

Regional Governments in Habitat III

ORU Fogar's position

Intermediate governments in the global agendas

In the last two decades, the consolidation of three international agendas with a marked territorial impact —sustainability, development and urbanisation— has become apparent. These three agendas have evolved along different lines, but in parallel. All three have raised the major problems of mankind today in an inclusive, interdisciplinary and change-oriented manner. Inclusive, because they have mobilised an increasing number of stakeholders. Interdisciplinary, because they have overcome the sectoral fragmentation typical of both the governments ministries and the UN specialised bodies. Change-oriented, because they have combined in a flexible way regulatory and programmatic instruments to move towards the creation of results frameworks that are known, accepted and verifiable.

This is a new reality that goes beyond the classic international framework —o intergovernmental— replacing it, at least partially, with a global order. The new goals of mankind no longer concern uniquely the sovereign states, but also the international organisations, non-central governments and all the stakeholders that have lately been organising themselves to make their voice Heard in the global scenarios. This situation proves the belief that progress for all depends on the common effort and nobody can be left behind.

This context has a significant impact on regional governments. What happens in the territory has an increasingly global reach; and, at the same time, the global agreements —orientations, guidelines and results agenda— must have a territorial implementation. We, the regional governments organised under ORU Fogar, believe that this new situation does not lessen the role of central States, but it has a wider nature that goes beyond classic intergovernmentalism.

The rich diversity of the regional phenomenon, of the constitutional position of the intermediate governments, of their powers and capacities, should not blind us to the fact that there is a shared need and mission. The mission will each time relate to our responsibility in the essential tasks to be carried out in the territory: development, cohesion, balance and sustainability. The territory is not only a geographic reality, but also human and social, which is increasingly incorporated in this local-global logic. Hence the need to ensure that our regions are well anchored both in the domestic and the international framework.

From Habitat II to Habitat III

These two decades also separate the last two UN Conferences on Human Settlements. In 1996 the discussion on urbanization focused on the cities and their governance. In 2016, though, in an

increasingly globalised and interconnected world, the discussion on urbanization fully reaches the non-urban domains. The urban world today must take the territory seriously into consideration, where the urban settlements are built, nourished and developed.

This is why regions are a centrepiece in the New Urban Agenda, so that – as the Toluca Declaration says– urbanization becomes an engine of development with the power to change and improve the living conditions of all people. Regions ensure that the cities development is carried out under conditions allowing not only territorial balance and cohesion, but also urban life. Cities depend unquestionably on a territorial system in terms of food, infrastructures, waste management, etc. which goes beyond their territory strictly.

To understand the inseparable nature of cities with their surroundings, the key concept is sustainability and the government of reference is the regional one. As our President Paúl Carrasco has put it, “Cities need the territory to be sustainable”.

Regions and New Urban Agenda: key aspects

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), as results framework by 2030, must be the horizon towards which we direct our greatest efforts, and also our regions efforts. We believe it’s important to consider the New Urban Agenda from this framework and make it an action-oriented program that strengthens and contributes to the localizing of the 17 SDG.

The SDG become a reality and have an impact when they are incorporated in the territorial surroundings. Regional governments must play a crucial role as initiators and driving force of efficient development processes, favouring the assimilation of consensus on the territories’ development and promoting strategic agreements and coordinated actions.

Regions, as intermediate territorial units between the central and the local powers, offer the most suitable dimension to define efficient and smart strategies for a balanced, inclusive and sustainable development. We can give these essential issues –economic development, environmental sustainability, land-use planning, food security...– a holistic approach that establishes the necessary mechanisms to define strategies aimed at encouraging synergies and interdependencies between the territories and the stakeholders operating on them.

Also, because of our status of proximity governments we have precise knowledge of the context in which we operate and an important ability in articulating the stakeholders involved in the territory’s development, both public and private. Therefore, regions are able to promote territorial development policies that serve as a framework for the articulation of the policies promoted by the local governments and as a vital complement to the central governments’ development policies.

