

#38

Basic Services as Commons

Innovative management
between local
governments and
communities



Peer Learning (online)
May 2024



Global Platform
for the Right to
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Foreword

Managing Basic Services as Commons

In the present era, marked by complex and interconnected emergencies, we reaffirm the role and responsibility of public authorities to ensure all populations can access basic services. These services are essential for ensuring human rights, prosperity, and sustainability. However, these complex emergencies often constrain the capacities of local and regional governments to provide these services, affecting particularly the communities most in need.

Women-elected leaders are often at the forefront of the work to ensure that those in vulnerable positions are not left behind and that basic service provision protects the social fabric of our communities. The Network of African Locally Elected Women REFELA, which I am honored to chair, is fostering policy changes and political engagement from women and men for this agenda.

During the Peer Learning on Basic Services as Commons, we have seen that the concept of commons is understood very differently, depending on the regions, the tradition, the city size and the governance system.

In the Gambia, and in many African countries the collaborative commons land-sharing structure for food-production purposes is a cultural asset that provides lessons to a new economic paradigm. These **“land-based commons”** mean that the rights to access, use, and transfer land are shared among a community – or the community is claiming the right to do so. It is critical to ensure that these governance models that empower communities as a whole and protect the common goods are also put upfront in the new urbanized models.

We understand the commons as what life depends on, the opposite of appropriation, what does not belong to a single person. Such understanding means including local communities in the conversation about dimensions of daily life such as health, water, housing, caring, and social protection. We need to understand which are the connections between life, the elements that enable life, the built environment, and human societies and communities.

I thank the participants for sharing the inspiring and challenging work during this learning exercise which has been driven in partnership with the Global Platform for the Right to the City. The experiences that were exchanged inspired our global community gathered in the UCLG Policy Council on the Right to the City and Reclaiming the Commons that I co-chair to redefine service provision and the governance of our common goods.

This redefinition is undeniably challenging in political, technical, financial, and regulatory terms. It is not, however, impossible, and it is also necessary to ensure egalitarian access to basic services, and the protection of the commons at all times, everywhere. If we manage to understand how different local and regional governments in different countries can find their ways to support commoning strategies, we will be able to learn from each other, develop commoning practices that can be scaled up and shared, and truly ensure that the commons are protected and guaranteed for all populations.



Rohey Malick Lowe
Mayor of Banjul

Introduction

Between May 23 and 31, 2024, around 40 representatives from local governments, community leaders, civil society organizations, researchers, and academics from 11 countries in different regions joined a series of four online Peer Learning sessions to explore the potential of understanding basic services as commons. The trans-local and inter-regional dialogues were organized by United Cities and Local Governments-Learning (UCLG-Learning) and the Global Platform for the Right to the City (GPR2C), as part of a multi-year collaboration to bring to light public-community partnerships and highlight key contributions of local actors to global agendas. Wide mobilization and active involvement across the UCLG network—including UCLG-Africa and UCLG-ASPAC, the Commission on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights, and the Policy Council on Right to the City and Reclaiming the Commons—were fundamental in terms of defining the main contents, methodologies, expectations and outreach.

An open **invitation** to the exchanges was first made in person during the UCLG Annual Retreat held in Barcelona between February 19-23, 2024. Participants gathering at that occasion also had the opportunity to join a field visit to Can Batlló, a case study of a former industrial area that has been repurposed for multiple recreational, cultural, and cooperative projects managed by civil society organizations with the support of the local government (more details below). During the following months, the call for registration was sent through institutional mailing lists and disseminated on social media. As a result, 13 cases from 13 cities and regional governments of co-produced approaches to basic service provision were identified and city officials were invited to present their experiences, with a focus on relevant strategies, lessons learned, and main challenges ahead.



40+
virtual
participants



11
countries

The peer learning built upon activities and efforts conducted by UCLG and GPR2C (both jointly and separately) that point to a growing interest and commitment to developing a concrete working agenda around the commons and commoning. Examples in this sense are the GPR2C paper on **“The city as a common good”**, published in 2021, as well as the **UCLG GOLD VI report** on **“Pathways to urban and territorial equality”** released in 2022, counting with a specific chapter on commoning practices, particularly related to housing and land. Moreover, the 2022 Town Hall process convened by UCLG towards its 7th World Congress, included a focus on the **“Global Commons”** and was constructed through a consultative process with a series of organizations convened by the GPR2C over the course of the year, culminating in the publication of a **policy paper** on the thematic with concrete recommendations, including the working definition showed below.

The agenda of the Peer Learning sessions included interactive exercises to identify key characteristics of public-community partnerships and how they differ from public and private models of service provision; presentation and debate of selected cases in smaller groups; and plenary conversations around shortcomings and possibilities of commoning initiatives.



GPR2C Paper
on **“The city as a
common good”**



**“(Global)
Commons
Policy Paper”**

“The commons are material and immaterial goods, resources, services and social practices considered fundamental for the reproduction of life, that therefore can not be commodified but have to be taken care of and managed in a collective way”.

Global Platform for the Right to the City and United Cities and Local Governments, “(Global) Commons Policy Paper”, 2022, p. 8.

Field visit: Can Batlló

Under the context of the 2024 UCLG Retreat held in Barcelona in February, a field visit to experience a public-community partnership in preparation for the Peer Learning sessions was organized.



The visit allowed participants (local and regional government representatives, members of different UCLG sections, and partners) to explore a remarkable **example of a public community collaboration** to jointly manage a community space by the city council and neighborhood inhabitants. **Can Batlló** is a 19th-century textile factory that, after more than 30 years in disuse, has been reclaimed by neighborhood inhabitants as a collective space. Following years of organizing and mobilization, in 2011 an agreement was reached between the City Council and the community association, which gave the latter the right to use a significant part of the large terrain in a self-managed scheme for 50 years, under an **innovative collaboration agreement** with the municipality.

