-2050 strategy and the Barcelona Green Deal.

> "The 15-Minute City: "The project was established to become an urban policy to transform cities interested in adopting a new, more resilient way of living with respect to climate and health. The aim is to change the urban territorial format for a polycentric and multiservice vision in order to achieve: decent housing, work at short distances, short-circuit shopping, regenerative local economy, education and culture, and rest. The aim is to create a mixed, functional, social and non-segregated city. The objective is to move from forced mobility to chosen mobility. It is not an easy path. It requires coordination with civil society and the private sector. It comes from the idea that we have to change the model to address climate change."
>
> **Carlos Moreno**, Urban Planner.
>
> *Plenary session. (VIII Conference of the Decentralised Cooperation Observatory).*

However, Latin American cities are matching the efforts of their European counterparts. The region has experiences with high added value that demonstrate the climate commitment of the Latin American urban world. These experiences are in the fields of **sustainable mobility,** such as the sustainable urban logistics project carried out by Bogota,

renewable energies, such as the Palmas Solar project[21] , urban biodiversity like the Urban Biodiversity Strategy[22] organised by the Brazilian city of Campinas, **nature-based solutions** like the project organised by Quito within the framework of Clever Cities[23] , and the **circular economy**, in the city of Rosario, in Argentina.

However, it is no less important that, in addition to their efforts to reduce emissions and adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change, cities address the negative externalities that those efforts may have in the form of new expressions of inequality. Phenomena such as **green gentrification** place **climate justice** agenda at local level. Many cities in both regions have begun to develop solutions in areas including energy poverty, promoting more efficient public transportation systems as tools for social inclusion, and linking policies social housing to the pacification of public space.

Latin American cities – and European cities to a lesser extent – are making major efforts not only to mitigate the effects of climate change, but also to adapt to them. The **resilience strategies** undertaken by cities including Medellin[24] (Colombia), Santa Fe[25] (Argentina) and Salvador, which are all supported by the Resilient Cities Network[26], are good examples. It is also necessary to consider how to support cities that are suffering **irreversible damage caused by climate change**. There are no clear precedents in this area, but it is an issue that must be considered from a local perspective.

Another issue that has been on the agenda for some years in many cities in both regions, and which is becoming even more important with rising global prices, is **food security and sovereignty**. The **Milan Urban Food Policy Pact**[27] signed by 123 cities in 2015 stated that today's food systems are supposed to provide consistent and secure access to a variety of adequate, safe, local, fair, healthy and nutritious food for all; and that this urban food supply will face various obstacles, including imbalances in access and distribution, environmental deterioration, resource scarcity, unsustainable forms of production and consumption, and food losses and waste.

Some cities such as Rosario in Argentina, Belo Horizonte in Brazil, Havana in Cuba and Valencia[28] in Spain have a long tradition of carrying out **urban agroecology** and food security programmes. These programmes are aimed at creating resilient, integrated, sustainable and inclusive food systems that free all citizens from hunger and all forms of malnutrition, based on the logic of environmental sustainability[29].

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21. https://tap-potential.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/palmas-solar-program-es_digital.pdf

22. https://interactbio.iclei.org/city/campinas/

23. https://clevercities.eu/quito/

24. https://resilientcitiesnetwork.org/medellin/

25. https://resilientcitiesnetwork.org/santa-fe/

26. https://resilientcitiesnetwork.org/

27. http://www.foodpolicymilano.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Milan-Urban-Food-Policy-Pact-_SPA.pdf

28. https://cemas.global/

29. Corinna Hawkes and Jess Halliday (2017): *What makes urban food policy happen? Insights from five case studies.* International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems. Ipes-food.org. Available at: https://www.ipes-food.org/_img/upload/files/Cities_full.pdf

To conclude this section, it should be noted that cooperation between European and Latin American cities in the field of climate transition is very intense. In addition to their strong bilateral links, which give rise to numerous joint initiatives, they have an ideal framework for exchange and joint work in specialised and generalist networks. Networks such as ICLEI, C40, Metropolis and CIDEU are a very good example of this, and they have become a space for learning, exchange, capitalisation of innovations and political advocacy. The flows in relationships are intense and multi-directional, and South-South and triangular cooperation are emerging areas with enormous potential.

Issues that can be addressed through decentralised cooperation:

- Political advocacy to adapt national – and, in Europe, EU – regulatory and budgetary frameworks to the needs of local governments in order to promote a just ecological transition.
- The transfer of knowledge and innovation in the field of solutions which can be promoted by local and regional governments in the fight against climate change.
- Mobilisation of resources to engage in innovative actions in the field of climate transition and climate justice.
- The impact of the digitalisation process on the fight against climate change (energy consumption, use of materials, etc.).
- The necessary link between the green transition, global justice and the commitment to leave no individual and no territory behind.
- The urban-rural relationship, and the challenge it implies in terms of food security and sovereignty.
- Addressing the structural causes behind climate change.
- Resilience strategies for adapting to the effects of climate change.
- Mobilising resources to support territories suffering from irreparable damage as a result of climate change.

2.3. Moving forward in the digital transition for more efficient and fairer management of local challenges

The involvement of local governments in the field of digitalisation is also very significant. The arrival of 5G, artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things, big data and intermediation technology platforms has a disruptive effect on cities. On the one hand, they contribute to improving how they work (**smart cities**), providing better services and making them more and better connected, nationally and internationally; but on the other, they create complex challenges such as the **digital divide** and **algorithmic inequalities**, and may distort key sectors such as housing, mobility and local commerce, and endanger labour and personal rights (privacy).

> "…the technological present is not an event, it is a process, and we must begin to change the dynamics in order to modify the future. Some technologies can contribute to protecting rights, starting to think about innovating from the public sector. Technology can contribute to a better world rather than a more unequal world as it is currently doing."
>
> **Gemma Galdon**. Founder and CEO of Éticas Consulting.
>
> *Round table: "The multiple transitions necessary to address the current systemic crisis: a just, digital, ecological, socio-economic and democratic transition". (VIII Conference of the Decentralised Cooperation Observatory).*

For centuries, technology has contributed to the search for more efficient solutions to address the many challenges facing cities. This indisputable truth has become more relevant in recent years with the emergence of the concept of the smart city. This concept is now at the centre of the priorities of many local governments all over the world. Indeed, many cities have created strategies to facilitate the introduction of technology in a wide range of areas including mobility and public transport, pollution control, water quality, management of the public space, the decarbonisation of buildings and granting aid to vulnerable groups, to give just a few examples. These strategies are created in partnership with the private sector, in a dynamic in which it is not clear who generates the demand – either the needs identified by local governments, or the marketing strategies of large corporations.

The experiences of European local governments in the digital transition process are countless. They range from efforts to improve air quality in Warsaw[30] to the introduction of technological innovations in the healthcare system in Oslo[31], the use of virtual reality in the education system in Kungsbacka[32] (Sweden) and the Smart Burgas project[33], the integrated urban platform recently launched by the Bulgarian city to manage mobility, air and water quality control and waste management more efficiently.

However, on the other side of the Atlantic, many Latin American cities are also leading the way in high value-added processes in the digital realm. Medellin is organising the Software Valley Centres[34], a group of 21 spaces designed to promote public access to innovative technology-based entrepreneurship. In a similar vein, the Digital Creative City [35] in Guadalajara is an urban hub for companies and institutions linked to knowledge in the field of technology-based creation. Meanwhile, Curitiba has included more than 700 digital services in its municipal app, including platforms for healthcare (Saúde-Já) and public service (Curitiba 156).

However, the disruptive potential of technology and digitalisation processes is not inherently neutral and positive. There is a consensus that **like the green transition, the digital**

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30. https://eurocities.eu/stories/keeping-the-air-clean-in-warsaw/

31. https://eurocities.eu/stories/oslo-a-pioneer-in-welfare-technology/

32. https://eurocities.eu/stories/is-virtual-reality-the-next-step-for-online-learning/

33. https://smartburgas.eu/en

34. https://cvs.rutanmedellin.org/

35. https://ciudadcreativadigital.mx/

transition is creating new forms of inequality and new threats to people's fundamental rights. This is why **an increasing number of cities are placing ethics and rights at the heart of their digitalisation strategies.** Innovative and significant experiences include the algorithm register[36] being implemented by cities like Amsterdam and Helsinki, which provides citizens with information about where artificial intelligence systems have been deployed in the city, informs them where they have obtained data, what data, and what they do with it; and enables citizens to participate with their feedback.

Another topic that has not been extensively addressed at the local level but will be in the coming years is the one that sets the two transitions – green and digital – against each other. As noted above, technology's contribution to a more efficient management of the fight against climate change is beyond any doubt. However, it is also necessary to take **the impact of technology and digitalisation processes on the climate** into account. The amount of energy that is needed to ensure the digital transition is very significant, and it is a major contributor to increasing CO_2 emissions. **Cities must begin to audit the carbon footprint of all the technology they consume**, in both the public and private sphere.

As a conclusion to this section, digital exchanges between cities are also becoming increasingly common. The agenda they address includes both technological solutions and those linked to digitalisation; as it move into the realm of digital rights and strategies in order to address digital divides. There are platforms like the **Cities Coalition for Digital Rights**[37], organised by Amsterdam, New York and Barcelona, which includes more than 50 cities worldwide, of which only two are in Latin America (Curitiba and Sao Paulo); and the **G20 Global Smart Cities Alliance**[38], an initiative organised by the World Economic Forum which in Latin America includes cities such as Bogota, Medellin, Piura, Brasilia, Cordoba and Buenos Aires; and in Europe, cities including Barcelona, Belfast, Bilbao, Karlsruhe, Lisbon, Milan and London.

Issues that can be addressed through decentralised cooperation:

- Political advocacy to adapt national – and, in Europe, EU – regulatory and budgetary frameworks to the needs of local governments in order to promote a just digital transition.

- The transfer of knowledge and innovation in the field of solutions that can be promoted by local and regional governments in the area of just digitalisation.

- Mobilisation of resources to engage in innovative actions in the field of a just digital transition.

- The impact of the digitalisation process on the fight against climate change (energy consumption, use of materials, etc.)

- The necessary link between the digital transition, global justice and the commitment to leave no individual and no territory behind.

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36. https://algoritmeregister.amsterdam.nl/en/ai-register/
37. https://citiesfordigitalrights.org/
38. https://globalsmartcitiesalliance.org/

2.4. Promoting another economy to address new productive logics that are more sustainable and respectful of local circumstances

In the prevailing global economic approach, cities act as landing platforms for financial capital and as spaces that trigger speculative bubbles (real estate, tourism, leisure, commercial, etc.). In contrast, **the social and solidarity-based economy represents a dynamic linked to communities, which is connected to addressing needs, and is a force for sociability**. This dynamic is behind cooperative networks and ecosystems, chains of shared value creation and appropriation, and green and circular economies.

Experiences of the social economy have spread across various countries in Europe and Latin America, and made a significant contribution to creating employment and economic activity. **Cooperatives and other types of economic third sector activities** are very important in countries like Spain, Italy, Argentina and Mexico, where they are an essential part of the economy of regions such as the Basque Country, Emilia-Romagna and the province of Buenos Aires.

This area of economic activity has strong links to the care economy, food production and distribution, and to sensitive sectors such as education, health and mobility. Social and solidarity economy organisations, which have significant potential for growth, tend to work on the basis of integration with regard to the societies in which they **operate, with a strong focus on the most vulnerable groups, unambiguously contributing to social cohesion**.

