Public decentralised cooperation

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Presentation

This lesson aims to describe conceptual and theoretical aspects of public decentralised cooperation. It is, in fact, one of the main cornerstones of the course, since it covers the fundamental aspects of the topics studied.

The structure chosen for this lesson responds to the fact that the course often takes as a reference the experience of Euro-Latin American decentralised cooperation, in which a donor-recipient approach to development cooperation has prevailed.

We have endeavoured to conjugate the facts that certain relations currently deal with exchange approaches similar to those between each of those geographic areas, and that the prevailing historical logic, and the most widespread today, is that of the issuer-recipient of official development assistance.

Based on that effort, this lesson begins by describing general aspects of public decentralised cooperation, such as: the various concepts in this regard, the reasons driving these relations, the specificities of this kind of relations in respect of others that might occur and their links to territorial cooperation.

The second part of the lesson tackles the influence of development cooperation on decentralised cooperation relations. In particular, it outlines how local governments are positioned as players in international development cooperation, which development theories have determined this positioning, how the main players of this sphere relate to each other and which current debates shape their action.

The third part of the lesson refers to the new trends in decentralised cooperation in which horizontal relations based on mutual benefit prevail, as opposed to the classic model of asymmetrical and one-directional development cooperation. This section aims to outline elements that help students find positions in which they are comfortable between these two models, which still coexist.

An important note: our analysis focuses on international actions by local governments, and not on cities as social, geographic and economic ensembles. Only governments plan and execute policies that may be interpreted as such, although they often do so in the name of a city as a whole. In addition, although this text often confines the term “local government” to the actions of municipalities, provinces, departments and counties, in general this text also encompasses the regional sphere. Lastly, note that certain bibliographic and legal references refer to local governments as “local authorities”. Accordingly, the two concepts are used indistinctly.
In this course the term sub-national (non-central) governments is used broadly, to include regional and intermediate governments, municipal groupings, metropolitan areas and local governments. Similarly, local authorities or groups also include regional, national and international associations or federations of municipalities.

The purposes of this lesson are as follows:

- To view decentralised cooperation as a tool for international action by local governments with various potential approaches: local economic and social development of the territories involved, development cooperation initiatives, cultural exchanges, other.
- To clarify the various interpretations of the concept of decentralised cooperation and to build an integrating definition that is useful for the work of local governments, without ruling out other standpoints.
- To identify the main factors driving the emergence of decentralised cooperation relations, their essential spheres of work and thematic priorities.
- To show the link between the scope of development cooperation and decentralised cooperation initiatives.
- To outline today’s main trends.
1. Concepts of decentralised cooperation

Decentralised Cooperation is currently one of the most common and dynamic forms of cooperation. In the last few years, cooperation between sub-national governments has progressed relentlessly in terms of both the number of actions and the number of actors involved. As a result, today the term “decentralised cooperation” is used daily in the sphere of development cooperation and the international action of local and regional governments.

However, there is still no definition that is fully accepted by all stakeholders: international bodies, central, local and regional governments, non-governmental players, academics, experts and other agents involved in the international system.

The paradox is that when the aforementioned stakeholders actually debate the issue, they may reach the conclusion that they are talking about different phenomena. This is evidenced by the various definitions that have emerged, which differ from each other as a function of the elements defining the concept (agents and leaderships, scope of action, degree of articulation with central government, type of relation, and so on). This has led to ambiguities and confusion in the use of the term and difficulties in identifying and analysing the practices of decentralised cooperation.

Precisely, this lesson is aimed at shedding light on these confusions and clarifying what decentralised cooperation is and why it has emerged, its characteristics, mechanisms, limitations, potential and current challenges.

The purpose of this first chapter is to present the various concepts of decentralised cooperation, to determine their differentiating features and to propose a definition that will be consistently used throughout this course.

1.1. Definitions and approaches

1.1.1. Notable definitions of decentralised cooperation

In order to understand the characteristic traits of decentralised cooperation and hone a definition for the purposes of this course, we first look at the definitions from some of the most significant institutions in the sector. We start with the European Union, since it is the first institution to recognise local players as actors for development and, accordingly, to legitimise their actions in the field of cooperation.

The European Union

Since the 1990s, the European Commission (EC) has acknowledged local authorities as agents of cooperation. The first precedent in the sphere of Official Development Assistance is to be found in article 12 of the IV Lomé Convention in 1989, signed by the EU member states, and African, Caribbean and Pacific states (ACP). For the first time, an innovative approach was introduced: “decentralised cooperation”. At that time the need to take into account local governments as aid implementing agents was recognised. After subsequent Cotonou agreements, in 2005, local authorities were acknowledged as partners and not merely implementers.

Although from then on the EC assumed decentralised cooperation as a significant modality of its international cooperation, it was only in 1992 that it proposed the following definition of decentralised cooperation:
A new approach in cooperation relationships that seeks to establish direct relationships with local representative bodies and to stimulate their own capacities for designing and implementing development initiatives with the direct participation of the groups of population involved, taking into account their interests and points of view on development (“Decentralized Cooperation. Objectives and Methods”, European Commission (1992)).

Accordingly, the EC lays emphasis on decentralised cooperation in a new approach to establish direct relationships with local representative bodies and placing the interests of the population firmly at the centre of cooperation.

In subsequent documents it considers that the agents of DC are any public or private stakeholders not belonging to the central government (DNGOs, local and regional organisations, associations, unions, economic agents, professional groups, universities, etc.). Accordingly, at that time there is no differentiation between the specific role of public agents and that of the rest of non-State agents.

Meanwhile, in March 2007, the European Parliament approved a resolution on local authorities as actors for development, signed by Pierre Shapira, acknowledging the role of local governments in policies to attain the Millennium Goals and to guarantee good governance. Moreover, it emphasised their role as bodies that foster the work of territorial agents and their capacity to encourage the participation of citizens in public life. The resolution highlighted the need to clearly distinguish the specificity of local authorities with respect to non-State agents.

A year later, in October 2008, the EC acknowledged the role of local governments in the cooperation system and their role as vectors of development through the document COM (2008) 626 “Local Authorities: Actors for Development”. In this case, decentralised cooperation is also understood at the financial level:

“The publicly and privately funded aid provided by and through local authorities, networks and other local actors.”

Subsequently, the EC adopted a new communication document, COM (2013) 280 “Empowering Local Authorities in partner countries for enhanced governance and more effective development outcomes” which signals an important step forward in recognising the specificity of local governments in international issues and the need to conduct a dialogue with them in order to define the agendas and thematic priorities of cooperation.

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2 Report by the European Parliament Development Committee on local authorities and development cooperation (2006/2235-INI) presented by Pierre Shapira, Deputy Mayor of Paris and Member of the European Parliament.
This step forward was backed by the European Council⁴ which also pointed to the specificity of DC from the standpoint of the type of relationships established among local authorities. Similarly, it pinpointed the spheres of action based on the characteristics of the local governments themselves.

“The EU should continue to support and coordinate decentralised and cross-border cooperation between Local Authorities from Europe and partner countries based on long-term and equal institutional partnerships. Decentralised cooperation between EU Local Authorities and their counterparts in third countries can bring added value to the implementation of development actions, through continuous peer-to-peer learning, transfer of know-how and enhancement of local actors’ participation in the public space at local level.”

**The French government’s definition**

This semantic journey highlights the vision of France, which has historically been a standard-bearer in the recognition of and support to decentralised cooperation and one of the first countries to review its legal framework so as to provide institutional coverage for the international action of local governments. Accordingly, the guidance law of 6 February 1992 concerning the territorial administration of the Republic established the legal framework for decentralised cooperation. From 2007 onwards, “The Thiollière Law” confirmed and broadened the scope of the 1992 Law, establishing that decentralised cooperation is an officially recognised competency of local governments. Furthermore, they can also act without signing conventions when they conduct new humanitarian initiatives or implement cooperation actions as part of “water and sanitation” projects, pursuant to the Oudin/Santini Law of 2005 (later extended). The definition of decentralised cooperation is specified in Law 4 February 1995 and recovered in a circular dated 20 April 2001, as follows.

Decentralised cooperation includes the set of international cooperation actions implemented through agreements with a common interest by one or several French territorial corporations (regions, departments, municipalities and groupings of municipalities), on the one hand, and one or several foreign authorities, on the other, in the framework of their mutual competencies.

As observed, decentralised cooperation from the French standpoint is based on its actors (territorial groups) and on the contractual modality and the degree of articulation with central governments and not on the content, which can potentially vary considerably. The groups are called upon to uphold France's international commitments within the framework of their foreign actions. The French Foreign Ministry report on the action abroad by French territorial groups (the Laignel Report, 2013) proposed a review and update of the legal framework to further develop the articulation between the various levels of the French administration, within the framework of a “diplomacy of the territories”. At present, in view of the increasing diversity of

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⁴ EUROPEAN COUNCIL (2013): “Council conclusions on local authorities in development”. FOREIGN AFFAIRS Council meeting, Brussels, 22 July 2013
types of cooperation undertaken, the less restrictive notion of **External Action of Territorial Collectives (EATC)** has been adopted. It includes, in addition to decentralised cooperation, humanitarian and emergency aid, and economic development and cultural projection actions. These relationships are not necessarily founded on formal commitments with a foreign local authority.

**International bodies**

**Development Assistance Committee (DAC)**

Other institutions appear to have acquired a similar idea, but this has not yet translated into the corresponding definition. One example is the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for **Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)**, which in 2005 conducted a study with the purpose of compiling the **Official Development Assistance (ODA)** contributions from local and regional governments in member countries. Consequently, in this case, DC is understood as part of the ODA implemented by local and regional governments aimed at developing countries.

**The United Nations Human Settlements Programme: UN-HABITAT**

The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT) in 2001 defined decentralised cooperation as a synonym of the term “city-to-city cooperation”.

“City-to-City Cooperation […] thus becomes a portmanteau term to cover all possible forms of relationship between local authorities at any level in two or more countries which are collaborating together over matters of mutual interest, whether with or without external support.” […] “The term city-to-city cooperation is sometimes used synonymously with the term ‘decentralised cooperation’, although the latter concept […] embraces a wider range of actions for development carried out by ‘non-state actors’.”

**United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)**

For some time, UCLG had a committee led by the government of the city of Lyon and known as the “Committee on Decentralised Cooperation”. In 2010, that committee merged with the committee on “Development Cooperation and City Diplomacy” whose Secretariat is based with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM). In its previous format, it established the following definition of decentralised cooperation:

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5 Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (2005): “Aid Extended by local and state governments”.
Decentralised cooperation is a supportive partnership between foreign local authorities. Its main aim is to consolidate territorial governance. It strengthens the capacity of local authorities to achieve competencies against a backdrop of increasing decentralisation of the world's various regions. Decentralised cooperation is defined by State legislation. The actions focus on the spheres of competency of local powers: urban development; water; sanitation; civil society; green areas; management of services... It can be developed in various ways, depending on the countries: through financial aid and/or an exchange of experiences; directly by the territorial collective and/or an external operator; bilaterally and/or through group networks.

