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I. Introduction

Dispute over the visions, actors and strategies around development has crystallised on several fronts against the backdrop of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In a setting defined by unstable alliances, nation-states, large cities, municipalities, the private sector, civil society, academia and international development cooperation actors all compete for greater influence. What is at stake is global impact on policy in terms of vision, orientation and funding, among other issues.

The 2030 Agenda is not a new way of measuring development in terms of setting new goals and indicators. On the contrary, it represents a critical vision that questions the sustainability of development and that notoriously demands that changes be made. However, the real chances of changing the development paradigm are hamstrung by certain actors repeating old schemes. This divergence –sometimes explicit, sometimes less so– occurs in a global arena shaped by power relations, differing forms of action and resource inequality. The prevailing institutional framework remains in place, but another is emerging. Local societies and government institutions seek to make a new model of society a reality. But actors with growing symbolic and real power are emerging. Their actions generate changes that clash with the vision of local societies legitimated by democratic mechanisms.

In this context, the debate on the role of territorial actors in the 2030 Agenda, a global agenda that is in dispute, will be discussed in this chapter. Realising the 2030 Agenda requires action be taken at different territorial scales. This chapter seeks to reflect on them with an emphasis on cities, but never losing sight of the global perspective. Its starting point is the situation in Latin America, the region in which the author mainly works.

This analysis contains very strong political content, with “politics” understood as the improvement of the quality of life, proximity, empathy, leadership and strategic vision. A discussion is therefore proposed that is closely related to the exercise of power and political competences, and the availability of resources.

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II. Sitting at the global table: challenges for territorial actors

What should be done to ensure that territorial actors have greater chances of taking a seat at the global table? Two factors are particularly important: forging territorial and global articulations, and having the capacity for *good governance*. The two are intertwined: the most skilled territorial leaders (*good governance*) will, in general, be better equipped to influence the different areas of global governance. What exactly is *good governance*? It is acting according to the competencies available with a focus on multilevel articulation, which includes influencing the global agenda. However, acting at multiple levels means facing some basic challenges, such as:

- Articulating the local and global from the territorial level. Local policies are the natural environment for management, innovation, articulation and participation in a context in which the dynamics of proximity prevail, but where global agendas permeate and influence. Global agendas have a range of territorial impacts that are not always positive. This is one of the reasons the role of local governments in guaranteeing inclusion, cohesion and improved quality of life is crucial:¹ they are obliged to interact with global actors and agendas via locally based management tools.
- Multilevel governance. Acting in a multilevel governance framework is not a matter of choice for territories (Serrano, 2011). Problems cannot be solved with more centralism, nor with a more *localist* or *municipalist* vision. While this is clear in the discourses of today's national governments, the *territorialisation of policies* of a centralist, vertical and sectoral nature predominates. Given this trend, a territorial approach to policies should be developed to ensure that territorial policies are constructed horizontally and in networks, not only with stakeholders from the territory, but also with actors from other levels of government and wider society. This does not mean that the problem lies in the volume of resources being allocated to territorial policies. Rather, these resources must be applied with a perspective that is local and not centralising, as well as with a global vision. Needless to say, this perspective poses major challenges in terms of articulation, and touches upon issues of policy *co-creation* and participation.
- Action and influence on the global agenda. While advances and achievements have been made, such as influencing the New Urban Agenda and configuring SDG 11, as well as the active participation of the Global Task Force (GTF) in the High-Level Political Forum on the SDGs, global agendas remain the preserve of central governments. The large number of city networks that have emerged around different subjects and issues (United Cities and Local Governments [UCLG] has identified more than 180) may lead to fragmentation of local government voices on the international scene before a shared vision can be built. To avoid this, we need a space for global articulation that produces synergies and greater capacity to influence global decision-making.

All these issues intersect with key questions such as the extent of territorial governments' competences, financing and capacities. Below, consideration is given to how to move towards this *territorial approach* to policies.