> "Restoring the social economy enables us to identify the actors in the communities so that no territory or group is left behind and so that we foster access to the human right to development together. To do this, we need to strengthen new ways of organising production, to make the social and solidarity economy visible for inclusive development."
>
> **José Leonardo Orlando Arteaga**. Governor of Manabí. Ecuador.
>
> *Workshops. (VIII Conference of the Decentralised Cooperation Observatory).*

However, **these organisations continue to face significant barriers in their work, and require support from the public sector**. A good example of this is **public procurement**, which accounts for 20% of GDP in Europe, and which should be an outstanding tool for prioritising and supporting the social economy. However, the data suggest that it continues to be governed by regulatory frameworks that favour large companies in the conventional economy to the detriment of alternative forms of economic organisation.

The efforts made by local and regional governments in Europe and Latin America to introduce **social, environmental and human rights protection clauses** show the path to be followed in the future. However, there is still a long way to go before changes can be made to regulatory frameworks, especially in Europe, where they are still very much geared to the interests of large economic operators. Despite the willingness of many local and regional governments to make changes, it will be very difficult to make progress without the involvement of national governments.

In this context, decentralised cooperation can play an important role in helping to reinforce processes of political advocacy aimed at bringing about changes in regulatory systems; capitalising on and replicating good practices; and promoting innovative initiatives that demonstrate the viability of alternative models. It has the potential to promote innovative urban economies connected to public research which are firmly rooted in proximity. These economies are based on these foundations, and open to the productive, creative and knowledge-based global economy.

Issues that can be addressed through decentralised cooperation:

- Political advocacy to adapt national – and, in Europe, EU – regulatory and budgetary frameworks to the needs of local governments in order to promote the social and solidarity-based economy.
- Capitalisation and transfer of best practices and knowledge.
- Mobilisation of resources to engage in innovative actions for the consolidation of alternative economic models.
- The link between institutions in the social and solidarity-based economy and decentralised cooperation partnerships.

2.5. Moving towards a democratic transition that restores decentralisation to the centre

Regaining the trust of citizens who are tired after years of austerity policies that have weakened the system of public services and the rights agenda in both Europe and Latin America; and doing so in a context of multiple crises like the one described in this document, is a major challenge for local and regional governments.

"…restoring the public sector, fighting against corruption as something that erodes democracy, expanding decentralisation with economic resources and competences based on the principle of the right to the territory and local autonomy. Fighting against the criminalisation of civil society organisations and human rights advocates, encouraging communication and new opinion formers, as well as public participation, transparency and public-community alliances that enable the co-production of public policies."

Augusto Barrera. Director of the PUCE Centre for Knowledge Transfer and Social Innovation and former Mayor of Quito.

Workshops. (VIII Conference of the Decentralised Cooperation Observatory).

As noted in the first chapter of this document, the two regions are witnessing a **rise in populism and nationalism**, which have been reinforced by a context marked by **corruption**, the crisis caused by the pandemic and geopolitical tensions. This rise has led to the consolidation of extreme right-wing political alternatives, and the creation of authoritarian and anti-democratic governments that challenge the essential principles of liberal democracies, in countries as important as Nicaragua, El Salvador, Hungary and Poland.

In this context, **local and regional governments are agencies for democratic resistance in many of these countries**. This resistance is committed to open and

cosmopolitan societies, which are tolerant and diverse, protective of the most vulnerable and conscious of the structural deficiencies and injustices that make up the productive system, social relations and geopolitical order that still govern the planet today.

There are some very interesting experiences that show how some local governments are attempting to challenge their national governments, and halt retrograde and strongly conservative policies in key areas such as the fight against climate change and the protection of minorities and vulnerable groups such as migrants. The **Pact of Free Cities**[39] which includes the capitals of the four countries in the Visegrad Group[40] is a very good example. Bratislava, Budapest, Prague and Warsaw are all defying their national-populist national governments by establishing direct relations with the European institutions and with their counterparts across the continent and throughout the entire world.

Addressing **the decentralisation agenda in a context of democratic regression** becomes an issue of unprecedented importance in view of the role that local governments play in addressing the transitions and transformations referred to in this document. They cannot be expected to be able to respond to the enormous challenges they face without having **clear frameworks of competences,** with **efficient financing systems** that give them the **fiscal autonomy** they need to promote transformative fiscal policies, and the channels to ensure **collaboration with other levels of government and with the actors working in the territory**.

It is necessary to rebuild the **consensus so that decentralised cooperation regains the political agenda of decentralisation.** This agenda was popular some years ago, and has been shelved due to the **rise of "solutionism".** It is a **political agenda** which should be oriented towards ensuring that local and regional governments are able to define the responses that citizens demand, regain their trust and move forward in a process of recovery that is sustainable, resilient and fair.

Issues that can be addressed through decentralised cooperation:

- Decentralisation processes of competences and fiscal issues, as well as the approach to political organisation principles such as local autonomy or subsidiarity.

- Improving multilevel governance schemes to foster more efficient public policies.

- Promoting governance mechanisms that stimulate the participation of citizens and stakeholders in the territory in a system based on cooperation, co-creation and co-responsibility.

- Advocacy so that the major international cooperation operators such as the European Union and development banks once again prioritise decentralised cooperation between local governments in Europe and Latin America.

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39. https://budapest.hu/sites/english/Lapok/2020/pact-of-free-cities.aspx

40. An alliance between Slovakia, Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic signed in 1991.

3. Notes for rethinking the types and impact of decentralised cooperation in a complex context of uncertainties

There is consensus around considering **decentralised cooperation as a public policy**. What is happening in the world "concerns" local and regional governments, which are aware that the root causes of many experiences in their territory which affect their citizens lie thousands of kilometres away, or originate in global decisions. The interdependencies that define the global context call for decentralised cooperation, which contributes in a responsible manner based on solidarity to creating the transformations needed to address the challenges in these territories. It must be coherent and connected to local circumstances, and at the same time, able to project itself in political and institutional spaces where global changes can be achieved.

Its definition as a public policy means that its objectives must be reviewed and a consensus about them reached.

Objectives of decentralised cooperation:

1 Strengthen local governance and contribute to the promotion of sustainable local public policies centred on human rights.

2 Promote a global, socially and environmentally fair and sustainable model of development from the local level.

3 Contribute to the construction of an inclusive, democratic and multilevel global governance model that gives local and regional governments a voice and involves them in decision-making processes.

4 Promote global citizenship with the participation of all the parties living in the territory.

5 Contribute to the consolidation of human rights, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the new urban agenda, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and other internationally agreed agendas that have an impact on the construction of a development model based on the principles of equity, equality, sustainability and human rights.

Based on these objectives, it is possible to state that decentralised cooperation promoted by local and regional governments is a cornerstone for accelerating the implementation of public policies to render universal rights effective by means of high-quality public services: the right to health, education, water and sanitation, decent work

and housing for all, as well as the right to a life free from violence and discrimination. To these should be added the right to a healthy environment; the right to live in the city freely and safely (especially for all girls and women).

Democracy, equality and the promotion of human rights, social and environmental sustainability, the culture of peace, justice and coexistence are the principles that must inspire local government action in the territory and in the international sphere. Innovative working itineraries are created based on an exercise of coherence, and these link political action at local level with an international presence and global political advocacy.

Figure: Principles of decentralised cooperation for global citizenship and justice
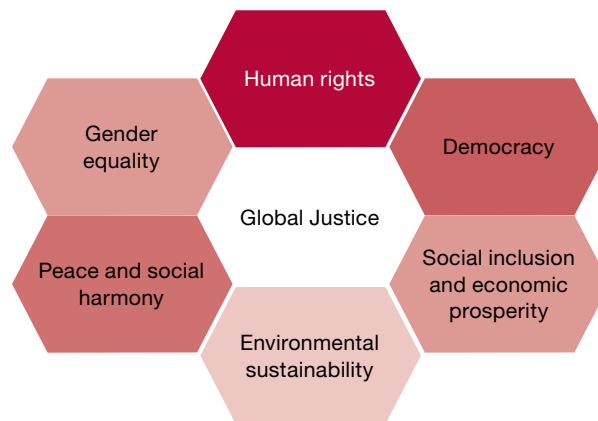
Source: produced by the authors

The study entitled "Decentralised cooperation as a mechanism to address inequalities and strengthen democracy in territories"[41] published by the Decentralised Cooperation Observatory after the conference held in Montevideo in 2019 noted that **decentralised cooperation has evolved considerably, from the classic, welfare-oriented, vertical configuration models, in which the added value is located solely and exclusively in the transfer of resources; to horizontal models coordinated around the logic of association and the construction of peer-to peer partnerships.** However, it also pointed out that this evolution had **"occurred more in narrative than in praxis, in academic constructions and in models drawn up from knowledge, than in the reality of local and regional governments."**

41. https://www.observ-ocd.org/es/library/la-cooperacion-descentralizada-como-mecanismo-para-abordar-las-desigualdades-y-fortalecer

"There is often a considerable gap between discourse and practice. Instruments and formats are not the problem; but perhaps we should stop making them a central consideration. We must base ourselves on objectives for the city, and then seek global coherence and alignment at the municipal level, instead of trying to mainstream cooperation. I would work in more long-term time frames. Give more voice to the global south in planning processes (master plans). Understand cooperation in terms of a process rather than as a series of projects."

Xavi Martí. Decentralised cooperation expert. Nadir Perspectiva.

Workshops. (VIII Conference of the Decentralised Cooperation Observatory).

Decentralised cooperation is currently expressed in a wide-ranging, diverse and complex series of formats and types of intervention that fall within approaches that are not always harmonious. This is summarised in the following table.

Table 1. Types and formats of DC

Format	Type	Approach	Channel	Flow	Type of intervention
Direct cooperation	Partnership	Vertical	Bilateral or multilateral collaboration agreements	North-South South-South	Transfer of aid (projects, funding, resources, etc.)
		Horizontal (peer-to-peer)	Bilateral or multilateral collaboration agreements	North-South South-South Triangular	Political advocacy Knowledge and innovation management Technical cooperation Learning Pilot projects
	Networks	Conventional	Affiliation (with membership fee)	North-South South-South Triangular	Political advocacy Knowledge and innovation management Pilot projects
		Multi-actor	Affiliation (with membership fee)	North-South South-South Triangular	Political advocacy Knowledge and innovation management Pilot projects
		Ephemeral alliances	Non-institutional	North-South South-South Triangular	Political advocacy
Induced cooperation	Partnership	Horizontal (peer-to-peer)	Grants through participation in calls	North-South South-South Triangular	Pilot projects

Indirect cooperation	Support for third parties (NGDOs, third sector, activism, universities, private sector, etc.)	Mediation	Grants through calls	North-South	Projects
Education for global justice	Direct action	Coordination	Bilateral or multilateral collaboration agreements	North-North South-South Triangular	Political advocacy Critical citizenship
	Support for third parties (NGDOs, third sector, activism, universities, private sector, etc.)	Mediation	Grants through calls	North-North	Political advocacy Critical citizenship

The following sections describe the main types of decentralised cooperation, listing the value-added aspects they contribute, the resistance they encounter, and the contradictions involved in them. The first section focuses on the frameworks of reference required for the various types of decentralised cooperation to be deployed in a context of policy coherence (PCD). The second looks at the evolution of direct decentralised cooperation, and focuses on the approaches and flows that enable direct decentralised cooperation to be oriented towards contexts with the most effectiveness and impact. The third focuses on induced decentralised cooperation and indirect cooperation as formats characterised by intermediation, their potential and the contradictions they encounter. The fourth focuses on education for global justice as a format that requires greater visibility and development. The final section focuses on the link between decentralised cooperation and some forms of public diplomacy with strong local roots.

