



The Messages

*The Irreversible Internationalization
of Local Governments*



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The Irreversible Internationalization of Local Governments

1.

International action of local governments: Not one step back

The emergence on the international scene of local and regional governments, as well as that of their networks, is a process that is rapidly being extended and generalized. Nowadays, a local government cannot fully exercise its jurisdictions, render public services, promote its productive capacity or develop the model of city or territory it desires to drive, without entering into a dynamic of relationships with actors from abroad. International relations today are, for any city, municipality or territory, a vital space of learning and of opportunity.

2.

International action is not an end, but a means for advancing the territory and its population

The end goal of any international action in which a local government participates must be to improve the living conditions of the population that inhabits its territory. The governments of cities and local authorities must ensure that their foreign relations contribute towards making their territory more inclusive, more sustainable and more attractive. International initiatives and interchanges must guarantee concrete results and impacts.

3.

The legal and institutional framework for the international action of local governments needs revising

In most countries, the legal and institutional frameworks in force do not adequately reflect the reality of local governments' actions abroad and therefore need to be revised. Although in actual fact this has not impeded the practice, the improvement of legal provisions is necessary in order to provide international action with greater legal security and guarantee in turn its sustainability vis-à-vis changes in local and national administration. An adequate legal framework could facilitate the establishment of agreements and covenants with foreign partners.

4.

In territorial internationalization, coordination among the different orders of government is desirable

There is a need for favorable conditions to be generated for the international actions of local governments to take place in an environment of collaboration with other orders of government, the legislative powers and with international organizations. Non-hierarchical mechanisms are required to guarantee the coordination and coherence among said groups, at the same time maintaining respect for the autonomy of the local governments. A proper linkage will allow for urban and territorial issues to be incorporated in global agendas.

5.

From reactivity and improvisation to a public policy of strategic internationalization

In order to offer real added value and have perspectives of impact and sustainability, the international relations of a city or territory need to be situated in an explicit strategic framework. It is important that international activity move from isolated, spontaneous and pivoted actions around concrete projects, to a public policy linked to the specificity of the territory and its strategic planning. Internationalization must no longer be the product of the personal whim or afterthought of a mayor or authority in turn. As any public policy, this one requires adequate resources in order for it to be developed professionally and efficiently. For this to occur, it is necessary to have offices and trained personnel, technical resources and financing, as well as mechanisms for assessment of its results and impacts. The professionalization of exterior actions also demands that the different areas or departments of the government have established spaces and channels for internal communications and coordination so as to avoid fragmentation and duplication. International relations in a local government must be an area of cross-sections covering the entire administration.

6.

The international relations of a territory must be built together with its people

A local government cannot be the only actor in the internationalization of a territory. In order to be able to transform its international action into public policy, it must integrate and articulate the different actors (civil society, opinion leaders, academia and the private sector) operating in the territory. It is indispensable that the local government develop and maintain spaces of dialogue for multiple actors on international issues so as to provide the process with permanence, legitimacy and sustainability. For this to happen there is a need not only for mechanisms of citizen participation in the environment of the internationalization, but also for adequate instruments of linkage of actors in concrete projects, of transparency and of accountability. Assuming this focus implies recognizing internationalization to be an issue of the public agenda and therefore an exercise of democratic governance. Even though the voice of local governments is sounding increasingly loud on the international scene, the echo of its message is not yet being clearly received by its citizens. No strategy of internationalization will be successful if the population is not informed and made aware of the benefits it brings with it. It is necessary to have the key messages reach the principal actors, build alliances and generate confidence. The new information technologies and social networks are tools of great potential for increasing public awareness of and reporting on the importance of cities and local governments in the world.

7.

International action is much more than cooperation and support for development

For many years the international relations of local governments was understood to be and was limited to so-called "decentralized cooperation", that is to say, the relations of local government to local government channeled first and foremost through projects. But this is merely one of many modalities of action abroad. Thus, today twinning, decentralized cooperation, actions known as diplomacy in cities and other issues related to international action exist simultaneously that surpass the initial vision of cooperation for development. In the catalogue of international proceedings today there are initiatives for peace, local policies on migratory issues, programs for economic promotion, tools for advancing territorial attractiveness in matters of tourism, sports, investments, events, culture and talent, as well as concrete responses in cases of natural emergencies or catastrophes.

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8.