Since then, Can Batllò has been a reference in terms of social experimentation and houses a series of services and activities, including a hub of cooperatives, workshop spaces, a library and community gardens. The visit provided the opportunity for a better understanding of the history of the community struggles and how organizing at the neighborhood level opened the way for advancing partnerships with the city council. The main goal is to give purpose to a disused space and find **collaborative arrangements to ensure provision of key services, that are beneficial both from a community and administrative point of view. But at the same time, this initiative has a city-wide impact and is strongly anchored on community organization and innovation.**

During the exchange, participants were able to deepen their understanding of the tools developed between the municipality and the community association to estimate the value and impact of the partnership, through an instrument applied to a set of similar practices being co-developed in the city (see more details under the Barcelona case of the Peer Learning section of this document). The assessment found that the hours of volunteering, maintenance, cleaning, construction, and activities developed by Can Batlló Associació represent 1.512.285 euros. The same study stipulates that for each euro of public investment in management and maintenance, Can Batlló generates three euros through community work.



Towards an understanding of basic services as commons



As alluded above, the Peer Learning was framed, on one hand, on previous efforts by the organizers around the right to the city and the commons and, on the other hand, under a context of a **growing interest in commoning** as a field for social experimentation and transformative action. As analysed by the last **UCLG flagship report on decentralization and local democracy, GOLD VI**, historic and ongoing practices point to the potential held at the local sphere for the flourishing of commoning experiences which can open the way for new models of cooperation and collaboration between communities and public institutions. There is a **growing consensus** that initiatives around the collective protection and fostering of the commons can play a central role in responding to two of the most pressing global challenges of our time: growing socio-economic inequality and inequity, and acute ecological crisis.

It then comes as no surprise the mentions of the “global commons” in “**Our Common Agenda**”, a report released by the United Nations Secretary General in 2021 as an urgent call for “inclusive, networked, and effective multilateralism to better respond and deliver for the people and planet”¹. Transposed to the local level, such a discussion is particularly timely regarding the role of local and regional governments (LRGs) in the provision of basic services as an effective measure to reducing inequalities, protecting the environment, and deepening democracy. Emerging frameworks for the collective management of water, energy, housing, public spaces, community facilities, and other essential services can offer positive outcomes in terms of reinforcing equality, social justice, and socio-environmental sustainability, as well as promoting trust, care, co-creation, and accountability.

¹ United Nations Secretary General, “Our Common Agenda”, 2021. www.goldvi.uclg.org/en/conclusions-and-final-recommendations

How does the debate on commons relate to LRGs?

Participants at the Peer Learning were invited to reflect on **transformative strategies**, including debates around how commoning can play a significant role in advancing the right to the city through new models of collaboration between the public sector and civil society organizations. Many interventions pointed out that, applied to the field of basic service provision, this kind of public-community partnerships can offer alternatives to address administrative, budgetary, and regulatory constraints faced by local and regional governments. At the same time, relevant questions were raised, such as

How to ensure that these models advance accessibility and inclusion, while also reinforcing democratic practices?

What are the challenges related to upscaling and maintenance?

The peer-learning participants had the opportunity to reflect on some of the **conceptual elements and key recommendations** of the Policy Paper prepared by the UCLG Commons Town Hall of 2022, which in turn were informed by the research, practice and debates on current and ancestral practices around commoning gathered in the GOLD VI.

From that basis, participants were asked to consider what both local governments and organized communities can bring to the table. Particularly in terms of a wide range of resources, organizational capacities, and presence in the territory, to move towards public-community partnerships. Looking into the day- by- day work of local governments, commoning can also be understood through its different forms and manifestations, including the use of **legal and administrative tools** such as remunicipalization, inclusive public procurement, and co-management.



GOLD VI Report
on "Pathways
to Urban and
Territorial
Equality"

Building a joint vision of commoning among the UCLG constituency

As stated in the Policy Paper (2022, p. 13), “**local and regional governments have a key role to play** not only in developing frameworks for the strengthening of collaborations around commoning, but also in the protection of the political spaces that allow commons to flourish”. In that sense, there are three fundamental sets of actions to take:

a | **Respect and trust**

including public sector proactivity, removing obstacles and providing differential regulation

b | **Protect**

both from resistances or retaliation as well to ensuring continuity

What do the commons need to flourish?

c | **Realize**

guaranteeing adequate resources and support aligned with social justice principles and human rights commitments



“(Global) Commons Policy Paper”

Commoning should be intrinsically **feminist, anti-racist, inter-generational** and aligned with the emancipation and autonomy of those traditionally marginalized and excluded

Against that background, the discussion on concrete challenges for the provision of basic services at the local and regional levels can be considered as an entry point to expand the conversation through the perspective of public and community innovation.

Participants reflected on **enlarging the notion of public services** regarding both what they encompass as well as different decision-making and management options. The case studies and the following debate provided relevant insights in terms of key lessons and takeaways along their experiences as seen below (these are further elaborated in the last section of this document):

- 1 | Service provision can be a vector to achieve social, economic, and territorial equality**
- 2 | Innovation plays a role in making service provision more affordable, accessible, and transparent**
- 3 | Community engagement is determinant to guarantee impact**
- 4 | Multi-actor and multi-sphere collaborations can be effective if roles and responsibilities are clear**
- 5 | Public-community partnerships call for the development of specific tools and support mechanisms**
- 6 | Trust-building is a crucial factor for the success of public community partnerships**

Peer Learning

This section summarizes the territorial experiences and policy reflections shared by cities and stakeholders during the four peer-learning sessions held online in May 2024. This includes a participatory exercise held at the beginning of the process, case presentations by participants, and main takeaways from the open debate.