"Formats and instruments should not be written in stone. They must be flexible and adaptable to each situation. The same instruments are not appropriate for different institutions (national, regional, local government, etc.). We need the broadest possible frameworks to be able to continue working in a rapidly changing context. If not, they will expire in a matter of years."

Ainara Arrieta Archilla. eLankidetza- Basque Agency for Development Cooperation.

Workshops. (VIII Conference of the Decentralised Cooperation Observatory).

3.1. A framework of reference and coherence

In this context of dispersion, in which various approaches, formats and types of intervention exist alongside each other, **decentralised cooperation requires a framework of reference that makes it more coherent** and with a greater capacity for impact to create the transformations which are its objectives. A framework of reference that highlights its specificity as a means of local international cooperation which gives the territory and its stakeholders a central role. As we have seen, this territory and the actors play a key role in moving towards a sustainable, fair and resilient recovery. It is important

to underline the importance of **understanding decentralised cooperation as part of a territorially based process rather than an isolated series of projects**.

The **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** undoubtedly provides an essential framework of reference. Apart from the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and the 169 targets that articulate them, the principles underlying the agenda define the cornerstones for reviewing decentralised cooperation in this context of multiple crises and transitions. It is therefore essential that decentralised cooperation approaches the sustainable development of territories from a comprehensive, holistic perspective, taking into account all its dimensions (economic, social, cultural, environmental and political) as well as all the assets, resources and actors within them. Collaboration and co-responsibility must also be promoted as forms of governance for the implementation of more efficient public policies. This is all based on the commitment to accountability as regards the results obtained, and capitalising on lessons learned.

> "The 2030 Agenda places sustainability at the centre of debate. It is an aspect of public pedagogy and enables a transnational language to be used, landing at local level."
>
> **José Luis Fernández Casadevante (Kois)**. Expert in socio-ecological transition, GARUA workers' cooperative.
>
> *Round table: "The multiple transitions necessary to address the current systemic crisis: a just, digital, ecological, socio-economic and democratic transition". (VIII Conference of the Decentralised Cooperation Observatory).*

Adopting a very similar approach, the OECD lists the guiding principles of decentralised cooperation in a study[42] published in 2018. They are:

- **Reciprocity:** ensures two-way relationships that create benefits between the parties, thereby overcoming the classic donor-recipient approach.
- **Proximity:** based on the concept of subsidiarity, and states that local governments and actors are best placed to address certain challenges because of their proximity to their citizens.
- **Territorial governance:** according to which the main objective of decentralised cooperation is to strengthen local governance by mobilising local authorities and other actors in the territory. Collaboration, coordination and co-decision between decentralised authorities and non-governmental stakeholders are crucial in this context.
- **Territorial partnership:** unlike traditional forms of international development cooperation, the specificity of decentralised cooperation arises from partnerships between local governments. This partnership is articulated through a common political agenda aimed at obtaining concrete results.

At the same time, other approaches that can provide a valid benchmark for decentralised cooperation, bridging the gap between discourse and practice, are worthy of consideration. These are:

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42. OECD (2018), *Reshaping Decentralised Co-operation. The key role of cities and regions for the 2030 Agenda.* OECD Publishing, Paris. https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264302914-en

- **Human rights and the promotion of democracy**. This approach places human rights and the promotion of democracy (or care for democracy) at the core of sustainable development processes. This approach is particularly important in a context of rising authoritarianism, and also at the territorial level, and aims to move beyond silos by mainstreaming democracy and the rights agenda as frameworks of reference for all policies promoted at the local level.

- **Policy coherence approach (PCD) for sustainable development and global justice.** This approach calls for a new paradigm of inclusive and sustainable development, based on a recognition of the interdependencies between the different territories, the different dimensions of life (social, economic and environmental) and the different generations. It highlights the need to encourage integrated and coherent work between the various policies and programmes undertaken by the local government with the actors working in the city.

- **Territorial approach for local sustainable development.** Unlike the sectoral approach, this approach aims to work in the territory based on a holistic perspective that takes into account the various dimensions of its sustainable development – economic, social, environmental and cultural – as well as all its assets, including the resources available and the actors operating in them. The territorial approach defines decentralised cooperation strategies based on the situation and assets in a specific area, taking its needs, aspirations, challenges and opportunities into account, as well as its weaknesses and all the factors that may represent a threat. It is based on an overall and coordinated vision of the territory, which seeks to integrate endogenous resources and the highest possible level of coordination and complementarity with those shared with other territories. It takes into account the different circumstances based on their various components: social, political, physical, environmental, cultural and economic. This approach considers public and private stakeholders in the territory as essential assets, and calls for the promotion of collaborative forms of governance based on dialogue, coordination, co-responsibility and co-creation[43].

> "We must consider the concept of global justice as the essence of cooperation".
>
> **Natalia Biffi.** Advocacy Coordinator of REDS – Social transformation solidarity network.
>
> *Workshops. (VIII Conference of the Decentralised Cooperation Observatory).*

3.2. Direct cooperation. Evolution against a backdrop of widespread resistance to change

The evolution of the various forms of direct cooperation has been widely discussed and addressed in the specialised literature[44]. Despite the fact that this evolution has taken

43. *Model for the territorialisation of national public policies in Latin America. Guide to implementation.* EUROsociAL Tools No. 75. https://eurosocial.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/HERRAMIENTA_75.pdf

44. Fernández de Losada, A. (2017). *Shaping a new generation of decentralised cooperation For enhanced effectiveness and accountability.* CPMR and Platforma. https://bit.ly/3OK4WqZ
OECD (2018), *Reshaping Decentralised Co-operation. The key role of cities and regions for the 2030 Agenda.* OECD Publishing, Paris. https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264302914-en

place more in the realm of narrative than in practice, there has indisputably been an evolution which must be highlighted. This is necessary because the current context requires more efficient decentralised cooperation, targeting the needs of the territories, their citizens and the actors operating in them; and towards achieving real changes and transformations in the face of global challenges.

There is no clear definition of the concept of **direct decentralised cooperation**. However, it is the type of decentralised cooperation that takes place between local and regional governments based on a logic of **partnership**, which starts with political dialogue and which can/must involve the actors of the territory. In general, this type of cooperation takes place on the basis of bilateral or multilateral agreements, is expressed through various cooperation flows, and takes the form of a wide range of types of intervention, ranging from political advocacy to pilot projects, as well as knowledge management and innovation, technical cooperation and mutual learning.

Direct decentralised cooperation has a long history, starting with its first steps based on aid, focusing on creating vertical relationships between local governments with unequal levels of development, in which the added value is focused on the one-way transfer of aid. This aid may consist of the transfer of economic resources (to finance projects), materials and/or specialised knowledge. **Although direct cooperation has evolved considerably, this top-down or welfare-oriented approach is still a strong feature of its praxis**. Overcoming this involves overcoming significant resistance. The logic by which the financing party sets the agenda continues to prevail; and it should not be forgotten that European local and regional governments continue to finance a large proportion of their links with their Latin American counterparts. On the other hand, and equally importantly, Latin American local and regional governments continue to approach decentralised cooperation as a means to obtain financing.

However, an increasing number of critical voices are highlighting the need for awareness of the counterproductive effects of relationships that lead to dependence and no sustainability. This is why other forms of direct cooperation have been gaining in strength and centrality in recent years, focused on the construction of horizontal partnerships between peers – even if they operate under asymmetric conditions – (Fernández de Losada, 2017) that transcend and move away from the North-South paradigm. They are two-way relationships in which although the financial component may be very important, the added value lies in the political dialogue between the parties (integrated cooperation). This type of relationship usually takes the form of technical cooperation agreements and mutual learning initiatives aimed primarily at strengthening the institutional and operational capacities of the partners involved.

"Latin America and Europe are not so different. That is why decentralised cooperation is so valuable. We need to come together to identify common problems and solutions that work in the territories. There are not only large cities, but also medium-sized and small cities, regions and rural areas".

Marcela Andino Ramos. Marcela Andino Ramos (CONGOPE).

Workshops. (VIII Conference of the Decentralised Cooperation Observatory).

Highlight horizontality and the concept of partnership, implies a definitive shift towards working within a logic of peers which address shared challenges together. These peers place political dialogue, knowledge, experience and learning at the centre of the equation. This paradigm shift requires vision, political will and above all, generosity. Vision and generosity to transcend local interests and focus on shared interests; to come together, creating alliances, including the actors in the territory (and outside it) in the partnerships that are created; and to be accountable for the results actually obtained, accepting responsibilities and capitalising on experiences.

What are the parameters that define the most advanced and effective decentralised cooperation partnerships?

- Political leadership for the promotion of partnerships and the mobilisation of territorial actors and resources.
- Political dialogue as a framework of reference for an integrated approach to shared challenges.
- Knowledge, innovation, experience and learning at the centre of actions.
- Knowledge management and innovation and exchange and transfer as working methodologies.
- The inclusion of stakeholders from the territory, and from outside it, in the relationships that are built.
- A focus on concrete and measurable results.
- Accountability as a key factor in the desire to democratise partnerships.

In this context of a paradigm shift, some forms of direct cooperation appear to have a particularly significant transformative potential. We focus below on South-South and triangular cooperation, and on ephemeral networks and coalitions as types of direct cooperation clearly aimed at moving beyond the welfare-oriented North-South logic.

3.2.1. South-South and triangular cooperation as an accelerator for a paradigm shift in direct decentralised cooperation

The new flows shaping direct decentralised cooperation (and international cooperation as a whole) are taking on unprecedented importance. **Decentralised South-South and triangular cooperation**[45] **are emerging as forms of relationship which have the**

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45. More information in Ojeda Medina, Tahina (2020): The strategic role of local and regional governments in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda: experiences from South-South and triangular cooperation This study presents

potential to subscribe to the parameters that define today's most advanced forms of direct cooperation.

South-South cooperation encompasses development cooperation relations between the "countries of the South". These relationships may be political, cultural, social or economic, and may be between different actors. According to the UNDP, "technical cooperation is considered to be any "process" by which "two or more countries, two or more developing territories, acquire individual or collective capacities through cooperative exchanges of knowledge, skills, resources and technical collaboration.""

One of the debates arising from this format focuses on establishing the extent to which this is a change of model, or a repetition of inertias in terms of unequal relations and the conditionality of aid on the donors' interests. In the case of decentralised cooperation, the establishment of more horizontal relationships, the greater ease of working on the participants' priorities, the partnerships with the population and the added value involved in exchanging experiences in particular, show that the practices are closer to a vision of decentralised cooperation that addresses global challenges from the perspective of the Global South in order to meet those challenges.