1.1.2. Essential characteristics of the definitions

Analysing the previous definitions, the essential characteristics and/or distinguishing features between the various definitions of decentralised cooperation are as follows:

**Participating actors and degree of leadership**

The main criterion is whether it refers solely to local and regional governments or to all organisations that are not central governments. As the first EC definition posited, decentralised cooperation is considered to be cooperation implemented by local and regional governments, but there is no distinction between public and private actors. Others specifically emphasise the actions led by local and regional public powers and the relationships established directly between them.

Consequently, the degree of leadership and engagement of the public actor is a characteristic that tends to define decentralised cooperation. In certain countries, the development cooperation action of local and regional governments is based mainly on inviting DNGOs to apply for grants to implement their initiatives. Hence, the resources used serve to implement external international strategies without the local or regional government having to develop its own strategy. As a result, there is a difference between those definitions that conceive of decentralised cooperation as the active involvement of the local or regional government and those in which it is considered sufficient that they provide funding.

**Degree of articulation with the central State and demarcation of local competencies**

Decentralised cooperation, since it operates in the sphere of international relations, can potentially generate conflicts with the positions and/or interests upheld by central governments. As a result, the definitions sometimes reflect the dichotomy between the defence of local autonomy that corresponds to legitimately elected governments and the restriction of their actions to what is dictated by central governments. Some institutions confine their definitions to the spectrum of issues that can be approached through decentralised cooperation relationships, confining them to themes that belong to the range of local competencies (water and sanitation, social services, urban planning, etc.). Accordingly, issues that are traditionally the competency of central governments are omitted (defence, international trade, diplomacy and intergovernmental debates).
Degree of equality in the distribution of benefits in the relationship

Another important criterion is the logic of the relationship, as they are relationships among peers, the relationship is more horizontal and reciprocal than usual in development cooperation relationships, since the benefits are for all the active members of the relationship. From this perspective, DC is further removed from the benefactorial and asymmetrical logic of classical donor-recipient relationships. Note that the first expressions of development cooperation were based on a one-directional and benefactorial approach in which the transfer of funds was the prevailing instrument. In contrast to this system, the latest trends are far removed from the classical paradigm of aid and propose an approach to cooperation based on relationships in which reciprocity and mutual benefit give way to other cooperation modalities and instruments.

Spheres of action

As we have seen, the concept is often used as a synonym of development cooperation, but with the specificity that it is spearheaded by local and regional authorities. This conception does not afford thematic specificity to DC and neither does it suggest added value in comparison with other kinds of cooperation. In contrast, other interpretations like the French approach offer a broader range of spheres of action than development cooperation as cross-border or inter-regional, territorial cooperation, or twinning.

Likewise, based on its specificity and added value, it makes more sense to place decentralised cooperation in the context of matters subscribing to local competencies and issues to improve proximity services and a strengthening of local self-government (decentralisation, local funding, strategic planning, transversality, citizens’ involvement, etc.). Consequently, the spheres of action are an important criterion for defining decentralised cooperation.

1.1.3. Our own definition of Decentralised Cooperation

This course takes as a reference the proposal of the Observatory of Decentralised Cooperation EU-LA (OCD UE-AL) since this is the institution in charge of promoting the first eleven editions of the EU-LA Decentralised Cooperation course. Although this edition exceeds the regional specificity set by the OCD courses, its contribution in regard to the definition of DC is still valid for this course.

Throughout its research on this matter since 2005, the OCD UE-AL considered DC to be the action of local governments on an international scale. However, the OCD UE-AL added to its definition the concept of public decentralised cooperation, which places the focus on the leadership of the local administration in decentralised cooperation relationships. Specifically, according to its first Director, Jean-Pierre Malé:

We understand public decentralised cooperation (PDC) to be the set of cooperation actions implemented by local and regional governments and we designate as “direct public decentralised cooperation” only a part of the above, namely direct cooperation relationships established between local and regional governments on both continents, based on the involvement and autonomy of these agents.

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Consequently, the OCD UE-AL paid special attention to the DC in which local governments play a central role in the programming, promotion and management of actions without depending on the central State or international bodies. So, from this standpoint, the progress in local self-government, its defence and development, is one of the most important issues that, according to the OCD EU-AL, DC should work on. Consequently, matters related to the strengthening of local administration, the improvement of proximity services, local public or decentralisation policies, will also be spheres of work pertaining to the DC.

Other characteristics that define DC according to the OCD EU-AL are the logic of relationships distinguishing DC compared with other kinds of cooperation. According to María del Huerto Romero, an expert closely linked to the Observatory’s concept of DC, decentralised cooperation points to relationships that are a far cry from the hierarchical and asymmetrical trends that characterise cooperation based on the “donor-recipient” paradigm. Without denying the existence of a kind of practice that conserves certain elements of the “aid” approach to cooperation, local decentralised cooperation is based essentially on the principles of multilaterality, mutual interest and partnership. It increasingly tends towards initiatives that contribute added value to the activities, based on the specificity of the spheres of competency and the experience of local governments.

Over time, the concept has varied as a function of several factors. Initially, this was a broad concept based on everything other than state cooperation. Subsequently, progress was made towards a greater restriction in terms of its scope, understanding it as cooperation that was fostered, led and/or managed solely by local authorities (public decentralised cooperation). At present, despite there not being an internationally accepted conceptual agreement, its definition includes the type of relationship established and its sphere of influence, assuming local leadership with the articulation of other actors participating in territorial development strategies. In this connection, and in order to obtain a conception that provides the backbone of this course, the following definition is proposed:

DC is a cooperation modality led by local governments, which is necessary and complementary to bilateral and multilateral cooperation. It is defined by goals and instruments that allow progress towards more symmetric forms of cooperation, in which relationships between local governments are governed by principles of reciprocity and mutual learning.

1.2. Factors that facilitate decentralised cooperation relations

As we saw in the previous section, DC is a phenomenon that bridges the two fields: development cooperation and local governments’ international relations. This situation

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8 ROMERO, M.H. (2006); "La cooperación descentralizada local. Aportes para la construcción de un marco de referencia conceptual en el espacio de las relaciones Unión Europea – América Latina". Anuario de cooperación descentralizada, 2005. Observatory of Decentralised Cooperation EU-LA.
means that factors facilitating its emergence come, on the one hand, from **changes in the system of international relations** and, on the other hand, **progress in the sphere of development cooperation**.

### 1.2.1 What are the main factors influencing the increase in decentralised cooperation relations from their origin to the present?

The main global trends that have fostered the emergence of local governments on the international stage traditionally reserved to national states and multilateral bodies or international organisations set up by these states, are developed broadly in the first module of this course. With regard to the way development cooperation has evolved, this is also dealt with in detail in the second module of the course. This is why here we include only a brief explanation as a reminder.

- Globalisation
- Urban development
- The Nation-State Crisis, decentralisation and regional integration
- Global citizenship
- Changes in the development cooperation sphere

The new international order shaped by economic and cultural globalisation makes it impossible to circumscribe the action of institutions within pre-established geographical limits. Globalisation has accelerated the exchange, interconnections and interdependence between economic, political, social, cultural and demographic processes that affect all actors on a global stage, regardless of where they are located. These new trends affect and impact on the territories governed by local and regional governments, while at the same time the new order requires their presence to tackle new challenges and global governance. The confluence of these two variables was epitomised through the maxim “think globally, act locally”.

### Urban development

One of the phenomena that have shaped and will continue to shape the global system in the most challenging manner is the unstoppable and rapid increase in urban development all over the planet. According to United Nations figures, of the world's current population of 7.4 billion, 54.5% lives in cities. The same source warns that the pace of this city population growth continues to increase: In 2030, the world population is expected to top 8.5 billion, 60% of whom will live in cities (two-thirds of humanity). Almost 90% of this increase will take place in Asia and Africa. This is accompanied by demand for housing, access to basic services, occupancy, security, food and drinking water, among others. Moreover, urban growth implies higher energy consumption, the production of waste, environmental pollution and the risk of natural disasters. Cities currently consume 60% of energy, emit 70% of greenhouse gases and generate 70% of waste.

These difficulties pose common challenges for local and regional governments and, accordingly, they require joint and coordinated action by local governments and a greater pooling of know-how and mutual learning. Moreover, global agendas that seek to tackle the challenges posed by urban planning must have the direct and active engagement of local and regional governments to be able to apply public policies that allow the agreements reached to be implemented.
The Nation-State Crisis, decentralisation and regional integration

States on their own can no longer tackle the new global challenges, so that we are gradually seeing a Nation-State crisis that obliges functions and competencies to be transferred to both supra-national bodies (regional integration processes), and to derive competencies to sub-national governments (decentralisation). Consequently, classical national barriers have been blurred, leading to the appearance of new actors that belong to the new multi-level and multi-actor governance: Trans-national companies and their stakeholders, financial corporations, supra-national bodies, international organisations, universities, citizens movements and their cross-border organisational methods and local and regional governments.

So in the current international system based on a renewed multilateralism, local and regional governments are called upon to participate and influence new global governance and, for this purpose, it is necessary to establish relationships between them in order to increase their capacity of influence and negotiating power.

Global citizenship

In addition to all these trends, the growth of the so-called global citizenship, directly impacted on the inclusion of local governments in the development cooperation system. In fact, in this new context, the concept of citizenship is redefined and transcends borders, giving way to greater awareness of international problems. The new, global citizenship is articulated through cross-border movements through which their voice is heard and their concerns included in national and international agendas (international peace, women's and antiglobalisation movements, etc.). One expression of this is local governments' demand for a greater level of responsibility in regard to international problems.

Changes in the development cooperation system

As we explained in module two of this course, the first expressions of decentralised cooperation emerged in the wake of the World War II, amid the desire to achieve peace and reconciliation through the twinning of French and German territories. Since then, the emergence of local and regional governments in the sphere of development cooperation has embarked on a dynamic and probably irreversible process because of the various moments and milestones that have signalled progress for local governments in the sector.

On the one hand, local democratisation processes are the first stage in which to begin decentralised cooperation processes. The difference between countries with and without local democracy clearly indicates the difference between the most and least active regions in the sector. In this connection, note that Europe and Latin America are the most active regions and, conversely, the Mediterranean, Africa and Asia have a more recent track record and only some countries implement cooperation initiatives between cities and regions. Precisely in the European case, one of the turning points was the citizens' influence on the United Nations campaign urging the public administrations of “developed countries” to earmark 0.7% of their budgets for “developing countries”9. From then on, many local governments began earmarking a specific budget item for development cooperation.

Another important milestone in the emergence of local governments in development cooperation

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9 Especially significant is the case of the Spanish State, whose initial incursions began towards the end of the 1980s and continued into the 1990s.
was the crisis of the paradigmatic neoliberal development assistance of the 1990s which led to the emergence of a **new paradigm of human development** fostered by the **UNDP (United Nations Development Programme)**. From then on, new challenges arose for achieving development (institutional strengthening and good governance, the exercise and guarantee of human rights, the fair distribution of resources and equal opportunities). The **transition of the conception of “cooperation” as aid to its being understood as an instrument to achieve** human development, paved the way for the emergence of new actors and new modalities, including local and regional governments.

