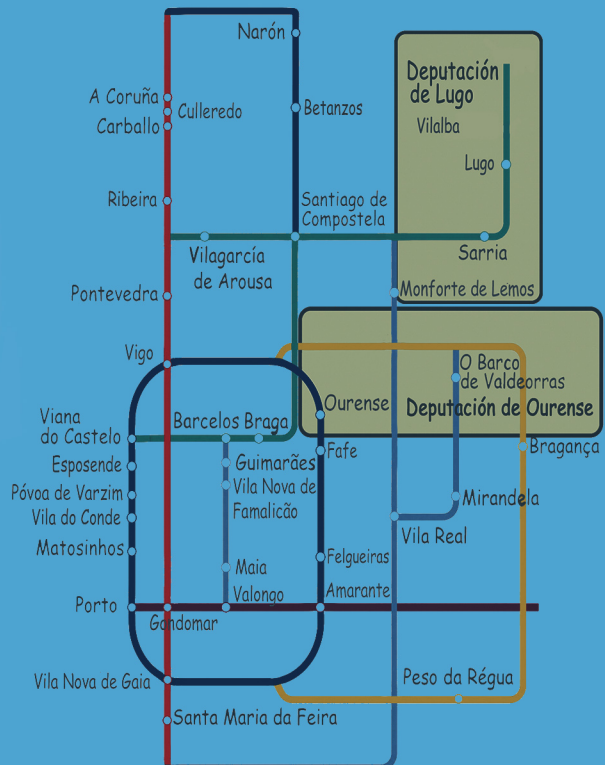




EIXO ATLANTICO COOPERATION GUIDES



# FOUNDATIONS FOR LOCAL DIPLOMACY WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF EIXO ATLANTICO



Interreg



Cofinanciado por la Unión Europea Cofinanciado pela União Europeia

España – Portugal





**EIXO ATLANTICO  
COOPERATION GUIDES**

**FOUNDATIONS FOR  
LOCAL DIPLOMACY  
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EIXO ATLANTICO**

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DIRECTOR:  
Xoán Vázquez Mao

AUTHORS:  
Jose Luis Méndez Romeu  
Paulo Ramalho

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## INTRODUCTION

### THE CURRENT INTERNATIONAL GEOPOLITICAL CONTEXT

Today we live in a highly globalised and interdependent world, in which everything that happens can be observed and discussed in real time, in which decision-making processes are clearly shorter, so anyone who wants to participate on the international platform and benefit from the opportunities and challenges it offers cannot fail to follow and take due account of the dynamics and trends of international geopolitics. This naturally applies to local and regional authorities who believe in the importance of local diplomacy and who want to build and maintain an international relations strategy. With this in mind, here are a few notes on the international geopolitical context of today.

On an international level, the end of the first quarter of the 21st century is essentially marked by two major events: the Covid-19 pandemic and the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation.

The virus that caused the pandemic (SARS-CoV-2) was first identified in December 2019 in the Chinese city of Wuhan, and the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a pandemic on 11 March 2020<sup>1</sup>. This disease is estimated to have caused around seven million deaths<sup>2</sup>, and the same WHO officially declared the end of the pandemic on 5 May 2023<sup>3</sup>.

Never before had the scientific community and the health industry mobilised so extensively in the search for an effective vaccine. The vaccine was developed in record time, playing a decisive role in controlling the pandemic.

Covid-19 paralyzed Western Europe and much of the world, causing not only a serious health crisis but also a large-scale economic crisis, a new reflection on the benefits and risks of globalisation, as well as the growth of protectionist desires.

The lockdowns have temporarily disrupted the normal functioning of supply chains and the flow of people. Gross Domestic Product in the 27 countries of the European Union as a whole fell by 6.4%<sup>4</sup> and industrial production by 8%<sup>5</sup> in 2020. On the other hand, the pandemic has accelerated the digital transition, e-commerce and teleworking.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.news.un.org/pt/story/2020/03/1706881](http://www.news.un.org/pt/story/2020/03/1706881)

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that the number of direct and indirect fatalities may have reached 14.9 million, [www.news.un.org/pt/story/2022/05/1788242](http://www.news.un.org/pt/story/2022/05/1788242)

<sup>3</sup> [www.news.un.org/pt/story/2023/05/1813942](http://www.news.un.org/pt/story/2023/05/1813942)

<sup>4</sup> [www.pt.euronews.com/business/2021/02/02/2020](http://www.pt.euronews.com/business/2021/02/02/2020)

<sup>5</sup> [www.pt.euronews.com/business/2021/02/15/](http://www.pt.euronews.com/business/2021/02/15/)

To address the economic and social damage caused by the pandemic and enhance economic resilience, the European Union launched a support programme for its member states, worth around 800 billion euros, known as “NextGenerationEU”<sup>6</sup>.

At the same time, not forgetting all the work done by the United Nations, in particular through the “World Health Organization”, the European Union has maintained its role as a major player in international cooperation. It has been the largest donor and exporter of vaccines worldwide, with financial and humanitarian support for the countries most in need<sup>7</sup>.

In the meantime, life has been returning to the “new normal”, and in 2021, according to Eurostat, the GDP of the 27 EU economies grew by 5.4%<sup>8</sup> and industrial production by 8.2%<sup>9</sup>, compared to 2020.

However, it is important to point out that the pandemic, and in particular the responses we have seen in the various regions of the global space, has reinforced a reality that we often undervalue and even ignore: that the world of today is still profoundly unequal and asymmetrical in terms of economic and social development, and in terms of “good governance” itself.

On 24 February 2022, the Russian Federation advanced with its armies over Ukraine’s borders, entering Ukraine’s territory, with the “argument” of trying to defend the Ukrainian population of ethnic Russian origin from an alleged ongoing genocide promoted by the Ukrainian government in the “separatist” regions of Donetsk and Luhansk. Vladimir Putin called it a “special military operation” aimed at “demilitarising and denazifying” Ukraine<sup>10</sup>.

Russian officials sought to prevent NATO’s expansion into Eastern Europe, overthrow President Zelensky’s government, and restore Russian influence in Ukraine under Moscow’s control. We would even venture to say that Vladimir Putin’s clear intention was to put an end to Ukraine’s ambitions to join NATO, but also the European Union itself.

The Russian president didn’t expect much resistance from the Ukrainian armed forces, and he was convinced that Western countries would react similarly to the 2014 annexation of Crimea.

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<sup>6</sup> [https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/recovery-plan-europe\\_pt](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/recovery-plan-europe_pt)

<sup>7</sup> [www.consilium.europa.eu/pt/policies/coronavirus-pandemic/covid-19-global-solidarity/](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/pt/policies/coronavirus-pandemic/covid-19-global-solidarity/)

<sup>8</sup> [www.eco.sapo.pt/2022/06/29/pib-da-ue](http://www.eco.sapo.pt/2022/06/29/pib-da-ue)

<sup>9</sup> [www.eco.sapo.pt/2022/02/16/producao-industrial-cresce](http://www.eco.sapo.pt/2022/02/16/producao-industrial-cresce)

<sup>10</sup> [www.pt.euronews.com/2022/02/25-putin-anuncia-operacao](http://www.pt.euronews.com/2022/02/25-putin-anuncia-operacao)

This time, however, Vladimir Putin miscalculated, or was deceived. Not only has Ukraine mobilised and organised all its forces to resist and expel Russian troops from the occupied areas of the Donbass, but it has also started to demand more strongly the return of Crimea. In the same way, the European Union and its member states, as well as a large part of the countries belonging to NATO, with the United States and the United Kingdom at their head, decided to respond with very tough economic sanctions on the Russian Federation and strong financial, material and military equipment support for Ukraine. They were joined by other countries such as Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Taiwan and Switzerland.

In fact, a large part of the international community immediately condemned the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation. At an Emergency Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly, held less than ten days after the invasion, 141 of the 193 member states voted to condemn Russia<sup>11</sup>. Only 35 states abstained and only 5 voted on Moscow's side. Among those who abstained were China, India, Iran, Pakistan and South Africa. Belarus, North Korea and Syria, as expected, voted against.

The truth is that the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation, as well as the annexation of Ukrainian territories are the most serious violation of the fundamental principles of the United Nations Charter ever committed by a permanent member of the Security Council<sup>12</sup>, and therefore constitute a real affront to the international legal order and to the United Nations Organization itself.

That's why the abstention of countries with the responsibilities of China, India, Iran, Pakistan and South Africa cannot put the international community at ease. In fact, in the case of China and Iran, it doesn't even show a true status of neutrality, because in practice these two countries are positioning themselves as real allies of Russia. China is now increasingly the Russian Federation's main trading partner<sup>13</sup> and Iran has often been accused of supplying Russia with ballistic missiles and drones<sup>14</sup>. And the truth is that the Russian and Iranian governments recently announced the conclusion of a new co-operation agreement between the two countries.

India, on the other hand, while it avoids officially censuring Russia, and is currently one of the main buyers of Russian oil, has sought to defend its neutrality, frequently affirming the need to find solutions to end the conflict in Ukraine peacefully<sup>15</sup>.

In the meantime, more than two years have passed since the start of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, and as much as it pains us, the truth is that Europe is once again at war, and there is no end in sight. Diplomatic efforts have been unsuccessful.

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<sup>11</sup> "General Assembly repudiates Russia's military offence against Ukraine" [www.un.org/pt/story/2022/03/1781482](http://www.un.org/pt/story/2022/03/1781482)

<sup>12</sup> "Da pandemia à guerra - Impacto das alterações geopolíticas na economia portuguesa", by Sandra Fernandes, Nuno Crespo, Carlos Gaspar and Bruno Cardoso Reis, page 21, Editora Caleidoscópio.

<sup>13</sup> Trade relations between China and Russia increased by around 64% between 2021 and 2023 [www.bbc.com/portuguese/articles/cl719vyyko](http://www.bbc.com/portuguese/articles/cl719vyyko)

<sup>14</sup> [www.consilium.europa.eu/pt/press/press-realeses/2024/09/13/iran](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/pt/press/press-realeses/2024/09/13/iran)

<sup>15</sup> [www.pt.euronews.com/2024/07/09/primeiro-ministro-da-india-critica-invasao-russa](http://www.pt.euronews.com/2024/07/09/primeiro-ministro-da-india-critica-invasao-russa)

We experienced seventy-seven years of peace between the end of World War II and 24 February 2022, but concerns about security, defence and military investment have returned to the speeches of European leaders.

So much so that a few days after the invasion of Ukraine, the president of the European Commission, Ursula Von der Leyen, warned that “what is happening today in Ukraine shows that Europeans cannot take their security for granted and must invest in it”<sup>16</sup>. In the same vein, German Chancellor Olaf Sholz said that “we must invest more in the security of our country in order to protect our freedom and our democracy” and immediately announced that Germany would significantly increase its defence budget in order to re-equip its armed forces<sup>17</sup>.

NATO is not formally involved in this military conflict, but as mentioned above, several of its member states continue to provide financial aid, as well as military supplies and equipment to Ukraine. In fact, in February 2024, the former NATO Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, even called on Europeans to produce more weapons in order to increase deliveries to Ukraine. “We need to rebuild and develop our industrial base more quickly in order to increase deliveries to Ukraine and replenish our own stocks. That means moving from slow production to fast production in times of conflict.”<sup>18</sup>.

There are no certain figures, but the truth is that the war in Ukraine has already resulted in tens of thousands of deaths and injuries. According to the New York Times, around 70,000 Ukrainian soldiers and 120,000 Russian soldiers will have died by August 2023<sup>19</sup>. As for the number of civilian victims, the United Nations estimates that they will have reached at least 11,000 by June 2024<sup>20</sup>. Also according to the International Organisation for Migration, the Russian Federation’s aggression against Ukraine is responsible for around six and a half million refugees<sup>21</sup>.

But the war in Ukraine is not just a humanitarian tragedy, a difficult-to-heal wound in the peace we have become accustomed to in Europe, or a serious violation of international law. It is also a geopolitical fact, which in such a globalised age as we are today, is quickly causing damage to the international economy.

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<sup>16</sup> “Von der Leyen stresses that EU defence policy has evolved more in six days than in two decades”, <https://cnnportugal.iol.pt/guerra/ucrania/von-der-leyen-sublinha-que-politica-de-defesa-da-ue-evoluuiu-mais-em-seis-dias-do-que-em-duas-decadas/20220301/621e1d010cf2c7ea0f1c626c>

<sup>17</sup> “Germany to supply Ukraine with weapons”, [www.rr.sapo.pt/noticia/mundo/2022/02/27/alemanha-vai-fornecer-armas-a-ucrania](http://www.rr.sapo.pt/noticia/mundo/2022/02/27/alemanha-vai-fornecer-armas-a-ucrania)

<sup>18</sup> “Ukraine. Nato calls on Europeans to increase arms production”, [www.rtp.pt/noticias/guerra-na-ucrania/ucnaia-nato-apela-a-europeus-para-aumentarem-producao-de-armas\\_n1549861](http://www.rtp.pt/noticias/guerra-na-ucrania/ucnaia-nato-apela-a-europeus-para-aumentarem-producao-de-armas_n1549861)

<sup>19</sup> “Ucrânia: dois anos de guerra”, [www.euronews.com/2024/02/24/ucrania-dois-anos-de-guerra-em-numeros](http://www.euronews.com/2024/02/24/ucrania-dois-anos-de-guerra-em-numeros)

<sup>20</sup> [www.news.un.org/pt/story/2024/06/1832886](http://www.news.un.org/pt/story/2024/06/1832886)

<sup>21</sup> “Conflict in Ukraine has made 14 million refugees”, [www.pt.euronews.com/2024/02/22/conflito-na-ucrania-ja-fez-14-milhoes-de-deslocados-segundo-a-onu](http://www.pt.euronews.com/2024/02/22/conflito-na-ucrania-ja-fez-14-milhoes-de-deslocados-segundo-a-onu)

According to US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, at a time when the economy was beginning to recover from the crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine represents the greatest challenge to the world economy<sup>22</sup>.

In fact, in the months following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the prices of fuel, energy, fertilisers, food<sup>23</sup> and most raw materials skyrocketed to very high levels on the international markets. Inflation accelerated and took on new life. The Russian Federation was one of the world's largest exporters of oil, gas and coal. Ukraine, a major cereal producer, was usually responsible for around 16% of the corn placed on the international market. And Russia and Belarus are among the world's largest suppliers of potash, an essential element in fertilisers.

That's why the Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres, warned at an early stage that this war could cause a serious food crisis, particularly in the poorest regions of the world, throwing tens of millions of people into food insecurity<sup>24</sup>.

Within the European Union, in addition to the costs of financial and military aid to Ukraine, member states are also suffering the consequences of trade restrictions resulting from the economic sanctions imposed on the Russian Federation. Before the invasion of Ukraine, Russia was Europe's largest supplier of oil, gas and coal.

Since February 2022, the EU has banned the export of more than 48 billion euros in goods to the Russian Federation and the import of more than 91.2 billion euros in goods from Russia. This means that compared to the export and import figures for 2021, 54% of exports and 58% of imports are currently under embargo<sup>25</sup>.

The trajectory of economic growth within the EU has clearly slowed down. Many member states have been forced to increase their defence budgets. Germany itself, Europe's largest economy, is currently experiencing difficult times, with predictions of a possible recession.

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<sup>22</sup> "War in Ukraine is biggest challenge for world economy, says Yellen", [www.exame.com/economia/guerra-na-ucrania-e-maior-desafio-para-a-economia-mundial-afirma-yellen](http://www.exame.com/economia/guerra-na-ucrania-e-maior-desafio-para-a-economia-mundial-afirma-yellen)

<sup>23</sup> "How Russia's invasion of Ukraine aggravated the world food crisis", [www.consilium.europa.eu/pt/infographics/how-the-russian-invasion-of-ukraine-has-further-approvated-the-global-crisis/](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/pt/infographics/how-the-russian-invasion-of-ukraine-has-further-approvated-the-global-crisis/)

<sup>24</sup> "War in Ukraine jeopardises food security and could trigger hunger hurricane, UN warns", [www.rfi.fr/br/mundo/20220314-guerra-na-ucrania-coloca-em-risco-seguranca-alimentar-mundial](http://www.rfi.fr/br/mundo/20220314-guerra-na-ucrania-coloca-em-risco-seguranca-alimentar-mundial)

<sup>25</sup> "EU sanctions against Russia explained", [www.consilium.europa.eu/pt/policies/sanctions-against-russia/sanctions-against-russia-explained/](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/pt/policies/sanctions-against-russia/sanctions-against-russia-explained/)

Let's remember that Germany, which was one of Russia's biggest natural gas customers, in retaliation for Russia's aggression against Ukraine, even suspended the certification of the "Nord Stream 2" gas pipeline.

However, despite all the challenges, the truth is that the EU has clearly emerged stronger from this conflict, both in terms of its identity and its internal cohesion. By standing firm on its core values, defending the pillars of democracy and the rule of law, the dignity of the human person, as well as the respect for international law, the European Union has managed to mobilise its member states for a common response, both in terms of the economic sanctions to be imposed on the Russian Federation and the aid to be given to Ukraine. It has also been able to look for alternative ways of freeing itself from dependence on Russian fossil fuels.

In fact, the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation significantly accelerated the energy transition and investment in renewable energies, thus making a "positive contribution" to the implementation of the European Green Deal, which aims to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050. Shortly before the start of the war, the European institutions were negotiating a target of 40% renewable energy sources and 9% energy efficiency by 2030. In response to Russian aggression, the European Commission increased the ambition of the targets to 45% and 13% respectively, as part of the RePowerEU plan<sup>26</sup>.

On the other hand, it is worth emphasising the decisive and leading way in which the European Union has already prepared itself to participate actively in the recovery and reconstruction of Ukraine, having recently created the so-called "Mechanism for Ukraine" for said purpose<sup>27</sup>.

NATO, too, has come out of this war stronger, because while it didn't formally intervene in the war, it also managed to mobilise all its members, with the exception of Turkey, to take part in sanctions against Russia and aid to Ukraine. And it also managed to secure the accession of two new member states: Finland in 2023 and Sweden in 2024.

With regard to Turkey, it's important to note that although it didn't take part in the economic sanctions against Russia, it voted in favour of the latter's condemnation at the United Nations Assembly and closed the Bosphorus Straits, thus preventing the reinforcement of the Russian squadron in the Black Sea.

This war is also confirmation of the decline of the Russian Federation and its break with the Europe of democracies. Despite all the resources it has mobilised, which are incomparably superior to those of the Ukrainian armed forces, it has not achieved the easy victory it had hoped for, nor is it likely to do so. It's no coincidence that Russian leaders often need to remind the world that they have nuclear weapons.

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<sup>26</sup> [www.publico.pt/2023/02/25/azul/noticia/guerra-ucrania-fez-ue-avancar-energias-renovaveis](http://www.publico.pt/2023/02/25/azul/noticia/guerra-ucrania-fez-ue-avancar-energias-renovaveis)

<sup>27</sup> [www.consilium.europa.eu/pt/policies/ukraine-facility/](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/pt/policies/ukraine-facility/)

What's more, the Russian economy is highly dependent on the export of natural resources, namely oil, gas and coal, so having lost a large part of its trade space with EU member states as a result of the economic sanctions imposed on it, it is now heavily dependent on the will of its major clients, China and India<sup>28</sup>, to whom it is forced to sell at a discount.

China, with the decline of the Russian Federation, is consolidating its status as the second world power, with the ambition of being able to lead a kind of "coalition of autocratic powers", in opposition to the biggest power, which clearly remains the United States, and which leads the powers of the so-called "wider West".

As far as the United States is concerned, the invasion of Ukraine demonstrates the leading role that this "superpower" continues to play in resolving military conflicts in Europe, not only by participating and mobilising others to impose economic sanctions on Russia, but essentially by providing Ukraine with financial aid and military equipment. Let's not forget the role that the United States played in organising the Contact Group for the defence of Ukraine, the so-called "Ramstein Group"<sup>29</sup>.

It is important to recognise that the international order is now much more multipolar in terms of power and influence than in the recent past. The group of emerging economies and developing countries have increased their combined weight<sup>30</sup>. The rise of other powers and economic blocs, such as the BRICS and the so-called "Global South" countries, shows clear changes in the international order<sup>31</sup>.

The BRICS, a kind of informal group with the ambition of political and economic influence on the international platform, initially made up of Brazil, Russia, India and China in 2009, later joined in 2011 by South Africa, and by 2024 by Saudi Arabia, Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran and the United Arab Emirates, now account for 46% of the world's population and around 36% of global GDP at purchasing parity<sup>32</sup>.

Finally, the United Nations Organization. Regardless of all the efforts made by its Secretary-General, António Guterres, there is no doubt that the world's largest multilateral organisation is clearly weakened by this conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

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<sup>28</sup> "Russia exports almost all its oil to China and India", [www.jornaldenegocios.pt/economia/detalhe/russia-exporta-quase-todo-o-petroleo-para-a-china-e-para-a-india](http://www.jornaldenegocios.pt/economia/detalhe/russia-exporta-quase-todo-o-petroleo-para-a-china-e-para-a-india)

<sup>29</sup> "Nato: New aid plan for Ukraine", [www.pt.euronews.com/my-europe/2024/06/13/nato-novo-plano-de-ajuda-a-ucrania](http://www.pt.euronews.com/my-europe/2024/06/13/nato-novo-plano-de-ajuda-a-ucrania)

<sup>30</sup> In this regard, Sandra Fernandes, Nuno Crespo, Carlos Gaspar and Bruno Cardoso Reis, in "Da Pandemia à guerra, impacto das alterações geopolíticas na economia portuguesa", Conselho Económico e Social, page 113

<sup>31</sup> [www.dn.pt/6821779541/os-brics-e-um-mundo-multipolar/](http://www.dn.pt/6821779541/os-brics-e-um-mundo-multipolar/)

<sup>32</sup> [www.exame.com/mundo/brics-anuncia-ampliacao-do-grupo-com-mais-seis-paises/](http://www.exame.com/mundo/brics-anuncia-ampliacao-do-grupo-com-mais-seis-paises/)

On the one hand, it has failed to prevent war, and on the other, it has witnessed, for the first time, a serious violation of the fundamental principles of the “United Nations Charter” by a permanent member of its own Security Council...