> "In order to say what formats we are going to use, there has to be a critical overview, and many of these factors have been mentioned here. What South-South? Do we accept it or not? First, we must do this exercise and then see whether or not our institutional political subjects and the social scaffolding that goes with them, whether or not our decentralised cooperation needs certain types of cooperation. We cannot consider new formats without a critical overview."
>
> **Daniel García**. DEMUCA Advisor.
>
> *Workshops. Workshops. (VIII Conference of the Decentralised Cooperation Observatory).*

The factors that may accompany decentralised South-South and triangular cooperation are characterised by a relationship based on a mutual understanding of historical factors; a contribution to regional integration that enables new development paradigms to be introduced (global challenges) and the establishment of relationships between territories with similar problems, despite their differences in income, institutional or socio-economic conditions.

experiences of local and regional governments, organised in two groups: The first describes how the process of situating the SDGs in sustainable development planning is taking place in Colombia, Mexico and Brazil in multi-level policy schemes and with multi-stakeholder participation; the second looks at two projects linking local and regional governments in Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay and Brazil in decentralised South-South and Triangular Cooperation processes related to specific SDGs. Ojeda Medina, Tahina. In OASIS Magazine, pp. 9-29, January–June 2020 (APOST-53)

Table 2. Principles and distinguishing features of DS-SC

Format	Type
Principles	Distinguishing features
Mutual collaboration, horizontality and solidarity.	Limited to the public sphere.
Reciprocity and shared responsibility.	South-South.
Respect for the local relevance of cooperation.	Emphasis on the technical dimension.
Complementarity and added value of cooperation.	Diverse and distinctive.
No conditionality.	Multilevel governance.
Adoption of sustainable development principles (A2030 and NUA).	Participation of other social actors in decentralised cooperation.

Source: Ponce Adame (2017).

The principles that apply to South-South cooperation are applicable to **decentralised triangular cooperation**[46]. The OECD-DAC considers triangular cooperation as a type of cooperation, and acknowledges that it can be used by all partners (countries and territories) involved in development cooperation projects, regardless of their level of income. Its principles are horizontal relationships, the generation of knowledge, and a territorial approach translated into public policies.

A recent report by the Ibero-American General Secretariat[47] states that values including horizontal relations and mutual aid arise from the practices and discourses of decentralised South-South and triangular cooperation. The decentralised South-South and triangular cooperation ecosystem (in the Ibero-American context) emphasises:

- the political nature of cooperative relations;

- their orientation towards the strengthening of local public policies,

- the focus on responding to specific challenges in the territories and local and regional contexts; and

- the focus on exchanging experiences and innovations aimed at generating applied knowledge to be shared.

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46. For more information, see the specific study by Martínez Oses, P (2022): *Towards an Ibero-American Ecosystem of Decentralised South-South and Triangular Cooperation*. Study commissioned by the Ibero-American General Secretariat (SEGIB) within the framework of the "Innovative Triangular Cooperation for a New Development Agenda" project undertaken by SEGIB with the support of the Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development of the European Commission (DG DEVCO)

47. Study on South-South and decentralised Triangular Cooperation in Ibero-America and Europe

Decentralised South-South and triangular cooperation is a distinctive value in the promotion of political dialogue and multilevel technical exchange, in the development of shared planning processes and joint initiatives, in the appropriation of experiences, the solutions that are worked on and their suitability to local realities. In this field, decentralised cooperation provides robust knowledge of the issues and contexts in which it works. The capacity for strategic leadership and political articulation of decentralised cooperation must therefore be enhanced, based on an increased availability of resources for these formats. This issue will continue to be a demand by local governments in the Global South.

A good example is the ADELANTE Programme implemented by the European Commission, which seeks to foster horizontal relations between the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean and between those countries and Europe, in order to promote the exchange of knowledge and take advantage of the ability of all the partners involved to provide solutions aimed at sustainable development. ADELANTE 2[48] is now under way. It is an innovative programme in which different local governments are participating, and its overall objective is to contribute to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda through strengthened regional cooperation initiatives. Meanwhile, the **Mirada Ciudadana**[49] [Citizens' View] project has contributed to the institutional reinforcement strategies of the municipalities involved, linking good governance with reducing gaps in inequality by focusing on social inclusion and encouraging public participation. **Mirada Ciudadana** works with 17 MERCOSUR municipalities, with the participation of Spanish institutions including the Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces (FEMP), the Complutense University of Madrid and the National Institute of Public Administration (INAP).

3.2.2. Strategic/ephemeral networks and coalitions

International networks of local governments are an ideal space for the promotion of bilateral or multilateral direct decentralised cooperation initiatives. These range from those that place it among their founding aims (such as the Ibero-American Centre for Strategic Urban Development, CIDEU); those that offer ideal spaces for partnerships and initiatives without it being among their priorities (such as United Cities and Local Governments or Metropolis); and south-south decentralised cooperation networks (such as Mercociudades).

However, recent years have seen the emergence of what some authors have called **ephemeral or strategic networks** (Malé, 2019; Fernández de Losada, A. & Zapata, E., 2022). These spaces aim to influence specific areas of the international or regional agenda, and find a facilitator needed to form alliances in decentralised cooperation relations. These are ad hoc, informal alliances, operating alongside traditional networks and multi-stakeholder platforms, which aim to promote advocacy strategies in specific areas where local governments are subject to public pressure (such as the Cities for Adequate Housing Initiative which was signed in New York by Barcelona, Paris, London, Vienna,

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48. https://www.adelante2.eu/es/el-programa-adelante-2
49. https://www.adelante-i.eu/mirada-ciudadana#descr

Montreal, New York; Montevideo and Medellín, among others) or in a context of confrontation with their national governments (health management of the pandemic, climate crisis, migration and refugees).

These partnerships make it possible to actively support "**city diplomacy**" by promoting values of peace, sustainability, respect for human rights, etc., as part of planning advocacy on specific issues to mitigate global effects on territories.[50]

It is important to note that these alliances are mainly based on political dialogue between different local governments. The approach involved in this type of decentralised cooperation, in which the local or regional government carries out concrete action, can often be undertaken without major financial outlay. The relationships can be formal and institutionalised, or informal. They can be said to operate with a logic based on less bureaucracy and more results. These ties are often non-institutional and short-term, and based around the pursuit of a specific objective; but they may also often lead to the formation of wider processes aimed at facilitating mutual knowledge and exchange of information and experiences in achieving the proposed objective.

3.3. Indirect and induced decentralised cooperation. Coordination or dependence?

Indirect decentralised cooperation and induced cooperation have something in common, despite their different formats. The local and regional governments that become involved do so on a coordinated basis with other stakeholders. In the case of indirect cooperation, this is with civil society organisations specialising in international cooperation, universities or the private sector; in the case of induced cooperation, with multilateral organisations, national agencies, and even philanthropic organisations. And in both cases, there is a significant debate that needs to be addressed: are these formats oriented towards effective formulas for coordination and collaboration, or do they lead to relationships of dependency?

In countries such as Spain and Italy, most regional governments and medium and large cities have **financial instruments to support territorial actors working in the field of international development cooperation** (public calls for projects for development cooperation, or education for global justice). As noted at the most recent EU-LA OCD Conference in Montevideo, this support is in response to a dual logic. On the one hand, it contributes to the sustainable and human development of the partner countries with which the organisations work; and on the other, to strengthening the solidarity-based associative fabric and creating critical awareness and an informed public on the major challenges facing the planet.

It was also pointed out that apart from helping to strengthen their own associative fabric, working with NGDOs has enabled many European local governments to come into contact with other situations and with international cooperation, to establish contacts

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50. For further information, see Cuaderno No. 9 of AL-LAs: *Alianzas locales para los retos globales*

and partnerships with local governments in other regions of the world, and to have knowledge and experiences that are difficult to find in their own local government and/or city or region. However, the predominant role that NGDOs have continued to play in many contexts has led to a series of dysfunctions that call the effectiveness of indirect cooperation into question.

On the one hand, the logic of working through **public calls for proposals** has relegated many European NGDOs to a role of intermediation in projects, and has distanced their counterparts – the civil society organisations in the countries where they work – from the local governments that finance the projects. Likewise, the logic of working on a project-by-project basis often clashes with support for longer-term processes, and presumably with greater potential to create sustainable transformations. Finally, the dependence of many NGDOs on aid and grants from local and regional governments (linked to a loss of social base) is in some cases causing some resistance to making changes and accepting the involvement of other key actors in development, such as the third sector, universities and the private sector.

An analysis of the situation also shows that in most cases, local and regional governments that engage in indirect cooperation strategies do not link them to their own direct cooperation strategies; i.e. NGDOs and other institutions that receive funding do not necessarily carry out initiatives in the territories of the funding government's partners (local and/or regional governments). The lack of coordination between direct and indirect cooperation strategies can contribute to the fragmentation and isolation of the initiatives funded; by any reckoning, this runs contrary to the principles of aid effectiveness and policy coherence.

Meanwhile, **induced cooperation** has become increasingly important in recent decades as a force that has enabled decentralised cooperation to establish itself within the international development cooperation system. As noted in chapter 4 of this document, various multilateral agencies and – more recently – philanthropic organisations are supporting direct decentralised cooperation in one way or another.

There is consensus that support from multilateral agencies and philanthropic institutions has helped decentralised cooperation move towards more efficient horizontal formats along the lines described in the previous section. Instruments such as URBAL, the Thematic Programme for Civil Society Organisations and Local Authorities[51] and the International Urban and Regional Cooperation Programme (IURC)[52] have helped decentralised cooperation to highlight knowledge

However, it is not local and regional governments that set the political agenda that defines the frameworks of reference for these programmes, but instead multilateral organisations, national governments and philanthropic institutions. This creates a threefold problem: first, the priorities defined in these programmes do not necessarily respond to the priorities of local and regional governments; this may have an impact on their

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51. https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/cso-la-mip-2014-2020_en.pdf
52. https://www.iurc.eu/latin-america/

appropriation of the projects and processes financed; and it ultimately has an impact on sustainability. As also discussed below, when a multilateral agency, a government or a philanthropy decides that the financial instrument has run its course, there is little that local governments can do or say.

It would be reasonable to move forwards based on the logic of multilevel governance, and for international organisations such as the European Union or the World Bank, and even philanthropic institutions (although it is more difficult for them as they are private institutions), to subject these programmes, their design, implementation and evaluation, to effective consultation with the large networks representing the interests of decentralised cooperation and local and regional governments.

3.4. Education for Global Justice

Together with direct decentralised cooperation partnerships, indirect and induced cooperation and work in the framework of networks, **education for global justice is another of the most common, albeit less studied, formats in the framework of international development cooperation policies promoted by local and regional governments**.

European local governments have traditionally worked in this field based on another approach that did not adopt the objective of changing their own citizens' attitudes and practices in their cooperation policy, but instead aimed to inform, raise awareness of other situations and legitimise their own policy. The Education for Global Justice (EJG) approach brings together the work of local governments in Europe and Latin America in order to engage their citizens in responding to global challenges. Sharing practices and promoting mutual learning in this area is a challenge for decentralised cooperation in the coming years.

The primary objective of education for global justice is to engage citizens, social movements and civil society in a critical reflection on the major challenges and transformations facing the planet. This is an essential strategy in the policies of the various agents of decentralised cooperation. Facing our current challenges of sustainable development in the context of the transitions taking place in our societies requires citizens to have a critical knowledge of the situation, and to be committed, active and involved in social change.

> "Education is emancipating. We must rescue the knowledge of popular education as a working tool that municipal councils have. So we gather the proposals from community networks, all the territorial work designed based on people's demands."
>
> **Judith Muñoz**. Expert in Decentralised Cooperation.
>
> *Workshops. (VIII Conference of the Decentralised Cooperation Observatory).*

Citizens that act based on their knowledge of the links between their local context and the rest of the world. We are at a crucial point in the existence of strong, organised, participatory citizens committed to human rights, global justice and sustainability. We have seen the expressions of solidarity and mutual support that citizens offered during the worst points of the

pandemic, helping the most vulnerable. This community work has shown us important lessons that must be incorporated into the frameworks for action of decentralised cooperation.