1. See ECLAC (2018) on linking SDGs with territorial development in Latin America.

III. From the “territorialisation of policies” to the “construction of territorial policies”

From a broad perspective, especially in Latin America, territorial policies and national and global development dynamics coexist with a set of paradoxes that make political action more complex for local governments. Some elements of this *context* are:

- More state and more decentralisation. Latin America has been through a major cycle since the *neoliberal era* began, when strong states were rebuilt that took charge of regional activity. A renewed wave of decentralisation has taken place that, a few setbacks and debates aside, has a clear view of the need to incorporate a territorial dimension into national policies. Numerous laws, normative frameworks and revamped systems of transfers of resources and competences have shaped the regional reality. Although the sustainability of this process is debated, certain authors speak of “recentralisation” or “centralised decentralisation” because a notable power imbalance exists in the interfaces, in other words, in relations between government levels.
- Higher income for territories, but territorial inequalities remain. Regions’ resources may be greater, but it has not been possible to overcome the historical inequality between regions (in this sense Latin America is the most unequal place in the world). When measuring the SDGs, for example, the results obtained at state level are generally good, but the differences between territories are enormous. The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) has noted that the resources transfers between different levels of government in Latin America have been unable to meet their targets of improving regional equality. In some contexts they have even been regressive, while in several countries growing discretionality has been observed in the forms of the transfers to local areas and their sizes, especially in unitary countries. In federal countries, the trend seems to be towards favouring intermediate levels over municipalities, although there are some exceptions.
- Better quantitative indicators in terms of transfers and financial resources but fewer *local projects*. The discourse behind focussing policy on local issues and the political will to transfer more resources to territories is strong, but it has a centralist mindset. The local is often reduced to a sphere for managing decisions taken at other levels (*tendering* for funds) and local capacity for negotiation is greatly diminished. Major efforts are still required to empower actors and improve territorial capacities. In short, the challenge is how to combine national and territorial policies in pursuit of a common goal of fighting inequality and territorial fragmentation from local societies that have the capacities, competences and resources to implement their development agenda autonomously.
- From globalised value chains to territorial value chains. As a backdrop, global systemic processes and value chains are in play that operate with an enclave dynamic in which none of the economic surplus they generate is retained. This partly explains why, although monetary poverty indicators have substantially improved, the signs of multidimensional poverty, of fragmentation and of social exclusion still exist at territorial level (and are in some cases even growing). In this regard, authors such as Francisco Alburquerque highlight the need to promote mechanisms that allow greater local control of these value chains in terms of negotiation and connection with the territorial development agenda.

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Many of these policies (which cannot be analysed in a polarised way because of their multiple nuances) tend to encourage the “territorialisation of policies” rather than the “construction of territorial policies”. In other words, local governments increasingly take on the role of managing decisions taken by central government. Thus, while the concept of the “territorialisation of policies” refers to a logic of action in which the sectoral and the vertical (the state’s influence in the local sphere) prevail, the idea of the “construction of territorial policies” alludes to a complementary horizontal and reticular logic which makes the territory the object and subject of development policies.

An important part of breaking the centralist mindset involves actors and alliances being articulated at territorial and global levels. Various studies exist on the need to promote these articulations in terms of governance,² although the volume of work proposing methodological responses based on empirical evidence is more reduced.

IV. The actors, their visions and practices. Debate, complementarity and diverse agendas

Building alliances and territorial articulations is key to improving citizens’ quality of life and to achieving greater presence and impact at the global table, where many crucial decisions are taken that impact the daily work of our local governments. This territorial articulation is not unconnected to the tensions and conflicts that occur at regional, national and global levels. It is therefore necessary to ask ourselves who the actors are in territorial development today and what are their interests³. Development is carried out with people and people tend to be concentrated in urban areas – mainly cities and metropolitan areas. But the traditional actors characterised by their identification and bond with the territory are not the only ones on the scene (Barreiro, 2007). They now share it with global actors with presence in the territory, who frequently treat it as an enclave in which to obtain and maximise resources.

This plurality of actors makes identifying interests (which are currently diffuse) more complex and therefore hinders the articulation of a shared project and vision of the territory’s development. That is why good local government in terms of governance is one of the factors that must be considered, even though it presents significant challenges. So, to the difficulty of coordinating the public sector with the private sector, civil society and academia, we must add the pending challenge of incorporating gender and generational diversity into all urban development projects.