Meanwhile, another conflict has arisen, following the terrorist attacks carried out by “ Hamas ”<sup>33</sup> on 7 October 2023 against the state of Israel, in which around 1,200 Israelis were killed and another 250 taken hostage, with an impact on the geopolitics of the Middle East, and with a strong risk of escalating.

In fact, following this attack, Israel responded by eliminating the terrorist group Hamas and recovering the 250 Israeli citizens taken hostage, entering the Gaza Strip with its troops and, later, in the face of attacks by another armed group, this time from Lebanon, “ Hezbollah ”<sup>34</sup>, also entering the south of this country with its armed forces.

Meanwhile, Yemen’s “ Houthi ” rebels<sup>35</sup> continue to terrorise ships trying to pass through the Red Sea to the Suez Canal on the grounds of retaliation for Israel’s attacks on Hamas and the Palestinians in Gaza<sup>36</sup>.

Since 25% of international trade usually passes through the Red Sea, many shipping companies are beginning to abandon this corridor as a result of the Houthi attacks, which is increasing the costs of maritime transport and logistics.

Hamas, Hezbollah and the Houthis are “ non-state ” armed groups supported by Iran, so the immediate protests from the Iranian authorities over Israel’s military offensives came as no surprise.

The same cannot be said of the missile and drone attacks carried out by Iran against Israeli territory on 14 April<sup>37</sup> and 1 October<sup>38</sup>, or the bombings carried out by Israel against Iranian territory on 19 April and 26 October<sup>39</sup>. All during the current year of 2024. Here we are talking about a much more dangerous escalation of the conflict between two sovereign states that are also regional powers.

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<sup>33</sup> [www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-67039975](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-67039975)

<sup>34</sup> [www.bbc.com/portuguese/articles/c0dm7mw27m3o](http://www.bbc.com/portuguese/articles/c0dm7mw27m3o)

<sup>35</sup> [www.bbc.com/portuguese/articles/cx0vkgq29jno](http://www.bbc.com/portuguese/articles/cx0vkgq29jno)

<sup>36</sup> [www.pt.euronews.com/2024/06/14/houthis-reivindicam-ataques-a-3-navios-nas-ultimas-24-horas](http://www.pt.euronews.com/2024/06/14/houthis-reivindicam-ataques-a-3-navios-nas-ultimas-24-horas)

<sup>37</sup> [www.pt.euronews.com/2024/04/14/irao-ataca-israel-com-mais-de-200-misseis-e-drones](http://www.pt.euronews.com/2024/04/14/irao-ataca-israel-com-mais-de-200-misseis-e-drones)

<sup>38</sup> [www.pt.euronews.com/2024/10/01/eua-dizem-que-irao-est-a-preparar-ataque-com-misseis-contra-israel](http://www.pt.euronews.com/2024/10/01/eua-dizem-que-irao-est-a-preparar-ataque-com-misseis-contra-israel)

<sup>39</sup> [www.pt.euronews.com/2024/10/26/israel-lanca-vaga-de-ataques-aereos-contra-o-irao](http://www.pt.euronews.com/2024/10/26/israel-lanca-vaga-de-ataques-aereos-contra-o-irao)

The truth is that, just over twelve months on, this conflict has already caused a real humanitarian drama in the Gaza Strip: around 70% of existing buildings have been destroyed, including basic infrastructure, schools and hospitals, 1.9 million people have been displaced out of an estimated population of 2.2 million Palestinians, and more than 40,000 people have died<sup>40</sup>.

And here too, the United Nations Organization has seen its voice disrespected and its ability to ensure peacekeeping called into question. The Israeli Foreign Minister even declared recently that United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres was “persona non grata” and “forbidden to enter Israel”<sup>41</sup>.

Now, it is right to recognise the enormous work that the United Nations has done in other areas, including with the personal commitment of the Secretary-General himself, such as humanitarian aid, the fight against poverty and climate change, the promotion of human rights, sustainable development and good governance, even bringing local authorities on board in solving major global problems. But we must not let the United Nations’ main mission of “promoting international peace and security” fall by the wayside<sup>42</sup>. It is important to rethink the UN, how it works and, in particular, its Security Council.

Meanwhile, on 8 December, after 14 years of civil war, the Syrian regime, led by Bashar-al Assad, a dictatorship supported by Russia and Iran, fell...

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<sup>40</sup> [www.ffms.pt/pt-pt/atualmente/quatro-notas-sobre-o-conflito-no-medio-oriente](http://www.ffms.pt/pt-pt/atualmente/quatro-notas-sobre-o-conflito-no-medio-oriente)

<sup>41</sup> [www.pt.euronews.com/2024/10/02/antonio-guterres-considerado-persona-non-grata-e-proibido-de-entrar-em-israel](http://www.pt.euronews.com/2024/10/02/antonio-guterres-considerado-persona-non-grata-e-proibido-de-entrar-em-israel)

<sup>42</sup> [www.cig.gov.pt/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/carta-das-nacoes-unidas.pdf](http://www.cig.gov.pt/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/carta-das-nacoes-unidas.pdf)



**01**

**CITY DIPLOMACY  
AND LOCAL COOPERATION  
WHAT IS LOCAL DIPLOMACY**

01

# 01

## **CITY DIPLOMACY AND LOCAL COOPERATION WHAT IS LOCAL DIPLOMACY**

The demographic and sociological changes that define the recent evolution of cities have been reflected in local policies, which have been progressively expanding, despite the relative rigidity of the legal context that defines local competences. Under pressure from citizens' demands, municipalities have taken on new competences, created specialised services to respond to unavoidable problems, got involved in planning companies' logistical and infrastructure needs or devised innovative solutions to complex problems.

At the same time, cities have become aware of their unique institutional position, as a habitat where labour and social exchanges take place, where the main companies and public services are based, where trends are created, consumption is produced and processes of innovation and creativity are generated. Cities have acted and also interacted primarily with their peers, other cities, through exchanges, meetings, forums and other forms of knowledge sharing. In the context of state or European Union structures, but also in informal and other frameworks created directly by the cities. They did this because they had urgent needs and problems that could not be solved without delay. They then drew up the necessary reports to justify this. This is local diplomacy.

It can be said that globalisation has generated common goals among civil stakeholders. Advances in information technology and the globalisation of both mass and business tourism have brought the world much closer together, with extensive information available at all times, from anywhere and through any medium.

Systematically in some cases, occasionally in others, the inclusion of many activities in a global framework has meant that specific objectives and strategies have had to be incorporated, often creating specialised international relations units. Even the Foreign Service, traditionally run by career diplomats, has had to recruit new professional profiles to fulfil some of these functions.

This is how we talk today about commercial diplomacy or cultural or sports diplomacy, as specific areas of relations between states. For their part, companies, universities, research centres, corporate entities, multinationals, non-governmental organisations, sports federations and clubs, among many other types of institutions, maintain a constant relationship with their counterparts in other countries and often even support specialised structures for this function.

Nowadays, it is inevitable to consider the international dimension of any ambitious project. Whether it's to exchange information, develop joint projects, influence other economic or social spaces, or even simply to promote one's own activity, a presence abroad is essential. Any organisation that aspires to visibility must consider its international dimension through media presence, the use of social networks, presence in relevant forums and markets or through other procedures. This presence will sometimes be explicit, such as in development cooperation or through participation in networks or alliances of cities, organisations or companies. On other occasions it will be implicit, such as participation in international forums and congresses.

On the other hand, within the EU, cooperation between cities and territories is mandatory in order to access many lines of financial support with the underlying aim of fostering European citizenship through mutual knowledge and shared work on the same objectives.

Sub-state powers followed a similar trend in all countries. Both at the level of the governments of federal or autonomous states and at the level of local authorities, the relationship with counterpart institutions in other countries has become more generalised and specialised. As a result, international structures have emerged that bring together governments at the same level or at several levels, such as the EU Committee of the Regions, in which both regional and local governments participate.

The new form of diplomacy was defined as follows:

This new regional capacity to dialogue directly with other parts of the world has been called *paradiplomacy* to differentiate it from foreign policy, which remains the prerogative of central governments<sup>43</sup>. [It is] a response to the state's inability to solve local problems<sup>44</sup>.

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<sup>43</sup> ZERAOU, Z., 2011. Diplomacia paralela y las relaciones internacionales de las regiones. *Desafíos* (23). Pág. 77

<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem* pág. 90.

We are seeing a new application of the principle of subsidiarity so that local powers can also look after their specific interests in the international sphere. A new sphere of international relations has necessarily been created. The generalisation of city diplomacy has been very rapid, which speaks volumes for its necessity and usefulness.

City diplomacy encompasses all the institutions and actions that allow cities to interact with other players on the international stage to represent their interests and those of their citizens. The thematic areas of action are as follows:

Economic and trade policy, the promotion of foreign investment and the attraction of decision-making centres, the promotion of exports, the attraction of investment, policies for attracting sporting events, cooperation on science and technology, energy, the environment and transport, the fight against climate change, education, immigration, international solidarity and labour mobility<sup>45</sup>.

The break-up of the bipolar world characteristic of the Cold War gave rise to new economic and political dynamics such as globalisation, the reduction of protectionism or the drive to integrate states into supra-state structures, of which the European Union is one of the most successful examples. Another notable example is Mercosur. These trends have helped to dilute the concept of the border, which was previously understood as a safeguard of territorial integrity, and is now considered an obstacle to free trade and the movement of people, without prejudice to the fact that borders continue to delimit different communities of citizens governed by their own rules and legal systems. States quickly assumed that the elimination of customs barriers, the free movement of people and goods, the relocation of production and the internationalisation of capital could contribute to the progress of the population to a greater extent than the previous model of limited integration.

Co-operation between states and even between cities and territories separated by state borders has been encouraged at all levels. Borders have not disappeared, but their impact has been diluted, while exchanges of all kinds have become widespread on both sides of these artificial divisions. Of course, trade between different countries has always existed, but what is new is the current intensity of flows of goods, people and capital. More recently, globalisation has been shown to generate not only the positive effects mentioned above, but also drawbacks and risks, to which the Covid epidemic has given high visibility: risks to supply chains, loss of control over inputs, mass migration, the impact of mass tourism, etc. To date, however, neither international organisations nor national states have changed their position in favour of globalisation.

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<sup>45</sup> PAQUIN, S., 2022. Paradiplomatie fonctionnelle, identitaire et protodiplomatie en Catalogne: un cas unique. *Catalonia* (31), p. 3.

One of the most unique areas of external relations is cross-border cooperation. Although the first European experiences of cooperation between territories separated by a border took place in Scandinavia, it was within the framework of the EU that they became widespread and consolidated with the first initiative, the Enschede-Gronau Euroregion between the Netherlands and Germany, created in 1958, followed in 1963 by the Basiliensis Euroregion, which integrated territories from three countries. France, Germany and Switzerland.

Since 1980, the framework has become widespread through different organisational instruments designed to coordinate concerted actions on both sides of the respective borders. The Cohesion Fund promoted said structures. The co-operation thus established sought to solve a double problem, firstly by managing services whose functionality in the territory was hampered by the border barrier, but also by overcoming the peripheral nature that border territories almost always represent in relation to the main capitals.

Local authorities and central or sub-state governments are part of the same institutional bloc, since they are all public institutions that administer the competences of the state. The differences are a consequence of their different functions. Local authorities deal with issues related to the coexistence and development of their territory, and are geared towards managing services and promoting social participation, always within the framework of their territorial demarcation. While state governments take care of supra-local functions, regulating the legal framework and defining economic, foreign, defence and security, fiscal and scientific policy guidelines, etc. It can be deduced from this that local diplomacy is not encroaching on the sphere of competence of states, but is transferring its own issues of interest to relations with other cities which, although local, are also common to those of other cities, but across borders.



## EIXO ATLANTICO, INTERNATIONAL CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION ORGANISATION

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The Eixo Atlântico, one of the most consolidated and experienced transnational organisations, cannot ignore the trend described. Both because of its European projection and in order to respond to the needs of the urban system of its member cities and in coherence with its internal development policies, Eixo Atlântico must have a strategy for action, which the present Report seeks to develop. By its very nature, as the entity that brings together the cities of the Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion, the international cooperation strategy must facilitate dialogue with other institutions based on the representation of a single territorial space.

Over the three decades of its history, Eixo Atlântico has promoted various projects with a view to internationalisation. These include those related to territorial planning and development, such as the First and Second Strategic Studies which gave rise to the Eixo Atlântico's Agenda 21 and, subsequently, the Urban Agenda and its corresponding Action Plan, actions fully in line with the United Nations and EU guidelines on urban development. Said initiatives were subsequently continued by the Urban Sustainability Plans and the Social Cohesion Map.

The Eixo documents are based on the expertise of specialists from the academic, professional and institutional fields, whose reports are then validated by the Eixo' representative bodies. In this way, conceptual rigour and the representativeness of the proposals are combined, guaranteeing their best subsequent implementation. Through the aforementioned documents, an internationalisation strategy has been developed which has recently given rise to cooperation projects in Latin America, the Caribbean and Canada.

The importance and uniqueness of Eixo Atlântico has been duly recognised institutionally by both the Spanish and Portuguese governments. An example of this is the General Assemblies chaired by the respective Heads of State, the King of Spain and the President of the Portuguese Republic.

The process of internationalising Eixo Atlântico began in 2014 when representatives of the Brazilian federal government, who had learned about the work carried out by Eixo Atlântico through the European Commission and international forums, planned a mission to Galicia and the Northern Region of Portugal and asked Eixo Atlântico if it could organise the agenda for the visit.

The mission includes the Federal Government's Secretariat for Regional Development, a senior official from the Ministry of the Interior and the president of the border mayors of the Association of Municipalities of Brazil.

As a result of the Mission, a year later, the Secretary General of Eixo Atlântico was invited by the consortium of Brazilian municipalities CODEPAMPA, and by the Border Observatory of Uruguay, to give lectures on the border between Uruguay and Brazil, in the cities of Santana do Livramento and Rivera. This is the first contact with a reality that is different in many respects, but similar in many others.

During said period, Eixo Atlântico developed the EU's first cross-border urban agenda and its action plan. The year before the pandemic, a group of experts who had participated in the development of the Urban Agenda were invited to give training on the subject on the border between Argentina and Paraguay, in the cities of Encarnación and Posadas. The process was funded by the European Parliament.

The year before the pandemic, and as part of the European City to City programme, a development proposal was submitted for Rivera and Santana. This proposal was approved and began to be developed after the pandemic, with the difficulties that implies. Despite this, the programme is a success and achieves all its objectives, which reinforces the image of Eixo Atlántico both in Brussels and in Latin America.

As a result, Eixo Atlántico has received proposals for joint work from local and national organisations in Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Cuba, plus organisations from Cape Verde.

All of them for collaboration and exchange in the field of sustainable urban planning and its development areas: Urban Agenda, Urban Sustainability Plans, Sustainable Tourism and social cohesion strategies.

But the dynamism, as well as the speed with which the Eixo Atlántico's internationalisation process is developing could mean that this process ends up being a concatenation of more or less fortunate occurrences. That's why a roadmap is needed, a viable and rigorous plan that provides a conceptual framework, viable objectives and coherent timing for this process, and that's what we propose in this document.

## 1.2

### TERRITORIAL FRAMEWORKS FOR ACTION

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The development cooperation promoted by China, mainly through the so-called "New Silk Road" initiatives, has led the EU to develop its own strategy, more ambitious in terms of its objectives and endowed with more resources, the Global Gateway, which aims to mobilise 45 billion euros in resources for sustainable development by 2027.

The initiative seeks to further integrate the actions carried out, while incorporating a geopolitical vision in which foreign policy objectives are integrated with those of economic and social development. The aim is to strengthen the image and visibility of EU external action, giving it greater coherence and influence, while adding private investment. The EU is thus joining a trend that some countries have already been applying in their national external action.

Previously, the EU approved other reference documents, such as the New Development Consensus (2017)<sup>46</sup> and Regulation (EU) 2021/947<sup>47</sup> establishing the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument - Global Europe (NDICI), which absorbs different previous funding instruments. The aim is to refocus cooperation with third countries, adding public and private funding for projects that share the core values defended by the EU, such as democracy and the rule of law, respect for human rights, transparency in government action, protection of labour rights, gender equality and sustainability.

Said strategy has been strongly criticised, mainly by academics, because it is considered to lack transparency in the selection of objectives, and also because it is mercantilist in that it is geared towards the participation of the private sector. In fact, the new EU strategy is a revision of the previous policy. Whereas before international cooperation was developed in a decentralised way through various programmes, some of which were undoubtedly successful, now it is centralised, giving greater participation and influence to private companies and consultancies. Where before there was decentralisation and participation, now centralisation is being promoted. On the other hand, the financial participation of the private sector poses new challenges, such as the possible diversion of resources to their own economic interests. Another challenge will be to adequately combine the increasing centralisation of initiatives with the rich experience of decentralised cooperation that has been practised in recent years.

The EU's new orientation broadens the thematic range and territory of action. It is no longer primarily about fighting poverty, but also about peace, security, stability and conflict prevention, among other objectives. Geographically, the Neighbourhood joins the traditional areas of action, including the countries bordering the Mediterranean and the Middle East, in a clear reference to migration, for which one of the largest budget lines is earmarked.

By opening up the thematic and geographical range and substantially increasing resources, the EU initiative can have a more significant impact by combining various financial instruments such as grants, loans and guarantees, with technical assistance. On the other hand, by mobilising private resources it can develop projects of greater economic volume with repercussions on different Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is also considered that the Global Gateway initiative can facilitate the assumption of European values such as the green agenda.

Recent studies have highlighted some characteristics of the new strategy, such as the reduction in the budget for the Americas and the Caribbean, the new thematic priorities, the prioritisation of the geographical approach over the thematic approach, as well as the increase in bilateral actions to the detriment of plurinational regional actions, as a way of improving the EU's image.

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<sup>46</sup> [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/ES/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:42017Y0630\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/ES/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:42017Y0630(01))

<sup>47</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/ES/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021R0947>

The implementation of the new cooperation policy will take into account the so-called Team Europe approach, adopted during the last Covid pandemic. Team Europe is made up of the European Union, its member states, including their public development banks and executive agencies, the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). It has promoted flagship programmes, also known as “Team Europe Initiatives”. Through a form of collaborative work, these initiatives aim to ensure greater impact and the concentration of resources on geostrategic priorities.

The aforementioned Regulation establishes a new grouping of countries where EU co-operation actions can be carried out, classifying them as follows.

### 1.2.1 NEIGHBOURHOOD

This concept groups together the countries that, along with sub-Saharan Africa, are classified as “special priority”. We can group them into three geographical sub-groups. Firstly, the southern neighbouring countries, Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia, all countries bordering the Mediterranean that form the EU’s southern border and are therefore transit points for migration. These are countries with an Islamic culture, strong internal imbalances, a diversity of political systems and even, in the case of Libya, an internal division rooted after a civil war.

In these countries, there is a long tradition of co-operation developed by the EU which has facilitated partnerships between different countries on a multitude of issues, creating a culture of exchanges. However, the results are not encouraging:

When the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership was launched in 1995, some of the main objectives set out in the Barcelona Declaration were to establish “a common area of shared peace, stability and prosperity”, to create a “Euro-Mediterranean free trade area” by 2010, to work towards “strengthening democracy and respect for human rights” and to develop a “Euro-Mediterranean partnership for greater understanding and proximity between peoples”. More than twenty-five years later, none of these objectives have been achieved. Neither the subsequent European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) nor the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) have made significant progress in achieving these goals<sup>48</sup>.

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<sup>48</sup> AMIRAH FERNÁNDEZ, H., SOLER I LECHA, E., 2021. *Europe and the Mediterranean: What future together?* Barcelona: CIDOB.

Secondly, the so-called Eastern Association group, which includes Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, is made up of countries that, having been part of the Soviet Union, have now begun the process of moving closer to Western structures, four of them in the midst of armed conflicts. Although the Association was established in 2009, its achievements have been scarce. It is an artificial grouping, since three of the countries are Caucasian and three are from Central Europe. In fact, at the moment, Ukraine and Moldova have been admitted as candidates for EU membership, Belarus has excluded itself from the association, while Georgia and Armenia have signed bilateral agreements with the EU. For its part, Azerbaijan, a gas and oil producer, is strengthening relations with Turkey and the Islamic republics of Central Asia. Within this group of countries, the case of Ukraine stands out for the enormous needs that the reconstruction process will pose once the current war is over.

As far as possible action in the countries of this regional grouping is concerned, the lack of progress in terms of democracy or respect for human rights is generally questioned. However, the prevailing opinion is that, despite some problems, progress has been made that would not have occurred without EU co-operation, so the balance would be positive, without forgetting that, for these countries, the strengthening of EU institutions consolidates the necessary changes.

Thirdly, there is the group of countries in the Middle East, made up of Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Syria, which are the epicentre of one of the world's biggest security problems. They all border the Mediterranean, except for Jordan. The EU's action in the region has been more political in nature, trying to mediate between the conflicting parties. On the other hand, the differences in the level of development between Israel and the rest of the countries included on the neighbourhood list are very pronounced. The specific objectives common to the three subgroups of countries covered by the Neighbourhood Policy now proposed by the EU are as follows:

- a) Improving political co-operation, consolidating a solid and sustainable democracy, stability, good governance, the rule of law and respect for human rights.
- b) Supporting the implementation of association agreements or other existing agreements through institutional co-operation and capacity building.
- c) Promoting a consolidated association with societies, between the Union and partner countries and between partner countries themselves.
- d) Strengthening regional and cross-border cooperation, in particular within the framework of the Eastern Association, the Union for the Mediterranean and collaboration throughout the European neighbourhood, as well as regional cooperation in the Black Sea, especially in the fields of energy and security.