Decentralised cooperation has promoted the work carried out by civil society (indirect cooperation) aimed at formulating alternative frameworks for interpreting reality and taking action; and by formulating and implementing policies, highlighting the need for civil society's appropriation and participation in the processes and progress required by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In the current context, there is an urgent need for more decisive support for this method, which involves building proposals from and for citizens and the world we want, emphasising solutions and proposals for the post-COVID-19 reconstruction and the context of multiple crises.

When people cooperate, they have an undoubted ability to transform reality. This requires a collective and global awareness that enables us to reflect on, analyse and address the challenges from a perspective that goes beyond a particular viewpoint or group interest. Today's main political challenge is to create solutions for understanding and responding to the interdependence between local factors related to the territory and transnational dynamics which can open up or constrain political, economic and cultural parameters of action for all local governments.

An example of leadership by local governments and real coordinated work with civil society to address shared objectives can be found in the province of Barcelona, where towns like Manresa, which is involved in the promotion of fair trade, carry out initiatives aimed at education, awareness and public procurement in this area. In this case, it is the local government that leads the networking with local trade and associations, specialised second-level organisations, counterparts in Latin America and the Fair Trade Towns international network. Expanding this type of complex initiative that brings together different actors, and transcending the traditional boundaries between types of cooperation is another challenge for the coming years.

In addition, there is the challenge of **caring for democracy**. We are witnessing an increasingly intense polarisation in the political, media and social spheres that has become established in conversations, and is amplified in social media, the media and institutions. The breakdown of the social contract in our liberal democracies is mentioned above. Decentralised cooperation can play an important role as a means of strengthening and articulating the fabric of associations, which is a way to maintain a lively spirit of participation in and appropriation of public policies. It is a way to ensure a positive environment for citizens to take part in the democratic process. It is also a sign of healthy democratic quality. Furthermore, this quality favours processes for building democracy in other contexts by strengthening the role of citizens through support for the defence of human rights and global justice. The themes (peace, sustainability, interculturality, gender equality, etc.), methodologies (participatory, experiential, non-violent communication, etc.) and the approaches to education for global justice (individual/collective link; local/global link, etc...) build citizenship and promote social cohesion.

Finally, we must not forget that communication is a key factor in strengthening decentralised cooperation policy. It is therefore advisable to move towards communication

understood in terms of a broad-based and strategic tool that is present in decentralised cooperation from its conception, and is part of all the cycles in the political and management process. To that end, it will be necessary to allocate adequate and specialised technical and human resources to decentralised cooperation policies, to enable the construction of a genuine communication strategy for informed and active citizens concerning the challenges of our time.

3.5. Decentralised cooperation and different forms of local public diplomacy

Apart from what has come to be known as city diplomacy (engaged in by city government representatives), **there are other forms of public diplomacy that can help to enhance decentralised cooperation practices and open them up to other situations. These are cultural diplomacy and scientific and technological diplomacy**, which although they are not types of decentralised cooperation, are practices of international action with a strong local connection.

Culture is playing an increasingly important role in the political agendas of cities and regions, both for its own sake (it improves us) and as a strategy for economic growth and people's well-being. Considering and addressing our current challenges requires an understanding that culture is an essential aspect of quality of life, and a "lever of creativity" for new goods and services that citizens require. The cultural and creative industries can act as a bridge between communities, and provide disadvantaged people with opportunities for empowerment, self-sufficiency and integration into employment and productive activities. Culture is an integral part of local development, and contributes to more inclusive growth. (E. Miralles, 2011: *Cultura, cooperación descentralizada y desarrollo local*)

This highlights the growing importance of decentralised cultural cooperation between local authorities in Europe and Latin America, which undoubtedly presents future challenges for the strengthening and consolidation of this cooperation. The cultural and creative sectors are important in their own right in terms of their economic footprint and employment. They also stimulate innovation throughout the economy, in addition to contributing to many other channels with a positive social impact (welfare and health, education, inclusion, urban regeneration, etc.).

The basic types of decentralised cultural cooperation can be summarised as follows:

- The exchange of people, including creators, managers, politicians and culturally active citizens.
- The production or co-production of specific events, programmes and services
- Education, information and training programmes.

A clear example of this can be found in Medellín. At the end of the last century, the city's international reputation was affected by violence and drug trafficking, but it has since become a forum for culture. One of its cultural attractions is the Book and Culture Festival, which was held for the first time in 2007. It has become the fourth most important

book fair in Latin America. Medellín has carried out several cooperation projects in other areas of culture. For example, it joined the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) in the area of music in 2015, and the city has been an active member of the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities since 2017. These are all actions that demonstrate that culture has become a broad-based tool for the government of Medellín for leaving behind its past of violence, and presenting itself to the world as a place for tourism and leisure. Today, the image of the capital of the province of Antioquia is one of a city of culture, full of artists, traditions, and heritage and tourist attractions that are a cornerstone in the regeneration of the social fabric and the promotion of its development.

Together with culture, **science and technology** are another fundamental asset for addressing the context of crises and multiple transitions that are currently taking place in the global and local context from a local perspective. Science and technology have the potential to offer solutions to the challenges faced by local and regional governments in most of the areas described in this document. These solutions are crucial for addressing the transformations for channelling a process of recovery that as pointed out above, must be sustainable, resilient and fair.

In this context, **science and technology diplomacy** is an accelerator of the many processes in the field of science and innovation taking place in the territories, and especially in cities. Some cities are beginning to define science and technology diplomacy strategies with a view to improving their positioning in innovative ecosystems, creating partnerships with various kinds of local and international actors in order to attract talent, undertake large scientific, digital or technological projects and attract innovative international companies.

An increasing number of cities and territories are building bridges with science, technology and innovative ecosystems as part of their positioning and (sustainable) development strategies. Linking science and technology diplomacy strategies with decentralised cooperation policies and partnerships therefore takes on a new dimension, and will be an area to be explored in the coming years.

A good example of this can be found in the agreement promoted by the SciTech Diplohub[53] (the Barcelona-based hub for science and technology diplomacy) between Mexico City and Barcelona to promote scientific, university and business cooperation[54].

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53. https://www.scitechdiplohub.org/

54. https://www.europapress.es/catalunya/barcelona-economias-00982/noticia-barcelona-ciudad-mexico-acuer-dan-reforzar-colaboracion-cientifica-20221012183120.html

4. Towards an inclusive decentralised cooperation

Addressing the decentralised cooperation agenda requires a mobilisation of all the resources, capacities and commitments available. There has long been **a consensus on the need to involve the various actors operating in the territory in decentralised cooperation partnerships and strategies.** The study that the Decentralised Cooperation Observatory published after the 2019 Montevideo conference performs a detailed analysis of these actors and the most appropriate mechanisms to ensure their participation in the policy-making process.

> "….one of the challenges for local governments is that of experimentation. Thinking about actors is fundamental. There are actors in all the world's cities, linked to the territory, with a political vision of the overall problems that affect their territory; actors who attach value to the idea of proximity. There are actors trying to do things like this in every city in the world, and one of the tasks of local governments is to expand the political space for these experiments".
>
> **Pablo Martínez Osés**. Expert. La Mundial Collective. Spain.
>
> *Workshops. (VIII Conference of the Decentralised Cooperation Observatory).*

Reference is made to the actors that constitute the **quadruple helix**, namely government, civil society organisations, universities and research centres, and the private sector; and the importance of all of them being involved in the decentralised cooperation strategies defined by local governments in all phases of the public policy process: from the time when they are designed – when needs are identified, priorities are defined, activities are scheduled and resources allocated – during their implementation and in the evaluation and accountability phase.

> "In decentralised cooperation there are actors with different interests who must be highlighted in a transparent manner."
>
> **Anna Ayuso**. Senior Researcher at CIDOB (Barcelona Centre for International Affairs)
>
> *Workshops. (VIII Conference of the Decentralised Cooperation Observatory).*

Based on the content of the study published in 2019, this section highlights factors that need to be taken into account in order to deploy the full potential of an inclusive decentralised cooperation which is aimed at mobilising all the assets available in a territory and focusing them towards the recovery process.

4.1. Leadership from the government sector

The leadership of local and regional governments in establishing decentralised cooperation relations lies beyond any doubt, and is the source of the broadest consensus. Although the concept of decentralised cooperation is broad and full of various meanings, an exhaustive study[55] undertaken by the European Commission defined this practice as a form of international development cooperation between local governments. However, although they play a central role, there are other actors, including other levels of government, that also have an impact on the relationships that are built between territories and which must also be taken into account.

4.1.1. Local governments as articulators of public policy

If decentralised cooperation is understood in terms of a local or regional public policy, local and regional governments must play a central role in leadership and its articulation. As mentioned above, this role is crucial in the various phases involved in the process of formulating and implementing this policy and it is based on their **democratic legitimacy**, the competence assigned to them by the legal system and the public resources available to them.

More and more countries are recognising the specific authority of their local and regional governments to undertake strategies in the field of international development cooperation. An OECD study[56] noted that in Europe, 23 of the 27 member states recognised in law a practice that is widespread across the continent. The regulations on external action and international development cooperation in most European countries recognise and even regulate this practice; and there are regional laws on international development cooperation in Europe's federal countries.

> "We must emphasise that decentralised cooperation is not only done by municipalities, but also by regions. We need a joint territorial approach…".
>
> **Marcela Andino Ramos**. Marcela Andino Ramos (CONGOPE).
>
> *Workshops. (VIII Conference of the Decentralised Cooperation Observatory).*

In Latin America, countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Mexico and Uruguay also recognise the capacity of their subnational governments to participate in decentralised cooperation initiatives. Apart from national regulations, there are also cases of subnational governments that have regulated their international action. One of the most paradigmatic cases is that of Mexico City, where the Constitution recognises the city government's competence in the sphere of internationalisation and decentralised cooperation. However, some countries in the region appear to be regressing, which is hindering the decentralised cooperation practices of their local governments. The most paradigmatic case is current-

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55. https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/decentralised-cooperation/documents/capitalisation-study-european-experiences-decentralised-cooperation

56. OECD (2018), *Reshaping Decentralised Co-operation. The key role of cities and regions for the 2030 Agenda*. OECD Publishing, Paris. https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264302914-en

ly El Salvador, where the government is in the process of enacting a law that makes it extremely difficult for its municipalities and municipal associations to cooperate.

Many local and regional governments also allocate budgets to promoting this policy. Decentralised cooperation is mobilising ever greater resources in Europe. The table below shows the contributions by subnational governments in OECD countries to official development assistance (ODA). Countries such as Germany, Austria and Spain make significant contributions, although in the case of the first two, a large proportion of the resources goes to funding grants (Germany) and support for refugees (Austria), meaning that the resources are not transferred to the partner countries. It should be noted that there is no available and aggregated data for ODA that would provide a comparative framework linked to decentralised cooperation from 2017 onwards.

