



(Global) Commons Policy Paper

#CitiesAreListening

Town Hall Track

A Policy Paper Prepared for the UCLG World Congress and Summit of World Leaders

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Submitted by

The Global Platform for the
Right to the City
Cities Coalition for Digital Rights
Open Society Foundation
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#CitiesAreListening

The 2022 World Summit of Local and Regional Leaders and UCLG Congress will define the priorities for the international municipal movement through the adoption of the Pact for the Future, a pluriennial strategy that will constitute our contribution to the United Nations Common Agenda and the Summit of the Future. The Congress will be a platform for all stakeholders, connecting the local and global agendas, to come and co-create the communities of the future, with the central notion of care permeating all processes.

Special attention will be paid to creating a space of structural dialogue with other constituencies and stakeholders and in particular civil society. The outcome of this dialogue will be a corpus of integrated policy recommendations offering both bottom-up continental and region-specific priorities. The Summit will provide a space to connect the agenda of the global municipal movement and that of sister constituencies.

The Town Hall Track has been set up to this end, with discussions at the highest levels led by organized civil society. The UCLG Town Hall is the space for dialogue and interaction between internationally organized civil society and the political leadership of the local and regional governments constituency to jointly define our global policies building on the Live Learning and #CitiesAreListening Experiences, which informed UCLG's political agenda. Driven by civil society, it allows different international stakeholders to collaborate in the definition of policy priorities and the localization of the global agendas. As we face an unprecedented scenario of interconnected challenges, we need to build upon, strengthen and enhance partnerships to break through as one. The goal is not only to invite partners to join, but to collaborate in the world that we are building. No actor or sphere of government can achieve the transformation that we need on their own.

The 2022 UCLG Town Hall renewed the structured dialogue between the local and regional governments constituency and internationally organized civil society and is strengthened by the presence of international partners and 3 cross-cutting caucuses (youth, feminism and accessibility) and the contribution of UCLG UBUNTU Advisors. The subjects of the Town Hall are directly linked to UCLG's Pact for the Future and its three axes: People, Planet and Government and reflect the priorities and targets included in the UN Secretary General's Common Agenda.

The 2022 UCLG Town Halls focus on: the Global Commons and redefining public services and the notion of what is public and what should be considered as part of the commons; Trust and Government and defining how we will regain trust in the public sector and redefine our institutions; Caring Systems and understanding what we need to renew our social contract to put care at the center of our cities and territories; and Climate and Culture to guarantee that our planet and future generations are protected through culture as the backbone of our societies and as our motor for sustainable development.

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Executive Summary

This paper is intended as a key contribution for the Town Hall process that United Cities and Local Governments is promoting as part of its 7th World Congress to take place in Daejeon, South Korea, between 10-14 October 2022. Its contents emerge from a collaborative effort of civil society organizations, academics and United Nations agencies, in consultation with local and regional governments. The forward looking proposals and recommendations are based on lessons learnt and critical reflection from ongoing initiatives in regions around the world.

The commons constitute a burgeoning field of social experimentation and transformative action. Bringing together different actors at multiple scales, *commoning* is seen as a crucial strategy to tackle two of the most pressing challenges of our time: growing socio-economic inequality and inequity, and acute ecological crisis. From housing, public services or food, to public spaces, culture or the internet, there is growing evidence and consensus that reclaimed urban commons play a critical role in fostering community engagement and exploring alternative/innovative governance options beyond the private/public divide. In that sense, they also represented a fundamental component for a renewed socio-territorial contract of direct and participatory democracy from the ground up.

Understood at the same time as resources (material or immaterial) and social practices, the commons are at the core of the innovative right to the city and the municipalist movements and agendas. As a strategy, commoning provides a concrete tool for putting the social and environmental function over accumulation, privatization and speculation (through, for example, community land trusts and cooperatives), ensuring equal access and benefit to all. At the same time, it represents a productive opportunity to experiment with new forms of public-community collaboration (service provision, cultural facilities, etc.).