Participatory exercise

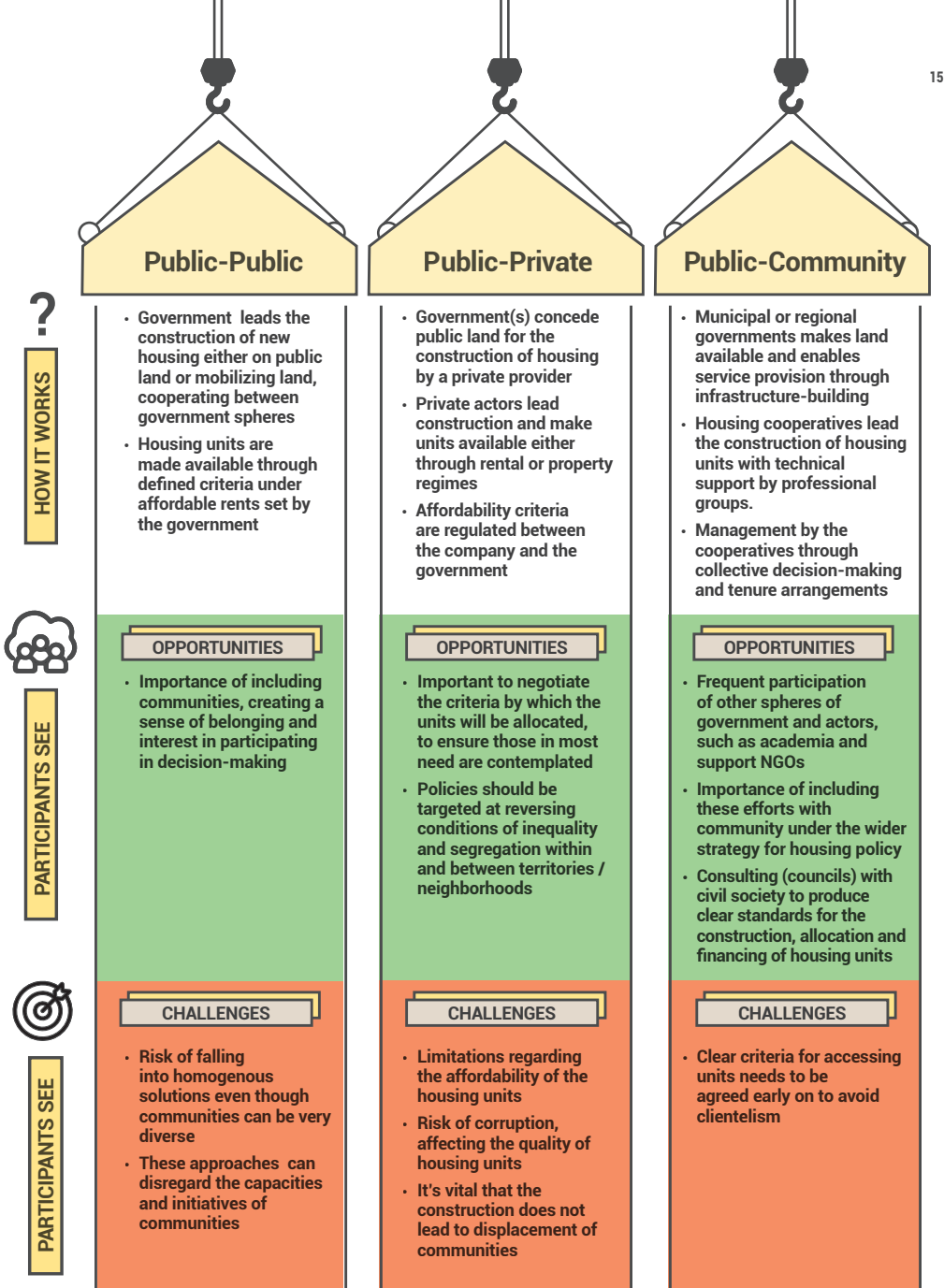
The Peer Learning cycle began with a brainstorming exercise to start advancing on a shared vision for public-community partnerships for basic service provision, through identifying its similarities and differences to public-only and public-private models. The exercise included three scenarios addressing diverse topics and scales: a) providing access to water and sanitation to an informal settlement; b) an intermediary city with a growing population, confronting large housing demand and short supply; c) a metropolitan region with a growing older population putting pressure on existing health systems.

In the opposite page you find the result of the interactive exercise, using the example of an intermediary city confronting large demand and short supply of housing. Participants identified challenges and opportunities presented by the different partnership models.

Among the most relevant **limitations of traditional approaches**, participants in the different groups identified common elements such as:

- One-size-fits-all approach, with little adaptability to community needs;
- Limited “ownership” of policies by communities, which usually do not have their capacities taken into consideration;
- Restrained outreach in terms of beneficiaries, not necessarily including those most affected by marginalization and exclusion;
- Limitations regarding financing, affordability, and availability;
- Shortcomings regarding quality of services and monitoring.

Following these reflections, participants engaged in a discussion on how public community partnerships can provide alternatives to these challenges. In particular, it highlighted the role played by community engagement practices in ensuring that policies and strategies adopted not only align with community needs but also build upon their existing capacities and initiatives. This opens the framework to conceiving public-community partnerships under a spectrum that includes both elements of consultation and participation, but also of co-management of common resources and public support to community practices.