At the same time, **local governments were starting to be recognised** as actors in the development cooperation system and to be considered vectors of local development. This recognition was embodied in **specific programmes by certain institutions in support of decentralised cooperation**, which were unquestionably a driver for this phenomenon. The European Commission was the forerunner, with the launch of budget line B7-5077 which soon afterwards was boosted by the regional programme for Latin America, URB-AL, which ran from 1995 to 2013 (in three different phases). The EC also implemented support programmes in other geographical areas such as the ENPI CBC “Mediterranean Sea Basin” Programme and the Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine ENPI CBC Programme. In addition to the EU, the UN has also launched programmes that clearly support decentralised cooperation, such as UNDP’s ART GOLD Programme, among others. Unquestionably, **these programmes have helped the emergence and consolidation of decentralised cooperation** to the present day.

The **increased role of local governments** in the sector’s reaction to the so-called “aid fatigue” has also stimulated **decentralised cooperation**. In fact, unlike the process that culminated with the 2000 Millennium Declaration, which set the 8 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in which local and regional governments were not invited to take part, in the recent process to devise the new 2030 Global Agenda of September 2015, with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), local governments have been much more present. In addition to this agreement taking into account the needs of local governments, an urban SDG agenda (OD11) being devised, and the rest of SDGs being locally declined, the importance of their role and their involvement in fulfilling the existing agreements has been recognised.

Furthermore, local governments have also made notable progress in the framework of the **“new aid architecture”**. Some of the principles established in the Paris Declaration by the Second High-Level Forum (HLF-2) in 2005 are especially relevant for local governments, above all in ownership and alignment. Moreover, from the first HLF in Rome in 2002 to the most recent on in Busan in 2011, there has been a shift from a goal based on boosting aid effectiveness to the formation of a “**Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation**”. This change moves cooperation away from the paradigm of ODA, adopting an approach much more in line with the characteristics of decentralised cooperation.

### 1.2.2 What are the main reasons that have driven sub-national governments to establish decentralised cooperation relationships?

After examining some of the main reasons for the emergence of decentralised cooperation, it is worth asking why many local and regional governments have become involved in the phenomenon and forged cooperation relationships with each other.

The origins are various, most notably including the following:
Unquestionably, the factor that best facilitates the generation of more decentralised cooperation links between different geographical areas, is that of historical ties dating from the colonial period. In this regard, a shared language (as well as a shared past) is especially important. This is the case, for example, of relations between French cities and the country’s former African colonies, between cities belonging to the Commonwealth, between Spanish and Latin American local governments, and between Brazilian cities and Mozambique.

Cultural and human ties derived from migratory flows are also powerful reasons to commence decentralised cooperation between territories. Accordingly, many cities in the south of Spain have links with Morocco, in the United States with local governments in Latin America, or in the UK with local governments in Asia.

**Solidarity: Political affinities and reduction of inequalities**

Solidarity is another of the factors that facilitate the establishment of relationships between local governments. Specifically, **solidarity with the most underprivileged** is perhaps the trend that has traditionally prevailed in encouraging municipalities and other administrative echelons to become involved in cooperation relationships. This goal is part of the classical approach to development cooperation understood as the fight against poverty.

In addition to reasons of solidarity with the poorest, reasons of political solidarity are also noteworthy. This is the case of the relationships established by many European sub-national governments with countries with which there has been political solidarity understood as revolutionary movements in the 1970s and 1980s. One of the countries that has most capitalised on this phenomenon has been Nicaragua, followed at a distance by Cuba and El Salvador.

The situations caused by natural disasters, political conflict or war also lead to the mobilisation of citizens’ solidarity which often crystallises in the form of decentralised cooperation. This was the case of Latin American cities in the aftermath of Hurricane Mitch (1998), with Ecuador following the 2016 earthquake, the Saharan people in Morocco and Algeria and decentralised cooperation in Tibet.

Solidarity is also often the reason leading many cities of the world to establish support networks and accompaniment of refugees fleeing current armed conflicts, such as the Cities Welcome Refugees network that resulted from the war in Syria.

**The need to project the territory**

Entrance into the international arena by major cities and other supra-municipal governments such as regions, demarcations or metropolitan areas, are particularly important, due to the volume of relationships in which they are involved.
There are many reasons for this considerable activity, and in all likelihood they do not respond solely to cultural relations as a result, in many cases, of historical ties, or actions linked to solidarity with political movements or the underprivileged. Other factors, like the marketing of cities, corporate strategies of cross-border enterprises and their local impact, or alliances between cities as strategies for exerting an influence on global debates, are present on the international agendas of local governments, mainly the largest ones. These reasons are detailed in the first module of the course.

A technical need to share experiences relating to the competencies of local governments

Despite the differences between territories, the changes in the international order and the challenges they pose similarly affect local public policies of local and regional governments. For example, the supply of basic services, management of migratory movements, mitigation of the effects of climate change, the lack of employment or urban mobility, and so on. Consequently, many local governments join together through direct decentralised cooperation, technical exchanges or the participation in networks of municipalities with the purpose of improving their local management capacity and improving public policy.

Indeed, some authors suggest that this is the reason that most specifically characterises decentralised cooperation. In particular, this is true of direct decentralised cooperation, since it is through the relationship between peers in which it is possible to share, innovate, learn and improve in respect of issues that are strictly their own in connection with improving local management (strategic planning, local financing, evaluation of public policy, citizens’ involvement, social innovation, transparency, etc.). In addition, in the last few years we have seen an increase in alliances between local governments to pool knowledge or between city networks on specific themes affecting them. These also include topics to improve governability (urban strategy, citizens’ participation, transparency, etc.) and especially local self-government (decentralisation, regional integration, local financing, etc.).

One example of an alliance to pool knowledge on international action and cooperation among cities is the AL-LAs Project (The European-Latin American cooperation alliance among cities)\(^\text{10}\), other networks seek knowledge on specific topics such as ICLEI (International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives)\(^\text{11}\), nrg4SD (Network of Regional Governments for Sustainable Development)\(^\text{12}\), Cities for Mobility\(^\text{13}\) (urban mobility), IOPD (International Observatory on Participatory Democracy)\(^\text{14}\), CIDEU (Iberoamerican Center for Urban Strategic Development)\(^\text{15}\), to name but a few.

**Lobbying for political influence and the safeguarding of local self-government**

Global changes and the new world governance through agreements and agendas set by central governments and their international organisations have a direct impact at local level. At the same time, it is up to sub-national governments to implement these agendas at territorial level. This situation has led many local and regional governments to commence decentralised cooperation

\(^{10}\) https://www.proyectoallas.net/about_en
\(^{11}\) http://www.iclei.org/
\(^{12}\) http://www.nrg4sd.org
\(^{13}\) http://www.cities-for-mobility.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=frontpage&Itemid=163
\(^{14}\) http://www.oidp.net/en/home/
\(^{15}\) http://www.cideu.org/
relations so as to influence and make their voices heard in global negotiations through networks of cities and associations of municipalities.

One of the examples of the most significant influence is to be found in the platform for cooperation between local governments articulated so as to make local and regional governments' voices heard in the 2030 Global Agenda agreed in September 2015 and in the New Urban Agenda adopted in Quito in October within the framework of the third UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Development, Habitat III. The instrument in both cases has been the creation of the “Global Task Force of Local and Regional Governments for Post 2015 Development Agenda and Towards Habitat III” or “GTF”. This platform was set up by city and local and regional government networks acting on a global (UCLG or ICLEI), regional (regional UCLG offices, Mercociudades, CEMR-CCRE – Council of European Municipalities and Regions, ORU-Fogar, ATO – Arab Towns Organization, CLGF – Commonwealth Local Government Forum) and even national level, such as CUF (Cités Unies France).

1.3. A paradigmatic change: The specificity of DC relations

1.3.1. Elements characterising sub-national governments

Decentralised cooperation has evolved from the paradigmatic patterns of aid based on asymmetrical relations and North-South hierarchies, towards a new, horizontal pattern. Before discussing how this paradigmatic change took place, and what its main features are, it is worth recalling the distinctive elements of the sub-national governments providing specificity and added value to decentralised cooperation.

The characteristics that contribute potential and added value to decentralised cooperation are:

- Their political legitimacy, as democratic institutions elected by universal suffrage and, therefore, enabling them to freely establish agreements and strategic alliances.

- Institutions with proven experience and skills in local public policies that include aspects of the management of their populations' daily lives and a democratic furtherance of local governability: The provision of basic public services (water, energy, transport, housing, etc.), the promotion of local development (jobs, economic growth, etc.), environmental sustainability measures, the contribution to social and cultural cohesion, and the organisation of systems for citizens’ participation, transparency or accountability.

- They are the administration closest to citizens and the territory, and, accordingly, the best acquainted with their needs and potential, affording them a privileged position from which to establish a dialogue with territorial players and act as a bridge between them.

- Local authorities can also mobilise and spur on the territory's social and economic agents, acting as a catalyst and helping nurture the local productive fabric, improving local skills and creating jobs.

- They have direct experience of matters of interest among their peers at international level: The decentralisation of the State, the principle of subsidiarity, territorial development, local democratic governance and urban policies.

16 http://www.qtf2016.org/
These characteristics show that although sub-national governments share with state or national governments the fact of being public administrations and belonging to the State Administration, they have very different functions and agendas that contribute new ways of relating to each other on the international stage. Generally, States act in a context of relationships of strength and in an environment of competition and, accordingly, tend to use coercive mechanisms inherent to foreign relations. Conversely, sub-national governments tend to be more pre-disposed to establishing horizontal cooperation relations, seeking to collaborate with each other as bearers of a logic of proximity and direct services to citizens.

Accordingly, sub-national governments can help change the prevailing trends in the international system and foster other, more human ways of organisation that advance towards a change of model that will safeguard the planet and its inhabitants.

1.3.1. A new approach based on new principles

As we saw in the first section of the document, the early manifestations of DC were closely linked to development cooperation and their approach and practice emulated those of Official Development Assistance. Hence, for years the relationships followed patterns typical of official cooperation, based on the transfer of resources as a pivotal instrument, in this case between local “donor” governments and “recipients”. This approach led to an asymmetrical and hierarchical relationship between donors (who established the subject of the relationship, its type, modality and agenda) and recipients (who executed the project in their territory and justified the expenses to donors). Steadily, this approach shifted towards a new type of relationship whose characteristics are among the distinguishing features of decentralised cooperation.

The principles on which this new approach is based are:

a) the leadership of local authorities (political actors)  
b) multilaterality (between actors and active partners)  
c) mutual interest (finding solutions to common problems through shared learning)  
d) partnerships (horizontal relationships among peers)

Although it is true that numerous actors intervene (directly or indirectly) in decentralised cooperation relationships, the leadership is exercised by local and/or regional governments. They are actors that, through direct relationships among them, seek to find solutions to face the new challenges posed by the global system. Accordingly, they are relationships based on partnerships, relationships between peers, aimed at mutual interest and seeking shared solutions from a multilateral approach far from pyramid management formulae. As a result, they are not asymmetrical relationships in which actors transfer their knowledge and resources, based on there being one rich, strong party and one poor, weak one. Conversely, they are relationships in which the term “cooperate” really makes sense, as the relationship is horizontal and generates benefits for all the actors involved.