- e) Achieving progressive integration into the Union's internal market through legislative approximation and regulatory convergence with Union rules and improved market access, including comprehensive free trade areas, institution building and related investments.
- f) Strengthening well-managed and secure migration and mobility associations.
- g) Developing confidence-building and other measures that contribute to security, conflict prevention and resolution.

## 1.2.2 SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

During the EU's sixth summit with the African Union in 2022, the association between the two supra-state organisations was renewed to boost solidarity, security and peace, as well as prosperity and sustainable development. Investments totalling 150 billion euros are planned and will be directed to the following areas:

- Energy, transport and digital infrastructures.
- Just energy transition.
- Green transition under the Paris Agreement.
- Digital transformation underlying connectivity and affordable access to the digital economy.
- Sustainable growth and the creation of decent jobs.
- Facilitating transport and network efficiency.
- Mobility and employability of students, graduates and skilled workers.

Specific instruments will also be developed for the health sector and the education system. In addition, regional and continental economic integration will be promoted through the African Free Trade Area.

Sub-Saharan Africa is the region of the planet with the highest poverty rate, with more than four hundred million people, representing half of the world's population living below the poverty line. It includes the ten poorest countries in the world and most of the current humanitarian emergencies due to problems of violence that force people to move to other countries, as well as climate-related problems.

In addition, access to drinking water is not widespread, which contributes to the spread of disease, while school enrolment rates are very low. On the other hand, it is home to a very large number of young people of working age, up to twelve millions of whom will enter the labour market every year over the next few decades, which represents an opportunity if there is local economic development and a challenge otherwise.

For the purposes of the present report, it is key to emphasise the importance of Camões - Instituto da Cooperação e da Língua, I.P., the Portuguese government body responsible for both development cooperation and the promotion of the Portuguese language and culture abroad, with a presence in 22 countries on the continent. Its co-operation with the Portuguese-speaking countries of Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique and São Tomé and Príncipe stands out. It is a well-established platform with valuable experience and contacts for launching new initiatives.

### 1.2.3 ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

The EU's co-operation with the countries of the region has a long history. With the Republic of Korea for over 60 years, with ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) for half a century. Relations with Japan, the EU's second largest trading partner after China, have also been intense for decades. The relationship with China has fluctuated due to political conflicts, with a turning point after the pandemic. In an official EU document, the relationship with China was defined in a complex context:

China is at the same time, in different areas, a cooperation partner with whom the EU has closely aligned objectives, a negotiating partner with whom the EU has to find a balance of interests, a competitor in the search for technological leadership and a systemic rival promoting alternative models of governance<sup>49</sup>.

In 2021, the EU approved the strategy for co-operation in the Indo-Pacific region. It is a strategy that takes into account the rivalry between the US and China, and its commercial and strategic consequences, while seeking to define its own vision without renouncing the EU's traditional alliances. The growing importance of the region in demographic, economic and political terms, as well as its influence in the current international order, make co-operation necessary. The EU is one of the region's most important trading partners. Together, the Indo-Pacific and Europe account for more than 70% of global trade in goods and services and more than 60% of foreign direct investment flows.

<sup>49</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/ES/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52019JC0005>

The EU wants to promote an international order based on regulations and a level playing field, in an open and fair context for trade, investment and the fight against climate change. The following priority areas for action are defined:

- Inclusive and sustainable prosperity.
- Ecological transition.
- Ocean governance.
- Digital governance and co-operation.
- Connectivity.
- Security and Defence.
- Human security.

The last two aspects show the EU's growing concern with security policies. Hence the push for an open and rules-based regional security architecture, including secure maritime communication routes, capacity building and increased naval presence in the Indo-Pacific. In addition, the EU will seek to promote more port calls, joint and multilateral exercises with partners in the region to tackle piracy and protect freedom of navigation. It also aims to strengthen partners' capacity to fight cybercrime and intensify dialogue on the fight against terrorism.

Among the actions envisaged we highlight:

- Collaboration and Cooperation Agreements (CCA) with Malaysia and Thailand; starting negotiations on a CCA with the Maldives; EU Association Agreement with the African, Caribbean and Pacific States (ACP), signed in 2023 (Samoa Agreement).
- Involving partners in the region to build more resilient and sustainable global value chains.
- Conclude the Union's trade negotiations with Australia, Indonesia and New Zealand; resume trade negotiations and launch investment negotiations with India; the conclusion of an Economic Association Agreement with the East African Community; consider the possible resumption of trade negotiations with Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand, and the future negotiation of an interregional trade agreement with ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations).

- Strengthen ocean governance in the region by stepping up EU support for fisheries management and control systems in Indo-Pacific countries in order to combat INDNR fishing<sup>50</sup> and promote the implementation of collaborative agreements in the field of sustainable fisheries.
- Strengthen cooperation on research and innovation within the framework of Horizon Europe; study the possibility of other eligible and like-minded partners in the region joining this programme, such as Australia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, New Zealand and Singapore.
- Intensify the implementation of connectivity associations with Japan and India; support partners in creating an appropriate regulatory framework and facilitate the mobilisation of the necessary funding to improve connectivity on the ground between Europe and the Indo-Pacific.
- Explore ways to ensure greater naval mobilisation of EU member states to protect maritime communication routes and freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific, while strengthening the capacity of partners to ensure maritime security.
- Strengthen support for health systems and pandemic preparedness in the least developed countries of the Indo-Pacific region and improving collaborative research on communicable diseases in the context of the Horizon Europe research programme.

For both the EU and the governments of Spain and Portugal, the Asia-Pacific region, despite its superlative dimensions in geographical, demographic and economic terms, is an area with little presence, except in relation to the main trading powers such as China or Japan. Cultural and historical differences, as well as geographical distance, have limited exchanges. On the other hand, the institutions of many of the countries in the region are significantly different from the dominant model of liberal democracy and welfare in Western Europe and the Americas.

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<sup>50</sup> Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing.

## 1.2.4 THE AMERICAS AND THE CARIBBEAN

In defining its co-operation policy with Latin America, the European Union has defined two priorities<sup>51</sup>:

- a) Human rights, democracy and other key elements of good governance, to be implemented through “incentives for results-oriented reforms with an emphasis on partners’ commitments to human rights, democracy and the rule of law, and to responding to peoples’ demands and needs”.
- b) Integrated and sustainable growth for human development.

The implementation of effective agreements between the EU and the countries of the region has been slow and diverse, and different instruments have been adopted. The oldest Association Agreement was signed with Mexico in 2000 and then with Chile in 2002. The Cariforum-EU Economic Association Agreement was signed with the Caribbean countries in 2008. Although it is economic and commercial in nature, it includes a cultural co-operation protocol. It affects fourteen countries in the Caribbean region. Agreements have also been signed with Colombia, Peru, Ecuador and Central America. Only Venezuela and Bolivia currently lack agreements with the EU.

However, the most important and complex agreement is the EU-Mercosur Agreement. It has been twenty years in the making and, although it has been finalised, it has not yet been ratified. It is a mixed agreement, with trade, political dialogue and cooperation aspects, the last two of which require ratification by Parliament and the member states.

The aforementioned agreements are very different from each other, although their common link is the interest in strengthening trade relations. The diversity of the development models of the different countries, as well as the ideological orientation of the governments, explain the differences. Thus, in the Association Agreement with Central America, in force since 2013, the aspects of political dialogue and cooperation have not yet been ratified. Something similar happens with the agreement with the Caribbean. Among the Andean countries, Colombia and Peru, with liberal governments, have signed agreements, while Ecuador and Bolivia, with nationalist governments, are more scrupulous about opening up trade. In the case of Mercosur, some European countries have expressed reluctance due to environmental issues or the protection of their products.

At the current political juncture, characterised by the coexistence of various crises with supra-state and even intercontinental repercussions, such as the climate and health crisis, migration, indebtedness or war conflicts, Latin American countries are trying to maintain channels of cooperation with the main states, avoiding alignment with any of the blocs.

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<sup>51</sup> Various authors, 2013. *La cooperación entre América Latina y la Unión Europea: una asociación para el desarrollo*. Santiago de Chile: CEPAL.

In this way, the United States, Russia, China and the European Union are present, to an unequal degree, in different sectors of activity in many of the region's countries: in economic exchanges, political alliances, investments or military aid. Europe, on the other hand, is the biggest investor in the region, with direct investment standing out more than trade or other lines of co-operation. The difficulties in implementing agreements between the parties have meant that China is now the country with the largest volume of commercial activity in the Mercosur area, far ahead of the EU and the US.

According to an overall assessment of EU policies in the region:

The association agreements, although conceived as strategic instruments that imply a common vision of similar core values and expectations that underpin the relationship between the European Union and its counterparts, in practice have been useful mainly for regulating bi-regional trade, rather than regulating or jeopardising the political dynamics or international agenda of the partners<sup>52</sup>.

## 1.3

### GENERAL STRATEGIES FOR PORTUGAL, SPAIN AND GALICIA

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Spain and Portugal, as neighbouring countries with a dense historical and current relationship, are states that belong to the European Union and NATO. They therefore share common strategic visions with the other countries that make up these organisations, aligning themselves with the bloc of countries in the world that enjoy solid, democratic institutions based on the rule of law, the separation of powers and the provision of welfare services. On the other hand, their different histories add objectives related to their language and culture, as well as the greater influence of each country in certain geographical regions. These aspects are complementary and not contradictory to the common European vision.

The Elcano Index of Global Presence<sup>53</sup>, produced since 1990 by the think tank the Real Instituto Elcano, calculates the projection of 150 countries outside their borders, in the economic, military and soft power fields (migration, sport, culture, science, climate change, development co-operation).

<sup>52</sup> BONILLA, A., SANAHUJA, J.A. 2022. *Los acuerdos de asociación entre la UE y América Latina y el Caribe: Balance y perspectivas para las relaciones birregionales*. Madrid: Fundación Carolina, page 267. The publication makes a detailed analysis of all the agreements signed and their effects.

<sup>53</sup> <https://www.globalpresence.realinstitutoelcano.org/es?years=2022>

The figures for Portugal and Spain are correlated with their GDP, i.e. their projection or influence abroad corresponds more to their economic weight than their demographic size. In the case of Spain, it stands out mainly, in this order, for its investments, manufacturing industry and military equipment. In the case of Portugal, services, manufacturing and investments.

### 1.3.1 INTERNATIONAL STRATEGY OF THE PORTUGUESE REPUBLIC

The Portuguese government has published the document entitled Programme of the XXIV Constitutional Government,<sup>54</sup> which stresses the country's Atlantic character and therefore the need to strengthen ties with the Atlantic community, both North and South, deepening relations with the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada and developing relations with the countries of Africa and Latin America, especially the Portuguese-speaking ones. As for Asia and the Pacific, it is proposed to promote relations with China and India in line with international economic trends, assessing geopolitical risks.

The aim is also to give Lusophony a distinctive foreign policy dimension, going beyond the linguistic and cultural framework to create an area of economic co-operation, political solidarity and sustainable development. It is proposed that the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP) promote co-operation and development aid, as well as cultural diplomacy to strengthen bilateral relations. An economic and commercial foreign policy aligned with the objectives of wealth creation and economic and social development is postulated.

Another relevant document, the Portuguese Cooperation Strategy 2030<sup>55</sup> undertakes three political commitments: the 2030 Agenda, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda,<sup>56</sup> which recognised the need for more effective use of development aid as a catalyst for financing, supporting the mobilisation of domestic resources, and the Paris Agreement on climate change, approved in 2015.

The lines of action coincide with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), grouped into five thematic areas: people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnerships. Geographically, priority is given to Portuguese-speaking African countries and East Timor, with which bilateral and long-term cooperation is sought.

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<sup>54</sup> <https://www.portugal.gov.pt/download-ficheiros/ficheiro.aspx?v=%3d%3dBQAAAB%2bLCAAAAAAABAAzNDE0swQAB5%2ba1gUAAAA%3d>

<sup>55</sup> Official Gazette 9-12-2022. <https://www.portugal.gov.pt/download-ficheiros/ficheiro.aspx?v=%3d%3dBQAAAB%2bLCAAAAAAABAAzNDYxNQcAkRsTgQUAAAA%3d>

<sup>56</sup> Approved at the third international conference on financing for development, held in that city in 2015, convened by the United Nations.

Secondly, countries and regions of strategic interest to Portugal are included, such as North Africa, West Africa and Latin America. As for multilateral co-operation, it will be promoted with the EU, the United Nations, the OECD, the CPLP, the Ibero-American General Secretariat and financial institutions international development-oriented<sup>57</sup>. Triangular co-operation will also be promoted. The strategy proposes highlighting the national players involved in cooperation, such as the private sector, local institutions, as well as civil society organisations. To improve efficiency, it is proposed to strengthen the role of Camões I.P. as the coordinating agency for Portuguese cooperation.

### 1.3.2 THE KINGDOM OF SPAIN'S INTERNATIONAL STRATEGY

The latest version of Spain's External Strategy<sup>58</sup> considers the country's main strengths to be the strength of its economy, its highly qualified human capital, its modern physical and digital infrastructure, the multinationals operating in different sectors, as well as the country's leading role in the ecological transition and the tackle against climate change, renewable energies, fibre optics and the agri-food and bio-health sectors. In addition, on a social level, gender equality, the protection of sexual diversity and migratory integration. It also emphasises social commitment to sustainable development and the 2030 Agenda. Additionally, Spain's significant role in international peacekeeping and conflict prevention highlights its active commitment to global security.

In the field of soft power, a clear cultural identity, the prestige and breadth of the language, artistic productions or sporting events are valuable assets for creating a country's image or brand. Close relations with the Mediterranean countries, with Latin America or firm participation in European and multinational institutions facilitate dialogue and agreements with other states. As far as the main axes of external action are concerned, the document identifies the following four:

- Promoting human rights, democracy, security and feminism.
- Dynamisation of a global socio-economic model based on the principles of integration, justice and equity.
- The defence of a more sustainable, liveable and green planet.
- Improving global governance.

<sup>57</sup> The international financial institutions include, among others, the following: World Bank, International Monetary Fund, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Inter-American Development Bank, African Development Bank, Asian Development Bank. There are also other institutions of a sub-regional nature.

<sup>58</sup> Spain's External Action Strategy 2021-2024: [https://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/consejodeministros/resumenes/Documents/2021/270421-estrategia\\_de\\_accion\\_exterior\\_2021-2024.pdf](https://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/consejodeministros/resumenes/Documents/2021/270421-estrategia_de_accion_exterior_2021-2024.pdf)

The document refers to the actions of local and territorial authorities, with whom it is proposed to promote greater dialogue and coordination, since,

They carry out increasingly extensive and intense work outside our borders, as a result of a decentralisation of competences that gives them responsibility for public policies with an external projection<sup>59</sup>.

It is the tacit recognition of the external projection that certain policies and initiatives from other levels of government can have. In order to rationalise external action, the document proposes the development of information-sharing platforms and the strengthening of existing commissions, including the Conference for Affairs Related to the European Union, where local authorities do not participate, the Interterritorial Commission for Development Cooperation or the Spanish National Commission for Cooperation with UNESCO, where local authorities also do not participate. The need to pay special attention to cross-border cooperation mechanisms is recognised.

On the other hand, the Strategy proposes strengthening dialogue with specialised institutions, such as agencies for business internationalisation, trade and investment or development cooperation, although this coordination role seems to be assigned to the Sectoral Conferences mentioned above. As for cities, it recognises their growing weight in certain issues, including climate change, and proposes a direct dialogue with those with a higher international profile, within the framework of the Spanish Urban Agenda.

As for the Spanish Sustainable Development Strategy<sup>60</sup>, it is proposed as a comprehensive project for all public administrations to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Local governments participate in it through their own local actions, by developing initiatives to deepen democracy and citizen participation, promoting a culture of peace and articulating cooperation between cities around the world.

It should be noted that, despite the good intentions of official documents, local diplomacy initiatives abroad often show how state structures jealously control their competences and spaces. Collaboration is publicised, but the administrative hierarchy ends up imposing itself.

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<sup>59</sup> Ibidem, pág. 95.

<sup>60</sup> <https://transparencia.gob.es/transparencia/dam/jcr:6e0f06b9-a2e0-44c0-955a-dad1f66c11d7/PLAN%20DE%20ACCI%C3%93N%20PARA%20LA%20IMPLEMENTACI%C3%93N%20DE%20LA%20AGENDA%202030.pdf>

With regard to Development Cooperation, the latest Master Plan<sup>61</sup> recognises and values the economic volume of local authority actions, which account for half of the total allocated by the state. Once again, collaboration is committed to the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda. With regard to geographical priorities, the following are mentioned: Latin America and the Caribbean, North Africa, the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa, especially the countries of West Africa and the Sahel. With regard to the European co-operation described above, the geographical scope proposed in Spain excludes the Indo-Pacific. As far as the objectives are concerned, the aim is to address the triple social, ecological and economic transition. The aim of the priority countries is to establish planning strategies that can be located at three different levels, depending on the capacities of the partner countries.

The Master Plan is a planning document, not an executive one. It proposes numerous objectives and actions that will have to be developed through programmes or actions endowed with resources.

For the purposes of the present report, of particular interest is the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID), with an extensive network of 33 centres in the region, including four training centres and 16 cultural centres.

### 1.3.3 EXTERNAL AND COOPERATION STRATEGY OF THE AUTONOMOUS COMMUNITY OF GALICIA

In 2018, the Xunta de Galicia (Regional Government of Galicia) approved the External Action Strategy,<sup>62</sup> based on the aforementioned Master Plan for Spanish Cooperation. It is an extensive list of objectives, without specifying actions or instruments to achieve them, to which are added reflections, proposals and general ideas. Among the shortcomings is the lack of human resources to develop a minimum strategy abroad, reflected in the crisis at the Galicia-Europe Foundation. Six years after its approval, it is impossible to detect the effects of this document.

On the other hand, the Fifth Master Plan for Galician Cooperation 2023-2026<sup>63</sup> establishes seven lines of action:

- Promoting fundamental social rights.
- Supporting sustainable agriculture, fisheries and aquaculture.
- Promoting gender equality.

<sup>61</sup> [https://www.exteriores.gob.es/es/PoliticaExterior/Documents/Cooperaci%C3%B3n%20para%20el%20desarrollo/Plan%20Director%20de%20la%20Cooperaci%C3%B3n%20Espa%C3%B1ola\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.exteriores.gob.es/es/PoliticaExterior/Documents/Cooperaci%C3%B3n%20para%20el%20desarrollo/Plan%20Director%20de%20la%20Cooperaci%C3%B3n%20Espa%C3%B1ola_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>62</sup> <https://ficheiros-web.xunta.gal/exteriores/documentos/libro-egaex.pdf>

<sup>63</sup> <https://cooperacion.xunta.gal/es/planificacion/v-plan-director-de-la-cooperacion-gallega-2023-2026>

- Promoting the guarantee and defence of human rights and democracy.
- Tackling climate change.
- Responding effectively to humanitarian crises.
- Building committed global citizenship.

Geographically, it identifies eleven countries eligible to receive aid: in sub-Saharan Africa: Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique; in Central America: Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and El Salvador; in South America: Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru and, finally, in the Caribbean, the Dominican Republic.

As far as stakeholders are concerned, it recognises non-governmental organisations (NGOs), local bodies, the Galician Fund for Cooperation and Solidarity<sup>64</sup> and the Galician Network for University Cooperation for Development as permanent interlocutors. It also postulates alliances with United Nations agencies.

They are involved through calls for proposals for programmes and projects abroad, research projects and training grants, in addition to direct cooperation from the regional administration.

Finally, it is worth mentioning in this section the document published by Eixo Atlántico on the necessary external action within the framework of Galician autonomy<sup>65</sup>.

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<sup>64</sup> The Fondo Gallego de Cooperación y Solidaridad is an association made up of the municipalities most active in development co-operation.

<sup>65</sup> Various Authors, 2018. *Informe sobre a política de Acción Exterior de Galicia*. Vigo: Eixo Atlántico.

**02**

**LOCAL ACTION;  
GLOBAL THINKING  
WHY LOCAL DIPLOMACY**

02

# 02

## LOCAL ACTION; GLOBAL THINKING WHY LOCAL DIPLOMACY

### 2.1

#### CROSSING BORDERS IN GLOBALISATION

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Globalisation, although it may seem paradoxical, has projected the local into the world. By blurring traditional economic and social boundaries, taking full advantage of the contributions of the technological revolution to overcome the barrier of distance, making it possible to contact any point on the planet in real time, cities have been able to exploit their full creative potential. As international organisations have acknowledged when they state that “Cities represent the future of global life”<sup>66</sup> or that “Never in the history of mankind have cities been as prominent as they are today. The world is urban and so is society.”<sup>67</sup>, it’s time for cities all over the world.

The process of urbanisation is accelerating. A recent United Nations publication, the World Cities Report,<sup>68</sup> presents forecasts for the evolution of the urbanised population in the world:

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<sup>66</sup> United Nations, SDG 11, Introduction.

<sup>67</sup> Spanish Urban Agenda, p. 12.

<sup>68</sup> UN-Habitat, 2022. Envisaging the Future of Cities <https://unhabitat.org/wcr/>, page 9.