The SDG show that inequalities are not only present just among countries, but they are an internal condition of societies. This inequality can also include new poverties and new territorial imbalances. Globalisation enhances competitiveness among cities, and it is the duty of the regional government to ensure that the gain of one city is the loss of another city, nor that it is at the expense of its

environment. This is why the regional government must ensure that the infrastructures and equipment provide structure to the whole territory, creating balance between cities (large, medium and small) and the villages and rural world. The current reality –disorderly migration, excessive consumption of natural resources, urban sprawl... – so demands it. Thus, we, the regional governments, undertake to set up action to readdress this imbalance, by fostering intermunicipal cooperation. We must also strive to compensate the differences –which can be serious– in our territories’ urban agglomerations, by evenly distributing opportunities and assets.

The concept of urban-rural linkages or partnerships is also important. We reaffirm the need to heal the rift between the rural and the urban world, and to pay attention to the continuum between these two spheres affecting their population –dense to a different extent– and their economic base –agricultural to a different extent–. Food security does not solely depend on the production and supplies chain, but also on their length and on the natural integration of the agricultural activity in its environment, offering value-added activities to the adjacent non-rural areas.

Above all commitments, we should highlight the fight against the unceasing rural exodus towards the urban areas. This exodus undercapitalises the territory, weakens the traditional cultures and generates uprooted inhabitants. This is not only negative for the territory, but it becomes particularly negative for the cities, which are already overcrowded, collapsed, with security problems and with social, educational and health services that are no longer able to cope with the situation. In short, this is a dynamic that generates poverty both in the rural and the urban world.

This fight to stem the rural exodus requires investing in the territory, but also a reappraisal of the rural and agricultural world and its modernisation.

In this series of actions, sustainability is cross-cutting and the regional governments promote it not only through mitigation and emission reduction policies, but also through policies focused on a shared governance of hydric resources, transport networks and monitoring and certification measures, just to name a few examples of increasingly regionalised functions and powers, having an increasingly political profile.

Governance and improvement of regional capacities

In addition to better national policies, regions need a suitable framework that will allow them to successfully meet these challenges. We believe, in line with the approach set out by the network Platforma, that the New Urban Policy must promote improved skills and autonomy of the local and regional governments, and that at this point the sustainability of the local and regional governments’ finances is crucial.

First of all, decentralization and regionalization policies remain necessary. However, they must be aimed at reinforcing, as opposed to weakening, regional autonomy and self-governance. In too many occasions, this transfer of functions and powers was not backed up by sufficient political and economic resources. In some cases, this has resulted not only in the disrepute of the regional authority. We reiterate our demand for democratic, responsible and autonomous regional governments.

Secondly, we see how, regardless of the type of central State and the level of decentralization, is increasingly crucial that the central governments deploy their public policies, and mainly those with a strong territorial impact, in a coordinated and efficient manner. Central, regional and local governments have different functions, partially overlapped in key areas like the promotion of economic development, the fight against poverty or the mitigation of climate change. Hence, it is necessary to implement measures and practices that contribute to multilevel governance in each one of the following fields: inter-ministerial coordination, policy coherence, information, financing, accountability... We, the regional government, are willing to support this type of improved coordination schemes and to exchange our experiences and best practices on this matter. In this regard, we strongly support the supportive framework set out in the Zero Draft, which is definitely a step in the right direction for the creation of territorial governance structures.

In the specific field of territorial policies, we believe that the New Urban Agenda must promote an Integrated Territorial Approach, addressing the urban issues in an effective way. Coordinating the efforts of the different administrative levels, but also those of the different ministries and their initiatives. An integrated approach including the appropriate dimensions (policies, spatial strategies, environmental protection, governance and financing), as organisations such Comunitas or NRG4SD have pointed out.

Finally, the regional governments express through their participation in Habitat III and in other international forums, their willingness and commitment to contribute, in its own and responsible manner, to the shared efforts. Therefore, we continue to call for the possibility to make our voice heard in the international stage, and to report on the progress made towards the common objectives that we have set for ourselves. In this respect, we agree with the Platforma network's call for the international recognition of the local and regional governments' role in the deployment of the New Urban Agenda. We also associate ourselves with Platforma's willingness to build a strong action program around the agenda, equipped with an evaluation mechanism with the involvement of local and regional authorities.

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