Furthermore, commons and commoning deeply connect with long-standing Indigenous Peoples' worldvisions and practices that have been taking care of the planet from past to present and future generations. Understanding the crucial role that the commons play for social reproduction, since time immemorial women have been at the forefront of the protection and collective management of the commons. A feminist, decolonial and intersectional approach is therefore needed to fully grasp the relevance and potential of common strategies as concrete tools to build non-patriarchal, non-racist, non-ableist and post-capitalist societies.

This paper includes a set of specific recommendations aimed at creating the conditions for protecting and fostering the commons. Local and global action is conceived as necessarily inter-connected and multi-sectoral, while public support for commoning should be always aligned with human rights obligations and the goal of promoting greater equity, social justice and radical inclusion. Organized in terms of both immediate initiatives and medium-term transformations, the suggestions cover critical areas of action, such as: participatory mapping exercises and peer-to-peer learning; local dialogues and collaboration between municipal/regional authorities and grassroots groups; enabling regulatory frameworks; supportive public policies, programmes and budgets; active public campaigning and engagement at international debates.

Acknowledgements

This document is the result of a collective process of elaboration developed between January and July 2022, including a series of online and in person meetings as well as the co-production of written inputs. Facilitated by the Global Platform for the Right to the City, the Commons Town Hall working group was formed by a broad range of organizations and networks, including: the Cities Coalition for Digital Rights, Open Society Foundations, the African Center for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO); as well as representatives from three (cross-cutting) Caucuses: youth (Children and Youth Major Group), feminism/women (the Huairou Commission) and accessibility (co-led by the General Assembly of Partners-Older Persons and Persons with Disabilities Partner Constituent Groups, World Blind Union, World Enabled). Participants at the multiple working sessions included: Bartlett Development Planning Unit (DPU), FIAN International (FIAN), Habitat International Coalition, International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), Observatori DESC (Barcelona, Spain), Women in Informal Employment Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO), Latin America Women and Habitat Network.

Defining the commons: a lively and diverse debate

The commons constitute a **powerful and ever-expanding theoretical and political agenda**. From academic debates to community struggles and initiatives, the relevance of the commons is brought forward as a multi-dimensional strategy that puts collective well-being and care of the natural and social goods and practices as part of a renewed social contract.

This vision is at the core of the UCLG Pact for the Future and complementary proposals and strategies to make it possible can be found on the other three Town Halls' papers around Caring Systems, the Culture for Climate Agenda, and Rebuilding Trust in Local Government. Within this integrated framework, commons and commoning practices are crucial for guaranteeing a fairer and more participatory approach to care, a more diverse ecology of knowledges and social imaginaries towards environmental justice, and the very-much-needed renewal of democracy from a local and territorial approach.

As a response to, and in clear opposition to privatizing and for profit trends, with the increasing concentration of power and resources, the creation, protection and shared management of the commons and its benefits (with or without state involvement) grows in legitimacy and strength through initiatives around the world, advancing towards a wider and more equitable distribution of benefits and opportunities for all. Whether material or symbolic, the widespread conceptualization stresses the **double dimension of the commons as things and dynamic, collective processes in which social agency and commitment is the crucial component**.

Many of the most substantial experiences around the commons are linked to the struggles of marginalized groups, that include but are not limited to indigenous peoples, black and racialized communities, migrants and refugees, *grassroots women and community organizers*, *LGBTQIA+ people*, *children and youth*, *people with disabilities*

*and older persons, campesines and rural communities, fiercely defending their lands, forests and waters against powerful corporate actors supported by often corrupt regimes. A wider **interest in the urban commons seems more recent and still limited, but certainly growing***¹. From community gardens, parks and other public spaces to infrastructure, basic services and affordable housing, urban social movements and scholars, **as well as progressive local governments** alike have been denouncing and resisting the devastating effects of gentrification and privatization under neoliberal globalization. The work of feminist scholars/activists regarding non-state centric and noncapitalocentric perspectives is crucial to exploring the relevance of commoning practices and expanding the horizons of the diverse, non-market economies taking place around the world in urban and rural areas².