Percentage of urbanised population (%)	2025	2050
<b>World</b>	58'3	68'4
<b>More developed regions</b>	80'2	86'6
<b>Less developed regions</b>	51'7	65'6
<b>Africa</b>	45'9	58'9
<b>Asia</b>	54	66'2
<b>Europe</b>	76'1	83'7
<b>Latin America and the Caribbean</b>	82'4	87'8
<b>North America</b>	83'6	89
<b>Oceania</b>	68'5	72'1

The process of urbanisation leads cities to implement solutions to some of the problems that concern them most, such as housing, mobility, waste management, the water cycle or climate prevention. The many local initiatives lead to a constant transfer of knowledge between cities and the connection of many of them into networks which, as well as favouring synergies, make it easier for state governments to fulfil their international commitments, for example the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Local diplomacy is drawing a new municipal map, where the boundaries are not traditional administrative borders, but are measured by their impact and influence. Just as cities urbanistically overflow their boundaries, generating a continuum of population and building, in the virtual world cities are present on social networks, content platforms, images and comments from visitors, while at the same time participating in projects or programmes from anywhere in the world.

In political terms, it is a question of indirectly questioning the traditional state, which, on the other hand, has ceded power to supra-state bodies and is now doing so in favour of cities. The United Nations has favoured this trend by convening various meetings of cities to deal with urban problems, among which the Habitat I, II and III Conferences held in Vancouver (1976), Istanbul (1996) and Quito, respectively, were particularly relevant. The latter, held in 2016, adopted the New Urban Agenda<sup>69</sup>.

<sup>69</sup> <https://habitat3.org/wp-content/uploads/NUA-Spanish.pdf>

The recent evolution of cities can be characterised by the following features<sup>71</sup>:

- The breakdown of the linear relationship between population growth, dynamism and urban hierarchy.
- The restructuring of the labour market and the formation of pockets of unemployment and urban poverty.
- The reduction in the birth rate and endogenous natural growth replaced by the growing contribution of immigrants.
- The sectoral transfer from the secondary sector - industry - to the productive tertiary sector and the specialised and technological quaternary sector.
- Rising family incomes and increased free time with new leisure needs.
- Changes in urban mobility.
- The internationalisation of local economies.

On the other hand, the phenomenon of urban agglomeration forces cities to plan and act in two very different dimensions: in the local dimension, cooperating with the immediate, metropolitan or catchment area, and in the international dimension, positioning themselves in relation to other cities and within participatory structures.

In a globalised society, cities have a competitive advantage because they bring together private initiative, political institutions, the creative industries of culture and innovation, academia and associations. The real economy, consumption, training and innovation take place in cities as a physical space. The greater flexibility of local governments compared to state governments, as well as their proximity to other institutional or business players, facilitates international connections and attendance at all kinds of forums or events.

The city is the immediate living space and is an agglomeration of people, services and companies. The dynamism that characterises them, the result of countless interactions, encourages creativity and favours innovation. The demands of citizens and economic requirements gravitate towards cities, where investment and human capital are concentrated. In the different spheres of urban life, there is a need to interact with companies and institutions of all kinds located in other cities, constantly creating economic, social, cultural or sporting networks.

Some cities add to said capacity an external image derived from their own history or relevance, a symbolic capital that is easy to identify and on which diplomatic actions can be based. The mention of Porto, Santiago de Compostela, Braga or Lugo, among many others, immediately awakens an association of ideas and core values, a recognition as a symbol that has a great capacity for communication, on which a brand can be built.

<sup>71</sup> PRECEDO LEDO, A., 1996. Ciudad y desarrollo urbano. Madrid: Síntesis.

The fragmentation of states' foreign policy is a consequence of the emergence of new stakeholders, including cities as democratically legitimised entities. In addition, the evolution of society towards more participatory models in all sectors has been influential. Constitutional and administrative doctrine recognises that local diplomacy does not compete with state diplomacy. They are complementary initiatives that move at different levels, with different specific objectives beyond a common identification in the projection of the country itself. However, while they are complementary, they must never be contradictory; they must act within the general framework of each state's international relations.

When we talk about complementarity, we are referring to the capacity of local diplomacy to go where state diplomacy cannot or should not go, subject to general political guidelines and the international situation. By its very nature, which is more flexible, paradiplomacy can act or mediate in countries where states do not wish to intervene. In these cases, cities develop links and relationships that can be useful for state diplomacy. Thus, co-operation and the exchange of information between both levels of government are requirements for smooth and effective action.

Cities carry out local diplomacy in a legislative and competences vacuum, so they don't pursue the same objectives as state diplomacy, but they do address global challenges at a local level. To do this, they can rely on other stakeholders such as private companies, institutions, cultural and sporting organisations, and even relevant personalities who have resources, experience or relationships, always looking for mutually beneficial synergies. For these agents, the alliance with the local government can confer greater legitimacy or recognition. As in other areas of local activity, the role of the first local authority, the mayor, is decisive for the results. The intensity and stability of the contacts, the leadership of all the participating stakeholders and the definition of the main objectives will depend on this figure.

In their international relations, cities promote this global agenda while at the same time influencing other cities, either bilaterally or as part of a network, as is the case with the Eixo Atlântico. In fact, the phenomenon of globalisation is highly visible in local policies. Examples of good practice have been reproduced and adapted in very different contexts, helping to establish links between cities. In some cases, they are part of international trends such as Urban Agendas, Strategic Planning or the generalisation of governance practices adopted by a growing number of cities. In other cases, they are successful sectoral policies. Sometimes they are proposals with political content, such as participatory budgets. Other cities publicise their economic policy initiatives to attract investment, generate employment or help retrain workers. Some have emphasised their focus on urban mobility. The big cities have added other initiatives such as prestigious and iconic architecture.

By progressively taking on global trends in local government, cities adopt a common language and similar initiatives that contribute to homogenising local management.

Successful public policy models are replicated in very different contexts as part of the process of insertion into the dominant trends. The framework that is spreading internationally is that of the globalised, connected, sustainable city with a high quality of life, attractive for investment and supported by urban marketing. It's an ideal model, a trend, which ignores the social and economic reality of each city in order to define a horizon drawn up by urban planners and specialists.

Cities do not have sovereign powers, unlike states, so they can establish relations with other cities without the political or ideological conditioning of their respective state governments. In this way, they can even operate as mediators to achieve objectives promoted by the international community. However, a lack of competences does not mean a lack of responsibilities. An ethical and political problem that has arisen in various situations occurs when cities in the international sphere take on policies or initiatives that directly confront those defended by their respective states, as has happened with immigration restriction policies.

Without the coercive power of states, based on security and defence, cities and metropolitan regions have innovated in regulation with the aim of sanctioning bad practices or raising funds for the local treasury. The city lacks general regulatory competence, so when it applies its resources to prevent or mitigate the effects of climate change, for example, it is not responding to general laws or the enunciation of rights. They are concrete measures, but without coercive force. The empirical aspect of the actions strengthens the narrative of local commitment and forces the international political community to take sides. The intersubjective recognition of cities as relevant stakeholders, reflected in the growing number of networks and alliances, validates urban practice and influences global environmental regulation.

## 2.2

### SUPRANATIONAL GUIDELINES

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International guidelines have boosted local diplomacy and influenced local policies, especially the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) promoted by the United Nations, and the EU's urban policies, especially the Territorial Agendas and the Green Pact<sup>71</sup>. These are declarations or agreements which, although they lack normative value, represent the high degree of international political consensus around the objectives that the action of the different levels of government should pursue.

<sup>71</sup> We analysed the different international strategies of local interest in detail in: MÉNDEZ ROMEU, J.L., PEÑA PENABAD, J.M., 2022. *Aplicación local de las estrategias territoriales internacionales*. Vigo: Eixo Atlántico del Noroeste Peninsular.

Due to their universal nature, the SDGs are driving a common reform agenda in all countries, allowing governments at each level to interact with their counterparts on the basis of shared principles and strategies. It should be noted that these agreements promote a levelling process based on a common doctrine about people, their rights and needs, as well as how best to tackle universal challenges.

The high level of consensus reached on the issues mentioned above becomes the benchmark for comparing their own policies, which gradually produces greater rapprochement. Even institutions that are less inclined to develop international guidelines, whether for domestic political or other reasons, will be repeatedly confronted with indicators that show convergence or distancing from the stated objectives. It is clear that, in order to achieve the greatest possible consensus, the wording of the objectives approved by international organisations is sometimes deliberately ambiguous. It is also true that previous formulations of similar objectives have been blatantly non-compliant. But the process of converging objectives in local policies seems historically unstoppable.

At the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 and known as the Earth Summit, Agenda 21 was duly approved, involving all countries and local governments in the generic objective of Sustainable Development, understood as meeting the needs of the current generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Subsequently, the Johannesburg Earth Summit in 2002 proclaimed the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. Ten years later, the Conference on Sustainable Development, known as the Rio+20 Summit, reviewed the results achieved and pointed out the existing obstacles. As a result, it was agreed to develop the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which were approved in 2015 after a consultative process in which numerous institutions and organisations of all kinds took part.

The 17 SDGs pose significant challenges. In contrast to the design of the Millennium Development Goals proposed in 2000, organised into eight goals and 25 targets, 17 SDGs are now proposed, articulated in 169 targets and 232 monitoring indicators to be achieved by 2030. Of the targets, 27 apply exclusively to developing countries. The greater number of goals and targets compared to the previous formulation reveals a more ambitious proposal.

The main contribution of the SDGs is their emphasis on sustainability. It also incorporates the defence of human rights, decent employment, gender equality and the empowerment of women. It should be emphasised that the approval of the SDGs has not been contested beyond academic analyses that have nuanced the most ambiguous or contradictory aspects of the targets. The SDGs start from the principle that the growth model based on the exploitation of the planet's resources cannot be infinite, either through the degradation of ecosystems or the generation of waste. It is therefore recognised that future development must integrate the social dimension and the environmental dimension into the economic dimension. Concern for people's rights and well-being, as well as safeguarding the environment, will be an inseparable part of economic policies.

The SDGs can be grouped into five thematic areas, known as the 5Ps (People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnerships). The following figure shows the 5Ps in graphic form:



For its part, the European Union has been progressively developing an Urban Agenda, embodied in various documents that coincide with the SDGs, such as the New Leipzig Charter (2020). However, unlike the UN goals, the objectives set by the EU are fully in line with local competences and are therefore easy and immediate to apply. Another difference is European financial support through cohesion funds for locally developed initiatives.

The Green Deal, proposed by the European Commission in 2019, is a set of legislative initiatives aimed at achieving climate neutrality by 2050, reducing carbon emissions by 55% compared to 1990 levels. Following the approval of the Green Deal, the European Climate Law was passed, an Industrial Plan was presented and economic funds were made available.

These include initiatives covering climate, environment, energy, transport, industry, agriculture and finance. There are also plans to review the EU emissions trading scheme, revise the rules on aviation emissions and create an independent scheme for emissions trading in road transport and buildings.

Recently, the Green Deal has been questioned by some countries and by representatives of the agricultural and automotive sectors, who criticise the loss of competitiveness compared to third countries where climate neutrality measures are different and environmental requirements are substantially less demanding. Pressure to change or relax the objectives and deadlines has increased following the results of the 2024 European elections and the negotiations to form the new European Commission, which took office in December of the same year.

Within the Spanish state, EU guidelines gave rise to the Spanish Urban Agenda<sup>72</sup>, the Eixo Atlántico's Urban Agenda<sup>73</sup>, along with numerous similar documents at municipal or territorial level.

In a clear example of local action within global thinking, European local policies are being decisively aligned with the guidelines of the United Nations and the EU, a universal action with few historical precedents. The process has strengthened local diplomacy, inviting cities to participate in numerous working groups and forums proposed by Brussels for the exchange of experiences. Regardless of their demographic size, local institutions in all EU countries interact systematically to develop their policies. In just one of the calls for proposals<sup>74</sup>, 254 European cities took part.

## 2.3

### THE NEW URBAN POLICY

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In 2016, a broad global consultation promoted by the World Urban Campaign, a United Nations initiative, with the participation of 124 countries and more than 2,000 organisations, resulted in a document or manifesto entitled “The city we need 2.0. Towards a new urban paradigm”<sup>75</sup>.

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<sup>72</sup> <https://cvp.mitma.gob.es/agenda-urbana-espanola-2019>

<sup>73</sup> <https://www.eixoatlantico.com/es/listado-publicaciones/3021-agenda-urbana-del-eixo-atlantico>

<sup>74</sup> <https://urbact.eu/>

<sup>75</sup> <https://www.metropolis.org/resource/city-we-needeng>

The document proposes a city model based on principles such as:

- Inclusion and participation.
- Equitable distribution of resources, accessibility to services and affordable housing.
- Promotion of local economic development and inclusive prosperity through decent work.
- Democratic and participatory management.
- Balanced territorial development.
- Regenerative and resilient city.
- Shared identities, fostering a sense of belonging.
- Urban planning and pedestrianisation.
- A safe, healthy and wellbeing city.
- Innovation

The document analyses the policies that can promote the agenda of changes needed to achieve the ideal city, grouping them into ten areas of action that address all aspects of local government action. As is usual in United Nations reports, some of the proposed goals have already been achieved in more developed societies, while they remain an objective for societies with a lower level of development.

The document recognises the decisive role of local governments in the development of their cities, by providing both the strategic vision, the long-term goals and the necessary leadership. Local governments have the capacity to engage in dialogue with other local stakeholders, whether private, associative or institutional, and with other administrations. The gender perspective is safeguarded in local policies to reduce existing inequalities. The effectiveness of intelligent management of public services, known as Smart Cities, is also recognised, although people-centred solutions are advocated.

In terms of governance, it is proposed to use different channels to involve the largest number of inhabitants, such as open consultations, online platforms and digital tools accessible to all segments of the population. It's about raising awareness and generating a sense of community. Art, culture and sport also provide citizens with alternative ways of expressing themselves, especially at neighbourhood level.

The United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, held in Quito in 2016, approved the New Urban Agenda, an extensive document with more than 150 policies or general lines of action, many of which affect several areas. It is a political declaration aimed at involving local authorities around the world around general objectives derived from the aforementioned SDGs. The document does not detail immediate objectives, unlike the other documents we have mentioned.

Much more precise and action-orientated is the European Urban Agenda that the EU adopted the same year in the document called the Amsterdam Pact<sup>76</sup>. It was ratified in 2020 by the New Leipzig Charter,<sup>77</sup> with the subtitle “The transformative power of cities for the common good”. The following year, the Ljubljana Agreement extended the proposed targets for urban policies.

The European Urban Agenda is based on three pillars:

- a) Better regulation, avoiding new legislation, adapting existing legislation and minimising the administrative burden on local administrations.
- b) Better financing. No new lines of aid will be created, but access to existing funds will be encouraged.
- c) Improving knowledge on urban issues. Promote the exchange of good practices and the collection of reliable data that allows the development of policies based on real data, favouring the re-use of public sector information and access to open data.

The document emphasises the need to place local development measures in a territorial context, since for European citizens, their daily lives may take place in different places of work, leisure, services or consumption, activities that are often located in municipalities other than their place of residence. The territorial context can be metropolitan or functional. In any case, local policies must consider the coordination of these spaces.

At the same time, the neighbourhood can be the scene of unique problems, such as pockets of poverty, environmental impacts or social tensions that require the promotion of cohesion and integration through participatory processes, investments and specific policies. The municipality is the institution that must address both the supralocal and small-scale levels within the city, as part of comprehensive planning. The supralocal level requires coordination and co-operation between municipalities to solve housing, mobility, infrastructure and other problems.

The EU advocates an integrated approach to urban policies that reconciles different interests with the public participation of inhabitants, institutions and private companies.

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<sup>76</sup> [https://futurium.ec.europa.eu/system/files/migration\\_files/pact-of-amsterdam\\_fr.pdf](https://futurium.ec.europa.eu/system/files/migration_files/pact-of-amsterdam_fr.pdf).

<sup>77</sup> [https://www.transportes.gob.es/recursos\\_mfom/paginabasica/recursos/nueva\\_carta\\_de\\_leipzig\\_es\\_070621.pdf](https://www.transportes.gob.es/recursos_mfom/paginabasica/recursos/nueva_carta_de_leipzig_es_070621.pdf)

Urban transformation is based on integrating the social, environmental and economic dimensions of sustainable development. The social dimension must be addressed through a just city that guarantees equal opportunities and the chance to integrate into society. It is therefore necessary to facilitate equal access to education, social services, healthcare and culture. Access to affordable housing and energy supply must be adapted to the needs of different social groups, such as the elderly, people with disabilities, young people and families.

The following should be taken into account:

Socially balanced, mixed and safe neighbourhoods contribute to the integration of all social groups and generations. Neighbourhoods and districts with a high proportion of migrants need comprehensive policies that support integration and avoid segregation<sup>78</sup>.

To address the environmental dimension, the green city is advocated, through the use of renewable energies, energy efficiency measures and the construction of climate-resilient and carbon-neutral buildings. It also proposes regenerating ecosystems, promoting green and blue infrastructure<sup>79</sup> that improves biodiversity, promoting efficient, multimodal and emission-neutral transport and sustainable mobility.

The sustainable economic dimension requires a diversified local economy, skilled labour and affordable infrastructure. It is proposed to create incentives for small businesses, low-emission craft production and urban agriculture to reintegrate their production into towns and urban areas.

The changes introduced by the digitalisation of commerce are leading to the creation of multifunctional spaces in urban centres, where residential use is added to leisure and hospitality. On the other hand, the impact of digitalisation makes it possible to introduce higher quality services in terms of urban mobility, energy efficiency, sustainable housing, administration and participation. Digitalisation is advocated to achieve inclusive cities, improve decision-making and manage local infrastructures. At the same time, it is proposed to promote the digital competence of citizens.

Sectoral policies aim to promote compact polycentric settlements, avoiding urban sprawl, with the necessary connections between work centres, residential and leisure areas, reducing traffic volumes. Reducing land consumption, prioritising the regeneration of spaces, providing healthy living environments and reserving sufficient land for housing.

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<sup>78</sup> EU. New Leipzig Charter, p. 4.

<sup>79</sup> The definition of green infrastructure can be found in COM2013 (249), which states that it is a network of natural and semi-natural areas and other environmental elements, strategically planned, designed and managed to provide a wide range of ecosystem services. It incorporates green spaces (or blue spaces in the case of aquatic ecosystems) and other elements of terrestrial and marine spaces. Moreover, this type of infrastructure is present in both rural and urban environments. [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:d41348f2-01d5-4abe-b817-4c73e6f1b2df.0008.03/DOC\\_1&format=PDF](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:d41348f2-01d5-4abe-b817-4c73e6f1b2df.0008.03/DOC_1&format=PDF).

The EU, aware of the budgetary and funding constraints faced by local governments, agrees to support the establishment of national and regional urban development policies that facilitate the exchange of experiences, enable dialogue with urban stakeholders to ensure governance, facilitate co-financing with the Structural Funds and stimulate innovation in sustainable urban development.

The progressive globalisation of urban policies has led to the dissemination of urban management models, strategic planning, social inclusion, the enhancement of heritage resources or the enhancement of public space, among other sectoral policies.

## 2.4

### CITY NETWORKS

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For some analysts, the current international recognition of cities is the result of the development of city networks which, in different spheres, have maintained a common discourse on urban challenges. In contrast to the concept of a state run hierarchically from a centre of power, networks present a structure of nodes without a defined centre. Horizontality versus verticality, co-operation between peers versus hierarchy and subordination. Networks have multiplied because they are functional. They are not bureaucratic and are orientated towards clearly defined objectives, hence the numerous thematic and regional networks<sup>80</sup>.

Networks disseminate information, influence the media and create a state of opinion. They perform lobbying duties, make proposals, coordinate protests, share core values and projects, while creating mutual trust between their members and favouring shared visions. Among many other benefits, by joining forces, they increase their effectiveness while enduring fewer institutional constraints.

Networks are a form of co-operation between cities with common problems which, through mutual knowledge of ways of managing, exchanging experiences and debating new solutions, improve their own policies and, at the same time, generate a trend that influences other cities.

Some cities have particularly distinguished themselves by their international vocation, promoting and belonging to many networks, hosting the headquarters of some, organising events such as international conferences and forums.

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<sup>80</sup> Regional here refers to regions of the world that can encompass several countries, for example: Latin America, the Mediterranean, the Caribbean or the Maghreb.

For medium-sized or small cities, networks provide visibility that is very difficult to achieve through other channels, as well as bringing them into contact with new ways of approaching management, innovative solutions or trends detected in other contexts that can be generalised. Some cities have joined the management and governing bodies of the networks. These are different avenues that give cities prominence and recognition, advantages that increase when a city acts as the leader of a network.

On the other hand, city networks' contact with state governments or supra-state institutions gives participating cities a new communication channel, access to information on cooperation and funding, as well as the ability to influence the process of drawing up future regulations, all of which have a favourable impact on local management.

The internal organisation of city networks is less bureaucratic and more flexible than intergovernmental institutions, which are subject to more restrictive legal frameworks . The simpler organisation of networks encourages participation and exchange on an equal footing, even if the demographic or economic weight of cities is very unequal. City networks generally work through commissions or working groups that analyse different issues and organise meetings, debates or congresses.

City networks have the following characteristics:

- a) Absence of a central or hierarchical power.
- b) Operating globally or regionally, thus influencing integration processes.
- c) Agility. The horizontal structure and new technologies facilitate decisions and exchanges.
- d) Plurality of stakeholders, facilitating the presence in international forums of politicians and technicians who would have less visibility without the network.
- e) Democratisation of knowledge. Smaller cities with less capacity can benefit from co-operation experiences and activities<sup>81</sup>.

The designations are very varied. There are networks and associations of cities, forums, collaboration in cooperation programmes and other forms, characterised by horizontal organisation based on common interests. Some networks are based on regional, continental or global geographical criteria.

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<sup>81</sup> CARDARELLO, A., 2007. Redes de ciudades, una herramienta privilegiada para la gestión de cooperación descentralizada. *Yearbook of decentralised cooperation*. Page 7.