Graphic representation of the collective exercise adapted by organizers for this publication

Case studies

During the four sessions of the peer learning, 13 promising initiatives were presented by city representatives from across the world. The different cases explored diverse contexts and strategies for developing public-community partnerships for a more just, affordable, and accessible approach to service delivery. They also represented a wide range of scales and levels of subnational governments (including rural towns, intermediary and capital cities, metropolitan areas, and regions).

The practices were peer-reviewed by participants both in small working groups and in the plenary, identifying differences and commonalities, as well as challenges and opportunities to further advance, scale, and replicate them.

This section includes relevant excerpts from each presentation. The cases have been ordered around the key takeaways of the peer learning, also listed in the final section of the document.

Many of the practices presented speak to more than one of these takeaways, but for simplicity, we have grouped them around the one that they most strongly represent, noting also that the last point on trust is considered transversal to all the practices.

1

Service provision can be a vector to achieve social, economic, and territorial equality

The following practices exemplify how service provision across the territory, and particularly in areas that were not previously well-served, is used by governments as a strategy for promoting social, economic, and territorial equality, through different models that go from the construction of large infrastructure (Iztapalapa) to mobilizing existent resources that can be co-managed with the community and other actors (Las Nieves).

Villa Carlos Paz, Córdoba (Argentina)

Online Social Action Network

The Online Social Action Network was launched in March 2020, with the primary objective of resolving social demands in the context of the pandemic, particularly those related to home food distribution. Given the emergency, a joint work system was required that would not only target structurally vulnerable groups but would also reach all sectors due to the socioeconomic characteristics of the city, since the main activity is tourism. As the health situation evolved, the network changed, moving from a home-based service to a model anchored in the facilities of intermediate institutions and municipal spaces strategically distributed throughout the city.

Today the municipality works together with art, culture, sports, and recreation institutions with activities aimed at different age groups and with special attention to marginalized populations. The neighborhood centers provide the physical space, while the neighbors provide the idea, they communicate their demands, the needs are visualized and the intermediate institutions respond to them. The network brings together the state and 75 civil society institutions. One hundred per cent of the requests for assistance were fulfilled, with more than 40 thousand residents being assisted. The process has required adaptation from the municipality, including the reallocation of budget items and tasks to municipal agents.



Photo: Villa Carlos Paz

Challenges

- Provide support to the entire territory in a changing context, with an economic reality marked by the predominance of tourism as the main activity.

Key lessons

- Flexibility in adapting to the context;
- Use of technology in combination with a co-construction process.

Iztapalapa (Mexico)

Units of Transformation and Organisation for Inclusion and Social Harmony (UTOPIAS)



In 2018, the territory was in critical social conditions and several public spaces were abandoned. Given this scenario, the UTOPIAS (Transformation and Organization Units for Inclusion and Social Harmony, from its initials in Spanish) represent the most important public investment in the construction of cultural, sports, welfare, care, and recreational social infrastructure. The recovery of urban space and access to public space and quality services seek to respond to the segregation of areas excluded from development, regenerating the social fabric of the affected areas within a framework of promoting security and peace-building.

Having its initial impulse in the post-pandemic period, 12 UTOPIAS have been built. Each one has specific architectural characteristics and is equipped with facilities for the coexistence of people of all ages, without any type of exclusion, providing a great diversity of services, with novel and innovative elements. This offer and the design of the spaces are the result of a process of community involvement that mixes a socio-territorial diagnosis with participatory planning, co-creation, and design workshops. With the development of the UTOPIAS, Iztapalapa has become a reference in the area in terms of peace-building, cultural, and sports development.

Challenges

- To move from the appropriation of spaces to the appropriation of the socio-political project that underlies this action of social and spatial justice;
- Identify and strengthen the social processes that create and transform urban projects, not the other way around;
- Regulate the management of the capital gains generated with these new facilities.

Key lessons

- Conception under guiding principles of human rights, social inclusion, spatial justice, and participatory processes;
- Innovation and creativity in the architectural elements and services provided: they generate symbolic value and dignity (in a traditionally neglected and stigmatized area of the city).

Las Nieves (Spain)

Las Nieves Co-managed Community Center

The CCM is a space co-created by the community that has significantly improved the elderly's quality of life. It is a practice in a rural area in a very small and aging municipality at risk of depopulation.

The center has been created through a partnership between the municipality, the community, a local foundation (PEM Foundation), and the regional government. The municipality provides the premises, taking advantage of underutilized space and implementing an on-demand transportation system, essential to connect the population to the center. The PEM Foundation manages the space and the regional government guarantees financial support.



The conception and daily operations of the center are based on community management. From the beginning, people have been included, going through informative talks and co-creation groups; the implementation is based on co-management and co-responsibility, with co-management meetings every two months. The project is now consolidated and in the replication phase. Reports about the psychosocial dimensions prove that the initiative has achieved a high positive impact on the inhabitants.



Photos: PEM Foundation

Challenges

- Advancing in co-responsibility, in the eradication of ageism, and in the involvement of other stakeholders;
- The permanence of the model.

Key lessons

- Trust-building phase with the population: enabling co-decision spaces from the beginning of the process;
- Adaptability in the use of resources (the center and the municipal minibus);
- The symbolic role of creating the center in a former school, a place of learning that had been deactivated due to demographic changes.

2 | Innovation plays a role in making service provision more affordable, accessible and transparent

The following practices express how innovation, through the use of technology (Xi'an), creation of new collaborations (Waterberg), or flexibilizing administrative procedures (Tiznit) can play a key role in improving basic service delivery and making it more collaborative and transparent.

Xi'an (China)

Data Governance in Urban Operation and Management

This initiative consists of how the Xi'an city government used a combination of technology, community provision of data, and institutional coordination to set up a system for the management of urban infrastructure. With a population of around 13 million people and a high influx of tourists, the city sought solutions for guaranteeing the safe and efficient maintenance and management of urban infrastructure as to improve the quality and responsiveness of the services delivered to the community.