Table 3. Total Decentralised Cooperation in the OECD relative to national ODA in 2015, 2016 and 2017

Donors	2015		2016		2017	
	DDC USD disbursements	DDC as % of total bilateral ODA	DDC USD disbursements	DDC as % of total bilateral ODA	DDC USD disbursements	DDC as % of total bilateral ODA
DAC total	2,418,327,071	1.82 %	2,283,587,545	1.55 %	2,328,257,292	1.58 %
Austria	170,806,287	20.92 %	244,839,779	24.05 %	252,691,838	41.91 %
Belgium	96,331,159	8.24 %	98,100,825	6.64 %	81,692,348	8.24 %
Canada	385,433,610	12.80 %	411,447,946	14.81 %	419,931,726	13.35 %
Czech Republic	941,574	1.24 %	926,670	1.22 %	982,599	1.32 %
France	63,634,428	1.20 %	91,842,309	1.59 %	92,230,543	1.08 %
Germany	985,465,203	6.68 %	1,041,151,864	5.12 %	1,077,682,185	4.99 %
Italy	35,146,651	1.86 %	231,25,642	0.93 %	23,722,191	0.78 %
Japan	3,727,463	0.06 %	3,451,311	0.05 %	3,339,674	0.02 %
Portugal	122,828	0.08 %	199,453	0.15 %	206,418	0.12 %
Spain	219,993,296	60.13 %	254,278,243	9.69 %	259,304,768	23.90 %
Sweden	21,618575	0.44 %	23,329,402	0.66 %	23,867,865	0.66 %
Switzerland	60,797,701	2.31 %	73,508,631	2.66 %	73,222,332	3.48 %
United Kingdom	18,455,630	0.16 %	17,385,470	0.15 %	19 ,382,805	0.15 %
Non-DAC						
Latvia			36,072	1.01 %	40,423	3.72 %
Lithuania	319,415	3.03%	276,213	1.87 %	400,934	9.75 %
United Arab Emirates	12,591,693	0.29%	10,159,910	0.24 %	9,292,928	0.32 %

Source: OECD.
DAC: Development Assistance Committee.
DDC: Decentralised Development Cooperation.
ODA: Official Development Assistance.

"Let's rethink ODA; we are seeing that we have major problems in common, and it is up to us to find interconnected solutions from our decolonial perspectives. We must sustain the perspective of the articulation of actors, and decentralised cooperation must be aimed in that direction, working to consolidate local government relations with social actors, allowing us to address inequality and this must enable us to redefine the formats of cooperation."

Pablo Martínez Osés. Expert. La Mundial Collective. Spain.

Workshops. (VIII Conference of the Decentralised Cooperation Observatory).

Apart from national figures, if we look at local governments individually, there are autonomous communities in Spain such as the Basque Country (€51 M) and Catalonia (€48 M), and regions in Belgium such as Flanders (€31.5 M) that contribute more than some OECD countries such as Cyprus (€19.3 M[57]), Latvia (€44.6 M[58]) and Malta (€51.9 M[59]).

The figures in Latin America vary a great deal. **The logic of subnational governments does not generally involve allocating resources to decentralised cooperation, rather attracting them.** However, local and regional governments are increasingly including funds in their budgets to manage their decentralised cooperation strategies and to finance actions in the area of South-South cooperation.

Another interesting fact is the gradual **professionalisation of the teams** working on the implementation of decentralised cooperation policies. This is a fundamental issue which is strongly linked to the quality and effectiveness of the strategies being promoted. Apart from their commitment, the professionals working in this area must have the appropriate skills. It is also important for them to work in a framework of adequate professional stability. This is not always easy, especially in Latin America, where the tendency continues to be to dismiss teams in the wake of political changes.

Within the framework of their competences, local and regional governments have the **democratic legitimacy** to establish the priorities that need to be addressed. This is part of their responsibility, as is efficient and transparent administration of the budgets for which they are responsible, and accountability for the projects they undertake. However, they cannot do this in isolation, without taking into account the needs, interests and aspirations of the other actors working in the territory and in partner territories. This is why it is essential to implement **advanced governance mechanisms that enable the involvement of all the actors that need to be involved in a logic of collaboration and co-responsibility.**

Making these mechanisms work, making them effective and facilitating collaborative relationships, co-creation and shared responsibility is a major challenge. Transcending symbolic measures and political correctness, and granting the actors they work with power and effective capacity to operate is not an easy task. It requires a great deal of generosity, leadership and political vision.

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57. https://data.oecd.org/oda/net-oda.htm
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid.

As discussed later in this chapter, there are significant experiences of participation that need to be leveraged, as important lessons can be learned from them. This particularly applies to the relationship with certain stakeholders. The involvement of what could be termed traditional actors, and in particular civil society organisations and more recently universities, does not create resistance and is firmly established. However, defining areas of work is more complex, albeit essential, with other actors. Involving social movements and activism can be very appealing to some governments, but their lack of an institutional framework complicates matters. A similar problem applies to the profit motive, which places the private sector's participation on a red line that is generally difficult to cross.

4.1.2. The need to move beyond tensions with national governments

The logical aspiration for local or regional autonomy often means that national governments are not taken into account when decentralised cooperation strategies are defined and implemented. However, they have a very noticeable impact on the international development cooperation policies implemented by subnational (local or regional) governments. This is either because of their capacity to define the regulatory framework for external action and international cooperation in which local and regional governments operate; because of the national programmes to stimulate decentralised cooperation that they often design; or the resources in other countries that they can provide.

> "The work done by decentralised cooperation at territorial level must have a political impact at national level. It is necessary to influence national institutions in order to achieve legislative reforms that will permit the transformations desired."
>
> **Daniel García**. DEMUCA Advisor.
>
> *Workshops. (VIII Conference of the Decentralised Cooperation Observatory).*

The relationship between decentralised cooperation and national governments should be approached from a two-pronged perspective. On the one hand, there is a need for political advocacy; this is to ensure that national governments create the most appropriate regulatory, institutional and operational environments for subnational governments to undertake policies in the area of international development cooperation. On the other hand, it is essential that the relationship between the different spheres of government – local, regional and national – are based on collaboration and complementarity.

Advocacy strategies should focus on:

- Improving the regulatory framework within which decentralised cooperation operates. Ensuring that it has clear and well-articulated competencies.
- Informing national public policies on foreign action and international development cooperation.
- Promoting national programmes to support decentralised cooperation.
- Ensuring the provision of effective multilevel governance mechanisms.

It is important to reinforce the capacities of national associations of local governments, and the spaces for political dialogue among decentralised cooperation actors.

A fragmented engagement with the national government may weaken the position of subnational governments. However, engagement by municipal associations should not limit direct engagement between the national government and the main actors in decentralised cooperation, whether they are large cities or regions with legislative powers. The diversity of local governments – which range from metropolitan cities to small rural municipalities, by way of medium-sized towns and all types of territorial bodies – is in this sense a complex challenge that must be addressed and resolved.

However, in addition to influencing national agendas, seeking alliances with central governments and promoting collaborative, synergistic action that enables complementary strategies to be developed must be a priority. A priority for national governments, which are most able to define the rules of the game, but also for decentralised cooperation. **This collaboration must take place within a framework of institutional loyalty, in which each level of government operates on the basis of its (often shared) competence, and which makes working on the basis of a non-hierarchical approach possible, prioritising principles such as subsidiarity.**

The absence of a space for dialogue is often a factor that hinders effective collaboration. This absence can be explained by the lack of political will on the part of national governments, which are mistrustful of the participation of subnational governments in external action in general and in international cooperation in particular. It can also be explained by the excessive zeal of local and regional governments which feel that their autonomy is threatened, especially when different political parties are involved.

Despite all the difficulties, support must continue for collaboration that is crucial in two directions. First, the contributions of decentralised cooperation enable national governments to implement international cooperation policies that are better contextualised and linked to citizens' interests; second, support from national governments can enhance decentralised cooperation strategies and their capacity to carry out effective transformations in the territories in which they operate.

4.1.3. Relaunching partnerships with international organisations

The significant development of decentralised cooperation in recent decades cannot be understood without taking into account the commitment of international organisations such as the European Union and various agencies within the United Nations system. However, this commitment seems to have diminished in recent years, and it is no longer as robust as it once was, which is leading to the gradual disappearance of some programmes that were central to understanding decentralised cooperation as we understand it today.

The European Commission has encouraged, facilitated and supported decentralised cooperation links between European and Latin American local governments for years. It has done so by means of what could be termed **induced decentralised cooperation programmes.** These programmes have not only facilitated the development of relations between local governments in Europe and partner countries, but have also fostered other alliances (in civil society, academia, the private sector, etc.); they have funded the

exchange of experiences, knowledge transfers and the development of solutions to shared problems with a strong innovative dimension. However, they have done so within the framework of a political agenda defined by international organisations rather than by local governments and their networks, with all that this entails from the point of view of appropriation of the initiatives undertaken.

The three phases of the URBAL Programme was an essential tool not only for reinforcing bi-regional cooperation between local governments but above all, for improving the quality of public policies promoted in key areas such as democratic governance, gender equality, social cohesion, local economic development and the fight against climate change. URBAL was based on networking and its numerous projects had proven results, including initiatives such as the EU-LA Decentralised Cooperation Observatory, which remains an essential benchmark, and a valuable repository of studies and research that have highlighted the significant capacity for territorial innovation in both regions.

Together with URBAL, which concluded in 2013, the global Thematic Programme for Civil Society Organisations and Local Authorities has in recent years financed bilateral partnerships between the major Latin American and European cities, and multilateral projects including the Euro-Latin American Alliance for Cooperation Between Cities (ALLAs)[60], which has been a benchmark in urban internationalisation policies. Likewise, the International Urban and Regional Cooperation Programme (IURC) promotes city-city cooperation. It is limited to some countries in the region (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Peru), although unlike those above, it does not have funds to finance the implementation of pilot projects.

However, it seems that the scenario will change significantly with the launch of the new Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDCI) that the European Union is to implement in the 2021-2027 budget period. The European institutions have reached an agreement to mainstream the issue and allocate at least 500 million euros to local and regional governments in partner countries around the world. These funds will be channelled through national and regional programming instruments. However, taking into account that the national programmes are implemented through the national authorities, and that there are no regional programmes focusing specifically on urban areas, and that the end of the thematic programme for local authorities has been announced, it may be difficult to mobilise European funds to carry out cooperation projects between cities in Europe and Latin America in the coming years.

In this context, local governments and their representative networks and associations must continue to strengthen their links and lobby the European institutions to include decentralised cooperation among its priorities once again. Viable options could include strengthening the IURC programme, focusing it on financing pilot projects and rolling it out to the entire region; opening up the new editions of regional programmes such as

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60. https://proyectoallas.net/

EUROsociAL+[61] or EUROCLIMA+[62] to direct participation by cities; and creating mechanisms to facilitate the link between national programmes and decentralised cooperation. Programmes such as Interreg Europe[63] could be an effective source of inspiration for all of these issues.

Meanwhile, in the United Nations system, some programmes have played a key role in improving the quality of decentralised cooperation strategies and their configuration as public policy. In specific terms, programmes such as the UNDP ART Initiative have been crucial in establishing decentralised cooperation in the promotion of sustainable territorial development strategies based on a comprehensive and inclusive approach. However, after operating for nearly 20 years, and obtaining significant results, the programme is no longer operational, and has been absorbed by other UNDP units.

There is some concern about this perceived decline in support from some international institutions. Decentralised cooperation remains a dynamic, innovative practice with proven results and enormous potential for improving the quality of the public policies implemented in both regions. Weakening it may be detrimental to the required empowerment of local governments at a time when they must play a key role in promoting strategies to move towards climate neutrality, the digital transition and the fight against all types of inequality, and on this issue there is consensus.

4.2. The link with civil society organisations: a consolidated relationship in need of rethinking

The link between decentralised cooperation and civil society organisations is extensive, diverse and complex; it is consolidated and is beyond doubt. It is a link that is expressed in very different ways, depending on the country and the context. In some countries, such as Spain and Italy, it mainly involves formulas for indirect cooperation. Elsewhere, civil society organisations are linked primarily through direct cooperation initiatives, which may be traditional North-South, South-South, or triangular.