As is well known, **the public-private partnerships were the cornerstone of the neoliberal agenda imposed at planetary scale since the early 80s**. Under the mantra of TINA ("There Is No Alternative"), its promoters put forward an aggressive agenda of so-called structural adjustment (weakening of the state and social protections), massive transfer of public goods and services to the private sector (while creating public private debt) and the business management model as the only one possible. The impacts of this trajectory are deep, as many public and collective institutions have been debilitated, leaving an open pathway for higher corporate power and control, and for an increasingly explicit and articulated attack on the commons. More recently, in the context of social and environmental crises deepened by the combined effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change, **there is a clear need to not only widen but to reconfigure the public sphere, through a multi-sectoral and multi-level governance of collective goods and collaborative decision making processes that put people and the planet at the center**³.

From the principles of the right to the city and a renewed municipalism, initiatives of **public-community partnerships** should contribute to fostering social cohesion and forms of active citizenship, with organized channels for social mobilization and action both inside and outside public institutions and state mechanisms. Indeed, promoting and strengthening spaces for autonomy and collective management is as important as broadening the spaces for recognition, representation and participation. At the same time, these processes should enable the effective redistribution of material and monetary resources at neighborhood scale, benefitting historically marginalized and discriminated-

¹ Dellenbaugh, Kip, Bieniok, Müller & Schwegmann (2015); Duru (2018); Huron (2015).

² Federici (2012); Federici & Caffentzis (2019); Gibson- Graham (2008); Gibson, Cameron & Healy (2016); Mies & Bennholdt-Thomsen (2001); Quiroga Díaz & Gago (2014).

³ As stated in a recent policy brief by Public Services International: "At a time of concomitant crises, we need more – not less - universal quality public services operated in the common interest, not for profit. Unless we collectively move from operating public services under an extractivist paradigm to a common-good and solidarity-based approach there can be no resilience, no functioning economies and societies, no long-term perspective and no planet for us." (Cibrario, 2021, p. 10).

against groups. Universal accessibility⁴ and universal design⁵ of physical infrastructures and information are a precondition for the inclusion and participation of children and youth, persons with disabilities and older persons, and therefore key elements of commoning efforts.

The right to the city framework provides concrete guidelines to engage in transformative commoning initiatives. Both fundamental principles and strategies are encompassed around 8 main components: non discrimination; gender equality; inclusive citizenship (detached from nationality and legal status); enhanced political participation; social functions of property and collectively defined public-community interest; equity in the use of quality and safer public spaces and services; diverse and inclusive economies (including informal and social and solidarity economies); and more just and balanced urban-rural linkages. The strong connections between the right to the city⁶ and the commons can be characterized⁷ as threefold: 1) the common goods in the city; 2) the city as a common good; and, 3) the commons/commoning as a tool for implementing the right to the city.

Key elements for understanding the commons

The vitality of the commons as a field of experimentation is reflected in lively debates about their conceptualization and the wide range of initiatives currently taking place in different regions of the world. This paper would like to contribute to a **working definition** that can both visualize existing efforts as well as foster new ones:

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, under democratic principles of direct participation, radical inclusion, and intersectional equity and justice within a continuum of stewardship and commitment with past and future generations and all forms of life on Mother Earth.

Despite their great diversity, *commoning* experiences usually present three main characteristics⁸:

⁴ The New Urban Agenda (2016), para 36, in line with the article 9 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), defines accessibility as the "...appropriate measures in cities and human settlements that facilitate access for persons with disabilities, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment of cities, in particular to public spaces, public transport, housing, education and health facilities, public information and communication (including information and communications technologies and systems), and other facilities and services open or provided to the public, in both urban and rural areas."

⁵ Understood as "the design of products, environments, services and programs to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design" (United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), article 2).

⁶ The right to the city is the right of all inhabitants, present and future, permanent and temporary, to inhabit, use, occupy, produce, transform, govern and enjoy just, inclusive, safe, sustainable and democratic cities, villages and human settlements, defined as commons. More information can be found in the Right to the City Policy Paper. UCLG World Congress, Durban. Available at https://www.durban2019.uclg.org/sites/default/files/2019-10/Right%20to%20the%20City_PolicyPaper.pdf

⁷ Following Fernandes (2021).