Accordingly, public decentralised cooperation provides an innovative approach that breaks with the traditional models of relationships. The latter, based on arguments of solidarity, used to generate asymmetrical donor-recipient relationships (especially in the sphere of development cooperation) and their main instrument was the unilateral transfer of resources. So this is an approach that changed the previous overriding pattern and provides an innovative heritage with which to tackle the new needs posed by the current international system.
Despite the potential suggested to us by DC, the relationships between local governments are not always horizontal, or reciprocal or equal. This is especially true of the relationships that establish the scope of development cooperation, which still involve benefactorial practices that are typical of the development assistance approach.

1.4. Supramunicipal framework: Territorial cooperation and development

1.4.1. From cooperation between local governments to supra-municipal relationships focusing on the territory

The territorial scope of decentralised cooperation has evolved over the years, and from cooperation focused on the territory confined to a local government, there has been a shift to supramunicipal cooperation that seeks to have an impact on the territory. The close link between decentralised cooperation and territorial development, and the capacity of sub-national actors as articulators of the territory, have facilitated the emergence of a cooperation that encompasses the regions, groupings of municipalities, metropolitan areas, etc.

This evolution has emerged from the link between DC and territorial cooperation, and indeed we might even understand that one is part of the other, since its goal is to link up local and regional authorities with a view to their relationship helping to improve the quality of life in their territories. Furthermore, decentralised cooperation is closely linked to territorial cooperation due to its territory-focused approach. In fact, its practices evidence the importance of the territory for local development. A concept that must be conceived from a dual perspective: on the one hand, as the physical space and also the representation in the collective imagination, and, on the other hand, as the set of actors interacting in that space (Sanz, Beatriz 2012). The new trends in local governability respond to this duality, in which as well as multi-level dialogue the engagement of all the territorial actors is required.

In this connection, DC is allowing new public-private alliances to be fostered for many local governments and facilitating a new vision, a new approach and instruments aimed at a multi-actor management that nurtures the role of all the actors in the territory.

1.4.2. Process of regional integration and cross-border cooperation

Territorial cooperation has always belonged to the processes of regional integration. The European case has, since the outset, been an example of this. The Single European Act (SEA) of 1986 acknowledged the importance of creating European public policies aimed at mitigating regional and social inequalities between the various European regions. Based on this goal, in 1990 the European Commission launched the first INTERREG programme and it continues to be a priority policy of the Commission today. In this connection, the proposal on political cohesion for the 2014-2020 period, within the framework of the 2020 Europe Strategy, acknowledges that European territorial cooperation is among the EU’s policy goals. It emphasises its relevance, especially considering that at present regions are increasingly transcending national and regional borders and require adequate joint cooperation measures on a territorial scale. In fact, this proposal highlights the centrality of territorial cooperation in the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), affording an essential role to cross-border cooperation.

Although the processes of regional integration in Latin America, Asia and Africa are different in pace and progress from their European counterparts, territorial cooperation has significant weighting in their various processes. At present there are spaces for cross-border and territorial articulation and cooperation, and these are among the priority topics for the new modalities of South-South and Triangular cooperation, as we shall see below.

Furthermore, cross-border cooperation is currently one of the aspects of territorial cooperation and one of the priority axes of relationships in the European Commission’s 2014-2020 programming. In this regard, in the last few years there have been notably interesting experiences, such as the Fronteras Abiertas Programme (Open Borders Programme – Interregional Network for Latin American Cross-Border Cooperation and Integration), funded by the Development Cooperation Department of the Italian Foreign Affairs Ministry and executed by Centro Studi di Politica Internazionale (CeSPI) and Istituto Italo-Latino Americano (IIA); “EU-Latin America Collaboration on Cross-Border Cooperation in the Framework of Regional Policy”, funded by the EC Directorate General of Regional and Urban Policy and executed by the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR); or the European Union’s URB-AL III Programme. Various projects pertaining to this latter Programme have been structured around cross-border cooperation, in the framework of the capitalisation strategy fostered by the Office of Coordination and Orientation (OCO), created the Observatory for Cross-Border Cooperation for Latin America and the Caribbean (OBSCOT).

In short, territorial and cross-border cooperation and regional integration processes are a priority in the political relationships between sub-national governments focused on a territorial framework that exceeds the confines of a specific local government.

2. Limits and framework of action of DC

As we mentioned in the previous chapter, decentralised cooperation is a phenomenon half-way between development cooperation and international action by local governments. The goal of this chapter is to define the limits of DC between the two fields, examine its legal and institutional framework for action, and demarcate its main themes, modalities and instruments.

For further information, recall that Lesson 1 of the course specifically examined the international action of local and regional governments, and Lesson 2 looked at development cooperation. Meanwhile, Lesson 4 will focus on the modalities of decentralised cooperation.

2.1. The links between DC and development cooperation

As we saw in the first part of the lesson, the emergence of decentralised cooperation is closely linked to development cooperation and some definitions even refer to the latter as a synonym of the former, with the specificity that it is undertaken by sub-national governments. Accordingly, from that standpoint, it could be deduced that decentralised cooperation is another source of resources (for local governments) to underpin development cooperation.

Conversely, as we discussed in the first section, decentralised cooperation is not defined solely by the actors that carry it out. As we have explained, there are other variables that define DC: leadership of the actions, the principles on which it is based, the spheres of action, its modalities and its instruments.
Although sub-national governments are the actors implementing decentralised cooperation, what is important is to highlight the degree of leadership in these actions. Sometimes, local governments act as another source of financing and manage a fund or administer an invitation to apply for grants aimed at private organisations (usually DNGOs) so that the latter can conduct development cooperation programmes. This type of cooperation is also decentralised cooperation. However, it is decentralised cooperation that delegates its leadership, design and execution to another actor (in this case, DNGOs).

In this case, as we have seen in the first chapter, we understand decentralised cooperation to be the direct cooperation relations that are established between local and regional governments, on the basis of their engagement and autonomy. Evidently, this does not mean that other actors are not involved; quite the contrary, it is especially important that, thanks to the mobilisation of local governments, local actors become involved in the actions. Furthermore, it is advisable and even sometimes necessary that these actions be complementary and articulated with other governmental cooperation actions.

Meanwhile, decentralised cooperation is also distinguished from development cooperation based on the paradigmatic notion of aid oriented to the fight against poverty. Decentralised cooperation moves on from more benefactorial approaches based on asymmetrical “North-South”, “donor-recipient” perspectives in which the political agenda is defined by the interests of the “donors” to focus on relationships based on a partnership, on trust, on reciprocity—on the mutual interest and learning of both governments. Here, we are talking about partners rather than donors and beneficiaries, where the benefits of the relationship impact equally on the actors taking part in the DC relationship. Consequently, it is not that a “wealthy” local government transfers resources (funds, infrastructure, technical assistance) to a “poor” local government with a view to improve the territory of the poor local government. DC seeks to develop relationships based on exchanges between local and regional governments in which the actions are executed in both territories and the impacts are on both their populations. As a result, DC relationships are characterised by modalities and instruments in accordance with this purpose (exchanges, technical meetings, network collaboration, etc.).

Since they are direct relationships between public administrations, their spheres of action should move away from the coverage of basic needs and give way to institutional strengthening and support for local public policies and to the exercise of local power, as a more effective way to respond to the needs of their population. It is precisely their territorial hold that gives them more intimate knowledge of the problems of their territories and the formulae for how to tackle them. Consequently, DC is not aimed at “exporting” models and recipes for development from one place to another, but at strengthening local governability and improving local public management so that each actor achieves improvements for their own population and territory as a function of their characteristics, needs and capacities.

Despite the differences, the problems and challenges facing local governments are quite similar (especially considering the changes in the current international order) and, accordingly, DC also undertakes joint influencing and lobbying actions to make their voice heard in the actions of others affecting their territories and to defend and advance their capacity for action (self-government, decentralisation, local financing, etc.).

To conclude, we can assert that, although decentralised cooperation is closely linked to development cooperation, it is not another one-stop-shop for resources, and neither is it limited to reproducing the practices of Official Development Assistance on a small scale,
but rather it contributes added value based on its specificities. This is a modality with a capacity to propose and advance towards a new and fairer cooperation model based on mutual trust and knowledge. Consequently, this is a specific modality and at the same time it is supplementary to bilateral, non-governmental or multilateral cooperation.

Table 1 Comparison between the ODA approach to Decentralised Cooperation and Decentralised Cooperation with added value:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cooperation as ODA</th>
<th>Decentralised Cooperation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vertical N-S relationship</td>
<td>Horizontal N-S relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donor-recipient approach (asymmetrical)</td>
<td>Reciprocity and mutual interest approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic instruments: Transfer of resources (financial or material) and technical assistance</td>
<td>Basic instruments: Networking, pooling of experiences, political influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefactorial approach: Reducing poverty</td>
<td>Mutual learning approach: Influence on structures (institutional strengthening, local governability, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aimed at a specific city</td>
<td>Influence on global territories and/or problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finalist one-off project (short term)</td>
<td>Process: Impact on local public policies (long term)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation is not inserted in a local public policy</td>
<td>Cooperation is a local public policy backed by strategic planning and resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sector-based vision of cooperation</td>
<td>Transversal (intersectorial) and multilateral vision (coordination with public and private territorial actors and citizenship)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City to city</td>
<td>Multi-partnership</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.2. DC as part of the international action of local and regional governments

The duality of decentralised cooperation generated by the two disciplines of which it is comprised: local governments’ external action (typical of international relations) and DC (development cooperation led by local governments) implies terminological and conceptual confusions in respect of what is considered to be decentralised cooperation and what is external action.

Historically, decentralised cooperation has been considered to be relationships triggered by the fight against poverty within the sphere of cooperation between local governments of countries from the North and local governments from more impoverished countries. Conversely, local governments’ external action has been attributed to a broader sphere of action and geographical sphere, not limited to the fights against poverty between rich and poor.

To clarify this, we propose to reflect, through a number of questions, on what the difference might be (if there is one) between DC and the international action of local governments:

- Is a one-off agreement to exchange technology between the city of Seville (Spain) and the city of Turin (Italy) decentralised cooperation or external action?
- And what if this is an agreement between Seville (Spain) and Maputo (Mozambique)?
- Is a partnership between different Latin American cities in consortium with some European cities in order to strengthen their external action capacity (AL-LAs Project) external action or decentralised cooperation?
• Is the participation of Bacnotan (Philippines) in global associations such as ICLEI external action or decentralised cooperation (network modality)?

• Is a wine-making agreement between the region of Tuscany (Italy) and Valle de Elqui & Limarí (Chile) external action or decentralised cooperation?