Over the years, some European countries have established an important network of organisations specialising in international cooperation. What is termed "the sector" is made up of organisations whose main mission is to contribute to the (sustainable) development of the countries in the global South, and they work within strong partnerships with decentralised cooperation. The provision of funds by local and regional governments has led to the territorialisation of this fabric, and has made it a key part of the cooperation strategies of many local and regional governments.

These civil society organisations specialising in international cooperation have been working to maintain the public commitment to global justice for years. They have also consolidated specialised teams able to mobilise funds and resources, which have played an important role in supporting their counterparts in the South. However, their

61. https://eurosocial.eu/

62. https://euroclimaplus.org/

63. https://www.interregeurope.eu/

level of professionalisation has developed at the same time as the public has to a certain extent become detached (which they are not responsible for) and has led to some degree of patrimonialisation of the funds that local and regional governments allocate to international development cooperation.

Today, some of these organisations are specialised and highly professionalised agencies that do not necessarily work on the basis of close contact with citizens. And those that maintain this connection, usually at the local level, have a more limited capacity to work beyond undertaking small-scale projects which do not always have the potential to bring about the transformations needed by the communities in which their partners operate.

However, in most countries, the link with civil society is not channelled through indirect cooperation, but by adding it to the partnerships established between the territories and their governments. In this area, they are expected to provide resources, the ability to mobilise citizens, and knowledge of their local environments and the contexts in which they work. Their role is considered essential for informing decentralised cooperation strategies, in order to implement programmed actions more efficiently and to ensure greater appropriation by the beneficiary population.

> "It is very difficult for municipal actors to engage in a dialogue with civil society in the territory. Local elected officials do not like to sit down with organisations that call them into question. This multi-stakeholder coordination is a process that must involve mutual education."
>
> **Héctor Aguirre**. Manager. Lempa River Trinational Commonwealth
>
> *Workshops. (VIII Conference of the Decentralised Cooperation Observatory).*

In these cases, the participation of civil society is not limited to non-governmental organisations in the development sector, but instead goes much further. It encompasses the vast network of organisations working in areas as diverse as inequalities and social protection for the most vulnerable, gender equality, the fight against climate change and the ethical and humanist dimension of technological disruptions.

> "Strengthening civil society wherever we want to undertake cooperation. Making it part of decentralised cooperation alliances. Involving the social fabric. When you involve different sectors, it's like making a rope that gets stronger the more strands you add to it. Only local governments have the capillarity to convey the information to each neighbourhood. That is transformative power."
>
> **Vicente Domingo**. Valencia World Centre for Sustainable Urban Food (CEMAS). Spain.
>
> *Workshops. (VIII Conference of the Decentralised Cooperation Observatory).*

However, unlocking the full potential of the link between civil society and decentralised cooperation strategies to a large extent depends on defining appropriate channels to ensure that collaboration. These channels must facilitate their involvement in the different phases of the process for the formulation, implementation and evaluation of those strategies. They must go beyond complying with requirements linked to good

governance and be effective conduits for implementing more effective strategies that are adapted to citizens' real needs; strategies which aim to have concrete and measurable results and impacts.

4.3. How can non-institutionalised social movements be involved?

The context of multiple crises described in this document is creating new forms of collective response. This response is a consequence of the discontent of important segments of society with the system and its impacts, in the form of inequalities, discrimination, authoritarianism and degradation of the climate and the planet. Bringing together these movements may be an opportunity for decentralised cooperation to connect with some of the issues that citizens are most concerned about.

Indeed, in recent years movements such as the Indignados in Spain, the Chilean revolt that led to the country's constituent process, Black Lives Matter in the United States and Me Too and Fridays for Future worldwide, have succeeded in setting the political agenda, including at local level. These movements are the focus not only for discontent, but also for proposals, resources, knowledge, experiences and desires aimed at defining solutions to the problems they condemn.

> "There is clearly a challenge in reaching out to actors who are not institutionalised and do not want to be, such as activists, social movements, influencers, migrants, etc. We have to invent ways to engage with them through experimental and creative communication, and create safe spaces for encounters and dialogues where we can meet."
>
> **Pepa Martínez**. **Director of Lafede.cat**
>
> *Workshops. (VIII Conference of the Decentralised Cooperation Observatory).*

The difficulty lies in establishing channels for dialogue with movements that are by definition spontaneous and non-institutionalised. Despite having figureheads and clear leaders, they tend to shy away from the organic dimension that the system establishes for considering solutions. This dimension should be a guarantee of transparency, but in an excessively bureaucratic format it turns public participation into an ineffective gesture.

Determining how to approach these movements is a challenge for decentralised cooperation and a need/opportunity to be connected to the public agenda. A good way to achieve it is undoubtedly through civil society organisations that often work within the framework of these movements, assisting their operations (campaigns, events, communication strategies, etc.). However, governments and decentralised cooperation must approach dialogue with them in a different way, which is more assertive and oriented towards active listening, and less hierarchical. This is not always easy for institutions which are designed based on hierarchical and bureaucratic frameworks of reference.

The focus is on creating experimental and creative forms of communication, and on the need to create safe spaces for meeting and dialogue which enable these actors to

engage in an effective and non-subordinate way. Learning to work on a coordinated basis in these spaces is a learning process that involves both governments and activists.

4.4. The link with the knowledge sector

Together with civil society organisations, the link between decentralised cooperation and the knowledge sector, which may be universities, research centres and think tanks, is subject to little resistance. Universities are crucial for training professionals in the international development cooperation sector and for educating citizens who are aware of the challenges facing the planet and the injustices taking place in it.

There is also consensus that partnerships with the knowledge sector are essential for enhancing the quality of the strategies undertaken by local and regional governments in a wide range of areas linked to sustainable development. They have knowledge, data and information to build evidence, a strong capacity for innovation, technological resources and contact with the scientific community; This is all essential for establishing more effective solutions to the challenges shared by the territories and actors involved in decentralised cooperation initiatives.

> "Training within local governments is critical. In Chile, those responsible for cooperation often do not have the appropriate skills. There is a need for close cooperation between universities and the government to train civil servants. Malpractice, even if it is rare, has damaging effects on cooperation as a whole."
>
> **Paulina Astroza**. Expert. Professor of International Law. University of Concepción. Chile.
> *Workshops. (VIII Conference of the Decentralised Cooperation Observatory).*

However, partnerships between local governments and the knowledge sector are not only positive for the former, but also bring significant added value to the latter. Indeed, contact with the reality of decentralised cooperation and the solutions and innovations that come from the local level improves the quality of the knowledge generated in centres specialising in development and other disciplines. In addition, partnerships between territories are an ideal channel for fostering alliances between universities and research centres.

4.5. Philanthropies and the private sector

The link between the private sector and decentralised cooperation, and with international cooperation as a whole, is undoubtedly the issue that leads to the most disagreements among all the actors involved in development. There is no doubt that the productive sector can contribute very important assets to cooperative relationships between territories. These assets take the form of resources, technologies, solutions and a wide range of knowledge, experience, data and information that is the result of economic activity and which can be crucial in improving the quality and impact of the strategies promoted.

Involving companies and business associations in the dynamics of decentralised cooperation can help build bridges for business exchanges, and foster trade between territories. This has many positive consequences in terms of job creation and economic opportunities.

It is equally true that in a profoundly unequal world, the business and economic opportunities that can arise in the context of these exchanges usually, if not always, favour the companies and professionals from the countries with the most resources in the global North.

> "…not enough has been said about private actors. The new philanthropy is willing to pay taxes as long as they're not subject to rules, and this new philanthropy has a lot of economic resources. But is that money going to work to solve public problems? We don't realise that private resources, which come from individual fortunes (High Net Worth Individuals), are playing a fundamental role in this shocking accumulation of wealth. This is a new actor in cooperation, and many of the traditional recipients of cooperation will be interested in asking them for funding, especially in contexts with limited resources."
>
> **Eugene Zapata**. Director for Latin America and the Caribbean at the Resilient Cities Network. Founding member of Phare Territorios Globales.
>
> *Workshops. (VIII Conference of the Decentralised Cooperation Observatory).*

This is precisely there where the red lines and the resistance to private sector participation in decentralised cooperation are located. Linking this type of cooperation, which is generally based on assumptions of solidarity aimed at transforming traditional power relations between North and South, to for-profit institutions, which are by nature oriented towards seeking business opportunities, is a complex undertaking. It is so complex that no matter how much debate takes place, there are few successful experiences.

However, apart from companies in the strictest sense, there are other private institutions linked to the productive sector that are not for profit and with links to decentralised cooperation that should be explored. First, there are business associations promoting entrepreneurship and facilitating trade and business exchanges; then there are philanthropic institutions, with increasingly close links to international cooperation and to addressing urban and territorial challenges; finally, there are institutions linked to the social and solidarity-based economy.

Business associations promoting entrepreneurship, trade and business in its many forms can be very interesting partners for some initiatives and strategies linked to local and regional economic development. Indeed, there is a long history of linking decentralised cooperation initiatives between Latin America and Europe to chambers of commerce and business and professional associations in various sectors. They can all contribute experience and knowledge, and act as a bridge for promoting exchanges.

Philanthropic organisations have emerged strongly in the field of international cooperation and urban and territorial solutions in recent years. They provide financial support for very important projects in key areas for cities and territories, such as the fight against climate change, resilience, migration and digitalisation. Some of the world's leading philanthropists have created platforms for cities to exchange of experiences and knowledge, and to address solutions to shared problems together. Platforms such as C40[64], which is supported by Bloomberg Philanthropies, the Resilient Cities Network[65], which

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64. https://www.c40.org/
65. https://resilientcitiesnetwork.org/

was funded by the Rockefeller Foundation for many years, and the Mayors Migration Council[66], which receives support from George Soros' Open Society Foundations, among other institutions, are very good examples.

The support of these platforms for cities and territories has undoubtedly placed critical issues on the agenda, and has contributed to the development of highly innovative solutions. These solutions are generally facilitated by the multinational private sector working in close partnership with them. The basic problem is that these organisations are more oriented towards providing solutions that mitigate the impact of the major challenges they face than towards introducing structural, systemic changes and transformations that can lead to solving them.

4.6. Social and solidarity-based economy

Finally, the institutions of what is termed the social and solidarity-based economy are the organisations in the productive sector that are subject to the broadest consensus regarding their link with decentralised cooperation. Their non-profit status places them in a privileged position which has given them a long history with very interesting experiences from which to draw lessons.

Decentralised cooperation and promotion of the social and solidarity-based economy are two local public policies that share common approaches to the development model and common areas of work, including education for social transformation and global justice, linking the local and the global spheres, active participation and citizens' co-responsibility. Both policies also share the objectives of reducing inequalities and ending their structural causes, are oriented towards greater equality of opportunities, are based on ethical, supportive and collaborative principles, and are committed to reinforcing improved relational and democratic public management with territorial stakeholders.

It is common for some decentralised cooperation initiatives to aim at supporting public policies for the social and solidarity-based economy for this reason. These include the support from the Cooperation Office of Barcelona Provincial Council for direct cooperation projects in Latin America aimed at strengthening local public policies in the social and solidarity-based economy. Indeed, since 2017 the Barcelona Provincial Council has been supporting the project entitled "**Inclusive Territorial Economic Development (DETI): cross-border local public policy for the economic development of the Trifinio Region, Central America**" led by the Lempa River Trinational Commonwealth in partnership with the Association of Cayaguanca Municipalities and the Cacahuatique Norte Intermunicipal Association. The objective is to create a local cross-border policy for inclusive territorial economic development in the region, at both the overall and municipal levels. Social and solidarity economy policies have been consolidated in the region (Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador) as a result of the various phases of the Project, which have developed local cooperative initiatives, rural community tourism routes and green and fair trade networks.