More than competing, local governments must cooperate in a horizontal, solidary and mutually beneficial fashion

Relationships between the local governments of different countries ought to be more in line with cooperation than competition. Even though some local institutions do make efforts to attract investments and visitors to their territories, there is much more space and potential in a relationship of cooperation based on horizontal connections and reciprocal solidarity. The interchange of experiences and sound practices and the construction of alliances for the strengthening of local public policies are very rich sources of mutual learning. However, over and above the exchange, the qualitative contribution of the link between territories must be valued, above all when agreeing to joint proceedings that result in concrete changes in local conditions. Networking is very appropriate for this. The authorities, civil servants, technicians and experts in the local governments can derive great advantages from working in virtual communities that allow them to exchange information and pool their efforts on behalf of common causes.

9.

The advocacy of local governments is reinforced via networking

Local governments are gaining ever greater recognition on the international scene as key actors in processes of development. However, their capacity to influence global agendas is still limited. For this reason they are making important efforts today with regard to lobbying and advocacy actions so as to gain ground, obtain visibility and increasingly be considered actors on the international scene, particularly before the United Nations system. A city or territory on its own, regardless of how large, has a limited capacity to influence the global agenda. Notwithstanding, to be an actor in the global agenda it is not enough to be "recognized" or "listened to" by others, it requires having alliances that allow for the generating of sufficient critical mass to participate in and have an influence on the making of decisions on topics that affect them all, for which it is indispensable that networking take place.

10.

International action for more attractive, more inclusive and more sustainable territories

Given the urban challenges the planet is faced with, international action, cooperation among territories and networking allow for the dissemination and startup of sound practices in the building up of more attractive, more inclusive and more sustainable territories. In this regard, cities and local governments, in order to be attractive, must surpass the narrow vision of "marketing" and advertising as means of positioning themselves in the world. More than a slogan or a brand, a territory builds its attractiveness based on a model and based on a collective identity. Across the board, sustainability is not a label. We are betting on local governments and a committed and active citizenry in the promotion of social and environmental justice, where culture is a fundamental pillar of this development. In light of the economic, social, cultural and environmental challenges, emphasis must be placed on the construction of active citizenship and the participation of all the actors in the territory, deepening the exercise of democracy, equal treatment and Right to the City.

11.

The international action should serve to build the model of territory we are dreaming of

The future of the planet is being played out today in its cities and urban areas. Thus, the international action of local governments is an instrument for stimulating critical thinking and public debate vis-à-vis poverty, inequalities, social exclusion, as well as the challenges of sustainability and of respect for cultural diversity.

The new urban millennium requires a new territorial model that banks on a truly more sustainable, inclusive, fair, environmentally sustainable, multicultural and egalitarian development between men and women, that guarantees the Right to the City for all persons. If the international action of local governments does not contribute to driving this model, the effort will have been in vain. The international action of local governments will be useful only if it allows for opportunities for ensuring a dignified lifestyle for its population.

12.***The strategic internationalization of the cities in Latin America:
an unresolved task***

Although Latin America is going through an accelerated process of urbanization, it has not yet been accompanied by the internationalization of its local governments. Some cities have managed to stand out, but most do not yet have policies in place for building strategic and long term international relations. There is much potential for improving the linkage between the local governments and the networks of cities, such as Mercociudades, Redcisur, FLACMA and the AL-LAs project. The celebration of the Habitat III Conference in Quito provides an opportunity in this regard. For the internationalization of its local governments, Latin America has Europe for an ally, particularly Spain and France, with whom relationships of historic cooperation between sub-national authorities have been building up. The AL-LAs project has managed to consolidate this relationship by providing its members with concrete tools for fortifying its international connections and sharing the experience with governments, municipalities and local authorities on both continents.

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This document summarizes the main findings and ideas that the cities, local governments and member networks of the AL-LAs project accumulated as lessons learned in the course of the two years of the project's life. It brings together the messages derived from the training workshops, the Collection of Workbooks for the Internationalization of Cities, numerous articles, eBooks, webinars, actions on behalf of in-person and distance training, debates over coffee with AL-LAs in the on-line community of experts, sundry publications, local multiple actor consultations and advocacy campaigns, as well as the presence and participation of AL-LAs in dozens of international seminars, forums, congresses, summits and conferences.

AL-LAs General Coordination



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