Others are thematic in nature, covering the whole range of local interests, such as the environment, mobility, social policies, tourism, etc. Some are private initiatives. There are networks with free access and others with restricted access. Networks of networks have even been created<sup>82</sup>.

Networks facilitate cities' access to relations with other higher-level governments, strengthen the leadership of their leaders and provide comprehensive specialised information. At the same time, they facilitate comparisons with similar realities that result in the improvement of services and action programmes.

## 2.5

### NEW URBAN PARADIGMS

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Traditionally, cities have performed two functions: land-use planning and the administration of public services. The first function, dependent on the specialised work of town planners, architects and other experts, dealt with the creation and development of land, the planning of commercial, residential and leisure uses or the renovation of urban areas. The close relationship of this activity, endowed with administrative powers, with local economic interests gave it great political importance.

In terms of the administration of services, urban agglomeration requires the creation of communication routes, the organisation of mobility, the creation and maintenance of water supply and wastewater disposal networks, waste management and the development of services to help and protect people. Similarly, cities are responsible for creating cultural and sporting services of all kinds. A diverse group of professionals fulfils said needs. Both functions are co-ordinated by the local political authority, which also acts as a mediator with the other levels of government.

In recent years, new demands have been added to the previous functions that have been in place over the last century, as a result of the aforementioned urbanisation process, migratory flows, transformations caused by the digitalisation of the economy or the climate crisis, among other factors.

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<sup>82</sup> The best known for promoting the SDGs is the *Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments*: <https://www.global-taskforce.org/>

Cities have become more complex and citizens' demands more diverse. Without neglecting their traditional functions, which are now subject to more demanding standards than ever before, cities must respond to the new needs set out in this international framework<sup>83</sup>. The way to simultaneously meet the new needs with traditional management is through strategic planning, whether in the form of the Urban Agenda, a more modern trend, or through other planning instruments.

Said needs are similar in cities around the world. The ability to respond to the above challenges depends on the sociological and economic characteristics of each city, but also on the policies implemented by its leaders. As for the sociological determinants, we can mention the population pyramid, whose influence will differ depending on the predominance of the young or elderly population, social cohesion or the type of habitat. The main economic determinants are the structure of the productive sectors, the levels of employment and training, the level of income, growth or the level of investment. Political conditioning factors such as the stability of local government, management priorities, the desire to innovate or the ability to create its own identity act on all the other determinants.

On the other hand, the position of the city that acts as the head of an economic and functional space, whether metropolitan or simply territorial, is different from the city that is on the periphery of this centre of greater importance. In all cases, current local policies must take into account the following urban paradigms or models.

#### a) Smart cities

The application of digital solutions to the management of local public services, initially promoted by the digital industry itself, favours the use of tools such as Big Data or the use of algorithms to improve management efficiency, offer a better service to citizens and reduce conflicts. Ultimately, it's about automating management. Technology is also being applied to governance, learning, cultural industries and sustainability. Although the beneficial effects are evident in many respects, the excessive optimism that has surrounded its development tends to overlook its own limitations. Local government not only manages services, but also mediates conflicts and moderates coexistence within the framework of a democratic system of debate. Management algorithms or Artificial Intelligence cannot cope with the wealth of points of view, not just rational ones, that must be taken into account when making political decisions.

On the other hand, the extensive application of technology to urban services has provided cities with a huge volume of valuable data, which until now has hardly been exploited due to a lack of specialists, a clear difference with the private sector, which is aware of the value of its data and makes it profitable. It's about data relating to both the digitised services themselves and the use made of them by citizens, which makes it possible to further segment actions in order to obtain better services.

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<sup>83</sup> A more in-depth study of the new urban policies can be found in: Various Authors, 2022. *Urban development in the post-covid era*. Vigo: Eixo Atlántico del Noroeste Peninsular. Available at: <https://www.eixoatlantico.com/es/biblioteca>

## b) Environmental sustainability

Cities occupy 1% of the world's surface, but consume 80% of energy and produce 60% of carbon dioxide emissions. To protect the planet, we need to act locally through measures such as promoting the compact city as opposed to the dispersed city, reducing emissions, generating renewable electricity, waste management and efficient water management. This is the way to tackle the global problem of climate change, the consequences of which we are already suffering, from a local political perspective. It requires management, awareness-raising and regulatory measures.

The climate crisis is being tackled with local policies that, being embedded in the international guidelines mentioned above, have strengthened local diplomacy by promoting solutions based on the experience of other cities. In the face of state actions that are mainly regulatory and budgetary in nature, cities have the ability to apply effective solutions to problems that directly affect citizens. In addition to the effective results, there is an image benefit for local governments. It's an example of action with little institutional or economic capacity, but great effectiveness. On the other hand, cities can involve citizens and social movements in good practices in the face of climate change. When cities act internationally in defence of the environment, defending the same right to a sustainable environment across the planet, across borders, they are spreading the principles of equality and non-discrimination.

## c) Sustainable mobility

This includes multimodality, the promotion of soft mobility through cycle paths and pedestrianisation of streets, the promotion of decarbonised public transport and restrictions on the use of private vehicles through low-emission zones or car parks on the outskirts. Sustainable mobility has enabled the development of new urban models, such as the fifteen-minute city<sup>84</sup>, which seeks to concentrate residence and the main services within that time radius, reducing transport needs.

## d) Inclusion

As a result of migration, cities have a more heterogeneous social composition, requiring the development of policies that promote inclusion and a sense of belonging, avoiding spatial segregation by neighbourhoods or gentrification. The cultural diversity of migrants makes it necessary to develop comprehensive policies that include professional qualifications, family support, the promotion of participation and others that contribute to maintaining social cohesion.

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<sup>84</sup> Concept proposed by urban planner Carlos Moreno: *The 15-minute city*, at: [https://www.ted.com/talks/carlos\\_moreno\\_the\\_15\\_minute\\_city?subtitle=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/carlos_moreno_the_15_minute_city?subtitle=en)

Under the banner of inclusion, groups at risk of exclusion must also be included, whether due to poverty, uprooting or other reasons. On the other hand, the promotion of gender equality and the emancipation of women must underpin all local policies.

#### e) Promoting affordable housing

The progressive transformation of housing into a speculative asset subject to market criteria is making it difficult for young people to access housing that allows them to emancipate their families. At the same time, job insecurity and low wages make it difficult to access increasingly expensive housing, both rented and owned. Cities, which have urban planning competence, are involved, along with other public administrations, in promoting the creation of more housing, developing developable land, favouring the rehabilitation of existing housing and establishing limitations on certain forms of speculation. At the same time, they must avoid gentrification caused by tourist uses, commercial relocation or the redevelopment of neighbourhoods with speculative criteria.

#### f) Promoting an innovative and technology-based economy

Cities can support the performance of companies and investors by attracting capital and talent. This is a function that, despite being far from the remit of local governments, is necessary, not only in the traditional urban planning aspect of creating land for industrial or commercial activities, but also in processes such as vocational training, city promotion initiatives and the provision of services. Among the most frequent initiatives are the creation of technology districts or business parks that pursue synergies derived from the territorial concentration of certain productive sectors, such as technology or the creative industries.

#### g) Governance

The modern city must promote the involvement of citizens, associations and groups in the discussion and decision-making processes surrounding urban problems, reinforcing the legitimacy of elected governments in highly fragmented societies. It's about reconciling the horizontal power of citizens with the traditional vertical power of the administration. Participatory budgeting is one of the methods, although the representativeness of participation and the real impact on the city can be debated.

Governance must go beyond administrative boundaries to accommodate the diversity of situations that influence the city, such as the relationship with the rural periphery and with the contextual municipalities linked to the economic and relational space of the central city, in accordance with the corresponding territorial planning.

Governance is a process that overlaps with the traditional hierarchical model of administrations, promoting shared decision-making at certain levels. Officials and politicians, groups and companies participate in defining objectives and devising strategies, trying to reconcile different interests that can become contradictory. When the different levels of government - local, regional and ministerial - intervene simultaneously and in a coordinated manner at international level, we can speak of multi-level governance.

**03**

**LOCAL DIPLOMACY;  
NEIGHBOURHOOD DIPLOMACY  
GUIDELINES FOR LOCAL DIPLOMACY**

**03**

# 03

## LOCAL DIPLOMACY; NEIGHBOURHOOD DIPLOMACY GUIDELINES FOR LOCAL DIPLOMACY

### 3.1

#### THE ROLE OF CITIES IN DIPLOMACY VERSUS THAT OF STATES

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The 1648 Treaties of Westphalia are often recognised as an important milestone in international relations and modern diplomacy. Luís Moita<sup>85</sup> emphasises the establishment of some of the foundations of the modern European system of nation states, endowed with sovereignty over a certain population and territory, as well as the creation of conditions for the formation of a diplomatic network made up of permanent representatives, accredited to others. Later, the Congress of Vienna, held in 1815, consolidated the functional rules of this “classical diplomacy”, based on consultation and the sovereign equality of states. We are talking about a diplomacy that was essentially bilateral, of state-state relations, in which external representation was unique and centralised, and often “understood as personal representation from sovereign to sovereign”. A diplomacy that dealt fundamentally with political and strategic matters, and was almost always based on an atmosphere of great secrecy.

The 20th century brought major changes, even a new outlook and dimension, to diplomacy and international relations: the end of classic secret diplomacy, the emergence of multilateralism and the growing importance of local or city diplomacy.

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<sup>85</sup> Luís Moita, “Da diplomacia clássica à nova diplomacia”, (Janus, Espaço de Relações Exteriores, 2006).

In January 1918, the President of the United States himself, Woodrow Wilson<sup>86</sup>, as a contribution to ending the First World War and establishing peace, called for the abolition of secret diplomacy and the formation of a general organisation of nations capable of guaranteeing political independence and territorial integrity to both small and large states.

World War I ended on November 11, 1918, with the signing of the “Armistice of Compiègne”, and in 1920 the first major example of multilateral diplomacy appeared: the “League of Nations”<sup>87</sup>, an international organisation which, until 1939, had 63 member states (including Portugal and Spain), and whose main mission was to guarantee international peace and collective security. In the end, however, this organisation failed to achieve its goals, as it was unable to prevent the outbreak of World War II, and was replaced by another in 1945, also with the main mission of ensuring world peace and promoting international cooperation, but of a larger size and ambition, which is clearly the “United Nations Organization”.

The UN is still the world’s main multilateral platform for the co-ordination of nations, with 193 member states. Guided by the purposes and principles set out in its founding Charter, the United Nations Organization has the capacity to take action on major issues relating to humanity, such as peace and security, climate change, sustainable development (social, economic and environmental), human rights, disarmament, terrorism, humanitarian aid and health emergencies, gender equality, governance, among many others<sup>88</sup>. Portugal and Spain have been members of the UN since December 1955.

With the emergence of multilateralism and the growth of globalisation, international relations are losing their exclusive focus on state sovereignty and moving towards “global governance”<sup>89</sup>. In fact, multilateral diplomacy is absolutely crucial in our time to overcome the major global challenges facing humanity. So much so that today, in addition to nation states, there are many and diverse stakeholders who play an important role in diplomacy on the international platform and who operate at various levels. These include international organisations such as the World Trade Organisation, the European Union, the African Union, Mercosur and the North Atlantic Organisation, international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, non-governmental organisations such as Amnesty International, the Red Cross, Greenpeace and Doctors Without Borders, and even multinational companies such as Apple, Microsoft, Google and Amazon.

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<sup>86</sup> Woodrow Wilson’s speech to the US Congress on 8 January 1918, in which he set out 14 points to end the First World War.

<sup>87</sup> The pact that formally established the League of Nations was included in the Treaty of Versailles and entered into force on 10 January 1920.

<sup>88</sup> [www.unric.org/pt/história-da-onu/](http://www.unric.org/pt/história-da-onu/)

<sup>89</sup> In the same vein, João Pedro Ferreira Cabral, “As Nações Unidas e a governança global”, Universidade da Beira Interior (Social Sciences and Humanities), [www.ubiblion.ubi.pt](http://www.ubiblion.ubi.pt); Ana Carolina Evangelista Mauad, “Governança global: intersecções com paradiplomacia em meio à crise climática”, [www.bibanpocs.emnuvens.com.br/revista/article/view/394/376/](http://www.bibanpocs.emnuvens.com.br/revista/article/view/394/376/); Fernando Petrela, “A diplomacia como uma actividade profissional do século XXI”, UNO August 2014., <https://www.revista-uno.com.br/numero-17/a-diplomacia-como-uma-atividade-profissional-do-seculo-xxi/>

But there is another type of sub-national entity, with a growing role in international diplomacy, which should also be considered, such as Regions, Municipalities and Cities, and to which we are now turning our special attention. We are talking about local governments seeking to assert their own interests and find solutions to common problems in the international arena. But we are also talking about the growing relevance of local contributions to major global challenges.

In fact, following World War II, which left a large part of Europe destroyed and a legacy of civilian and military casualties in excess of 50 million people, formal partnerships between cities in different countries began to emerge, based essentially on relationships of friendship, solidarity and co-operation, with a focus on promoting cultural and social exchanges. The strong desire for reconciliation, to help build peace, as well as to avoid future conflicts, was clearly the main foundation of these partnerships, which we call “twinning”, and which were often even established between towns that were, during the war, on opposite sides of the barricade, as was the case with the first twinning in 1950 between German and French towns, in this case Ludwigsburg and Montbéliard <sup>90</sup>.

In 1951, the “Council of European Municipalities and Regions” was even founded<sup>91</sup>, which, recognising the importance of this “movement”, turned out to be an important driving force behind partnerships between cities.

In the meantime, these “twinning”, based on a kind of local bilateral diplomacy or proximity strategy, have evolved and grown, both in number and in ambition, so that partnerships between cities are now a reality all over the world, and are not just about promoting and establishing simple “friendly relations”, but are also real instruments for territorial promotion and economic and social development.

And this is a path on which many of our cities in Galicia and northern Portugal have already done a lot of work.

It’s worth noting the special attention that most Spanish and Portuguese cities pay to twinning and co-operation partnerships with cities and regions in countries that once belonged to their former colonial empires, to which they are no strangers, in addition to issues related to their own history, language, culture and diaspora.

In the European context, we must recognise the importance that twinning has had, and continues to have, in building a common European identity, promoting the idea of a united Europe, where towns and their citizens mobilise common efforts to face common challenges.

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<sup>90</sup> [www.deutschland.de/pt-br/topic/politica/alemanha-cidades-irmas-rede-internacional](http://www.deutschland.de/pt-br/topic/politica/alemanha-cidades-irmas-rede-internacional)

<sup>91</sup> [www.twinning.org/pt/page/o-conselho-dos-municipios-e-regioes-da-europa](http://www.twinning.org/pt/page/o-conselho-dos-municipios-e-regioes-da-europa)

In fact, the European Union, while being a project of a group of states and nations, is increasingly a space for asserting the regions and their interests. It's no coincidence that in 1994, the "Committee of the Regions" was created within the European Union itself, precisely to ensure that the interests and needs of regional and local authorities are duly taken into account <sup>92</sup>.

In the same way, we can understand the growing status that the European Union has given to the so-called "Euroregions", as instruments for dialogue<sup>93</sup> and the development of cross-border regions, of which the "Euroregion Galicia-Northern Portugal" is a good example, and which has given rise to cross-border cooperation networks, such as our "Eixo Atlântico of the Northwest Peninsula", in which cities and municipalities are truly key players<sup>94</sup>.

And while the so-called "twinings" can be integrated into a kind of "bilateral local diplomacy", as partnership relations between two towns, the participation of regions, municipalities and towns in international networks and organisations can, in our opinion, be perfectly identified as "multilateral local diplomacy".

We're not talking about local diplomacy competing or opposing the diplomacy of states, conducted by national governments, but rather complementary and sometimes even collaborative diplomacy, in which, in the end, cities and their local governments, as well as strengthening their capacity to respond to the challenges of their own territories, actively contribute to the solution of global problems such as climate change, sustainable development, good governance and even peace, also strengthening the action of states and their national governments in the international arena.

This is the case, for example, when cities participate in international networks and organisations such as "Eurocities"<sup>95</sup>, "Climate Alliance"<sup>96</sup>, "SDG Cities"<sup>97</sup>, "International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives"<sup>98</sup> or "Mayors for Peace"<sup>99</sup>.

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<sup>92</sup> [www.cor.europa.eu/pt](http://www.cor.europa.eu/pt)

<sup>93</sup> "Association of European Border Regions", [www.ccdr-n.pt/pagina/associacao-das-regioes-frontericas-europeias](http://www.ccdr-n.pt/pagina/associacao-das-regioes-frontericas-europeias)

<sup>94</sup> [www.eixoatlantico.com](http://www.eixoatlantico.com)

<sup>95</sup> [www.eurocities.eu](http://www.eurocities.eu)

<sup>96</sup> [www.climatealliance.org](http://www.climatealliance.org)

<sup>97</sup> [www.sdg-cities.org](http://www.sdg-cities.org)

<sup>98</sup> [www.iclei.org](http://www.iclei.org)

<sup>99</sup> [www.mayorsforpeace.org](http://www.mayorsforpeace.org)

The same happens when local governments promote and establish development co-operation relationships for the benefit of foreign territories or take part in international solidarity missions. These initiatives, in addition to the recognised merits they bring to the promoting cities, also clearly benefit the states to which they belong, as well as their national governments, namely by strengthening their status and efforts in terms of international cooperation, which is now a very important foreign policy instrument.

Hence the importance that the European Union itself and its member states have recognised for “decentralised cooperation” developed by municipalities, as can be seen in the opinion of the Committee of the Regions on “Decentralised cooperation in the reform of EU development policy”, published in the Official Journal of the European Union of 16 May 2006. It is an importance that we believe must be boosted today, in favour of affirming the European project in the world.

In 2013, the Camões Institute, I.P., which is responsible for implementing Portuguese cooperation policy, and the European Commission, supported the “Networks for Development - from twinning to more efficient cooperation” project, which had as its main objective the “enlargement and consolidation of a thematic network of Portuguese municipalities dedicated to development cooperation”<sup>100</sup>. This project even led to the birth of the “Intermunicipal Development Cooperation Network”<sup>101</sup>, an organisation which includes two Eixo Atlântico municipalities: Maia and Matosinhos.

In short, state diplomacy and city diplomacy nowadays play complementary, but equally important roles on the international platform, which states themselves, particularly in Europe, often recognise and nurture.

While the diplomacy of national governments, which is more centralised and elaborate, even bureaucratic and protocolary, focuses essentially on macro-policies and issues with a global dimension and strategy, the diplomacy of local governments, although usually aligned with that of states, is more pragmatic and flexible, less ritualised, more collaborative and more focused on results, more adapted to solving specific problems as well as finding solutions to common challenges.

In addition, it is now clear that major global problems require local solutions and co-operation at multiple levels of governance, which is why good alignment between the diplomacy of States and the diplomacy of Cities is fundamental to effectively and sustainably tackling the major challenges of our times.

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<sup>100</sup> <https://www.instituto-camoes.pt/activity/parcerias/cooperacao>

<sup>101</sup> [www.redesparaodesenvolvimento.org](http://www.redesparaodesenvolvimento.org)

Since they are closer to the territory and its people, local governments find it easier to diagnose problems and build solutions that are specifically tailored to the needs, challenges and ambitions of their communities. And they almost always do so more quickly and effectively.

## 3.2

### THE NEED FOR LOCAL DIPLOMACY

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As a result of technological developments, particularly in terms of mobility and transport, communications and digital technology, everything has become closer. Speed has accelerated and distances of space and time have become shorter, not only in terms of the flow of people and goods, international trade, but also access to information and knowledge. Nowadays we know everything that is happening on the other side of the world in real time, the problems and solutions, as well as the risks and threats, and so we also have the ability to identify and measure precisely what interests us and what can affect or condition us. Digital has created a kind of borderless world, permanently online. Territorial co-operation and competition is no longer just at regional and national level, but increasingly on the international platform, where everything is discussed and played out today. The world has become more globalised and interdependent, which is why local diplomacy is no longer an option for the regions, municipalities and cities of the 21st century, but a real instrument of good local government management, or even good governance.

State diplomacy itself has dramatically changed. Today's ambassadors are not just representatives of their governments to third countries, who deal only with "big policy" issues and liaise discreetly only with national governments, and almost always in offices in capital cities. In this day and age, foreign ambassadors, accredited to our countries, frequently travel around our territories, from north to south, from the coast to the interior, visiting municipalities, companies, universities and other institutions, in order to find partnerships that can respond directly to the interests of the governments they represent, but also of their local authorities, companies and institutions. It's no coincidence that we often hear it said that economic diplomacy is now a major activity of "embassies" and consular representations<sup>107</sup>. In other words, today it is the states themselves, through their diplomatic representatives, that recognise the importance of decentralised cooperation and create value and opportunities for local diplomacy.

Today, the state and national governments do not only work with foreign regions, municipalities and cities through their traditional diplomatic channels, but also through the structures they oversee, such as public investment agencies<sup>102</sup> and international co-operation<sup>103</sup>.

But organised civil society itself, through bodies such as Business Associations<sup>104</sup>, Chambers of Commerce and Industry<sup>105</sup>, Non-Governmental Organisations and even Universities, is calling on and putting pressure on Regions, Municipalities and Cities to be key players in international diplomacy. Actions linked to the promotion of the territory, the internationalisation of the economy, attracting foreign investment, development cooperation, the mobility of students<sup>106</sup> and teachers, scientific research, often require the involvement and response of local diplomacy.

That's why it's not surprising that many of our municipalities already have international relations and foreign investment attraction structures in their organisation, which often also play a role in supporting companies and institutions located in their territory in internationalisation processes and opportunities, and even in development cooperation actions.

And as we mentioned above, the major global challenges, such as tackling climate change and promoting sustainable development, also require the involvement and commitment of regional and local governments.