Photos: Xi'an City Government

The core of the system is the set up of a grid that allows the centralization, gathering, monitoring, and evaluation of the state of the urban infrastructure. Within the system, tools for the community to contribute by providing data themselves (through QR codes and apps) were set up. Through these channels, people can both provide data regarding issues observed, as well as consult and obtain information. This was conceived in a manner to allow for different age groups to use the technology without difficulties. Beyond community engagement, the initiative also relies on the coordination of urban departments and effective financial support from the municipality, ensuring data security and proper legal use.

Challenges

- Ensuring coordination between government structures and setting up the system.

Key lessons

- Using different forms of data gathering and processing to improve service delivery.

Tiznit (Morocco)

Provincial Incentive Scheme for Healthcare Professionals

Following a territorial diagnosis carried out during the preparation of the province's development program, the shortage of doctors working in rural areas and, above all, the problem of the stability of the health professionals recruited were identified. In response, the scheme mobilized financial and in-kind incentives for health professionals to encourage them to continue working in rural areas. The scheme has enabled the rural population to access the ministerial application for booking medical appointments without having to travel, by equipping certain rural health centers with computer equipment and Internet connection.

At the heart of the initiative is the partnership between the Provincial Council and a series of organizations, including the Provincial Health Directorate (Ministry of Health), the JOUDE Foundation and the Friends of the Provincial Hospital Association. The project's activity report shows that medical attention to residents has been assured, even in rural areas, for example with a 60.5% reduction in the number of birth deliveries outside the province between 2019 and 2021. Some provinces have taken inspiration from the scheme to set up similar initiatives to ensure access to the right to healthcare in rural areas.



Photo: Tiznit Provincial Council

Challenges

- Continued permanence of doctors in rural areas.

Key lessons

- Partnership agreement with the Ministry and involvement of civil society groups;
- Mobilization of private funding;
- Doctor's commitment.

Waterberg District (South Africa)

Building Capable Municipalities by Leveraging Social Partnerships

In 2018, the National Government of South Africa implemented the District Development model seeking to foster integrated planning and budgeting across spheres of government. For the first implementation of the model, three locations were selected, among them the Waterberg District.

The model sought to enhance the capability of municipalities to efficiently and effectively fulfill their mandate of provision of basic services, while addressing the increasing trust deficit between the communities and municipalities. This was addressed in the subsequent District Plan by leveraging partnerships for its implementation. These partnerships were focused on capacity-building targeted at both municipal actors, private sector, and communities as to leverage their capacities to advance the plans' main activities. Each action item developed through the partnership of non-public actors (such as foundations and private sector) for implementation and financing. The initiative also counted with the development of the Waterberg Digital Lab, which developed technological tools to improve the delivery of basic service provision and response to inhabitants' demands.

Challenges

- Further development and replication.

Key lessons

- Valuing the impact of collaboration between municipalities, private sector and civil society.
- Highlighting the role of seamless communication between actors

3 | Community engagement is determinant to guarantee impact

The practices described below illustrate how community engagement has been incorporated as a structural element of policy-making, influencing the whole policy cycle (from conceptualization to monitoring). This can take different forms that go from direct collaboration in implementation (Guimarães) to the creation of advisory bodies (Ougou), having at heart the willingness to open-up and democratize policy-making as a manner to guarantee long-term impact for all.

Guimarães (Portugal)

Ave for All - Promoting Public Participation in River Monitoring

The initiative intended to engage the community in monitoring and preserving Guimarães' main water stream (Ave River) by fostering a connection between the community and the city's natural heritage. Due to its industrial background, the river became one of the most polluted in Portugal. At the same time, it plays a key role for the community, supplying 90% of the municipality's water which must undergo to a costly cleaning procedure.

Through previous plans to clean the river, an assessment carried out in 2020 identified that despite advances, efforts were not enough. The approach adopted relied on community engagement to support the cleaning process, through awareness raising, consultations, and participatory workshops to gather proposals and capacity-building. Participants were provided with tools to measure and assess the water quality.

The project included the participation of intergenerational volunteer Green Brigades, schools, the city's Landscape Laboratory, two universities, and the Guimarães City Hall, who fully funded the initiative. The main impact has been transforming the community's point of view, creating attachment and co-responsibility. In three months, 80 kilograms of floating plastic were collected, and now most of the information on water quality comes from the community, through an app. The project has expanded to two other water lines in Guimarães and has been replicated in another city.



Photo: Laboratório da Paisagem

Challenges

- Working with companies, which should be engaged since much of the pollution is coming from the private sector.

Key lessons

- Mindset transformation, shifting the river's role from water provision towards seeing it as a landscape and biodiversity reserve that should be collectively taken care of;
- Facilitating engagement through the community's direct participation in taking care of the river and monitoring the water quality;
- Opening the way to restore an old profession, requested by the community: "guardian of the river", which once existed but had disappeared.

Kisumu (Kenya)

Pilot Project for Basic Service Provision in Intermediate Cities

The initiative sought to accelerate the recovery of dilapidated infrastructure to bridge the service delivery gap, directly addressing community claims for adequate services throughout the territory. The approach taken was focused on improving the livelihoods of the community and combining infrastructure provision with capacity-building for city management and communities to implement projects. The national government funded the project through a loan from the French Development Agency, which was allocated to the city of Kisumu to implement community-level projects prioritizing community participation.