These actors find themselves in competition and under stress and it is not always possible to advance in terms of a common project. Hence, authors like Barreiro (2007) describe the need for spaces that can enable a shift to be made from participation that is ideological in nature to a more pragmatic participation that aims to solve problems in line with the range of different viewpoints, interests and roles of the actors present in the territory.

In terms of global agendas, a city that creatively resolves these tensions and struggles will clearly be strengthened. To this end, alliances between different types of networks and typologies of cities (including metropoli-

2. For example, the OECD’s (2013) work with certain case studies, especially Colombia, is highly relevant for a better understanding of this topic; OECD (2015) is also in this line.

3. See Arocena and Marsiglia (2017).

tan areas, central and intermediate cities, and rural territories) are vital for mutual reinforcement and achieving greater influence. The large number of territorial networks in existence today is, in this sense, an opportunity (although some actors see this network density as a problem).

V. Linking with global agendas

Just as it is essential to move towards a rationale of territorial articulations and multilevel governance, it is important to strengthen cities' role in the global governance of development in order to give them greater regulatory influence in global scenarios. In the development field, the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs will serve as global reference points. As suggested above, this agenda criticises the day-to-day running of the prevailing development model and broad consensus exists that change is needed (UCLG, 2016). However, despite the intensive work done, it remains an agenda that emanated from within the United Nations System and was therefore signed by national governments. It may reflect many of the interests and concerns of cities and territories, but their role in the 2030 Agenda remains inadequate. SDG 11 is a major step forward, but the urban and territorial must occupy more and better spaces. In this sense, the participation of urban and territorial actors in global governance remains more symbolic than real, as they do not play a central role in the decision-making around global policies, financing and how to manage the SDGs at territorial level. *As all SDGs are local*, undeniable opportunities exist for local governments, but it is not clear that these territorial levels have managed to enter the decision-making spaces, either nationally or globally.

While the alliance between national governments and the classic configuration of international cooperation still prevails in the way the world order is organised, local governments –especially regions and large cities– are emerging as new actors with concrete proposals and activities. It is in this context that the “territorialisation of policies” (alliances between national governments and international cooperation) must be combined the “construction of territorial policies”, which involves a horizontal model of networks and articulations in the territory. This still-emerging space will only become a central part of the 2030 Agenda framework if local governments are able to take advantage of their strategic, management and international relations capacities and resist being swallowed up in alliances seen as spaces governed by national and global dynamics.⁴ There have been innovative experiences in international cooperation in this regard, including the UNDP ART Program (Gallicchio, 2017).

VI. Conclusion

Territorial actors' influence and capacity for articulation is closely related to decentralisation (and recentralisation) processes, as well as territorial and global challenges. Cities must position themselves in an innovative and creative way, on both territorial and global agendas. There are at least three parts to this positioning: articulating actors at a territorial level for the participatory construction of territorial policies, proper inclusion into the multilevel governance system and influence on global agendas, especially the 2030 Agenda.

The participation of urban and territorial actors in global governance remains more symbolic than real

4. An important contribution on the relationship between local governments and cooperation is made by Fernández de Losada (2016).

Each of these aspects can contribute to strengthening certain capacities and synergies in urban development processes. The opportunities related to the 2030 Agenda are enormous, but there is a risk that local governments may be subsumed in a strategy whose course is dominated by national governments and international development cooperation. The efforts being made by the networks of cities are managing to balance this to a certain degree. But there is still a great deal of work to be done.

Taking a seat at the global table means meeting a double challenge: being excellent in the local management of development and generating multi-actor alliances for greater global impact. As Barcelona's mayor, Ada Colau, has pointed out, though the "states rule" mentality still prevails, it is cities that have to grapple with everyday issues. For Colau, problems are resolved in cities or they are not resolved at all. Hence, reviewing competences and the allocation of more resources is key; but, as has been pointed out, this must be accompanied by the implementation of a management model based on good government and governance.

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