EURO LATIN-AMERICAN DIALOGUE ON SOCIAL COHESION AND LOCAL PUBLIC POLICY

BOGOTA AGENDA 2012
URBsocial, the Euro-Latin American Dialogue on Social Cohesion and Local Public Policies, is an initiative organised within the framework of the URB-AL III Programme.

The third URBsocial Dialogue, entitled “Governing Locally: Towards an Inclusive and Sustainable Future,” took place in Bogotá, Colombia, on 24, 25 and 26 October, 2012.

The organising institutions have gathered together the contributions of the participants from European Union and Latin American countries to make public their findings and recommendations on social cohesion and development, and the commitments that make up the URBsocial Bogotá 2012 Agenda.

While the first URBsocial put the emphasis on the need for more public policy and the second on innovation as a basic tool for moving towards greater social cohesion, URBsocial 2012, capitalising on the conclusions and discussions of those previous meetings that are still valid, makes clear the crucial importance of overcoming short-termism in forming development strategies at a local level.

FINDINGS

- The current global context, particularly that of Latin America and Europe, is very different to what it was at the start of the URB-AL III Programme, four years ago, and in 2010, when the first URBsocial dialogue took place. The economic, financial and social crisis has gradually become worse. While the impact has been diverse in both regions, we find a common trend: the constant increase in social inequality.

- If we compare the years at the start and end of the URB-AL III Programme, we find a repositioning of both regions in the international sphere. We also find that development and cooperation agendas have felt the impact of the crisis and have been undergoing a reorientation process in the light of the big debates that took place in that period (for example, the Busan 2011 Agenda or Río+20).

- It is clear that local and regional governments are now fully recognised as key players in development and cooperation.

- There is clear evidence that local and sub-state governments play an important role in coordinating other players and generating courses of action capable of creating dynamic synergies that foster inclusive economic and social development on a local and regional level. The positive impact of public policy on the quality of life of citizens continues to be seen.

- With regard to development, cooperation and public policies, it is just as necessary to continue supporting existing processes and dynamics as to launch new initiatives. Equally, making progress on development means adopting a medium-
and long-term view, not just when looking towards the future but also when looking back, as this allows us to make a better judgement on where we are and to identify those processes and dynamics put in place thanks to our enormous collective and financial efforts that might lack the necessary drive and continuity to produce change and which are worth supporting.

- It is clear that the sustainability of public policies depends to a large extent on their design. Therefore local public policies seeking to be more sustainable and contribute in greater measure to the inclusive development of an area or region, in short, to improve the welfare of citizens, are those that foster and include in their design aspects such as: equality and social inclusion, a sense of belonging, the recognition of diversity, institutional legitimacy and public participation.

- Local governments must continue to support multilevel governance and initiatives coordinated by the different levels of government. They must also try to turn their territory into a space for coordinating and creating synergies between all the public and private players in it and between the various levels of government that act there.

- Evidence shows the importance of decentralised cooperation as another tool for the socio-economic development of a territory and its projection abroad. This is just as true for traditional "North-South" cooperation initiatives as it is for the new kinds of "South-South" cooperation.

- Evidence shows decentralised cooperation based on a partnership model is not only innovative, it also strengthens the horizontal ties between equals and maximises the results and products of that cooperation. The specific nature of the sub-state level players means partnerships make sense and have an added value that benefits all those involved. Moreover, new types of cooperation have emerged that improve on the traditional "North-South" dynamics.

- Finally, evidence shows we still face the challenges that motivated the European Commission to promote regional programmes on public policies that favour social cohesion and development.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

**On the production and employment dimension of social cohesion**

- Local economic development requires the coordination of all the local players, especially through the creation of public-private partnerships.

- The local productive fabric and comprehensive local development are reinforced by encouraging innovation, training and employment formalisation processes and improving the social conditions of the population.
Local economic development policies must be formulated and implemented from an overall perspective that takes into account the area’s distinctive potential and focuses on associations and production chains.

Local development is a long-term project. The strategies adopted for it must therefore have a long-term perspective, in terms of the courses of action to be followed and the order in which their goals are to be achieved. This also requires a high degree of consistency in the basic lines of these targets over time, over and beyond any governmental changes.

The acquisition of abilities and fostering of individual development can be achieved through formal technical training adapted to the local context, which will lead to local development.

**On the social dimension of social cohesion**

Local development is more inclusive insofar as policies, plans and projects take into account the different conditions, characteristics, interests and needs of the various population groups: age, gender and ethnic differences, among others. Local inclusive development means valuing different people the same, thus ensuring equal rights and opportunities.

Social development must go hand in hand with strengthening educational processes and promoting social capital.

Social policies, plans and projects must be formulated on the basis of inclusive and participative diagnoses in order to address the real and specific needs of the citizens, going beyond the assistance model and promoting the empowerment of local players that will produce changes in the position and condition of the most vulnerable sections of the population.

In order to combat the crisis engendered by a global economic model that creates “discohesion” it is necessary now more than ever to continue programmes and projects in favour of social cohesion and maintain a strong presence of national, local and intermediary public institutions that guarantee access to basic rights and services.

In the medium and long term it is necessary to maintain universal access to basic social services and an acceptable level of public safety as central aims of the public agenda of sub-national governments.

**On the civic dimension of social cohesion**
It is necessary to think up and design public policies in line with the ongoing goal of creating active citizens. That means these policies must stop viewing citizens merely as the passive recipients of public decisions. On the contrary, they must encourage them to become active subjects responsible for their own development.