Projects were broken down into components: capacity building for the city management and the community; infrastructure development; public and commercial investments; informal settlement upgrading and solid waste management. Community participation was at the core of the project and included engagement with priority interest groups such as youth and older persons. This allowed for the co-development of the city's "Strategic Development Plan", which was later developed into a local land use plan. A second phase of the project is being studied.

Challenges

- Securing funding for continuity;
- Community engagement is complex and takes time, this should be properly taken into account and understood.

Key lessons

- Community engagement ensures the impact of the urban transformations made;
- Carrying out community mappings to identify key community groups to engage across the territory.

Commune d'Ogou 1 (Togo)

'Personnalités' Project

The project aims to improve the quality of public decision-making through participatory democracy mechanisms. It focuses on strengthening the participation of young people in the actions of their communes, through their ongoing involvement and inclusion in budgeting. The project adopts an intersectional approach, favoring the participation of young historical minorities in order to encourage them to get involved. This is framed in the recent process of decentralization of decision-making for part of the communes, with the creation of the Ogou 1 Commune in 2017. The initiative also addresses the commune's demographic reality, with 60% of the population under the age of 25 years old.

The first step in the initiative was to select 20 young people from the community: the 17 best middle and high school students and 3 young apprentices. Of the 20 young people, 12 are girls and 8 are living with disabilities. These young people embarked on a participatory process with the municipality to familiarize themselves with various municipal services, gather opinions to improve the services offered by the commune, and identify and include actions in favor of young people in the budget. This process will be repeated each year, based on inclusion criteria, with the establishment of a communal youth council to coordinate these meetings and boost young people's leadership and civic engagement.



Photos: Commune d' Ogou 1

Challenges

- Replicating the process and ensuring intersectional criteria.

Key lessons

- Create channels of representation with intersectional criteria that reflect the demographic reality of the commune;
- Adopting an inclusive, transparent, and participatory approach that enabled the voices and aspirations of different groups to be taken into account in local decision-making.

4 | Multi-actor and multi-sphere collaborations can be effective if roles and responsibilities are clear

The following cases are examples of ambitious, large-scale investments for territorial development and service provision with a clear goal of promoting social and territorial equality. To make such initiatives feasible not only multi-actor collaborations played a determinant role, but also collaborations between multiple spheres of government.

Province of Córdoba (Argentina)

Neighborhood Councils for Prevention and Co-existence

The Neighborhood Councils are mechanisms for citizen participation in which the community itself diagnoses its main problems, prioritizes them, monitors them, and coordinates responses with the provincial and municipal governments. The transformations promoted seek to improve socially vulnerable neighbor's quality of life to promote social cohesion and socio-urban integration, as well as to reduce violence in its multiple dimensions.

Photo: Province of Córdoba



Its implementation is based on participatory territorial diagnoses prioritizing 4 axes: neighborhood infrastructure, social problems, environmental factors affecting safety, and community strengthening. The initiative is led by the provincial government in coordination with more than 1,300 neighborhood institutions and 9 local governments, which together with the provincial government provide funding. Since the initial implementation, 82 Neighborhood Councils have been created. They implemented initiatives that include Safe Routes (5,000 blocks of LED lighting designed entirely by neighbors), 103 social sports centers, 6 Neighborhood Meeting Centers, and community strengthening actions.

Challenges

- The pandemic slowed down the strengthening of communities through the program;
- Program implementation in more remote areas of the province.

Key lessons

- Public policies based on proximity (state close to each community);
- Trust-building and transparency during the process;
- Intersectoral and multilevel coordination.

San Juan (Puerto Rico)

The ENLACE Project of the Caño Martín Peña

The Caño Martín Peña ENLACE Project (ENLACE Project) seeks to promote ecosystem restoration and the urban, social and economic development of the eight communities that make up the Caño Martín Peña Special Planning District in San Juan, Puerto Rico. The Caño Martín Peña is a body of water that plays a central role in the San Juan Bay Estuary system and San Juan metropolitan area. At the heart of the project is the organization and active participation of the community, along with the concern that environmental and development projects do not lead to displacement of residents.

For this reason, a community land trust has been created (pioneer in the region) a novel mechanism of collective land tenure that addresses the historical problem of lack of ownership, avoids the involuntary displacement of the community as a result of market forces, ecosystem restoration and/or development projects, guarantees affordable housing, allows the generation of income to reinvest in the area and overcome poverty. The ENLACE Project is composed of the: Grupo de las Ocho Comunidades Aledañas al

Caño Martín Peña, Inc. (G8), Corporación del Proyecto ENLACE del Caño Martín Peña and Fideicomiso de la Tierra del Caño Martín Peña (Community Land Trust). This is in addition to alliances with more than 100 entities, institutions, agencies and/or organizations. The G8 plays a fundamental role in promoting the interest and effective and assertive participation of the residents of each of the eight communities of the District.

The ENLACE Project has been able to secure funding through the U.S. Government and Puerto Rico for critical infrastructure projects, multifamily housing development and environmental restoration. The action is financed through a combination of government, federal and local, private funds and over 400 individual volunteers over the years.



Photo: Corporación del Proyecto ENLACE

Challenges

- Secure constant financing sources.
- Ensure projects completion despite climate events, market forces and other factors.
- Ensure the growth and strengthening of community leadership within an aging population.

Key lessons

- Ensure continuity through community organization and custody of the land by the Community Land Trust;
- Integration of popular knowledge and respect for the socio-cultural processes.

5 | Public-community partnerships call for the development of specific tools and support mechanisms

The practices below are examples of how to enable innovative forms of public-community collaborations, particularly through the co-management of spaces and resources (understood as commons). They focus on the need to develop novel mechanisms and tools, including collective decision-making and social impact indicators.