In fact, the European Commission recognises that many of the actions needed to achieve the goals and targets of the United Nations' "Agenda 2030"<sup>107</sup>, on a global scale, need to be carried out at a local level<sup>108</sup>.

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<sup>102</sup> In the Portuguese case, through AICEP-Portuguese Trade & Investment Agency, <https://www.portugalglobal.pt/> [www.portugalglobal.pt](http://www.portugalglobal.pt)

<sup>103</sup> In the Portuguese case, through "Camões- Instituto da Cooperação e da língua, [www.instituto-camoes.pt](http://www.instituto-camoes.pt)

<sup>104</sup> "The AEP Foundation, through the Global Diaspora Network project, supports companies to promote their exports through a vast network of national and international partners. Among these partners are the municipalities of Famalicão and Maia"; [www.portaldenegocios.redeglobal.pt/partners](http://www.portaldenegocios.redeglobal.pt/partners)

<sup>105</sup> "Luso-French Chamber brings together 50 French companies in Porto to bring investors closer to local communities" <https://eco.sapo.pt/2023/11/14/camara-luso-francesa-junta-50-empresas-francesas-no-porto-para-aproximar-investidores-das-comunidades-locais/>

<sup>106</sup> "Porto voted best Erasmus destination of 2024", [www.publico.pt/2024/04/16/p3/noticia/porto-eleito](http://www.publico.pt/2024/04/16/p3/noticia/porto-eleito)

<sup>107</sup> "2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 25 September 2015", [www.unric.org/pt/objetivos-de-desenvolvimento-sustentavel/](http://www.unric.org/pt/objetivos-de-desenvolvimento-sustentavel/)

<sup>108</sup> "Localisation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)" [www.urban.jrc.europa.eu/sdgs](http://www.urban.jrc.europa.eu/sdgs)

The United Nations itself even offers a programme, “UN-Habitat”, which calls on governments and local authorities to be active partners in building inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities and communities<sup>109</sup>.

One of the other global challenges that requires the co-operation and response of local governments is the growing phenomenon of migration and refugees. By way of example, we should remember that at the moment there are around 38 million people living in the European Union, scattered throughout the cities of the member states, who were born in third countries, which corresponds to 8.5% of all the inhabitants of the European Union<sup>110</sup>. According to the International Organisation for Migration, the war in Ukraine alone is responsible for around six and a half million refugees<sup>111</sup>.

The successful integration of migrants is crucial to the future well-being and cohesion of European societies. And while it is true that member states are primarily responsible for this task, we must not forget the role of cities and municipalities in the successful integration of migrants and refugees. That’s why the European Union supports national authorities, but also local authorities, in terms of coordinating policies, exchanging knowledge and providing financial resources<sup>112</sup>. In this regard, the “EU Action Plan on Integration” and the “Urban Agenda Partnership for the Integration of Migrants and Refugees” are worth mentioning.

It should be noted that in March 2022, at the beginning of the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation, twenty-two municipalities of the “Eixo Atlântico of the Northwest Peninsula” expressed their willingness to welcome and provide social and labour support to Ukrainian refugees<sup>113</sup>. And many of them have done so.

In the same way, when peace comes, we are sure that many of our towns and cities will mobilise their efforts and call on their companies to promote the reconstruction of Ukraine’s economy and infrastructures affected by the war, effectively responding to the will of the European Union itself.

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<sup>109</sup> “A better quality of life for all in an urbanising world” [www.unhabitat.org](http://www.unhabitat.org)

<sup>110</sup> [www.commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-life/statistics-migration-europe-pt](http://www.commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-life/statistics-migration-europe-pt)

<sup>111</sup> “Conflict in Ukraine has made 14 million refugees” <https://pt.euronews.com/2024/02/22/conflicto-na-ucrania-ja-fez-14-milhoes-de-deslocados-segundo-a-onu-europe-pt>

<sup>112</sup> “Inclusion of migrants and refugees in cities” [www.commission.europa.eu/eu-regional-and-urban-development/topics/cities-and-urban-development/priority-themes-eu-cities/inclusion-migrants](http://www.commission.europa.eu/eu-regional-and-urban-development/topics/cities-and-urban-development/priority-themes-eu-cities/inclusion-migrants)

<sup>113</sup> “Eixo Atlântico cities ready to welcome and provide social support to Ukrainian refugees” [www.publico.pt/2022/03/02/local/noticia/cidades-eixo-atlantico-preparados-acolher-dar-apoio-social-refugiados-ucranianos-1997344](http://www.publico.pt/2022/03/02/local/noticia/cidades-eixo-atlantico-preparados-acolher-dar-apoio-social-refugiados-ucranianos-1997344)

In addition, Portugal and Spain have a huge diaspora, spread across all corners of the world, so the cities of these countries have in these Portuguese and Spanish who have chosen other geographies to pursue their lives, true ambassadors who can and should be used to promote and represent their interests in the foreign communities where they are integrated<sup>114</sup>.

On the other hand, there are cities and city networks on the international platform that are interested in establishing cooperation partnerships in a wide variety of areas and subjects, such as economic development, culture, good governance, the environment, urban management, security, mobility, technological innovation, health, education, which are likely to empower the cities involved, as well as their main players, and thus help to solve common problems more efficiently, and which local governments should obviously not ignore.

In conclusion, local diplomacy is today a key instrument for strengthening international relations, for promoting the sustainable development of our territories in their most diverse dimensions, but also for identifying opportunities for the internationalisation of their companies and institutions. We would also add that it is a decisive instrument for the success of policies aimed at resolving the major global problems that affect and concern humanity at this time.

## 3.3

### LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP AND RESOURCES FOR INTERNATIONALISATION

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It's not enough to recognise the importance of local diplomacy and have the will to seek solutions on the international platform to the problems and challenges facing their territories. Local governments need to have a structured international relations strategy, naturally suited to their size and responsibilities, but based on strong, resilient leadership, dialogue with civil society, knowing what they want and where they want to go, and thus able to mobilise resources and other partners to nurture this path.

Leadership implies a holistic vision of the local and regional territory, but also knowledge of the challenges and opportunities that the global space offers, specifically in terms of instruments for sharing, empowering, attracting and accelerating development.

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<sup>114</sup> "The Portuguese Diaspora Council was set up on 26/12/2012 with the high patronage of the Presidency of the Republic, precisely for the purpose of strengthening relations between Portugal and its diaspora, Portuguese and Portuguese-descendants"; [www.presidencia.pt/iniciativas/conselho-da-diaspora](http://www.presidencia.pt/iniciativas/conselho-da-diaspora)

And also a clear awareness of the importance of local contributions to solving major global problems, in other words, the dimension of the new responsibilities that today's times impose on the challenge of good governance, even at local authority level<sup>115 116 117</sup>.

Therefore, knowledge of the international reality, geopolitics, its dynamics and trends, is now also a necessity for local political leaders themselves. Likewise, knowledge of the national international relations strategy, with which any local diplomacy initiative must endeavour to be aligned.

Because, as we all know, although proximity to the territory suggests a clear advantage in identifying its problems and ambitions, as well as in designing and building the best solutions for its communities, the truth is that external relations policies are not traditionally part of the “legal competences” of administrations and local governments, nor of those that most citizens easily identify as priorities, which often makes local diplomacy a minor competence and incapable, on its own, of mobilising the necessary resources, particularly from municipal budgets.

This is despite the clear recognition and importance that local diplomacy and decentralised cooperation currently enjoy from national governments and supranational authorities<sup>118</sup>, the results of which no one disputes, and on the contrary are often praised<sup>119</sup>.

In fact, investing in an international relations strategy, built in a competent and inclusive way, capable of involving the main players in the territory, should never be seen as an expense, but rather as an investment, because as well as enabling cities to find partnerships that add value to solving their problems and realising their ambitions, it easily increases their notoriety, and in particular their influence and ability to contribute to the formulation of global policies.

Even more important in this regard is a competent communication and dialogue strategy, capable of keeping civil society properly informed and mobilised.

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<sup>115</sup> “Os municípios e os objetivos de desenvolvimento sustentável” [www.rumoa2030-pt/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/AF\\_IMVF-Manual-ODS.pdf](http://www.rumoa2030-pt/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/AF_IMVF-Manual-ODS.pdf)

<sup>116</sup> “A abordagem holística da EU para o desenvolvimento sustentável” [https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/sustainable-development-goals\\_en?prefLang=ptloads/2020/06/AF\\_IMVF-Manual-ODS.pdf](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/sustainable-development-goals_en?prefLang=ptloads/2020/06/AF_IMVF-Manual-ODS.pdf)

<sup>117</sup> “Especial incidência no ODS 16- Promover a paz, a boa governação, a responsabilização e os direitos humanos” [www.forus.international.org/pt/custom-page-detail/107574](http://www.forus.international.org/pt/custom-page-detail/107574)

<sup>118</sup> [www.eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/PT/TXT/HTML/?uri=LEGISSUM%3Ar12004](http://www.eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/PT/TXT/HTML/?uri=LEGISSUM%3Ar12004)

<sup>119</sup> [www.issuu.com/imvf/docs/manual\\_casos\\_praticos](http://www.issuu.com/imvf/docs/manual_casos_praticos)

In fact, when it comes to the major global challenges, the active participation of citizens themselves, even if encouraged by local authorities, is absolutely decisive. That's why strategies linked to education for global citizenship are also avenues that deserve more attention <sup>120</sup>.

On the other hand, while it is true that the participation of local governments in the most important international forums of multilateral diplomacy sometimes entails high investments, including in specialised human resources, which are not always within the reach of smaller cities, it is no less true that the costs are substantially reduced if local governments are able to take advantage of the opportunities offered by foreign diplomatic networks in our countries, as well as opting for participation in national<sup>121 122</sup> and cross-border<sup>123</sup> networks that have the ambition to host and promote cooperation between cities and other organisations on the international platform.

Furthermore, in addition to municipal budgets, cities can and should make use of other financial resources available for their internationalisation and international cooperation projects, namely national and EU programmes, such as those linked to “Camões-Instituto da Cooperação e da Língua”<sup>124</sup> and “EuropeAid”<sup>125 126</sup>.

As we mentioned above, local diplomacy should not be seen as a cost, but as an investment. And a city with an active participation in the international platform, as well as being able to bring more and better development to its local community, will always be a city with more recognition and notoriety, and, we are sure, with more capacity to influence and participate in the construction of global policies, and even to have the ambition to mobilise other cities for its causes and to lead even more specific proposals and trends.

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<sup>120</sup> [www.instituto-camoes.pt/sobre/comunicacoes/noticias/tod-s-pela-educacao-para-o-desenvolvimento-e-a-cidadania-global](http://www.instituto-camoes.pt/sobre/comunicacoes/noticias/tod-s-pela-educacao-para-o-desenvolvimento-e-a-cidadania-global)

<sup>121</sup> “Intermunicipal Development Co-operation Network” [www.redesparaodesenvolvimento.org/pt/ricd/ricd/](http://www.redesparaodesenvolvimento.org/pt/ricd/ricd/)

<sup>122</sup> “Global Diaspora Network” [www.redegloba.pt](http://www.redegloba.pt)

<sup>123</sup> “Eixo Atlântico do Noroeste Peninsular” [www.eixoatlantico.com](http://www.eixoatlantico.com)

<sup>124</sup> “The Camões Institute finances and co-finances cooperation programmes and projects in various partner countries, particularly Portuguese-speaking countries” [www.camoes.pt/activity/o-que-fazemos/cooperacao/atuacao/financiamos/](http://www.camoes.pt/activity/o-que-fazemos/cooperacao/atuacao/financiamos/)

<sup>125</sup> “Aid, Development Co-operation, Fundamental Rights” [www.commission.europa.eu/aid-development-cooperation-fundamental-rights\\_en](http://www.commission.europa.eu/aid-development-cooperation-fundamental-rights_en)

<sup>126</sup> [www.europeaidcontracts.com](http://www.europeaidcontracts.com)



**04**

**IMPLEMENTING LOCAL  
DIPLOMACY**

**WHY LOCAL DIPLOMACY**

**04**

# 04

## IMPLEMENTING LOCAL DIPLOMACY WHY LOCAL DIPLOMACY

### 4.1

#### DEFINITION OF OBJECTIVES

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As mentioned above, a structured international relations strategy, duly aligned with national foreign policy, which responds to the needs and ambitions of the territory and takes into account the major global challenges, is today an important instrument of good governance for local authorities.

Before building a strategy, it is paramount for local governments to define objectives, in other words, what they want to achieve with local diplomacy. This is still a process, as it will always be necessary to listen to local stakeholders, define priorities, know the objectives and strategy of the national government's external relations policy, identify the opportunities and challenges that exist on the international platform, as well as the cities, networks and organisations with the capacity to respond to local needs and ambitions, and obviously know the means (human and financial resources) available to support the implementation of local diplomacy actions.

In fact, each region, municipality or city has its own specificities and needs, and even its own ambitions, whether due to the size and characteristics of its territory or the texture and level of development of its social, cultural and economic fabric, which a competent construction of local internationalisation policies cannot fail to take into due account.

Knowledge of the territory's socio-economic context, an assessment of the priority areas for action, such as economic development, education, environmental sustainability, urban management, health, tourism and culture, knowledge of the needs and ambitions of the local community, namely its main players, companies and institutions, as well as identifying the city's strengths, challenges and problems that can be addressed with value through actions developed at international platform level, are therefore absolutely essential for defining the objectives of local diplomacy.

It is also crucial for local governments to take into account the programme lines of the country's foreign policy<sup>127</sup>, the objectives and programmes of the European Union's foreign policy<sup>128</sup>, as well as the major global agendas, so that they can align their goals with national and European priorities, and thus integrate into them the issues linked to the major global challenges, such as the tackle against climate change<sup>129</sup> and the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals<sup>129</sup>. In the same vein, it is also important to know and take into account the main trends and dynamics of world geopolitics.

The most common objectives include: those linked to economic development, such as attracting foreign investment, seeking opportunities in international markets for local companies and promoting the city internationally as a tourist destination; those related to urban development and sustainability, namely the search for solutions to resolve local problems and challenges, such as urban planning, waste management, renewable energies, and even global challenges such as climate change, either by establishing cooperation partnerships with foreign regions and cities, or by participating in global networks such as "C40 Cities"<sup>130</sup> or "ICLEI- Local Governments for Sustainability"<sup>131</sup>; those linked to strengthening local identity, such as promoting the city's culture, traditions and values, as well as cultural and artistic exchanges, cooperation with the diaspora, promoting the territory and projecting the brand, and strengthening relations of friendship and power of influence with international regions; those related to education and innovation, such as promoting partnerships between local schools, universities and technology centres with similar foreign entities; and those linked to international cooperation itself, whether in terms of promoting capacity building, sharing knowledge and good practices, or in the context of development cooperation, promoting solidarity and human rights.

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<sup>127</sup> [www.institutocamoes.pt/activity/o-que-fazemos/cooperacao/cooperacao-portuguesa/mandato](http://www.institutocamoes.pt/activity/o-que-fazemos/cooperacao/cooperacao-portuguesa/mandato)

<sup>128</sup> [www.european-union.europa.eu/priorities-and-actions-topic/foreign-and-security-policy\\_pt](http://www.european-union.europa.eu/priorities-and-actions-topic/foreign-and-security-policy_pt)

<sup>129</sup> [www.consilium.europa.eu/pt/policies/paris-agreement-climate/](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/pt/policies/paris-agreement-climate/)

<sup>130</sup> [www.c40cities.org](http://www.c40cities.org)

<sup>131</sup> [www.iclei.org](http://www.iclei.org)

Diplomacy is therefore an increasingly important tool for local governments, as well as for the various stakeholders in the territory, particularly in the current context of globalisation, where challenges and opportunities transcend national borders and require a collaborative and decentralised approach. On the other hand, participation in the international platform allows local governments to increase the notoriety and recognition of their cities, as well as their power to influence major global decisions.

Still on the subject of the objectives of local diplomacy, it is key, both for reasons of transparency and the need to involve and mobilise civil society, that they are properly disseminated and publicised.

## 4.2

### DESIGNING A STRATEGY

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The process of designing a local government international relations policy is similar to that followed in any other local sectoral policy, with only the specific contents varying<sup>132</sup>. Having an elaborate strategy is essential because the characteristics of external action mean that the results will not be visible in the short term, but as a result of many coordinated actions over time. When designing the strategy, the available human and economic resources will be analysed and determined, as well as external collaborators, possible alliances with other stakeholders, priority action sites will be detailed, as well as external support such as the State Administration and its specialised bodies or the inclusion of initiatives in the external cooperation programmes defined by the aforementioned state bodies, among other measures.

Given the size of the municipality and the resources available, the motivation for the local executive to tackle an internationalisation strategy can be manifold:

- a) Solving specific problems whose complexity or cost exceeds local capacity, such as climate change or migration.
- b) Promoting solidarity with other territories or human groups.
- c) Obtaining international recognition.
- d) Gaining political visibility.

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<sup>132</sup> The general process has been detailed in another Eixo Atlántico publication: MÉNDEZ ROMEU, J.L., 2022. Implementación de las nuevas políticas. In: Various Authors. *El desarrollo urbano en la era pos-covid*. Vigo: Eixo Atlántico.

The first two objectives or motivations are the result of local policies of a sectoral nature, while international recognition, which favours the city, also strengthens the political figure of its first mayor. The last objective mentioned is purely political in nature.

Once the objectives have been duly defined, it will be necessary to develop them into the goals or actions needed to achieve them, with the greatest possible degree of concreteness, assigning a time horizon for each action, thus facilitating subsequent monitoring. At the same time, the cities where you intend to act will be identified, determining the possible interlocutors and how to access them. Sometimes, for the same objective, it will be necessary to be present in different cities, with different interlocutors: local authorities, state authorities, the media, institutions or companies, etc., which will require the use of different relationship channels.

The necessary human and financial resources will be assessed. The first include staff, advisors and elected positions, all selected for their specialisation or competence. They will take on the tasks of collecting and preparing the necessary documentation to support attendance at the different forums, organising the meetings and events, coordinating the different departments and entities involved. Sometimes it will be necessary to call on external experts, from universities or other institutions. On other occasions it will be necessary to seek the collaboration of local people with contacts in certain areas: entrepreneurs, academics, artists or sportspeople who have their own networks of contacts abroad.

The financial resources can be their own or come from other sources, such as ministerial aid and subsidies, European programmes, partnerships with private companies or the third sector.

The strategy will consider possible alliances with other entities to strengthen messages, media presence or influence in decision-making centres, depending on the cities where the action is to be taken and the level chosen: directly through bilateral relations with the corresponding local government, indirectly through a network of cities or through participation in a cooperation programme. Likewise, the possible collaboration of other state bodies or direct participation in their cooperation programmes will be taken into account.

Finally, the core values on which the actions will be based must be made explicit, such as public ethics, transparency, accountability and governance.

## 4.3

### SCOPE OF ACTION

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Within the framework of the action covered by the present report, the internationalisation of cities refers to the outside world outside the European Union, to countries and places that do not belong to EU member countries. In the latter field, cities already have well-developed cooperation programmes, regulations and practices. Nor should local international relations be identified exclusively with development co-operation, which is only one of the possible lines of local action abroad.

From the diversity of objectives that local internationalisation can address, it can be deduced that local external activity can be developed in very different areas, each of which requires a unique strategy, the identification of associates, partners or collaborators, and the establishment of the actions to be carried out. The different spheres of action can be grouped into four main areas: the institutional sphere, where political objectives predominate, decentralised development cooperation, the sphere of the economy, business and knowledge and, finally, the sphere of culture and sport.

#### 4.3.1 INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

Unlike state governments, cities don't carry out their external activities through agreements or treaties<sup>133</sup> that bind the parties, since they don't have the legal competence to do so. In this way, cities operate in a less regulated space, allowing for more agile structures based on co-operation between different stakeholders. It's about institutionalising local participation in the external agenda and gaining visibility and influence, which can lead to economic, image or other returns. When collaboration is promoted between networks of cities, there is a multiplier effect, especially for smaller cities.

The issues that form part of the external institutional agenda are varied and are often related to the priorities of states' external action. Thus, in recent years, cities have been involved in migration policies, or the effects of the Covid pandemic, but also in environmental policies as a result of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Agreement, taking on the fight against climate change or decarbonisation.

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<sup>133</sup> The Vienna Convention of 23-5-1969 regulates the law of international treaties: [https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetailsIII.aspx?src=treaty&mtdsg\\_no=xxiii-1&chapter=23&Temp=mtdsg3&clang=\\_en](https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetailsIII.aspx?src=treaty&mtdsg_no=xxiii-1&chapter=23&Temp=mtdsg3&clang=_en)

Co-operation on climate-related issues is a clear example of a cross-cutting policy with broad social recognition: it affects all people without distinction, all territories on the planet beyond political borders and the maintenance of the conditions necessary for human life and all species. Other areas of frequent action include housing and urban planning policies, mobility policies and social policies.

Local involvement in state or international strategies is seen at all stages of policy implementation, so that cities have participated in the processes of drafting and formulating international agreements, are part of monitoring structures and, at the same time, have promoted local actions to achieve these objectives. Their signature is not on the agreements signed between states, but their voice is audible in the texts.

There are many forms of institutional participation. From relations through the representation of each state abroad, such as embassies or sectoral representation offices, to direct lobbying. The usual actions include organising visits by officials or elected representatives to exchange experiences, organising international events of all kinds in which representatives of institutions and civil society take part, participating in calls for applications and aid, prizes and awards, taking part in forums and congresses or participating directly in international structures such as the various committees of the United Nations, UNESCO, UNICEF, the Council of Europe, etc.