⁸ Taken from conceptualizations put forward by Federici & Caffentzis (2019) and Kolioulis (2022).

1. **a community of commoners committed to overcome social divisions and inequalities**, and where skills for self-government can be developed;
2. **common pool resources, which are not commodified** and are used to meet the needs of the community;
3. **a set of shared principles, agreements and practices**, including means of effective communication to create, maintain, govern, protect and reproduce the commons through non-authoritarian, inclusive and horizontal democratic governance.

These characteristics make the commons a specific form of organization for social wellbeing, differentiated both from private and public models. **Commoning practices are committed to the non-commodification (privatization) of common resources and services; which should have their use and management guided by the fulfillment of their socio-environmental function** . At the same time, they are based on direct democracy mechanisms and self-management that strengthen the community.

Commons and commoning practices can be considered as multidimensional and multi/trans-scalar endeavors. They encompass material, symbolic and political resources and social relations (including: housing and land, nutrition and health; education and culture; information and communication; affects, solidarity and creativity) that interconnect the local, national, regional and global spheres of action.

For the purpose of this paper some key thematics for action are highlighted:

- housing and land;
- food systems and agroecology;
- basic services, including water and sanitation, energy and internet, and waste management;
- health and care systems;
- culture and education;
- information, communication and digital rights
- safe and accessible public spaces and livelihoods;
- natural resources and ecosystems;

These have been selected based on a combined set of criteria. Those include: the relevance of the topics for this Town Hall process; the expertise and examples available within the Town Hall group (plus existing/potential linkages with other Town Halls); and, notably, the relevance of this issues for LRGs agendas and the capacity for action/mandates (competences). More details on some of the current relevant initiatives taking place in regions around the world, involving civil society organizations and local/regional governments, are included in the table at the following page.

Moreover, other collections and repositories of cases and initiatives related to commoning can be found at the sources listed below:

- [“The future is public”](#) - (Global)
- [“Access to quality local public services for all: a precondition to beat inequality”](#) - GOLD VI Working Paper Series #02, (Global)
- [Cases Repository for the commoning chapter of the GOLD VI research](#) - (Global)
- [Cohabitat.io](#) - (Global)
- [“Common wealth initiative”](#) (England)
- [Minim · Municipality Observatory](#) - (Global)
- [Transformative Cities - Atlas of Utopias](#) - (Global)
- [“Atlas Cities for change”](#) (in Spanish only)
- [Procomum](#) (Brazil)

Beyond a conceptual definition, commons can be also understood through its different forms of manifestation. A recent compilation shows that during the past two decades there have been 1,400 cases of remunicipalization⁹ of a broad range of public services in more than 2,400 cities in 58 countries around the world¹⁰. Although not all remunicipalization are understood as commoning processes, they clearly fit in the same narrative of finding/recovering alternative models for resource and service management and can incorporate elements of commoning. Moreover, when looking at remunicipalization through a commoning lens, it is key to assess the impact that such processes have in terms of accessibility of services and on the overall community (specially in cases where such services are also provided by informal workers). According to this analysis, **collaboration between civil society organizations, cooperatives, unions and local and regional governments have taken three main forms:**

- a) public-public cooperation (between municipalities);
- b) public-community cooperation (between LRGs and non-profit organizations);
- c) public-commons collaboration (emphasizing co-production and co-ownership of goods and services between public and social institutions).

⁹ “Remunicipalization is the return of public services from private control and/or ownership in any form to full public ownership, management and democratic control. Remunicipalization means that municipalities and regional governments take back privately owned and/or managed services that are commissioned, under concession or funded by public bodies. The term emphasises the subnational dimension of bringing public services back into public ownership in territories and communities.” V. Wegmann, *Taking Our Public Services Back In-House*, PSIRU-PSI, Greenwich, UK and Ferney-Voltaire, France, September 2020, p. 10, <https://bit.ly/3ICdciB>

¹⁰ Kishimoto, S.; Steinfert, L. & Petitjean, O. (2021).