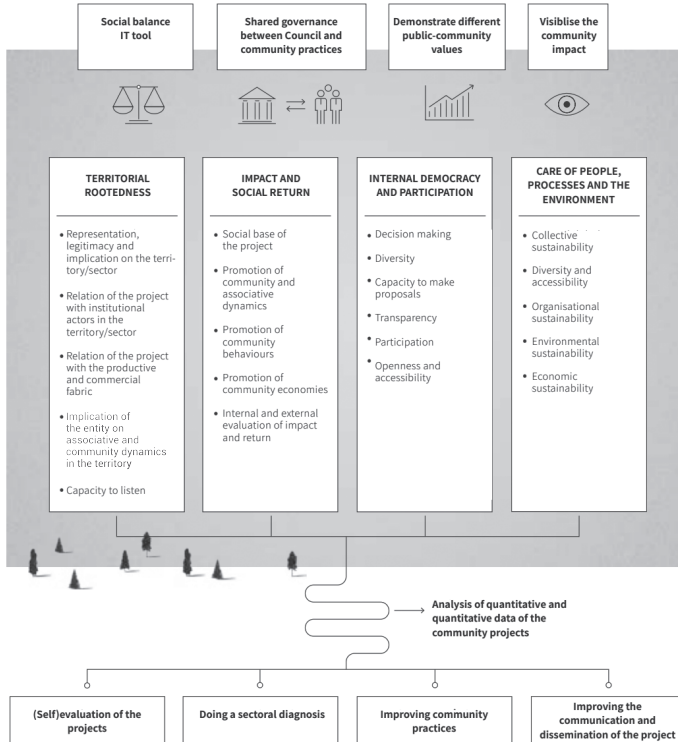
Barcelona (Spain)

Citizen Heritage Programme and Community Balance Tool

The Citizen Heritage Programme was introduced in Barcelona in 2016 seeking to find models to encourage participation in the management of public resources and ensure the quality of basic services. It was conceived as a public policy for the commons, seeking co-responsibility in the management of the city's heritage and recognizing the importance of community management initiatives being carried out. Its origin is in long-standing claims of citizen movements demanding a commitment to co-management. The program led to the creation of the Citizen Heritage Board, where different agents converge for the transfer of municipal heritage to neighborhood entities.

At the heart of the program is the creation of a tool to support its monitoring and evaluation, which calls for the development of new methodologies, as the initiatives differ from traditional models of public or private provision. The Community Balance is a tool that measures the community-social impact of these practices based on a questionnaire with concrete results under 4 areas of good community management: 1) territorial rooting; 2) impact and social return; 3) democracy and participation; and, 4) care. The development of the tool was supported and facilitated by the Catalan Network of Social and Solidarity Economy, which is responsible for publishing the balance directly on its website. In this way, the tool is not only an instrument of accountability to public bodies, but an instrument of transparency that allows for quantifying and disseminating the community's impact and value of these practices.

How is the Community Balance measured?



Source: IDRA - Barcelona Urban Research Institute.

Challenges

- Construction of specific instruments to support public-community initiatives

Key lessons

- Shared governance between the city council and community practices;
- Shows the differential public-community value and makes its impact visible;
- Creation of a dialogue mechanism for co-management of goods and spaces.

Montevideo (Uruguay)

Abandoned Buildings Programme



Photos:
Municipio B of
Montevideo

The initiative is a program to recover abandoned buildings in the central area of Montevideo to promote accessible and affordable housing, community spaces, and services. It responds to the negative impact that these empty buildings have on the environment and to the historical claims of movements for the right to housing and to the city, demanding affordable and well-located housing, especially in the face of the growing gentrification of central areas. The first step has been a study developed together with the public university on the state of these properties and their architectural potential, as well as the financial and regulatory feasibility for the transformation of these private properties into public ones.

The regulatory path found has been to expropriate the properties (many with accumulated debts), supported by regulations to avoid speculation. Once this stage is complete, a new phase begins, aimed at turning the buildings into common goods. The key to this transformation is the participatory process of co-creation and co-management of these new spaces. They have been promoted for community radio associations, community collectives, feminist collective assemblies, houses for homeless women, housing alternatives during the pandemic, libraries, cooperative housing, and others.

Challenges

- Development of legal instruments and consultation with stakeholders;
- The time length required by these processes.

Key lessons

- Guaranteeing access to urban land in central areas;
- Process of co-creation and co-management of spaces, with the social fabric transforming these public spaces into common goods as part of a longer democratic process committed to the implementation of the right to the city;
- Importance of the historical popular demands of the organized community, including the consolidated cooperative housing ecosystem in Uruguay.

Open dialogue

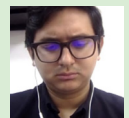
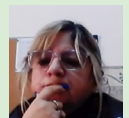
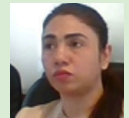
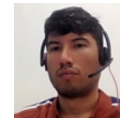
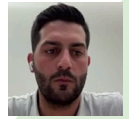
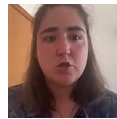
Before and after the peer review of the practices, participants in the Peer Learning were able to engage in open dialogues, discussing both the challenges being faced as well as the opportunities available for local and regional governments to advance public-community partnerships for basic service provision.

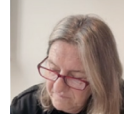
The starting point of the open discussion was to acknowledge the **diversity of contexts and approaches adopted, as well as commonalities**. Contexts vary between countries. There are places where communities already have a history of greater engagement, which facilitates the development of community management approaches, either by governmental impulse or by demand of the organized communities. In other cases, the approach of participation and co-creation may even generate questions, disbelief, and distrust. In this sense, it has been essential to identify how this type of approach requires specific time and trust-building but produces long-lasting and impactful returns.