Because of their repercussions on the visibility of cities, it is worth mentioning the participation of cities in rankings that compare and position cities, carrying out the preliminary tasks necessary to position themselves appropriately. Said rankings, which prioritise cities, can have positive effects on the urban image, but it should be borne in mind that the parameters for constructing the indicators are generally not transparent and that the sample selection can be biased. These are basically marketing strategies. Something similar can be said of competitions for urban awards and recognitions, the number of which continues to grow, although in some cases they are clearly commercial initiatives. The existing risk was explained as follows:

As well as stimulating costly competition between cities, centring a city's growth and development strategy on these objectives leads - sooner or later - to placing it more at the service of external agents (investors, tourists, etc.) than of the citizens themselves<sup>134</sup>.

Comparing cities has a political dimension because it allows local strategy to be analysed in the international context, leadership to be assessed in order to bring together the actions of the different local players, as well as the links between local internal policies and international projection

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<sup>134</sup> MALÉ, J.P., CORS, C., Jean Pierre Malé. 2015. Las relaciones "internacionales" de las ciudades y los gobiernos locales: autonomía, especificidad y potencial de cambio. *Revista Mexicana de Política Exterior* (104), pages 49-68.

The oldest initiative for institutional external relations is “sister cities”, a bilateral agreement between two cities. Promoted by the United States after the Second World War and boosted by the EU, “sister cities” or “town twinning” aims to create links between two towns that usually have similar demographic and sociological characteristics, as well as sharing common objectives. The content of twinning can be very varied: exchange of knowledge on local government issues, public services, between companies, research institutions, centres of artistic production, etc.

A more advanced level of twinning is the joint development of cooperation programmes or joint business projects involving the active participation of local players in the commercial, logistics, tourism, etc. sectors.

There are currently more than 40,000 registered twinning agreements, as it is common for a city to participate in several at the same time, even with cities from very different continents and cultures. Most twinning agreements involve at least one European city. In the Eixo Atlântico territory, the city of Porto is twinned with 17 cities, Braga with 11, Pontevedra with 8 and Lugo with 4 cities, among other examples.

### 4.3.2 DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION

International development aid has been greatly boosted in recent years, promoted by state governments, international organisations and partly as a result of increased activity by local governments and non-governmental organisations. All of them responding to the greater awareness of public opinion about the problems of the population in some countries. At the same time, there has been greater professionalization and planning of initiatives to achieve greater efficiency in the application of aid. The two main forms of cooperation, centralised cooperation, managed by state authorities, and decentralised cooperation, managed by local authorities and other stakeholders, serve the same objectives, although they use different instruments.

Particularly important is decentralised development cooperation, in which many cities participate, even competing with each other to attract financial or training resources. Its action is complementary to the actions carried out by state cooperation agencies and the instruments of international organisations.

At the beginning of cities’ commitment to development cooperation, the political commitments of local governments converged with the needs of civil society, expressed through different platforms that supported the proposal to apply 0.7% of each developed country’s Gross Domestic Product as development aid, ratifying a target that had been set in 1970 by the United Nations.

Half a century later, according to OECD data, only five countries have exceeded this target: Norway, Luxembourg, Sweden, Germany and Denmark. The average for developed countries was 0.37%, while Spain's 0.24% and Portugal's 0.19% were far from the proposed target. In absolute terms and clearly standing out from the rest, the world's largest donor countries are currently the United States, Germany, the EU, Japan, the United Kingdom and France.

As a result of said process of reflection and social demand, and even vis-à-vis state governments, regional and local governments have taken on the same objective, promoting decentralised cooperation. This differs from the centralised cooperation promoted by state governments by the greater presence of civil society organisations in cooperation actions, to the extent that they channel most of the cities' spending in this area.

Over the years, local co-operation has evolved from responding to external demand to greater planning, which has led many cities to create specific units to design and implement their aid. Planning can be based on different instruments, such as Municipal Plans, Strategic Guidelines, Cooperation Plans, etc. The aforementioned instruments generally set targets, define geographical and thematic priorities, and detail development and implementation instruments. Channels for civil society participation are also provided for. As with any strategy document, monitoring and evaluation are paramount.

A very active sub-sector of decentralised cooperation is made up of initiatives promoted by university institutions as part of cultural outreach activities and the promotion of relations with society. By its very nature, university development cooperation encompasses a catalogue of initiatives including international cooperation and technical assistance programmes, the promotion of volunteering, specific training, as well as research and teaching projects or networking initiatives with similar institutions. On the other hand, universities attract teachers and students from other countries who, when integrated into local life, can develop stable ties and acquire a positive appreciation of the city. These are aspects that in the future could make these people collaborators in the external promotion of cities.

Decentralised cooperation aims to establish direct relations with local representative bodies in destinations, so that they can design and implement development actions with the population concerned. It faces specific difficulties due to insufficient financial resources in local budgets and a shortage of qualified staff. On the other hand, state cooperation structures do not always give due importance to local initiatives.

One of the ways to overcome the obstacles to promoting development co-operation mentioned above is to network with other cities that share common interests, devising a single strategy, promoting concerted action by the different cities and integrating civil society initiatives into larger projects.

### 4.3.3 ECONOMY, COMPANIES AND KNOWLEDGE

In the economic sphere, the aim of local governments is to position themselves among the cities open to capital movements, promoting foreign trade, the internationalisation of local companies, attracting investment, attracting talent and managing the territorial brand. By their very nature, city initiatives in the economic sphere should accompany actions that are directly promoted by local economic agents, joining forces and promoting synergies. Develop actions such as taking part in trade missions promoted by chambers of commerce and sectoral business entities, attending fairs and international markets together with local companies, participating in specialised forums, etc.

The recent evolution of the economy shows the decline of industry and its distancing from cities, while the services sector is growing in sub-sectors such as technology, finance and professional services companies whose activity is carried out in cities. The orientation of cities towards technology-based entrepreneurship is an asset with external projection, since it affects companies that generate technology transfer and are intensive in highly qualified human capital. Said companies are usually located in foreign markets. In the economic field, we can also highlight cooperation between technology centres, R&D&I or business schools, institutions that interact regularly with their counterparts in other countries and compete to attract talent.

Tourism is a fast-growing and diversifying economic activity that generates high volumes of local employment and has a strong impact on the external image of cities. Some of its forms, such as event and congress tourism, are directly related to local productive activity.

Sometimes, with the aim of boosting the external projection of local mobilising companies, cities build infrastructures that can attract companies from technological sectors or related to the mobilising companies, in order to achieve critical mass, generate synergies and achieve greater visibility. We are referring to initiatives such as business parks, business centres or venues for events and congresses.

### 4.3.4 CULTURE AND SPORT

Since Joseph Nye coined the term soft power in 1990<sup>135</sup> as a counterpoint to the traditional hard power of states, based on coercion and deterrence, the expression has been transferred to the analysis of influences.

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<sup>135</sup> NYE, J., 1990. *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*. New York: Basic Books.

Later, the same author proposed the term smart power to refer to the combination of hard power and soft power as a way of obtaining the best policy results. Soft power is the ability to influence rather than coerce. It is realised through intangible content, such as values or image.

If there is one sector where soft power or influence is immediately recognisable, it is culture and sport, where the public authorities are usually behind the real protagonists, creators, artists or sportspeople, and their organisational structures.

For the purposes of the present report, it is interesting to highlight the ability of both activities to create an external image of a city through communication. Overall, both activities can be categorised as leisure activities. The leisure industry is a constantly expanding economic sector thanks to the development of telecommunications and digitalisation.

In addition to the industries that are generated around them, dedicated to audiovisual, music, the creation of digital content for the internet or sports, and unlike the activity of other economic sectors, cultural and sporting activities are part of general information and are omnipresent in the media. Musical or sporting events, especially big shows, capture the attention of the media and facilitate the external projection of cities.

## I-Culture

Culture has a direct impact on personal emotions. It does so through all channels (media, education, leisure, tourism), provoking admiration, providing experiences, role models, aspirational desires or simply information. It is also an ideal vehicle for projecting identity through language, cinema, music and other manifestations. Proof of this is how, since 1945, the export of cultural and leisure goods from the United States has profoundly moulded lifestyles in many countries. Something similar could be said of the image that cities like London, Paris or Rome have exported.

Cities organise events such as festivals, concerts, anniversaries or exhibitions. They also promote their museums and monuments, natural landscapes or architecture. Cultural circuits also project images, such as the Way of St James, the Vinho Verde Route through Northern Portugal or the Great European Route. UNESCO World Heritage Sites: Porto, Guimarães, Alto Douro, Braga, Santiago de Compostela, Lugo, Mondoñedo, Coruña or the Ribera Sacra, Baroque or Manueline architecture, *fado*, gastronomy or *fiestas*, are all reasons to strengthen a powerful image of the city or territory.

The cities of Porto, Guimarães and Santiago de Compostela have been honoured with the distinction of European Capital of Culture, a recognition that spreads the image of these cities across the continent, draws attention to their characteristics and multiplies the number of visitors.

The cultural manifestations that can be transferred to external action are varied: shows, audiovisual products, gastronomy, monuments, etc. In general, any cultural manifestation can be used, especially when it is unique. The promotion of cultural tourism is based on these resources, showing the local identity to visitors who get a direct, unmediated experience from cultural and heritage assets.

Within cultural products, music occupies a strategic place. It is a universal language that needs no translation, crossing geographical or social boundaries. It is present everywhere and is one of the most consumed productions, as listeners and buyers, in all its forms: pop, urban, techno, Latin, roots, academic, lyrical, etc. Its ability to arouse emotions and identities has favoured its use as a diplomatic tool, as evidenced by the export of British pop in its day and even before that by the penetration of jazz that accompanied the American armies after the Second World War. Some events, such as the international tours of musical groups, systematically transcend borders.

Today's cultural creation knows no borders, existing in fluid contact between creators from different cultures and countries who use the same expressive codes or participate in the same artistic currents in a transnationalised activity. Inserting the very objective of cultural diplomacy into dialogue with other expressions based on common values or concerns encourages exchange and foreign interest in getting to know local manifestations. On the other hand, individual creators and cultural institutions are agents capable of engaging in regular dialogue with their counterparts in other countries.

Local cultural action abroad can be coordinated with the respective state structures in Portugal and Spain. In the former case, Camões - Instituto da Cooperação e da Língua, I.P. has a vast network of centres abroad. In the case of Spain, competences are distributed among various bodies: the Instituto Cervantes, under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Culture and its bodies, and Acción Cultural Española (AC/E), under the Ministry of Finance, a dispersion that atomises initiatives, disperses efforts and loses effectiveness.

## II-Sport

Sport is an extraordinary tool for dialogue in all countries. To its emotional character, which it shares with culture, it adds the enthusiasm it provokes, an attitude that facilitates intercultural rapprochement. International sporting structures, the big football clubs, the most famous individual sportsmen and women are the paradigm of soft power because of the influence they exert and their ability to communicate. They enjoy international recognition, admiration for their achievements and a positive image.

Football in general, but also other sports, enjoy constant media attention, as do the most recognised sportspeople in any discipline. They are considered carriers of universal core values: effort, competitiveness, sacrifice, and are seen as role models for younger generations. In this way, they are carriers of meaning, projecting an image both of their own activity and team and of the city they represent. Their presence at competitions and tournaments in other countries represents an opportunity to support external promotional activities.

For the purposes of external projection, sport has a considerable advantage over other events, with its extensive calendar of competitions at all territorial levels, making it easier to anticipate and use already organised events on which to base a local external projection strategy.

### 4.3.5 THE CITY BRAND

Nowadays, the promotion of cities does not only take into account tangible aspects, but mainly intangible factors that represent a higher quality of life and social cohesion, differentiating factors. The city must offer adequate infrastructure, quality services and attractions for its residents and visitors. In today's globalised world, cities compete to attract visitors, investment and talent, making it necessary to define a symbolic imaginary that makes them unique.

The creation of a city brand or a territorial brand aims to emphasise certain local attributes in order to target a predetermined audience, such as attracting investment or tourist flows, promoting events such as congresses, shows, festivals or sports competitions, etc. City branding is one of the most common resources in the external promotion of cities.

Any city has a consolidated external image of itself, whether in a neighbourhood, regional, national or international environment. This image has been formed through various perceptions spread by the media about the events or initiatives that have taken place there or on which it has had an influence. Rarely will this collective perception be based on objective facts, statistics or exhaustive descriptions which, when they exist, are only studied by researchers or specialised professionals who need this data. Political leaders, through their activities, also help to create a certain image of their city.

Given said informal perceptions, city branding as an external projection strategy reverses the terms. Following the corporate and business management model, the aim is to first design and then apply a certain image that is considered appropriate to the values and objectives that are to be transferred. The aim is to offer a unique and competitive image of the city, associating it with distinctive characteristics, whether material (a building, heritage, a business activity, etc.) or immaterial (lifestyle, experiences, etc.). The brand synthesises a local identity and makes it unique to the outside world. It is neither an advert nor an object, but the graphic and symbolic expression of a discourse that includes values, facts and objectives. These will be defined in advance, taking into account the characteristics of the city and the objectives pursued. In other words, the brand is built on a previous history.

City branding is not an end in itself, but a tool that must be accompanied by other actions. It can form part of a Local Strategic Plan or be limited to covering certain sectors of special interest, such as tourism. The city's international activity utilises the brand, but is not limited to promoting it. Moreover, the international presence itself is already a form of affirmation of core values, such as a desire to integrate into consolidated international trends.

City branding often involves sectoral actions that make the content implicit in the brand explicit, for example: urban designs, equipment, services, leisure activities, logos, etc. The brand must also be accompanied by a communication strategy that positions the brand, and consequently the city, in the media and digital universe, on social networks, in the relevant institutions and in the sectoral areas to which the message is directed. These are mainly: a) the external sectors to be reached; b) the external markets; c) visitors and d) the inhabitants themselves, who must be involved in the local strategy.

Branding is promoted through specific sectoral plans related to the economy, the promotion of products and services or the tourist markets of origin. Citymarketing is used to identify the different audience segments to which brand communication efforts can be directed, while at the same time developing the necessary products for these audiences, defining the entities, physical locations, people and ideas to be communicated. Public-private collaboration is promoted in initiatives that favour quality of life, the rehabilitation of urban areas, heritage or tourism promotion. Also, measures that favour economic growth, such as the improvement of infrastructure, mobility or the creation of business land.

The brand works when it is sustained over time, when it is linked to local internal policies and is accepted by the main stakeholders when they recognise themselves in it. It's a strategy similar to that of any other commercial product, since promoting cities is similar to promoting an institution or a private organisation.

Based on the assumption that public opinion is formed mainly through the media, political messages seek to convey symbolic concepts based on a narrative or story that gives them an overall meaning. Emotional acceptance is sought by avoiding details and promoting a global discourse or narrative, a storytelling that arouses support. Messages transmitted by reliable sources, authorities or prestigious people enjoy greater credibility than messages from other sources, such as social networks or rumours. On the other hand, the narrative coming from public authorities is increasingly personalised, leading to extreme polarisation, built on history rather than objective facts.

## 4.4

### KEY STAKEHOLDERS

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City diplomacy is limited by the lack of legal capacity that has already been noted and by insufficient local resources. Consequently, local authorities rely on other stakeholders, such as non-governmental organisations, foundations, the private sector or universities, among others. They will share resources, experiences and knowledge of the reality in which they want to operate, factors that can strengthen the local initiative. For the aforementioned organisations, collaboration with local authorities gives them recognition, access to information and strengthens their own image.

Multilateral alliances can increase the resources available, although it is necessary to coordinate the different objectives of the players in order to avoid divergences or contradictions in actions. In the previous pages we outlined a wide range of local stakeholders who can develop initiatives with an external projection: companies (multinationals, technology companies, exporters), financial institutions, NGOs, universities and research centres, health structures, professional groups, private foundations and others. The role of the local authority is to bring together, if possible, the different objectives of each player in the service of an integrative local external strategy.

### 4.4.1 POLITICAL STAKEHOLDERS

The main local political stakeholder is the mayor. This is the individual who brings together the legitimacy conferred on it by the ballot box and the symbolic capital of representing its city everywhere. To this symbolic capital is added the executive capacity to run the local administration. It is the only leader in its territory who is known and recognised as such. Its type of leadership is emotional and is exercised by taking the political initiative. This doesn't depend on the legal framework or competence, but rather on the social perception of the problems and when to tackle them. In other words, political vision and a sense of timing.

It is also the favoured interlocutor for other stakeholders, whether in the economic or business sphere, civil society or other public institutions. Compared to other institutional authorities, mayors enjoy greater public trust, both because of their proximity and the perception that they are more effective in dealing with problems and mediating with other institutions.

Unlike the foreign policy of states, which is directed by a Ministry and carried out in each place by professional diplomats, in local diplomacy the attitude and presence of the Mayor or Mayoress is key. While relations between states are based on treaties and international law, relations between cities, and even networks of cities, are based more on personal contacts and leadership. Medium-sized or small cities are usually unable to support a professional team dedicated to internationalisation, which requires greater dedication from the top local authority. Their action will mostly be abroad, in the forums that have been defined as their objective, but they will also have to act in their own city, combining efforts, combining projects, promoting actions.

In its international activity, the Mayor or Mayoress will be supported by the members of its municipal government, especially those who have delegated responsibilities in areas related to the objective of external projection: economic promotion, tourism, strategic projects, etc., so that his internal sectoral actions are interwoven with the external project. Municipal officials and advisors can fulfil support roles for elected bodies.

Local governments collaborate with universities and external consultancies to carry out studies and analyses of the local reality, its context or to support business investment. Both contribute knowledge and experience to local authorities, and strengthen municipal structures dedicated to international relations.

## 4.4.2 ECONOMIC AGENTS

When local companies that export goods or services operate in global markets, they necessarily maintain international relations. In some cases to position their products on the markets, in others to gain access to regulatory, EU or state authorities. They do this directly, with their own resources or with the help of consultancy firms. These are companies that have knowledge of the economic area in which they operate, who liaise with suppliers, clients, competitors or advertisers and, in the case of the most important companies, enjoy a certain image. Multinational companies or those with permanent offices abroad have a greater presence and knowledge of their surroundings. Both need to analyse the political and regulatory risks of the places where they operate, protecting their interests. They will also have to develop networks of influence and maintain a reputation through the exercise of business diplomacy.

For their part, business organisations, such as chambers of commerce or sectoral organisations, maintain continuous external activity in the form of trade missions, participation in fairs and congresses, as well as stable relations with counterparts in other countries.

Economic agents are focused on commercialising their products and services in competitive markets. They cannot divert efforts in favour of the international strategy of local governments, but they can help local governments define objectives, suggest the most effective channels or evaluate the most effective actions based on their own experience. Their most important value is their knowledge of and insertion in the territory where they intend to operate.

## 4.4.3 SOCIAL STAKEHOLDERS

Among the civil society stakeholders carrying out internationalisation actions, we find very different profiles. On the one hand, there are non-governmental organisations specifically dedicated to development cooperation or the promotion of causes that, by definition, are universal, such as poverty, human rights or children, among others. Earlier, reference was made to the role of university, sports and cultural institutions, each in their own specific field. A different profile is presented by philanthropic organisations such as private foundations or those linked to companies that carry out systematic activities in one or more areas such as culture, research, social problems, etc.

NGOs interact with states, international organisations and all public and private institutions. They operate as private civil society organisations whose commitment to solidarity has given them the legitimacy to act.

Their growing professionalization and knowledge of the field make them the necessary interlocutors for other institutions. The major international conferences where issues related to the SDGs are negotiated, such as the recent conference in Baku<sup>136</sup>, are attended by representatives of numerous NGOs whose voice, arguments and documentation influence the delegations of the participating countries.

Aware of the complexity of the problems, NGOs are promoting networking in order to unify proposals and increase their influence on state governments. Currently, nongovernmental stakeholders are the most organised group with the greatest public presence behind the institutions.

Unlike institutional or economic stakeholders, social stakeholders need public opinion to create a favourable climate for their objectives, to influence official institutions, promote legislative changes or raise funds. Their most frequent sphere of action is development co-operation.

Among the social stakeholders, we can consider the diaspora, emigrants who have settled in another country on a stable basis who, when involved in the host society, can facilitate access to networks of influence that are useful for a city's external strategy.

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<sup>136</sup> The 29th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP29) took place in Baku, Azerbaijan, in November 2024, convened by the United Nations.



**05**

**EIXO ATLANTICO'S  
INTERNATIONAL STRATEGY**

**05**

# 05

## EIXO ATLANTICO'S INTERNATIONAL STRATEGY

Eixo Atlantico is a cross-border association of cities from Galicia and Northern Portugal. It represents the entire political spectrum of both countries, gives voice to city policies, coordinates initiatives, promotes action proposals, and mediates with governments and the EU.

In this chapter, we address the design of our own international relations strategy, systematizing the experience within the framework of reflections on trends in international city relations analyzed in previous pages. This strategy will be compatible with the actions carried out by each city and, when appropriate, complementary—always within the framework of the SDGs and the previously described EU trends.

### 5.1

#### ALIGNMENT WITH THE STRATEGIES OF NATIONAL AGENCIES

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As we have argued above, the local diplomacy strategy promoted by cities or networks of cities is complementary to, and not in competition with, that of states, and should therefore be aligned with their strategy and objectives.

As such, the international relations strategy to be developed by Eixo Atlántico or its member cities should also be duly aligned with the main axes and national priorities of Portuguese and Spanish foreign policy.

In the same way that the foreign policy strategies of Portugal and Spain endeavour to be aligned with those of the European Union, of which they have been member states since 1986.

In fact, Portugal and Spain see the European Union as a central pillar of their foreign policy, sharing objectives such as preserving peace, strengthening security international, promoting international cooperation, developing and strengthening democracy and the rule of law, as well as respect for human rights, but also as clear advocates of deepening European integration, policies that strengthen economic and social cohesion within their territorial space, as well as enlargement policies with other states and strategic partnerships with other regions.