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66. https://www.mayorsmigrationcouncil.org/

Another example is the support from the same office for the **Economic development and attention to vulnerable groups** project undertaken in Ecuador since 2021, led by the Consortium of Provincial Governments of Ecuador (CONGOPE) and the Terranueva Foundation, which aims to design a provincial economic model to enhance food sovereignty and security and to promote the territory's popular and solidarity economy as a means to achieve local economic regeneration and to define a model of public, private and community governance that contributes to the sustainable development of the provinces of Ecuador.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

As is evident throughout this study, like their peers in other parts of the world, European and Latin American local governments face the dilemma of dealing with a highly uncertain and complex scenario. This is defined on the one hand, by the effects of various global crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the geopolitical tensions arising from the war in Ukraine; and on the other, the transformative and disruptive potential of the climate and digital transitions. These crises and transitions have merely aggravated the structural shortcomings of a model of production, consumption and coexistence that is socially and environmentally unsustainable, and which has enhanced vulnerabilities, inequalities and injustices and endangered the social contract. This is all taking place against a backdrop of rising nationalism, populism and authoritarianism in which the existence of democracy is at stake.

There is a strong consensus on how local governments are dealing with this scenario involving multiple crises and transitions. Local governments' commitment to people and their environment is leading them to create responses and solutions that are heavily adapted to local situations; as well as responding to the needs, interests and aspirations of the citizens and actors in their territories. However, there is also consensus concerning the limitations and barriers they face when defining those responses and solutions; the obstacles are imposed by inadequate regulatory and institutional frameworks, and the lack of resources and authority with which they work in many countries.

In this context, decentralised cooperation has a key role to play in reinforcing the ability of European and Latin American local governments and institutions to address the complexity of the challenges they face. This will enable them to unlock the transformative potential of the transitions and mitigate the impacts of the crises and threats that are endangering the social contract and democracy; to contribute to shaping socio-economic models that curb unlimited growth and inequalities, which are sustainable and which place the agenda of rights and democracy at the centre of their actions.

By way of conclusion, we offer a series of recommendations that arose from the collective debate that took place during the VIII Annual Conference, which proposed a rethinking of decentralised cooperation in a context of multiple transitions.

Recommendation 1. A fair and transformative political agenda
Promote horizontal political dialogue between European and Latin American local governments **in order to define a new political agenda for decentralised cooperation** that addresses the transitions and transformations required by the context of

multiple crises in a fair, responsible and socially committed manner. This agenda must be comprehensive and inclusive, and aimed at addressing the challenges shared by local governments in the two regions and strengthening public policies with the greatest transformative potential.

Recommendation 2. An agenda for rights and a feminist perspective

Transcend the welfare-based approach, and **make the rights agenda a cornerstone of decentralised cooperation strategies to combat inequalities and poverty.** Local government policies should not only help the most vulnerable groups, but must also be focused on generating structural changes in key areas including housing, the integration of immigrants, gender equality, employment and the care economy. A **feminist perspective** must be adopted that comprehensively addresses the inequalities and gaps created by an unjust and unsustainable socio-economic model.

Recommendation 3. Climate justice

Place **climate justice** at the centre of decentralised cooperation strategies with a special focus on the **new forms of inequality and exclusion created by the green transition.** There is an urgent need to reduce CO_2 emissions, decarbonise the economy, adapt societies to climate change and mitigate its effects by means of policies in areas such as urban mobility, renewable energies, access to water and sanitation, and food security. However, these policies must aim to prevent and mitigate the negative impacts of the climate transition, and create mechanisms to repair the irreversible damage and losses caused by climate change.

Recommendation 4. Ethical digital transition

Contribute to European and Latin American local governments' **placing ethics and the rights agenda at the heart of their digitisation strategies** through decentralised cooperation. They must define how to combat the inequalities and gaps that are created, and how to protect rights in a heavily deregulated sector. Strengthening the powers of local governments in this area is crucial, as is reinforcing the existing platforms for political advocacy and knowledge transfer.

Although on the one hand technology and the digital transition can help cities to provide better services, on the other they create complex challenges such as the digital divide and algorithmic inequalities, which have the potential to create distortions in key areas such as housing, mobility and local commerce, threatening employment and personal (privacy) rights. Meanwhile, the impact of digitalisation on climate is a challenge with dimensions that are yet to be determined.

Recommendation 5. A different economy for different development

Help local governments to **deploy the full potential of fairer, more ethical and sustainable economic models.** The prevailing economic model, based primarily on speculation, has proven itself to be unjust and unsustainable, and has a strong impact on local conditions. New forms of production are emerging to address this issue, such as the so-

cial and solidarity economy, which are heavily inclusive of the societies in which they operate, oriented towards the most vulnerable groups, and unambiguously contribute to social cohesion.

However, despite the major role that they should play in the future, there are barriers to these forms of production, especially in the regulatory framework, which limit their potential. For this reason, decentralised cooperation must promote political advocacy processes aimed at bringing about changes in regulatory systems, especially in the area of public procurement, by supporting social clauses and the protection of human rights and the environment.

Recommendation 6. Decentralisation and local autonomy

Restore the agenda of decentralisation and local autonomy by orienting decentralised cooperation towards **care for democracy** by empowering local governments and actors, from three main perspectives: a) giving local governments the resources and authority to address citizens' needs, interests and aspirations; b) promoting the "**right to territory**" and encouraging political advocacy strategies that foster regulatory frameworks which guarantee clarity of powers, sufficient resources and adequate collaboration between different levels of government, and between them and the actors working on the ground and the public; c) supporting accountability as an essential cornerstone of democracy addressing issues of corruption. This is a key factor in restoring citizens' trust in the local public sphere, strengthening democracy, caring for it, and counteracting the spread of populist and authoritarian narratives and formulas.

Recommendation 7. Incorporate a broader framework of coherence

Address the multiple challenges facing the territories based on **a framework of coherence** that seeks means of administration based on the **logic of complementarity, horizontality and trust**, incorporating the **principle of transparency and collaborative logic, co-creation, co-responsibility and accountability** of all the actors involved. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is an essential roadmap due to its holistic and integral perspective on development, as are other approaches such as rights and the promotion of democracy, policy coherence for sustainable development and global justice, and the territorial approach to sustainable development. All of these constitute the essential foundations of the political agenda for decentralised cooperation.

Recommendation 8. Bridge the gap between discourse and practice: assessment of types of decentralised cooperation

Decentralised cooperation is currently expressed in a wide-ranging, diverse and complex series of formats and types of intervention that fall within approaches that are not always harmonious. Despite the remarkable evolution and transition from the classic, vertically structured welfare-based models to horizontal models based on the logic of building partnerships between peers, there is a consensus that this evolution has taken place more in narrative than in practice, in academic constructs and in models drawn from knowledge, than in the real situation of local and regional governments. The

assessment of types of cooperation from a transformative perspective must avoid the imposition of bureaucratic and functional logics on policies, and reinforce more effective decentralised cooperation strategies that give the agenda of rights, democracy and local governance a central role.

Recommendation 9. Support horizontal cooperation

Support horizontal types of direct cooperation and those with the most transformative potential. Promote processes for the capitalisation of good practices, knowledge transfer mechanisms and training instruments. Promote technical cooperation, especially within the framework of South-South cooperation, as well as multilateral action mechanisms, highlighting the work done within the framework of the ephemeral networks and coalitions. Take advantage of the opportunities offered by some multilateral organisations and philanthropic organisations based on the political agendas defined at the territorial level.

Recommendation 10. Commitment to Education for Global Justice (EGJ)

Emphasise **education for global justice as a practice within decentralised cooperation aimed at making citizens, social movements and civil society** in Europe and Latin America part of a critical reflection on the major challenges and transformations that the planet requires. Unleash the full potential of culture, science and technology as accelerators of social change and transformation, and enhance the links and feedback between decentralised cooperation and the various types of cultural, scientific and technological cooperation.

Recommendation 11. Strengthen the legal, financial and technical framework for decentralised cooperation

Apart from sub-national governments, which are the central figures in decentralised cooperation, other spheres of government have a considerable impact on relations between territories. **Partnership with national governments must be encouraged to promote legislative processes aimed at expanding the regulatory frameworks** that legitimise decentralised cooperation and regulate its practices, and foster the implementation of **national financial and technical instruments that strengthen decentralised cooperation.**

Recommendation 12. Call for EU support for EU-LA Decentralised Cooperation

Call for support for decentralised cooperation within the framework of political dialogue between the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean, and especially to achieve greater support from the European Union, which has been a benchmark in the promotion of decentralised cooperation between the two regions. However, there is now evidence that this support is fading. It is therefore necessary to foster a **fresh impetus for systems supporting cooperation between local governments in the two regions**, both bilaterally and in networks, within the framework of the regional programmes defined during the implementation of the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework through the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDCI).

Recommendation 13. Support a multi-stakeholder vision for inclusive decentralised cooperation

Rethink the relationships between decentralised cooperation and civil society, promoting the link with the partnerships that are defined between territories on the basis of **collaborative formulas and co-responsibility**. The added value of civil society must go far beyond carrying out specific projects in partner countries, and be geared towards enhancing the partnerships that are established within and between territories. Promote the participation of the third sector, as well as the social and climate activism movements that are today the conduits for a large proportion of citizens' concerns in both Latin America and Europe.

Recommendation 14. Enhanced partnerships with the knowledge sector

Foster the relationship between decentralised cooperation and the knowledge sector by linking it to the partnerships that are built between territories. Its contribution is crucial for training professionals in the international development cooperation sector and for educating citizens who are aware of the challenges facing the planet and the injustices taking place in it. However, this relationship is not limited to training and education. It is also vital for improving the quality of local government policies. The full potential of this partnership should be deployed to promote strategies that are more informed and tailored to the local situations in which they are implemented.

Recommendation 15. Establish ethical limits to private sector partnership

The link between decentralised cooperation and the private sector leads to disagreements, and the need to **establish clear boundaries on its vocation for profit and to place environmental and labour demands outside the extractive approach of the market**. The work being done by philanthropic organisations, which are very active in the urban environment, must be analysed and understood from a critical perspective. This is in addition to moving towards increased **collaboration with the social and solidarity economy sector** in implementing the necessary relationship between decentralised cooperation and local productive sectors.

Recommendations for the Observatory

Some recommendations specifically addressed to the Observatory were also expressed during the VIII Conference. We have included these in our work objectives, and will progressively endeavour to respond to them in the planning of activities.

- Contribute to the systematisation and collection of data on decentralised cooperation, as no initiative or institution has done so since the Observatory stopped doing so after its time as a European project.
- Support the culture of assessment and measurement of the impact of existing types of cooperation and their instruments.
- Epistemological reflection on the types of cooperation, since it is not the types that are important, but the emancipatory nature of cooperation.
- Rethink the types of cooperation because we are constrained by regulatory frameworks, and the current instruments are limited. Create creative models and new formats.

- Support training in decentralised cooperation for elected officials.
- Support education for global justice as a core aspect of cooperation policy.
- If the Observatory adopts the agenda proposed in the discussion workshops, it should examine forms of shared work, with multi-level articulation, co-governance and the establishment of bioregions.

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