Trust emerges as a key aspect to cultivate: if consultations are made, it is important to reflect and respect the conclusions, otherwise, trust is strained. At the same time, the importance of transparency and aligning expectations about what can be achieved emerges.

An important similarity identified has been the impact of the pandemic on the promotion of initiatives that have the provision of **quality basic services as an axis for the promotion of socio-territorial justice**. The pandemic brought to the surface social and administrative management problems that had existed for years if not decades. With the outbreak of the health crisis, the system collapsed and its immediate and multi-scale management was more necessary than ever. This has been fundamental to create experience and flexibility in public management and to identify possible points of innovation and other ways of acting. In this context, it was also highlighted how the initiatives have been able to adapt to the changing context, evolving over time and in many cases gaining scale.

The **relationship between physical and social transformation** was also highlighted, considering both components as necessary to achieve a community-based structure. The physical space is a space for meeting, and creation but also co-





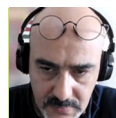
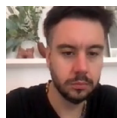
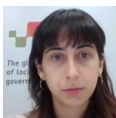
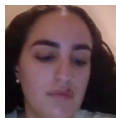
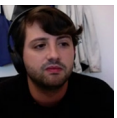
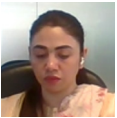
management and co-responsibility. The importance of symbolic elements for creating a sense of belonging and legitimization of community leadership, essential to moving towards co-management models, has also been emphasized.



An obvious common challenge has been to **secure the necessary funding** to carry out structural and comprehensive improvements in the provision of basic services. Many approaches can be observed in this regard. On one hand, there are cases in which large-scale programs with substantial investments in infrastructure and/or technology have been secured through partnerships with multiple municipalities and spheres of government or through the support of funding institutions. In this sense, it is important to note that the linkage with socio-territorial justice, confrontation of social problems and community strengthening reinforce the importance of the investments. In other cases, budgetary constraints have led to smaller-scale actions but are also supported by innovation in the use of existing resources (reviewing underutilized public assets and making budget items more flexible, for example) and in valuing the non-monetary contribution of other actors, particularly the community.



Finally, a critical point that also came up during the discussion **was the role of innovation**. Almost all practices explicitly engage with elements of innovation. In some cases these relate to different levels of technology application, either to ensure the monitoring of service provision or to allow for ensuring service provision in the face of territorial limitations (for example in the case of peri-urban and rural areas), or through practical limitations faced in contexts such as the pandemic. In other cases, forms of social and regulatory innovation were used for a stronger implication of communities. In this sense, one recurrent element was the role of education, sensibilization, and capacity-building approaches, targeted both at communities and public administration. This is further expressed through the role played in some cases by the partnerships with universities and research centers.



Key lessons and recommendations

Building upon these reflections, as well as on a comprehensive analysis of the experiences shared and conversations developed within the Peer Learning sessions, some main takeaways and recommendations can be identified for local and regional governments seeking to foster public-community partnerships for basic service provision. These are the following:

1. Service provision can be a vector to achieve social, economic, and territorial equality

- Ensuring accessibility and affordability of basic services as a measure to promote equality;
- Distribution of services across the territory: involves both making sure that low-income and marginalized populations can live in central areas that are well provided with services, but also decentralizing services provision across the territory;
- The physical transformation of spaces and infrastructure as a tool for social transformation;
- The presence of the government in the territory (through policy and direct presence, with offices and services) as an effort to open channels for community engagement.

2. Innovation plays a role in making service provision more affordable, accessible, and transparent

- Traditional public-only approaches can be quite expensive;
- Even when these are possible, a multi-sphere approach is key, involving coordination of different spheres of government;
- Innovative approaches can be used to overcome strained resources and find manners to expand service provision, as well as to make it more participatory;
- Key to take into account the economic impact of the community initiatives already being developed in the territory;
- Conceiving innovation beyond the use of technology: social and regulatory innovation, assessment of the use of resources through redistribution and repurposing of material and financial resources.

3. Community engagement as a determinant to guarantee impact

- There is a spectrum for community participation that can take many forms, from participation to co-management of resources and spaces;
- In some cases, organized communities push governments towards action; in others, the governments play a key role in opening up participation and deliberation spaces;
- There is a space for going beyond engagement and advancing toward models that incorporate community knowledge and ownership more strongly;
- Acknowledge and value local knowledge: communities know their areas, priorities and issues;
- Community engagement transforms how people appropriate and use the space.

4. Multi-actor and multi-sphere collaborations can be effective if roles and responsibilities are clear

- Governments can bring resources, regulations, and organizational capacity to the table;
- Communities can bring knowledge, organization, self-led initiatives, and presence in the territory to the table;
- Local and regional governments can act as brokers between different actors to encourage collaboration;
- Community buy-in and ownership of practices play a key role in ensuring that initiatives are maintained through political cycles;
- Importance of expanding the idea of co-responsibility to other actors, such as the private sector.

5. Public-community partnerships call for the development of specific tools and mechanisms

- Community initiatives cannot be financed or regulated in the same manners as those that involve the private sector;
- Setting up public-community partnerships might require changes in regulation;
- Mechanisms to follow-up and evaluate need to be with the communities designed since the beginning.

6. Trust-building is a crucial factor for public community partnerships' success

- Physical shared spaces facilitate trust and permanent engagement from different actors;
- Importance of fostering trust, representation, and stability through time in participatory arrangements;
- Shared responsibilities, mutual-learning and leveraging of expectations are vital for fostering collaborative environment ;
- Importance of including community engagement from the get-go, from project conceptualization to securing funds;
- Ensuring intersectional representation as a key factor.



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