The debate is not closed and evidence of this is the diversity of forms of organisation, nomenclatures and legal and institutional frameworks that sponsor local public policies of external relations and decentralised cooperation. In most cases, external action is still legally the exclusive terrain of central governments, while local governments’ right to implement cooperation practices is recognised (legally or institutionally). In other words, there is an acknowledgement and recognition of the importance of local governments in development processes and in urban issues, in particular, avoiding other spheres of international relations that are still reserved to States, such as defence, international trade, diplomatic representation or intergovernmental debates. Consequently, recognition of local governments’ external relations is practically confined to development cooperation, which tends to be associated with decentralised cooperation. As a result, the legal advances tend to be found in this sphere, which for now conceptually limits the capacity for international action of local governments to the possibility of generating decentralised cooperation relations.

At organisational level, many local governments do not specifically differentiate the decentralised cooperation initiatives that carry out external projection. In other words, decentralised cooperation relations (twinning, one-off projects, participation in programmes, etc.) are often treated and managed from the same department, office and even personnel as “city diplomacy” relationships or local governments’ actions to promote peace and conflict resolution (typical of external action).

Accordingly, there are no shared conceptual limits assumed by the sector, with opinions differing depending on the various practices of the territories, the approaches or principles orienting the policies of certain local governments.

Despite the considerable diversity of approaches, especially since the end of the North-South focus (with the appearance of numerous “souths” in the northern hemisphere and countries with intermediate and even high income levels in the southern hemisphere) the vision attributing DC to the external action between rich and poor local governments has steadily broadened. As a result, there are currently an increasing number of local governments that consider DC as an axis or modality of sub-national government’s external action, in which the main goal is collaborative work and mutual learning between foreign sub-national governments (wherever they are from) to advance in strengthening local governability and public proximity policies.

2.3. Main spheres of work, modalities and instruments of DC

In this first section we offer a brief overview of the five spheres of work that have most grown in the last few years and where it makes the greatest impact and sense to locate decentralised cooperation. Secondly, a very brief global view is provided of the main modalities and instruments, since this topic will be developed specifically in the following module of the course.

Spheres of action and impact
The spheres of action of decentralised cooperation are determined by the new global context and the challenges that this implies for local governments (economic globalisation, nation-State crisis, urban development process, the recent systemic crisis, new multilateralism and the multilevel and multi-actor democratic governability). Moreover, their working axes and capacity to impact are also shaped by their attributes and characteristics. Among the current main axes, we highlight:

- a) Institutional strengthening.
- b) Public social cohesion policies.
- c) Democratic governability.
- d) Local economic development and projection of the territory.
- e) Political lobbying to influence structural changes.

**Institutional strengthening**

Relationships between local governments have transitioned from one-off projects aimed at meeting the basic needs of a “more impoverished” local government, to establishing relationships aimed at strengthening institutional capacity and boosting the effectiveness of the public action of that local government. So, the aim is to strengthen the local public administration so that it can respond to the needs of its people and its territory. These are relationships with a dual aspect of technical and political strengthening aimed at influencing the local administration.

Accordingly, the spotlight is placed on improving technical and political aspects that are part of local government functions: Strategic planning, diagnosis and planning instruments, transversal and intersectoral management, design, implementation and evaluation of sector policies, etc. Other vitally important issues for the proper functioning of administrations’ management are local financing and the sustainability of the public policies undertaken.

Also noteworthy are the strengthening actions aimed at creating or consolidating institutional mechanisms for public-private arrangements for local or regional management and the articulation and search for synergies between the various municipal-regional-national decision-making levels.

One example of this axis of cooperation between the various local and regional actors is the **GODEM project (Optimised Waste Management in the Mediterranean)**. This is a project involving the region of Piedmont (Italy), the urban community of Al Fayhaa –Tripoli (Lebanon), the region and city of Rabat (Morocco) and the municipalities of Sousse, Mahdia and Djerba (Tunisia). The project aims to establish a network for pooling information and experience between European local and regional authorities and institutions from the southern Mediterranean in regard to the sustainable management of waste treatment.

**Public social cohesion policies**

Social cohesion is a multidimensional and integrated concept that combines and articulates a set of public policies and management thereof aimed at building a fairer and more cohesive society. This is a process, then, involving a broad range of public policies that cannot be reduced to simply meeting the specific needs of certain vulnerable groups.

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"A socially-cohesive community – regardless of the scale: local, regional, national – is characterised by a global situation in which citizens share a sense of belonging and inclusion, participate actively in public matters, recognise and tolerate differences, and enjoy relative equality in access to public goods and services and in regard to the distribution of income and wealth. All of this in a context in which the institutions generate trust and legitimacy and citizenship is fully exercised."20

Based on the conviction that local governments are key actors to improve social cohesion, decentralised cooperation relations have gradually focused on underpinning public policy courses that contribute in this connection. The URB-AL III Programme is a milestone in this field, as it focuses on increasing social cohesion through EU-LA decentralised cooperation relations. The Programme has been executed directly in 74 territories, with an impact on 500 Latin American municipalities.

Decentralised cooperation relations aimed at achieving local social cohesion can be approached from different working standpoints, executing simultaneous actions addressing various aspects. The structure presented here is the one that has guided the action of Phase III of the URB-AL Programme.

The production and occupational aspect: Fostering of integrated local economic development and employment policies aimed at improving social integration in the territory through dignified employment and by stimulating the local economy. Actions in support of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), active employment policies or professional training.

The social aspect: Universal access to basic social services and citizens’ security through policies that foster an increase in the coverage and quality of basic social services (primary education and professional technical training, healthcare, water, basic sanitation, garbage collection, etc.) in the territory. This also includes policies that promote citizens’ security through education and prevention.

The territorial aspect: Reduction of territorial inequalities by fostering urban integration policies, social urban planning and an improvement in the quality of peripheral areas, within the framework of integrated strategies for territorial arrangement and management. The idea is to ensure higher levels of territorial cohesion, removing factors discriminating social groups based on their place of residence.

The civic aspect: Construction of active citizenship by building a socio-cultural identity with a gender-based approach and respecting diversity. Including specific measures such as cultural and youth policies, policies to incorporate a gender-based approach into public strategies and institutions and for intercultural coexistence.

The institutional dimension is also a part of local social cohesion, and is transversal in respect of any action undertaken in the process of advancing towards a more cohesive society.

Democratic governability

Strengthening democratic governability on a local scale is also a sphere of work and exchange among cities and regions. The idea is to reinforce the public arena and access to and defence of political, economic, social and cultural rights. The aim is to further develop democratic arenas to generate a more effective, stronger and more collaborative governability.21

Moreover, due to the specific characteristic of being the closest administration to citizens, local governments are in a privileged position to generate social consensus with territorial actors and to nurture greater dialogue between social, economic and cultural agents. Accordingly, the idea is to establish relationships between local communities, under the leadership of the local government and with the control and active participation of citizens, economic and social agents and civilian society in general.

Accordingly, we see that decentralised cooperation can and must play a significant role in terms of democratic ownership. As a result, there are an increasing number of relations focusing on aspects such as participatory budgets, mechanisms for citizens’ participation, control, transparency and accountability or the instruments of e-government.

One example of this sphere of action is the execution of a direct cooperation project between five municipalities in the Catalan province of Baix Llobregat and 10 municipalities in the district of Menara (Marrakesh) called “Support in the definition of proximity policies” which has the support of Institut marocain pour le développement local (IMADEL) and the Barcelona provincial government. The project aims to reinforce the democratic processes that foster training and skill-building among citizens based on the pooling of knowledge and good practices among civil servants and technical experts in order to improve proximity management (civic centres) and cultural and social stimulation among the Moroccan and Catalan governments involved.

Local economic development and projection of the territory

Although we have seen how local economic development is one aspect of social cohesion, in the current context of globalisation and interdependence, the quest for opportunities for a territory is a key factor for local development. The aim is to generate sustainable and inclusive economic development, which generates dignified employment and stimulates the production fabric. Accordingly, through decentralised cooperation relations, local governments can exert a decisive influence on the production activities of their territories, stimulating its economic agents, unlocking the value of its specific characteristics and generating exchanges with other territories. It is not so much that the local government provides economic support to small and medium-sized enterprises, but that it plays an active role in promoting local production systems, in assisting in their projection abroad, seeking to generate commercial ties, helping to transfer technology in the territories and attracting investors.

Relations focusing on economic development and the projection of the municipality or territory are increasing significantly, and there is now a broad range of experiences and practices that can be shared and exchanged: Local economic development agencies, business incubators, agreements with universities, industrial facilities, training packages, public agencies to activate employment,

commercial deals and alliances to boost the production fabric. Moreover, activities focusing on urban marketing or the projection of the city by hosting or participating in international fairs, systematisation of good practices, presentation for international awards or accompaniment of local enterprises are increasingly a common task of cities’ cooperation and/or international relations offices.

Notably, this work axis often exceeds the scope of relations between local administrations and fosters territorial cooperation. Hence, relations have emerged on the basis of proximity (supramunicipal alliances to share technology, generate clusters, tourism corridors, etc.) or on the basis of shared interests. Finally, note also the recent experiences in the sphere of entrepreneurship and cooperative, social and caring economy, which is the subject of exchanges and meetings between local authorities in different countries and regions.

A significant project in the projection of the territories is “Live your Tour: A cross-border network to increase sound and harmonious tourism in Italy, Spain, Lebanon and Tunisia” within the framework of the European Commission’s ENPI CBC Med Programme. “Live your Tour” is an initiative that proposes boosting sustainable tourism in partner regions in Italy, Spain, Lebanon and Tunisia, with a special emphasis on improving off-season tourism in the chosen geographic areas. In each country, a Tourist Destination Area (TDA) will be designated as a geographical area in which the project’s various actions are implemented, on the basis of an analysis of the cultural and natural potential of each territory, in accordance with the criteria of the Technical Committee, affording priority to marginal areas with unharvested tourist potential, along with those that uphold the sociocultural authenticity of the communities. Partners in this project are: Province of Lecce, Management Consortium of Coastal Dune Reserve, Management Consortium of Torre Guaceto Park (Italy), FAMSI – the Andalusia Development Cooperation Fund (Spain), Tunisian American Association for Management Studies – TAAMS (Tunisia), Aalbeck Municipality Union, UNDP-Lebanon (United Nations Development Programme-Lebanon), Lebanon Houf Es Souayjani Municipalities Federation, Lebanon American University of Culture & Education (AUCE).

**Political lobbying to influence structural changes**

The final sphere of action to which we refer is structured through a network of local governments and seeks to impact on the conditions that limit local administrations or to trigger changes to obtain global goods. Consequently, the idea is not to directly influence the territory, but to impact on the national or international agendas that affect local matters. This modality represents one of the emerging axes with greatest projection in the evolution of decentralised cooperation. Although this has already been explained in the first module of this course, it is important to recall the lobbying conducted by local governments in the leading global agendas that shape the international roadmap: The new **2030 Global Agenda**, the new **Climate Change Agreement (COP21)** and the new **Urban Agenda** agreed in Quito (Ecuador) at the Habitat III conference in October.