Similarly, Portuguese and Spanish foreign policy strategies recognise the importance of promoting social, economic and environmental sustainability, reflected in the implementation of the “2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals”<sup>137</sup>, the “Paris Agreement on Climate Change”<sup>138</sup>, as well as the “European Green Deal”<sup>139</sup>, but also the strengthening of multilateralism and the defence of the international order. Hence the importance that Portugal and Spain attach to participating in and developing partnerships with organisations such as the UN<sup>140</sup>, NATO<sup>141</sup> and the World Trade Organisation<sup>142</sup>.

In addition, both Portuguese and Spanish foreign policy also value international solidarity and development cooperation, of which the European Union is the world’s largest contributor, and even has national agencies specially dedicated to this purpose, such as “Camões-Instituto da Cooperação e da Língua”<sup>143</sup> and “AECID-Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation”<sup>144</sup>.

The priorities of Portuguese and Spanish diplomacy are also to attract foreign investment, promote the internationalisation of their local companies and seek out new export markets, which they do preferably through specialised national entities such as “AICEP-Portuguese Trade & Investment Agency”<sup>145</sup> and “ICEX-España - Exports and Investment”<sup>146</sup>.

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<sup>137</sup> [www.unric.org/pt/objetivos-de-desenvolvimento-sustentavel/](http://www.unric.org/pt/objetivos-de-desenvolvimento-sustentavel/)

<sup>138</sup> [www.consilium.europa.eu/pt/policies/paris-agreement-climate/](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/pt/policies/paris-agreement-climate/)

<sup>139</sup> [www.consilium.europa.eu/pt/policies/green-deal/](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/pt/policies/green-deal/)

<sup>140</sup> [www.unric.org/pt/](http://www.unric.org/pt/)

<sup>141</sup> [ww.nato.int/nato-welcome/index\\_pt.html](http://www.nato.int/nato-welcome/index_pt.html)

<sup>142</sup> [www.wto.org](http://www.wto.org)

<sup>143</sup> [www.instituto-camoes.pt](http://www.instituto-camoes.pt)

<sup>144</sup> [www.aecid.es](http://www.aecid.es)

<sup>145</sup> [www.portugalglobal.pt](http://www.portugalglobal.pt)

<sup>146</sup> [www.icex.es](http://www.icex.es)

This is why Eixo Atlântico and its member cities, when defining and developing their international relations strategies, should consider maintaining a close relationship with said national agencies, which are particularly important in the processes of cooperation and internationalisation of the Portuguese and Spanish economies.

It is important to emphasise that, for historical reasons, Portugal attaches special importance to relations with Portuguese-speaking countries, even using language as an instrument of diplomacy, in the same way that Spain favours relations with Latin American countries. Hence the importance that these two countries attach to the “CPLP - Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries”<sup>147</sup> and the “Organisation of Ibero- American States for Education, Science and Culture”<sup>148</sup> .

In fact, it is no coincidence that Portugal and Spain have always offered their strongest commitment to the partnership agreement between the European Union and Mercosur<sup>149</sup>.

And whilst it’s true that Africa and Latin America are two continents that, for reasons of history, are part of the priorities of Portuguese and Spanish diplomacy, it’s also worth noting Portugal’s “friendly” relationship with China, due to its occupation of the Macau Special Administrative Region for nearly 400 years (until 1999). The People’s Republic of China has even created a forum for economic and commercial co-operation between China and Portuguese-speaking countries, known as “Forum Macau”<sup>150</sup> .

Finally, a word for the Portuguese and Spanish diasporas. For historical reasons too, Portugal and Spain have a large community of emigrants and their descendants, spread all over the world. These displaced nationals and their descendants are very important assets for Portuguese and Spanish diplomacy, in terms of strengthening relations with third countries and asserting the interests of our regions and cities in the territories where they live, which must also be duly taken into account.

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<sup>147</sup> [www.cplp.org](http://www.cplp.org)

<sup>148</sup> [www.oei.int](http://www.oei.int)

<sup>149</sup> [www.portugal.representation.ec.europa.eu/news/ue-e-mercosul-celebram-acordo-de-parceria-inovador-2024-12-06\\_pt](http://www.portugal.representation.ec.europa.eu/news/ue-e-mercosul-celebram-acordo-de-parceria-inovador-2024-12-06_pt)

<sup>150</sup> [www.portugalglobal.pt/noticias/2024/dezembro/relacoes-portugal-china-nos-25-anos-da-transicao-de-macau/6\\_pt](http://www.portugalglobal.pt/noticias/2024/dezembro/relacoes-portugal-china-nos-25-anos-da-transicao-de-macau/6_pt)

## 5.2

### PRIORITIES

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The Eixo Atlántico del Noroeste Peninsular, as a cross-border association that includes a very important group of municipalities and cities from the Galicia/Northern Portugal Euro-region, has played a key role in the discussion and construction of policies for regional cohesion, social, economic and environmental sustainability, urban management and mobility, as well as cultural and tourism promotion, for more than 30 years. It is an institution that today has a wealth of knowledge and experience that makes it a particularly capable and recognised key player in the Euro-region.

This is why the internationalisation of Eixo Atlántico is a natural consequence of the work it has done, and in particular the success it has achieved in cross-border cooperation. Let's not forget the European Commission's own recognition of the work carried out by Eixo Atlántico in drawing up the first Urban Agenda linked to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. So it was only natural that we witnessed the recent construction of Mercosur's first cross-border Urban Agenda, on the border between Brazil and Uruguay, led precisely by Eixo Atlántico. And we're not surprised that, given the success achieved, other countries want to join Eixo Atlántico for similar projects and others more closely linked to development co-operation, as is already the case with Cuba and Argentina. This is a mission that Eixo Atlántico is required to embrace, not only for reasons of international solidarity, but also for the value it can add to the Galicia/Northern Portugal Euroregion, as well as to its member cities, and even to Portuguese and Spanish diplomacy itself.

In fact, international co-operation aimed at improving the living conditions of the beneficiary regions, as well as building the capacity of their local authorities, is a priority in the foreign policy of Portugal and Spain. And in this regard, Eixo Atlántico itself, or as a liaison structure representing the interests or coordinating the actions of its member cities, can play a very important role here, particularly with Portuguese-speaking and Latin American countries.

Furthermore, Eixo Atlántico can and must also contribute to actions related to major global challenges, such as those linked to climate change, migration, peace and good governance, seeking to follow the trends of the European Union and respond to its demands.

One of said demands could be, for example, participation in the reconstruction of Ukraine<sup>151</sup>, combining the capacity of its associated cities to act when peace is reached in the conflict initiated by the Russian Federation in February 2022.

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<sup>151</sup> [www.consilium.europa.eu/pt/policy/ukraine-facility/](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/pt/policy/ukraine-facility/)

## 5.3

### OBJECTIVES AND INITIATIVES

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Eixo Atlántico has a vast international relations activity, in addition to its specificity as a cross-border association of cities. In the context described above, the organisation, on behalf of its member cities, intends to deepen and broaden its international presence around the objectives it has set itself, making the most of the experiences of its member cities and promoting the core values it advocates within the framework of international relations. Both with its own means and resources and within the framework of bilateral or multilateral programmes.

More specifically, the following general objectives are proposed:

- Operating with its own voice in scenarios of interest to the organisation and its member cities, taking on board the United Nations SDGs, the framework established by the European Union, the Strategies of the States of Portugal and Spain and promoting synergies with other players.
- Disseminating the good practices of the member cities, as well as the programming proposals drawn up by Eixo Atlántico on climate change, the Urban Agenda and others related to the SDGs.
- Strengthening the bilateral alliances duly established by the member cities with cities in other countries and continents, broadening and deepening the lines of common work.
- Promoting the advantages of the north-west of the Iberian Peninsula, Galicia and the north of Portugal as an advanced economic and technological area, part of the global economy, with a high quality of life and open to the outside world.

In development of these general objectives, the following specific objectives and the respective actions or lines of work to achieve them are proposed.

### **Objective 1.1 Actively participate and propose initiatives in third countries within the framework of the EU and the governments of Spain and Portugal**

As a cross-border network of cities, the Eixo has accumulated know-how in different areas of local management, as well as experience in relations with national governments and EU structures, in addition to managing European funds and participating with other partners in cooperation programmes.

Initiatives:

- Drawing up a document with proposals for territorial action to present to the Cooperation Agencies in Spain and Portugal, as well as in Brussels. Likewise, to the United Nations Agencies deemed appropriate (UNESCO, UNICEF, UNHCR, etc.) and other organisations such as the Council of Europe, Atlantic Euroregions, Association for Atlantic Cooperation, etc.
- Carrying out a census of the international twinning agreements signed by the Eixo cities.
- Analysing with the member cities the development cooperation programmes that have already been implemented as a basis for participation in future programmes.
- Promoting reflection and debate on the international presence of Galicia and Northern Portugal, in collaboration with local governments and universities.

### **Objective 1.2 Influence the local action proposals of international organisations, in coordination with other cities and city networks**

The north-west of the Iberian Peninsula is relatively peripheral in the geography of Europe, although it is part of the Atlantic seaboard, a vital area for the logistics of the entire continent. From this position, it is intended to provide its own reflection on the problems on the international agenda.

Initiatives:

- Promoting a network of Atlantic cities in Europe, Africa and the Americas with a view to dialogue and the exchange of ideas on local policies.
- Proposing a minimum programme of common objectives for Atlantic cities to be adopted by international organisations, especially in relation to climate change, the reduction of inequalities and migration policy.

- Disseminating this programme in all national and international bodies related to local governments.

### **Objective 1.3 Develop an international network of bilateral contacts with similar organisations**

As we have stated, networks that bring together small and medium-sized cities strengthen their individual capacity to act in international relations. In addition to relations between cities, it is crucial to develop bilateral relations with networks pursuing similar goals.

Initiatives:

- Promoting a virtual forum with similar supra-municipal bodies.
- Exchanging information and documentation on good practices and programme proposals.
- Maintaining information relations with the consulates of foreign countries with representation in the Eixo Atlântico territory.

### **Objective 2.1 Promote the good practices of member cities abroad**

Good practices are the best presentation of cities. They can generate interest, facilitate co-operation agreements, as well as provoke emulation actions in other cities. Although there are repositories of initiatives at both European and national level, bringing together and systematising the actions completed or underway in the different Eixo cities will strengthen the image of the territory.

Initiatives:

- Creating a website that brings together the actions carried out in the member cities in the following areas: urban planning, housing, mobility, decarbonisation, social cohesion, culture, etc.
- Disseminating Eixo Atlântico's programme documents related to the SDGs to experts, European institutions and specialised media.
- Creating a tripartite virtual forum with member cities, companies and institutions present abroad and cities in other countries with which there are cooperation agreements.

## **Objective 2.2 Develop the role of the Eixo Atlántico think tank**

There is no effective action without prior reflection, nor effective policies without the support of ideas. Eixo Atlántico has called on professionals and experts on several occasions to analyse and design policies. We propose to plan and systematise the development of local policies of general interest in priority areas.

Initiatives:

- Systematising the work of the external collaborators' office in accordance with the programme lines defined by the Eixo' governing bodies.
- Establishing a schedule of reports and other reflective documents to be prepared.
- Offering cities participating in cooperation programmes a strategic advisory service.

## **Objective 2.3 Facilitate the presence abroad of cultural and sporting agents from the Eixo Atlántico territory**

Creative activities in the Eixo Atlántico cities are experiencing the best moment in their history and are fully integrated into global trends. Promoting their knowledge in other countries is a way of promoting the territory of Galicia and Northern Portugal.

Initiatives:

- Promoting, with Camões I.P. and Acción Cultural Española (AC/E), the presence abroad of relevant artists and sportspeople from the Eixo Atlántico territory.
- Promoting a programme of exchange of artists and sportspeople with the countries where cooperation actions are carried out.

## **Objective 3.1 Broaden and deepen relations between twinned cities within the framework of Eixo Atlántico**

Together, the member towns have a large number of twinning agreements with other towns around the world. This is relational capital, not always fully developed, on which systematic external action can be based.

Initiatives::

- Proposing a contact agenda and an exchange of information.
- Promoting reciprocal visits by officials and elected authorities.
- Promoting trade missions to these cities.
- Selecting five cities twinned with others in the Eixo to propose a cooperation programme.
- Proposing to the twinned cities a programme based on the initiatives of Eixo Atlántico: urban sustainability, mobility and the urban agenda, underlining the quality of the institutions in development policies.

**Objective 3.2 - Complete the co-operation actions carried out in Canada and Argentina**

These European cooperation programmes are at an advanced stage of implementation and should be completed in the coming months.

Initiatives:

- Finalising ongoing programmes.
- Disseminating results and recommendations.

**Objective 3.3 - Promote horizontal and reciprocal cooperation between cities**

The experience in international relations of the Eixo and the associated cities, as well as the availability of qualified professionals, allow co-operation between the Eixo cities and others to develop on a larger scale around different sectoral issues.

Initiatives:

- Identifying, together with cities in other countries, actions that can be carried out jointly or in parallel to have an impact on solving common problems, sharing tools such as strategic thinking, the exchange of methodologies and experiences or the training of civil servants.
- Informing relevant people in the diaspora about the objectives promoted by cities in their international relations.

- Creating a Forum of Mayors from Portuguese-speaking and Latin American cities to share a common agenda.
- Promoting the exchange of fellows and officials between the cities.

#### **Objective 4.1 - Publicise the north-west of the Iberian Peninsula as a model of balanced development**

The geographical area of Galicia and Northern Portugal is a territory of singular and characteristic beauty, moulded by human action throughout history, with an advanced and diversified economy, respectful of the environment and traditionally orientated towards the outside world.

Initiatives:

- Producing promotional materials for social networks.
- Publishing a directory for companies and consultants on the territory's strengths in areas such as technology, innovation and sustainability.
- Promoting a digital agenda with the member cities, emphasising a fair and environmentally sustainable social model.
- Promoting the results of the policies developed in the Eixo Atlántico territory to the bodies of the European Commission.
- Creating a regular newsletter to publicise Eixo Atlántico's internationalisation activities.

#### **Objective 4.2 Transfer the commitments of the Eixo Atlántico and its member cities to the SDGs into the political debate**

Cities find it difficult to transfer their policies or needs to the state level, and there are no formal channels to facilitate joint analysis between the different levels of government. It is therefore necessary to use existing channels to publicise initiatives and create a state of opinion.

Initiatives::

- Promoting parliamentary initiatives before regional and state governments to ratify the commitments made by the Eixo cities, through parliamentary groups.

- Disseminating the internationalisation initiatives of the Eixo Atlántico cities to the relevant administrative institutions of the state governments.

### **Objective 4.3 Boost the dynamics of decentralised cooperation**

For years, decentralised cooperation has been effective in meeting objectives, as well as facilitating the participation of local governments and third sector entities in the different programmes. Said decentralised cooperation should not be restricted or reduced when, at the same time, greater involvement of citizens in the design of policies through governance is advocated.

Initiatives:

- Coordinating with local governments and third sector organisations a document in favour of decentralised cooperation, to take to the EU and the governments of Spain and Portugal.
- Promoting public debate together with third sector organisations to publicise the proposal and influence public opinion.
- Promoting the submission of corresponding proposals to the legislative chambers.

## **5.4** IMPLEMENTATION

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As this is a long-term development strategy, the maximum possible consensus of the member cities must be ensured in order to guarantee the coherence of the initiatives over time. To this end, the following initiatives are proposed within the organisation.

- Approval of the five-year strategy. Once approved, it will be duly sent to the member cities and presented to the governments of Santiago, Lisbon, Madrid and the European Commission.
- Creation of an Advisory Council with academic and institutional experts.
- Drawing up a work plan sequencing the actions and establishing a timetable.

The role of the Advisory Board will be to provide guidance on the broad outlines of the strategy, to analyse the context and, where appropriate, to propose specific actions.

Once the strategy has been duly approved, a task force will have to be set up to develop it, comprising Eixo Atlántico experts and the panel of external experts from the university, economic and political fields who collaborate with the organisation. Specialists from member cities could also be involved.

In order to increase theoretical and academic reflection, collaboration agreements will be proposed with University Departments in Galicia and Northern Portugal that are developing research programmes on strategic aspects. At the same time, close collaboration will be maintained with institutions in Galicia and Northern Portugal with similar objectives.

The initiatives will be financed in multiple ways, with our own resources and by participating with project proposals in calls for tenders within the framework of international cooperation and technical assistance from public administrations and the EU.

The Eixo Atlántico' actions in international relations will be guided by the core values of the SDGs and other international documents, promoting institutional strengthening and governance. The principles of transparency and accountability will be observed through the Eixo Atlántico website. The strategy will be externally evaluated on a regular basis, incorporating any modifications that may be advisable.

Once approved by the Eixo Atlántico bodies, the strategy will be duly presented to the governments of Galicia, Spain and Portugal, as well as being publicised among the ministries and agencies involved in external cooperation and the relevant EU directorates-general.

**ANNEX**



## ANNEX - SUMMARY OF GENERAL AND SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS

SUMMARY OF GENERAL AND SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS		
<b>1. Operating with its own voice in scenarios of interest to the organisation and its member cities</b>	<b>1.1</b> Actively participate and propose actions in third countries within the framework of the EU and the governments of Spain and Portugal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Drawing up a document with proposals for territorial action</li> <li>- Carrying out a census of the international twinning agreements signed by the Eixo Atlántico cities</li> <li>- Producing an inventory of the cooperation programmes implemented by the Eixo Atlántico cities</li> <li>- Promoting reflection and debate on international presence</li> </ul>
	<b>1.2</b> Influencing the local political agenda of international organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Promoting a network of atlantic cities in Europe, Africa and America geared towards dialogue and the exchange of ideas on local policies</li> <li>- Proposing a minimum programme of common objectives for atlantic cities to be taken up by international organisations, especially in relation to climate change, the reduction of inequalities and migration policy</li> <li>- Disseminating the programme in all national and international forums</li> </ul>
	<b>1.3</b> Developing an international network of bilateral contacts with similar organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Promoting a virtual forum with supra-municipal organisations</li> <li>- Exchanging information on good practices and programme proposals.</li> <li>- Maintaining relations with the Consulates in the Eixo Atlántico territory</li> </ul>
<b>2. Disseminating the good practices of the member cities, as well as the programme proposals of Eixo Atlántico</b>	<b>2.1</b> Promoting the good practices of member cities abroad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Developing a website with the actions carried out in the member cities in the following areas: urban planning, housing, mobility, decarbonisation, social cohesion, culture, etc</li> <li>- Disseminating Eixo Atlántico's programme documents</li> <li>- Virtual forum with member cities, companies and institutions abroad and cities in other countries with co-operation agreements</li> </ul>
	<b>2.2</b> Developing the role of the Eixo Atlántico thinktank	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Systematising the work of the Office of External Collaborators in accordance with the programme lines defined by the Eixo Atlántico bodies</li> <li>- Calendar of reports and other reflection documents to be drawn up</li> <li>- Offering cities participating in cooperation programmes a strategic advisory service</li> </ul>

	<p><b>2.3 Facilitating the presence abroad of cultural and sporting agents from the Eixo territory</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Promoting, together with Camões I.P. and Acción Cultural Española (AC/E), the presence abroad of relevant artists and sportspeople from the Eixo Atlántico territory</li> <li>- Promoting a programme of exchange of artists and sportspeople with the countries where cooperation initiatives are carried out</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. Strengthening the bilateral alliances established by member cities with cities in other countries and continents</b></p>	<p><b>3.1 Deepening twinned cities' relations with the member cities of the Eixo Atlántico</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Proposing an agenda for contacts and information exchange</li> <li>- Promoting reciprocal visits by officials and elected authorities</li> <li>- Promoting trade missions to these cities</li> <li>- Selecting five twinned cities for a cooperation programme</li> <li>- Proposing to the twinned cities a programme based on Eixo Atlántico initiatives</li> </ul>
	<p><b>3.2 Completing the co-operation actions carried out in Canada and Argentina</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Finalising ongoing programmes</li> <li>- Disseminating results and recommendations</li> </ul>
	<p><b>3.3 Promoting horizontal and reciprocal co-operation between cities</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identifying actions that can be developed jointly or in parallel to have an impact on solving common problems</li> <li>- Informing relevant people in the diaspora about the objectives promoted by cities in their international relations</li> <li>- Creating a Forum of Mayors from Portuguese-speaking and Latin American cities to share a common agenda.</li> <li>- Promoting the exchange of scholarship holders and staff between cities</li> </ul>
<p><b>4. Promoting the north-west of the Iberian Peninsula as an advanced economic and technological area, integrated into the global economy, with a high quality of life and open to the outside world</b></p>	<p><b>4.1 Disseminating the Northwest Peninsula as a framework of balanced development</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Producing promotional materials for social networks</li> <li>- Publishing a directory for companies and consultants on the territory's strengths in areas such as technology, innovation and sustainability</li> <li>- Promoting a digital agenda with the member cities, emphasising a fair and environmentally sustainable social model</li> <li>- Promoting the results of the policies developed in the Eixo Atlántico territory to the bodies of the European Commission</li> <li>- Creating a regular newsletter to publicise Eixo Atlántico's internationalisation activities</li> </ul>

	<p>4.2 Transferring the commitments of Eixo Atlántico and its member cities to the SDGs to the political debate</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Promoting parliamentary initiatives before regional and state governments</li> <li>- Disseminating the internationalisation initiatives of the Eixo Atlántico cities to the relevant administrative institutions of the state governments</li> </ul>
	<p>4.3 Boosting the dynamics of decentralised cooperation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Coordinating with local governments and third sector organisations a document in defence of decentralised cooperation, to take to the EU and the governments of Spain and Portugal</li> <li>- Promoting public debate together with third sector organisations to publicise the proposal and influence public opinion</li> <li>- Promoting the submission of corresponding proposals to the legislative chambers</li> </ul>





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