Name of the case	Location	Leading organization	Key points
<u>Caño Martín Peña Community Land Trust</u>	San Juan (Puerto Rico)	Fideicomiso de la Tierra del Caño Martín Peña	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Land is provided by the municipality - Ensure ownership and management of the area by the community and for the community - Multi-actor governance structure, with key leadership of the community - Improved environmental conditions by developing basic infrastructure and dredging the channel. - The Fideicomiso is very active in exchanges and capacity building to promote the model, particularly in Latin America. One example is the project being led by <u>Catalytic Communities</u> to develop a CLT in favelas in Rio de Janeiro
<u>Baan Mankong Secure Housing Programme</u>	Thailand	CODI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Potential to leverage funding for land, housing and services for the urban poor - Remarkable example of the national Baan Mankong “secure housing” programme in Thailand. Launched in 2003 this government-funded programme, under the auspices of the Community Organization Development Institute (CODI) - LRGs have a critical role to play in supporting negotiations between communities and land-owning agencies, as well as providing infrastructure and services to upgraded and new settlements - Co-production nature of finance mechanisms, ensuring ongoing control by commoners of the use of funds
<u>Can Batlló</u>	Barcelona (Spain)	Can Batlló association + City of Barcelona	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Arises from a neighbors' movement to gain the control of large community space in a site of a deactivated factory - The association managed to gain the control of the space under a novel partnership contract that gives term long-term (50 years) control over the space - Key role of the programme launched by the city of Barcelona in 2015 for the collective use and management of community spaces - The programme creates a novel framework for assessing and valuing the social contribution of the project based on the value of the activities and services provided to the community
<u>Vaccine Access for Informal Workers</u>	Thailand	HomeNet Thailand and Federation of Informal Workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - HomeNet Thailand and the Federation of Informal Workers (FIT) stepped in to facilitate informal workers' access to COVID-19 vaccines - Negotiating with the Ministry of Labour for vaccine access for 300 FIT members, including migrant domestic workers - Setting up a help-line to support members access COVID-19 tests, government healthcare service providers, herbal medicine and vaccines - The case can help exemplify the notion of commoning as a collective strategy to access public goods (vaccines) and services (health care)
<u>Co-creation of street vending ordinance 1787</u>	Lima (Peru)	Street Vendors and Municipal Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The case looks at the multiple approaches the Municipality of Metropolitan Lima has taken towards street vendors and the use of public space - from participatory processes to punitive regulatory practices. - Enabling factors that can strengthen social dialogue among key stakeholders regarding inclusive public space regulations - Explores setbacks in the process that limit implementation of more enabling regulatory frameworks - Sheds light on important dimensions that strengthen participatory governance processes, particularly in terms of sustainability.

<u>Co-creation of health protocols to protect rights to work during pandemics</u>	Belo Horizonte (Brazil)	Waste pickers and city government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Multistakeholder platforms building synergies among key actors to protect acquired rights of integration of informal waste pickers in the city's solid waste management - Participatory platforms can be instrumental for workers to build alliances and co-produce key knowledge that can enable recyclables as a common pool resource - Pandemics can threaten waste pickers established rights but shifting practices in the waste sector through a participatory process can be a path towards commoning
<u>Child and Youth Participation in Local Budgeting Process</u>	Batticaloa (Sri Lanka)	UNICEF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In 2020 the Municipal Council of Batticaloa organized the first budget consultation session with children. - It was revealed that there is no special category or line item to cover child development work. The allocation for preschools maintenance, children's parks, and libraries are considered under the infrastructure development and maintenance category. - Suggestions made by children included considering building recreational parks for adolescent children, expand green areas, improve road safety, allocate space within the MC-owned facilities such as preschools, health clinics, and library buildings for children's club activities and others - Results achieved include creating a specific expenditure category as "Child-friendly city Initiative" and allocated rupees one million for infrastructure development related to children. Mayor appointed a committee to collect information about existing abandoned buildings and propose using those buildings for children's club activities. - Similar experiences have been facilitated by UNICEF in Colombia and Niger
<u>Bologna Regulation on civic collaboration for the urban commons</u>	Bologna (Italy)	City of Bologna	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enables community organizations to develop collective management schemes for urban resources recognized as commons. - An agreement is signed with the city to grant the management rights and dedicate support and resources to the initiative under a "public-commons" partnership which included the care and regeneration of the urban common in question (green space, public building, city square) - Community organizations have the leadership in proposing the initiatives and presenting them to city government. - The <u>regulation</u> was based on a two year process of experimentation in three city neighborhoods and now has been the basis for more than 280 initiatives in Bologna and for fostering commoning experiences throughout Italy
<u>Community-driven informal settlement upgrading</u>	Gobabis (Namibia) and Harare (Zimbabwe)	Local communities, NGOs, Slum Dwellers International and local governments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Community-driven informal settlement upgrading facilitated by communities in partnership with local governments and civil society organizations and networks - The development of the initiative has been community-driven from inception to implementation and is based on incremental strategies - Approach has had an impact on influencing other initiative at local and national scale