As we saw in the first chapter, the platform used by local governments to participate and exert influence is the **Global Task Force of Local and Regional Governments for Post-2015 Development Agenda and Towards Habitat III**, known widely as the GTF. The two greatest success stories of the GTF in the 2030 Agenda were the inclusion of a specific goal in regard to urban topics, **SDG 11: Sustainable cities and communities**, and the localisation of the rest of
sustainable development goals (their implementation at local level) through a specific proposal of 100 localisable indicators.

1.3.2. Action modalities

The description of the decentralised cooperation modalities with their respective precursors, instruments, topics and approaches are the subject of Lesson 4. Here, we will only mention the most common methods of decentralised cooperation.

In the first place, bilateral relations are distinguished (relations between two local and/or regional governments, each from a different country). The relationships may be one-off and limited to a specific time frame through a concrete agreement or project or may be lasting. Of these, we highlight (city-to-city) twinning, which has been the most traditional formula and which continues to exist strongly.

The rest will be known as multilateral relations and include more than two governments. These may pivot upon a specific project in consortium between various local governments, such as the projects executed in the framework of a programme financed by an international agency, or may lead to collaboration agreements with a more lasting perspective.

Last but not least is the network modality, in which the involvement of local governments has increased exponentially in the last few years. This involves the construction of associations between a broad spectrum of local authorities on a geographic or sector basis for the purposes of exchange, strengthening institutions and defending their interests, and reinforcing municipalism on the global stage. This is the most widely used modality in relations aimed at lobbying or political influence.

Finally, the methods of action have evolved over time and several such modalities are often implemented simultaneously, as a function of the goals sought in each of the decentralised cooperation relations undertaken.

2.4. The legal and institutional framework of PDC

Local governments’ capacity to implement decentralised cooperation varies from one country to the next depending on the legal framework and legislation and on the institutional relations between the local governments and their national governments. Accordingly, it is important to present a brief overview of the limits and the need to advance towards a greater capacity of local self-government to foster the capacity for action of sub-national governments. Likewise, it is also necessary to take into account the importance of the relationship, dialogue and complementary aspect with the national government. In fact, the institutional framework is an essential element in a local government's manoeuvring room, regardless of the scope of competencies defined in the legal frameworks.

2.4.1 The legal framework for the external action of local governments and their recognition on an international scale

Traditionally, external relations have been the monopoly of nations as a direct result of the

Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 and the rise of nation-States that displaced and subjected the city-States that had dominated the international political scene in previous eras. From then on, the prevailing practice was the tutelage by “nations” of local institutions and the monopoly of “international” relations by central or national governments. Consequently, the system of international relations is based on the recognition of nation-States as exclusive actors in the system, represented by their respective central governments and multilateral bodies or international organisations created by them. On the legal front, local governments do not have a recognised regulatory framework as international actors.

Accordingly, sub-national governments are formally “invisible” to international law. Nationally, the legal receptiveness to undertaking decentralised cooperation and international action varies from one country to the next, and even within the same country. This situation often places local governments in a rather blurred “grey” zone that leads to legal insecurity in respect of their external action.

As a result, the legal framework is not formally adapted to respond to the emergence of the internationalisation of local governments, whose unfolding and generalisation requires a deep-seated reform of said legal framework. However, the practices and modalities of the international action of sub-national governments are increasing exponentially on a daily basis. The power and scale of the phenomenon has translated into significant progress indicating greater legal and institutional receptiveness.

This is an acknowledgement and regulation strictly confined to the cooperation of local governments, avoiding taking on international spheres that are still considered to be reserved to central governments. The international player that commenced this approach was the European Commission, which should come as no surprise considering its configuration as a supra-national organisation and, accordingly, one interested in a fluid communication with non-State authorities. Nevertheless, from the 1990s onwards, other actors such as the UN have gradually acknowledged the role of local governments generating spaces for dialogue and consultation on topics that are of special interest to them.

Table 2 shows a summary of the main milestones on the road to recognition for local governments as actors in the international cooperation system and, more broadly, their role on the international stage.

**Table 2: Summary of the recognition of LGs as international actors by international bodies – The main stages of the process**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date and actor</th>
<th>Event/Document</th>
<th>Effect on the recognition of local governments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1985 EC</td>
<td>European Charter of Local Self-Government</td>
<td>Proposal by national governments to acknowledge the power of LGs to enter into associations and cooperate on the international level (44 signing countries).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989 EC</td>
<td>Art. 12 IV Convention Lomé (ACP)</td>
<td>Innovative focus on decentralised cooperation (considering non-State actors as the executors of aid).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992 EC</td>
<td>Creation of the budget line B7-5077</td>
<td>Generalisation of the Lomé approach to the rest of developing countries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Organisation</td>
<td>Event/Decision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996 UN</td>
<td>Istanbul Declaration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999 UN</td>
<td>Creation of UNACLA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000 and 2005 EC</td>
<td>The Cotonou Agreement and its subsequent review</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001 UN</td>
<td>UN General Assembly Resolution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003 UN</td>
<td>UN-Habitat invites UNACLA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004 UCLG</td>
<td>Creation of the UCLG</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004 UN</td>
<td>Cardoso Report</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007 European Parliament</td>
<td>The Pierre Shapira Resolution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007 EU</td>
<td>Launch of the thematic programme “Non-State Actors and Local Authorities in Development”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008 EU</td>
<td>European Charter on Local Self-Government</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008 International Community</td>
<td>Accra Programme Third High Level Forum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>COM (2011) 637</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Program/Initiative</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>International Community</td>
<td>“Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation”. Art. 21 establishes the essential role of local parliaments and governments to reinforce the links between State and citizens and ensure democratic ownership.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>EC</td>
<td>Thematic document “Local authorities in development” Document within the framework of the consultancy process among LGs regarding the EC’s new 2014-2020 programme period in regard to development cooperation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>COM (2012) 942</td>
<td>Communication on the outcome of the Structured Dialogue on the involvement of CSOs and Local Authorities in EU development cooperation. The role of local governments as actors for development with initiative is again acknowledged.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012 (Sept.)</td>
<td>UN</td>
<td>Rio +20 Summit Launch of an Intergovernmental framework on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Campaign for participation in the debate by the UCLG and the United Regions Organisation (ORU-FOGAR) to structure an agenda that is less environment-focused and more focused on urban governability and territorial cohesion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012 (July)</td>
<td>UN</td>
<td>Post-2015 programme Start of the debate on completion of the MDGs and the post-2015 programme, designating a High Level Group. Participation of LGs in thematic and regional consultation processes. The participation of local governments in the intergovernmental process remains pending.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013 (March)</td>
<td>Global Task Force UCLG</td>
<td>This Task Force was set up by UCLG and various cross-border networks (Metropolis, Association Internationale des Maires Francophones (AIMF), Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF), FOGAR, International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI), Network of Regional Governments for Sustainable Development (Nrg4SD) and UNACLA) to contribute jointly to international debates with a particular influence on the 2030 Global Agenda and towards the new Global Urban Agenda signed in Habitat III.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013 (August)</td>
<td>EU</td>
<td>COM (2013) 280 “Empowering Local Authorities in partner countries for enhanced governance and more effective development outcomes”, recognition of the specificity of LGs in international themes and the need for dialogue with them to determine the agendas and thematic priorities for European cooperation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Despite this progress, and as UCLG asserts in its recommendations for the New Global Agenda agreed in Habitat III:

“Local and regional governments will push for a qualitative leap in our recognition in the institutions of global and regional governance over the coming years. Today we have the same status as ‘civil society organisations’, and our access to UN and multilateral processes is limited. Our democratic legitimacy as a sphere of government should be recognized with a unique status in the UN and multilateral system to contribute to a more democratic and accountable global system of governance.”

UCLG, Draft Outline of the Global Agenda of Local and Regional Governments for Habitat III, November 2015

### 2.4.1 The institutional framework: Relations between national and sub-national governments

Implementation of decentralised cooperation and external action of local governments do not depend solely on the legal framework established and initiatives are often conducted using the different devices of national governments to stimulate, contain or, conversely, control local governments in their external action.

The spectrum is broad and there are positions ranging from those most distrustful of actions that show a certain resistance to the phenomenon (control, non-conducive legal framework, budget restrictions, etc.) to those that understand that the process is irreversible and that have gradually lent their support to local governments. In the latter case, there are various type of activities (information, training, fostering of contacts with counterparties, structuring bodies, and financing).

In fact, some national governments have realised that the international action of their local governments may benefit, especially those actions with a clear content of economic or cultural projection, which may directly influence their national interest. As a result, their cooperation and external action is often supplemented by that of their local governments, provided this does not contravene the country’s foreign policy.

However, note that the international action of local governments and decentralised cooperation can become an element of political and legal wrangling between the various echelons of government. For example, the Spanish government stepped back from its support for decentralised cooperation by amending Law 27/2013 concerning the Rationalisation and Sustainability of the
Local Administration, and in 2015 by challenging the December 2014 Catalan Law on External Action. This example evidences the link between the legal and institutional receptiveness and the degree of decentralisation of the country, the territorial model of the governing political parties, and the internal political tensions.

In short, it is important to focus on the risk of subordinating local governments to the interests of national governments and ensure that there is legislation that affords full local self-government, so that the most specific and valuable elements of local governments are not lost.

Finally, it is worth noting that to achieve a conducive legal and institutional framework it is fundamental to maintain a permanent dialogue with national governments, whose attitude is pivotal if progress is to be made in this connection. The international community can provide support to local governments, but the legal-institutional frameworks depend on the State’s central institutions.

The main measures for national governments and international bodies to support decentralised cooperation.

Information

This support includes providing information on decentralised cooperation founded on strategic and operating reasons by national governments and international institutions. The former includes the desire to know about the aspects of ODA (thematic sectors, geographic scope, etc.), to obtain statistical and quantitative data, to visualise changes in models or practices (for example, the transition from indirect to direct cooperation), to learn the institutional operation of decentralised cooperation or its impact. The latter includes facilitating the coordination of activities and the pooling of experiences.

The unit of measurement will vary in accordance with the goal. Specific actions (projects) are the most widely used, with the OECD as the reference, and with references in all its member countries, although not all of them compile figures on the ODA of local governments. Further information on these characteristics is also available in the Atlas of Decentralised Cooperation of the Committee of the Regions or certain countries, such as Spain. With regard to partnerships, there is considerably less information, although there are a number of references including the central governments of France and Argentina. In some cases, specific experiences are used as examples of good practice and data on the cooperation of individual institutions is compiled.

Training

Some central governments and international bodies promote decentralised cooperation actions by facilitating training to local governments through regulated courses or sessions to outline specific topics. Initially, this training appeared to be aimed more how to handle the instruments of development cooperation, such as, for example, the dominance of the Logical Framework

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23 OECD (2005): "Aid Extended by local and state governments".
24 With regard to the Atlas of Decentralised Cooperation, you may consult the following website: http://lra4dev.cor.europa.eu/portal/en/atlas/Pages/Maps.aspx
25 With regard to compiling information about Spain, you may consult the following website: http://cooperacion.femp.es/
26 With regard to decentralised cooperation in France, you may consult the following website: http://www.cnscd.fr/home.asp
Approach in project management. Over time, this gave way to training focused on the specificities of decentralised cooperation.