Producing active citizens requires public incentives for public participation. Some of the tools for encouraging public participation include citizen committees, multi-sectorial committees, public-territorial committees and territorial agreements.

If problems that should be considered as belonging to the public sphere and strategies for dealing with them are identified jointly, that makes it easier to build social links and create a sense of belonging and, therefore, an active citizenry.

At a local level it is necessary to rebuild the civic conscience and civic values that make it possible to fight against intolerance and exclusion.

Producing an active citizenry must be seen as an ongoing political project that is linked to the quality of local governance and requires the application of short-, medium- and long-term strategies.

On the territorial dimension of social cohesion

It should be recognised that territorial management policies transcend the technical aspects and directly affect aspects of the social, economic, cultural and human development of a territory. This strategic view should be reflected in comprehensive development plans drawn up on the basis of consultation and political leadership by the local government, and which avoid a political party-based view of managing a territory.

Part of the strategy involves continuing to take advantage of the technical skills acquired, as well as the networks and partnerships formed through territorial cooperation, with the aim of capitalising on experiences that contribute to comprehensive territorial development.

Territorial management regulations, processes and strategies should support environmental sustainability.

Reducing territorial imbalances should be seen as an ongoing political project that requires the application of short-, medium- and long-term strategies.

Use should be made of educational material from municipal education development councils to the ministry of education (local to national) to promote local identity, transmit basic knowledge of the local administration, involve the population in local decision-making and encourage public participation in primary, secondary and higher education.
On the institutional dimension of social cohesion

- Among other things the strengthening of the institutions of local government will help to:
  - Formalise multilevel and multi-sectorial coordination processes that recognise the complexities of territorial realities;
  - Generate confidence and legitimacy in the eyes of the citizens through accountability, transparent resource management, encouraging participation processes and citizen action, and so on;
  - Give government a political and technical vision.

- To facilitate the formulation and implementation of public policies at a local level, a clearer definition of its powers is required, while the process of decentralisation and deconcentration needs to go further. At the same time, regulatory and fiscal frameworks need to be drawn up that are in line with national legislation and transcend changes of government and external funding.

- Strengthening local institutions and improving the local tax system should be viewed in relational and two-way terms.

- Local governments usually spend a large part of their scarce resources on solving problems inherited from the past. There is therefore a need to recognise the importance of governing well today so it is not necessary to allocate scarce resources towards mitigating the effects of something done badly before. In turn, good local government requires an adequate level of institutional development and an adequate flow of resources from taxation and public finances.

- Social cohesion is not possible without adequate funding of the public policies that promote it. However, adequate funding of public policies does not necessarily lead to greater social cohesion. That depends on the kind of policies and the capacity of local governments to work strategically in a governance context.

- In a context of scarce resources and global crisis there is a need to develop alternative funding strategies for local action, such as increasing the capacity of local government to raise taxes, creating a tax culture among the citizens and promoting territorially based social alliances.

- On a local level it is necessary to promote a culture of planning, monitoring and assessing that transcends a project-driven vision and adopts a local public policy vision.

- Strengthening local institutions and improving the local tax system should be viewed as ongoing political goals that require the consistent application of short-, medium- and long-term strategies.
A socio-economic observatory should be set up that continually compiles, analyses and presents socio-economic data to support sustainable, comprehensive, territorial development processes.

As regards international cooperation:

- What is needed is an inter-territorial, socially inclusive, reciprocal, horizontal, decentralised cooperation model, based on partnerships, that strengthens the role of all the players in the territorial system, favours the setting up of networks that give prominence to local governments in Latin America, not just as recipients but also as initiative promoters, and which combines North-South with South-South cooperation initiatives.

- Some of the key issues to be tackled by this new cooperation model are:
  - strengthening the role of citizens in local government;
  - strengthening educational and cultural processes.
  - strengthening decentralisation processes, both in powers and in resources;
  - creating decent jobs;
  - migration, human mobility and public security;
  - cross-border cooperation and regional integration;

- When defining its priorities, international cooperation must examine and take account of the existing differences in income and welfare distribution between the various regions of a particular country. The concept of middle-income countries cannot be the sole criterion for selecting countries that will benefit from cooperation.

COMMITMENTS

The institutions that have organised this 3rd Euro-Latin American Dialogue on Social Cohesion and Local Public Policies undertake to:

- Publicise this URBsociAL Bogotá 2012 Agenda and encourage local and regional governments in Europe and Latin America to adhere to it.

- Present the main URBsociAL 2012 conclusions to the various local government associations and networks, international agencies and European Union institutions.

- Continue promoting spaces for dialogue, reflection and the exchange of experiences between local elected representatives and leaders that serve to provide deeper knowledge about and foster reference frameworks for the processes of developing and implementing local public policies.
• Continue backing social cohesion as a means and an end for achieving inclusive cities and regions capable of developing their full potential.

• Continue looking for synergies with the various initiatives that foster the goals of the URB-AL III Programme in Latin America.

• Highlight the importance of programmes like URB-AL that focus on local and regional governments and rely on knowledge sharing and mutual learning. Highlight the importance of building on the programme's achievements and promoting the instruments they have created.

• Continue backing innovative cooperation initiatives between local and regional governments in Latin America and Europe that are not based on a transfer of financial resources.

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