One example of specific training on decentralised cooperation was the launch of the Observatory of Decentralised Cooperation EU-LA, a European Union initiative which has now offered 12 editions of online training. Central governments have also generated some actions in this connection. An example of this are the training initiatives implemented by Cités Unies France on decentralised cooperation, aimed at local governments in France, which receive financial support through a new framework agreement with the French Foreign Affairs Ministry.

**Fostering contacts with counterparties**

Some central governments and international bodies encourage meetings between the local governments in their respective territories and peers from other territories. These encounters can be through financing activities, as explained below. Another is to generate meeting events in which to encourage the presence of local governments.

One example of a highly active central government is the French government, which through the Foreign Affairs Ministry’s National Committee for Decentralised Cooperation, has organised events in Mexico, Brazil, Argentina and Chile. We might speculate on the fact that relations with emerging countries predominate, based on its international policy priorities. Another example are the events promoted by the Colombian government in partnership with the heads of the UNDP-ART Programme. Another example is the Ibero-American Forum for Local Governments, which has the support of the Ibero-American General Secretariat (SEGIB) in which the central governments of Ibero-American countries are represented.

**Articulation bodies**

Clear evidence of the depth of the commitment of central governments with the cooperation of local governments is the existence of permanent articulating bodies.

The most significant example is Platforma, the sphere of relations between the EU and local governments created in 2007 to coordinate dialogue in favour of greater recognition of LG’s as actors of cooperation, the orientation of development policies and improvements in practices. There are several examples of such central governments. For example, in Spain’s case the body responsible for these competencies is the Interterritorial Committee for Development Cooperation. This has been described as a forum for joint collaboration and agreement, aimed at the adequate pooling of information and criteria so as to better use the funds that each Public Administration designates for development cooperation, within their respective spheres of competencies.

**Financing**

The final kind of action is the financing of decentralised cooperation activities. Although a number of programmes fund actions in the territories of specific local governments, there are fewer in support of decentralised cooperation, or cooperation between the local governments of various countries.

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27 To learn more about the UNDP-ART programme in Colombia, visit the following website: [http://web.undp.org/geneva/ART/action/colombia.html](http://web.undp.org/geneva/ART/action/colombia.html)

Nevertheless, some central governments arrange financing programmes to support the actions presented by local governments in their territory with foreign counterparts. This is the case of the central government of the Netherlands, through VNG International (the international agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities) or the French government, which implements this measure through the National Committee for Decentralised Cooperation.

In the case of international bodies, such programmes can actually boost relations. This is the case of the UNDP-ART programme.

3. The current challenges facing DC

The evolution of decentralised cooperation has been shaped by change in the international context that pose new challenges for local governments. Specifically, some of the changes in the world order have affected development cooperation agendas, triggering the emergence of new priorities, actors and modalities. Furthermore, in the midst of the period of signing global agreements, local governments are involved in a flurry of activity to influence and mobilise, in order to make themselves heard in global agendas. DC must adapt to the new reality based on its strengths to advance towards its own consolidation and improvement. Moreover, decentralised cooperation is still far from tackling the challenge of going from one-off actions to planned and orderly decentralised cooperation, understood as real local public policy. Accordingly, one outstanding challenge for most local governments is still communication, understood as an integral part of decentralised cooperation that is legitimised by all departments of the local public administrations and the citizens.

This chapter aims to summarise the main challenges mentioned to advance towards decentralised cooperation that is adapted to the present circumstances and has the capacity to contribute value and specificity to the global stage and the territories where it is enacted.

3.1. Changes in the development cooperation agenda

A world in crisis: Safeguarding global public goods

In less than 10 years, a series of systemic crises have erupted that have changed the world in which the MDGs were negotiated and have directly affected the priorities of the development cooperation agenda. These include the financial and economic crises unleashed by the demise of Lehman Brothers, the environmental crisis, the refugee crisis stemming from the conflict in Syria, security fears as a result of the threats of terrorist groups acting all over the world, and the food and water crises affecting millions of people worldwide. In addition to these crises is the current economic vulnerability, mounting debt, migratory movements, the lack of jobs or the increase in inequality and the maze of tax havens along with the flourishing industry of tax evasion and dodging that has led to the world’s richest 1% having greater wealth than the other 99% of the world’s population put together.29

These are global challenges that affect the whole world, and are not a problem confined to the so-called southern countries. Accordingly, development policies based on the ODA management

29 See Oxfam Report: “An Economy for the 1%. How privilege and power in the economy drive extreme inequality and how this can be stopped”, Oxfam GB, Oxfam Mexico, 2016.
Public decentralised cooperation

approach are no longer valid, and we need common policies that appeal to shared responsibilities between the traditional donors and recipients, so as to hold a joint debate regarding the global provision of public goods.

This situation is generating other priorities in development cooperation programmes and new partnerships between actors. For example, demand for a development agenda more focused on sustainable human development, the exercise of human rights from the standpoint of their indivisibility (political, economic, social and cultural rights), inclusive growth, coherence in public policy, democratic ownership, transparency and mutual responsibility, combating tax havens and greater coordination between the adoption of global development commitments and the establishment of local targets and the distribution of multi-level responsibilities. These priorities are reflected in the new programmes to support decentralised cooperation such as Europe Aid’s thematic programme “Global Public Goods and Challenges”.

**Change in the poverty map**

In the last decade, the poverty map has also changed: at present there are numerous “norths” in countries that previously belonged to the south, and many “souths” in the northern hemisphere. The increase in poverty in traditional donor countries and the increase in economic wealth in some of the recipients has blurred the traditional North-South divide and has led to the concept of global poverty that breaks with the traditional pattern of developed vs. developing countries.

The South's new economic rising stars include the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and, since 2010, South Africa), which account for 43% of the global population, and 21% of GDP. The 2013 UNDP report “The Rise of the South: Human Progress in a Diverse World” projects that by 2020, the combined production of Brazil, China and India will exceed the total production of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States. In addition, in the last few years the OECD has changed the category of low-income countries to middle and high income.

The emergence of new donors and the lack of resources from traditional donors have helped change some of the traditional cooperation modalities in the search for new partners (such as enterprises) and sources of finance (private foundations). One paradigmatic example is the emergence of South-South and triangular cooperation, which has now been in place for several years, especially in Latin America and Africa.

**South-South cooperation**

The concept pinpoints development cooperation relationships between the so-called countries of the South. These relationships may be political, cultural, social or economic, and may involve a number of different actors. According to the UNDP, this is “technical cooperation” among developing countries, defined as “a process whereby two or more developing countries pursue their individual or collective development through cooperative exchanges of knowledge, skills, resources and technical know-how”.

One debate on this modality is the extent to which it is a change of model or a repetition of the inertia in terms of inequality of relations and conditionality of aid to the interests of the donors.

In the case of decentralised cooperation, the fact that more horizontal relationships are sought, that it is easier to work on the participants’ priorities, that partnerships with the population are encouraged, and that the added value is to be found especially in the exchange of experience brings these practices closer to the UNDP's hypotheses for this kind of cooperation.
In any event, the factors that might accompany South-South decentralised cooperation are:
- a relationship based on a mutual understanding of historical factors.
- Contribution to regional integration.
- Allowing new development models to be introduced.
- Relationships may be struck between territories with similar problems, despite the differences in income.

Lastly, note that one derivation of South-South cooperation is so-called triangular cooperation (also known as South-South-North). Triangular cooperation takes place between a provider of cooperation or donor partner, a mid-income partner country, that will also offer cooperation (often technical), and a recipient partner from a country that is relatively less developed.

3 2. Towards a public decentralised cooperation policy

Although decentralised cooperation relations have, for some local governments, been common practice in the last few years, there are still few local governments that have institutionalised their activities around a local public policy. Local governments often implement decentralised cooperation without these being understood as an integral and irrevocable part of the local government's political agenda. If DC is understood to be an integral part of local governments' broader external action policy, it is still less articulated, as the actions implemented are often not coordinated by the same department and they may respond to very different approaches and themes. As we saw in Lesson 1 of this course, some local governments have recently started to implement internationalisation strategies for their municipalities which include decentralised cooperation relations.

In the case of DC, its recent evolution has led to the progressive articulation of a policy that is adapted to new trends, and in which the local government is an actor for cooperation in a globalised world.

Some of the changes that have permitted a transition towards a public policy are:

- From indirect (or delegated) cooperation to direct public cooperation

As evidenced throughout this Lesson, at the outset, decentralised cooperation practices were based on Development assistance, donor-recipient approaches, emulating official development assistance. Consequently, many local governments delegated their actions to private players (DNGOs). In fact, indirect decentralised cooperation practices are still common among local governments of both donor and recipient countries. Hence, local governments of countries like Spain focused part of their cooperation on managing an invitation for proposals from private actors (mainly DNGOs) with counterparties in southern countries. Meanwhile, the local governments of recipient countries also tend to delegate in DNGOs the leadership and implementation of projects executed in their territories.

In this way, the Spanish local government (to continue with the example) tends to focus part of its cooperation on managing an invitation to tender proposals, adjudication of grants and management of proceedings. This is a conception of decentralised cooperation similar to managing a percentage of the corporation's budget, ignoring all the added value that direct public cooperation offers.

This situation has evolved as local governments have started to consider cooperation as a real local public policy. This transformation has led to a greater impulse for direct cooperation in
which local governments relate directly with their peers. Accordingly, the projects, twinning or participation in networks by local governments are increasingly frequent. This evolution has not always been easy, due to the resistance of some DNGOs to “lose” prominence and resources. For example, in the Spanish case, with the country experiencing a profound economic crisis, this process has, to a certain extent, been traumatic, and both modalities of cooperation, direct and delegated, continue to co-exist today.

- **Changes in approach, themes and modalities**

The North-South approach has highlighted specificity and local governments have realised that the problems they face are similar (despite the differences in each territory) and, consequently, the best interlocutor with which to share them and find solutions is another local government. As a result, there has been a shift towards **new methods of collaboration** under a focus of co-responsibility and mutual learning, dialogue, trust and reciprocity. Hence, classical cooperation projects or tools have turned into bilateral or multilateral agreements, network trends, mutual collaboration agreements and the pooling of experiences.

This change of focus carries with it a **transition from relations based on goals of covering basic needs** (construction of infrastructure, delivery of equipment, seeds or drugs) towards relationships that seek to improve local management, strengthen institutions and support local public policies. As evidenced in Lesson 2, the aim is to strengthen local administration, both technically and politically, so as to better respond to the territorial problems from a strong government. To achieve this, the entire local government must be mobilised, not only the DC department, since it is the Local Public Administration as a whole that has experience to share with its peers. In accordance, decentralised cooperation can be understood from a transversal and non-sector standpoint that allows the mobility of all departments and from an integral standpoint that helps benefit the local administration as a whole.

**From a one-off finalist project to cooperation as public policy**

Decentralised cooperation has steadily matured from one-off interventions (direct or delegated) towards greater planning within local authorities. While spheres of action and instruments have evolved, local governments have also tapped into the advantages of DC and advanced towards the construction of a public cooperation and/or international relations policy. Accordingly, it is increasingly common (especially in medium-sized and large cities) for local authorities to have IR and/or cooperation offices with an integral strategy, with human, technical financial resources and with instruments for inter-sector and territorial coordination.

Many local governments, then, are including decentralised cooperation as part of their city strategy and providing their offices with strategic plans for international relations or cooperation master plans. These guidance documents allow actions to be specified as a function of the municipality’s planning and to advance towards greater dialogue with the rest of the government’s departments, making the various local public policies more coherent.

The construction of a public policy in this sphere requires **reaching agreements with actors in the territory**. Without the participation of citizens and territorial actors (NGOs, universities, professional schools, unions, enterprises and sector organisations) the legitimacy of any public policy would be significantly hampered and rendered unfeasible. Perhaps it is even more important that this is a policy that is not always understood and often questioned and even criticised due to
certain stereotypes that compare decentralised cooperation with international travel. One of the most important instruments in this connection is to have an integrated communication strategy.

3 3. Communication as a strategic element of DC

Why is communication so important?

In most decentralised cooperation policies or international action by local governments, communication tends to be an external policy element, associated with the dissemination of results or specific activities. They are often only taken into account at the end of a process (a project, an activity, etc.) and tend to be improvised.

However, communication is a key element to contribute to the construction of a shared story, disseminate the citizenship policy and contribute legitimacy on both an external front (citizenship) and an internal front (the rest of local government departments, which are often unaware of the importance of decentralised cooperation). It is worth noting that at present citizens’ assessment of politics has a lot to do with the capacity of institutions to communicate well and build suitable perceptions. In this connection, to govern well is to “do good” but also to “communicate well”. The policies or actions that are not known or not properly conveyed to citizens will find it hard to secure the necessary support, and may even generate people’s rejection, distrust and disenchantment with politics.

Despite the increasing significance of aspects linked to communication and information, in practice these don’t tend to be included in the strategic core of decentralised cooperation policies. Communication is commonly only used as a means of reporting the results obtained; it works as an external tool and is not planned from the outset. This approach, which is frequent among press offices hired solely to disseminate specific results, is a waste of part of the potential of communication to increase the likelihood of success of the policies.

Conversely, communication, if understood as a transversal and strategic element, present in the programme or policy since its outset and included in all cycles of the process, can significantly increase the policy’s success. This approach consists in using communication as another tool to achieve the desired results of a policy, and not just a one-off instrument to disseminate specific results.

Although public institutions and international bodies are increasingly keen on planning and taking into account communication as a strategic element, the fact is that this is an emergent strategy that is still under construction. Hence, at present, one of the major challenges of local governments is to adequately convey their decentralised cooperation policies and actions both to the people and within their own institutions.

Communication is not improvised, it is planned.

To advance towards communication that is clearly part of the achievement of results and not merely to report results, it is necessary to build a planned communication strategy. For this purpose, in the first place, it clearly requires communication to be included as a transversal element of the DC or IR office. In other words, an element that is present throughout the cycle of external action policy (identification, planning, execution, valuation and assessment) and is inter-related with a complex maze of players.
Secondly, the construction of a communication strategy implies specific planning with a clear definition of the goals, messages, audiences, activities and actions in the short, medium and long term and the mechanisms for review and assessment.

Another essential aspect with a huge impact on trends is the degree of self-government in DC policy in communication terms, since this often depends on the Town Hall’s press office and often another area or secretariat. This situation tends to create a lot of pitfalls, either because DC policy is not on the agenda of the press office, and therefore actions are not properly reported, or because the messages are not conveyed to their intended audience through the proper channels and tools.

According to Sanz, Verónica (2014), the main characteristics of poor communication planning are:

- Failure to tap the considerable potential of communication as a transversal element to increase the chances of success of a public decentralised cooperation policy.
- Difficulties in explaining to the public the specific benefits of the municipality’s international action and decentralised cooperation, which can lead to criticism and questioning.
- Ignoring and wasting communication capacity, in line with a strategic approach (communication for results), of managing intangibles, building perceptions and weaving awareness. Communication is key for public policies to be understood, interiorised and legitimised by citizens. A poor communication strategy or unplanned communication actions can build on negative perceptions.
- Disregard for the people’s right to transparency, access to information and participation in public matters.
- Poor communication by a local government hampers the achievement of goals, actions and results of external policy actions. This tends to cause misunderstandings, duplicity, overlapping of activities, dysfunction and even suspicions. If what the DC or IR office does is not understood or shared “internally”, it is very difficult to make it understood “externally”.
- The lack of communication competencies poses a risk that the messages that these offices wish to convey may be diluted, undervalued and even misunderstood. This lack of autonomy leads to management difficulties, can hamper communication efforts made and sometimes leads to distorted or out-of-context information.
- The lack of planning or definition of goals, priorities and pivotal ideas can lead to contradictory, overlapping or incoherent messages.
- Not all audiences are permeable to the same messages, not all require the same type of information and not all have access to the same tools or channels. Based on a sound segmentation of the public, it is easier to design efficient communication strategies.
- The absence of planning to select the right channels and tools to convey the messages can hamper their understanding or minimise their impact.

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A poor choice of wording for each channel or the same choice of language for all the channels can completely distort its meaning and, as a result, the public's perception. Highly technical and academic language used for a mass audience can lead to incomprehension and disaffection.

A balance must be found between planning and dynamism. A good communication strategy is one that can adapt to a changing environment without losing sight of its goals.

Reactive communication only serves to soften the “blows”. A proactive communication strategy anticipates risks and can avoid these “blows”.

The absence of planning prevents monitoring and assessment mechanisms from being established with a view to ascertaining and analysing the impact of policies, and to perceive new demands and needs.

A realistic strategy implies proper chronological planning and the necessary economic and human resources.

Relations with the press cannot be left to chance. They must be planned and developed respecting the interests and trends of the media themselves.

Using social media means understanding a whole new scenario of multi-directional communication, in which we are all transmitters and receivers. It is worth noting the risks of immediacy, universal dissemination and the possibility of a real-time response.

Not having a communication strategy does not mean that there is no such thing. Accordingly, it is advisable to design a communication policy enabling us to ascertain all its potential and risks, structure it and optimise it.

In short, communication is a key element to strengthen decentralised cooperation policy and, therefore, the recommendation is to progress towards results-based communication understood as a transversal and strategic tool present in decentralised cooperation from the very conception of the policy and belonging to all the cycles of the political process. For this purpose, it will be necessary to provide decentralised cooperation policies with adequate technical, human and specialist resources to enable a real communication strategy to be built.
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Office for Coordination and Orientation (OCO) of the URB-AL III Programme “Informe final: Alcances y aprendizajes del Programa URB-AL III”. Diputación de Barcelona.

Follow this link to the document:  

OXFAM (2016) “An Economy for the 1%. How privilege and power in the economy drive extreme inequality and how this can be stopped”, Oxfam GB, Oxfam Mexico.  


Follow this link to the document:  


Follow this link to the document:

SANZ, B. (2010): “Las asociaciones territoriales de desarrollo (ATD) como expresión de un renovado pluralismo territorial en respuesta a los retos planteados por la agenda de la eficacia de la ayuda”. Anuario de Cooperación Descentralizada, 2010; Observatory of Decentralised Cooperation EU-LA.
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**Websites of interest**

2030 Agenda (UN)  

Spanish International Development Cooperation Agency (Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional al Desarrollo)  

Committee of Regions, Atlas of Decentralised Cooperation  
[http://lra4dev.cor.europa.eu/portal/EN/atlas/Pages/Maps.aspx](http://lra4dev.cor.europa.eu/portal/EN/atlas/Pages/Maps.aspx)

Comisión de cooperación de la Federación Española de Municipios y Provincias:  
[http://cooperacion.femp.es/](http://cooperacion.femp.es/)

Commission Nationale de la Coopération Décentralisée  

Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness  

Global Task Force  

AECID Glossary  

Habitat III  
[https://www.habitat3.org/](https://www.habitat3.org/)

Non-state actors and local authorities in development  

Millennium Development Goals  

UNDP-ART in Colombia:  

PLATFORMA  
[http://www.platforma-dev.eu/](http://www.platforma-dev.eu/)

CIUDAD Programme  
[http://www.ciudad-programme.eu](http://www.ciudad-programme.eu)

Proyecto AL-LA’s, Euro-Latin American Cooperation Partnership between Cities  
[https://www.proyectoallas.net/](https://www.proyectoallas.net/)

United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)  
[https://www.uclg.org/en](https://www.uclg.org/en)
### Glossary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AIMF</td>
<td>Association Internationale des Maires Francophones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LA</td>
<td>Latin America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ODA</td>
<td>Official Development Assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APC</td>
<td>Africa, the Pacific and Caribbean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APC - Colombia</td>
<td>Presidential International Cooperation Agency in Colombia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEA</td>
<td>Single European Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRIC</td>
<td>Group of countries comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa</td>
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<tr>
<td>DAC</td>
<td>Development assistance Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>CAN</td>
<td>Community of Andean Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>DC</td>
<td>(Public) decentralised cooperation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EC</td>
<td>European Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UCLG</td>
<td>United Cities and Local Governments</td>
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<tr>
<td>CLGF</td>
<td>Commonwealth Local Government Forum</td>
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<tr>
<td>HR</td>
<td>Human rights</td>
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<tr>
<td>ERDF</td>
<td>European Regional Development Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>FLACMA</td>
<td>Latin American Federation of Cities, Municipalities and Local Government Associations</td>
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<tr>
<td>LGs</td>
<td>Local governments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GTF</td>
<td>Global Task Force</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN-HABITAT</td>
<td>United Nations Human Settlements Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>DCI</td>
<td>European Commission Financing Instrument for Development Cooperation</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICLIE</td>
<td>International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IILA</td>
<td>Istituto Italo-Latino Americano</td>
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<tr>
<td>MERCOSUR</td>
<td>Common market of the South</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nrg4SD</td>
<td>Network of Regional Governments for Sustainable Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>OBSCOT</td>
<td>Observatory for Cross-Border Cooperation for Latin America and the Caribbean</td>
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<tr>
<td>OCD</td>
<td>Observatory of Decentralised Cooperation EU-LA</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>OCO</td>
<td>Office for Coordination and Orientation</td>
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<tr>
<td>MDGs</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goals</td>
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<tr>
<td>DNGOs</td>
<td>Development Non-Governmental Organisations</td>
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<tr>
<td>IBS</td>
<td>International bodies</td>
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<tr>
<td>ORU-FOGAR</td>
<td>United Regions Organisation</td>
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<td>LHDP</td>
<td>Local Human Development Programmes</td>
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<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
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<td>SMEs</td>
<td>Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises</td>
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<td>IR</td>
<td>International Relations</td>
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<td>SDGs</td>
<td>Sustainable Development Goals in the Framework of Rio+20</td>
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<td>SICA</td>
<td>Sistema de Integración Centroamericana</td>
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<tr>
<td>SUBDERE</td>
<td>Deputy-Secretariat of Regional and Administrative Development</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNACLA</td>
<td>UN Advisory Committee on Local Authorities</td>
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