Commons as (re)emerging alternatives to current challenges

As stated, the debate and practices around the commons are not new. However, they currently experience a renewed relevance as a key piece in supporting strategies to pressing current challenges faced by communities around the world and that require a **clear paradigm shift, particularly in terms of models for production, consumption and decision-making**. Among these challenges, three converging crises play a particularly relevant role in the emergence of the commons as an alternative to current models of resource management and delivery:

- **The environmental/climate emergency:** exposing the flagrant need to protect natural resources and ecosystems, as well as to put-forward new models of production, consumption and of conceiving and living our relationship with the planet, recognizing the relevant experiences and innovations by grassroots movements and leaders in community resilience building
- **The COVID-19 crisis:** underlying the key role that public authorities and communities have in ensuring that key service and good provision, such as housing, water and sanitation, health, nutritious and sustainable food, education, waste management, internet and others, are truly accessible to all.
- **Rising inequalities:** which coupled with the rising commodification and financialization of some of the goods and services cited above, exposes the marginalization and violation of rights of an increasing number of people and to the impossibility of achieving fair and equitable standards of living for all under the current models that prioritize profits over people and the planet.

Moreover, these crises are being faced in a moment in which cities and territories are changing spatially/morphologically (through unplanned and rapid urbanization), demographically (with the urban population becoming increasingly younger overall, while at the same time urban areas are centers of increasingly global aging population¹¹, and in terms of governance (with Increasing conflict in urban areas), underscoring the need for new strategies for facing the challenges of today and of the future. The need for a paradigm shift is clear. **It is also evident that new models not only need to place the protection of rights and key resources at the center, but also rely on more open and participatory approaches.** In this sense, if the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the central importance of public institutions (under the slogan “public is back”), **it is clear that this idea of “public” also needs to be broadened and reconfigured, under mechanisms that open and democratize institutions and decision making grounded on direct participation and involvement, particularly of those traditionally left behind.**

¹¹ According to a recent publication, by 2030 more than 1 billion people will be 65+ years old, while in 2050 two thirds of the world's population will live in urban areas with nearly 1 billion older people living in cities in the developing world (Das, Yuko, Chapman and Jain, 2022).

In this sense, beyond a recognition of commons and their importance, what we see emerging now is the renewed **potential of commoning processes to be implemented as strategies for harnessing collective action and wellbeing**. This is of particular importance given the current context of rising conservatisms coupled with concerted efforts to delegitimize public institutions and persecution towards mobilized civil society. Thus, the collective management of common goods and resources through joint collaboration between civil society organizations and public institutions presents an opportunity not only to ensure a more fair and equitable distribution of those common goods, but also to support and expand collective organization.

Why are Commons relevant for a joint agenda between civil society and LRGs?

The local and regional spheres lend themselves as a particularly fertile ground for the flourishing of collective management of common goods through public-communities partnerships. This can be accounted for several reasons, starting with the degree of proximity that such levels of government have with communities and residents. This proximity entails two elements. On the one hand, it facilitates the development of collective arrangements that have the proximity and contact with communities at its core. On the other, as over the last decades the rising challenges being encountered in cities, many of those related to the crises cited above, have increased the pressure on local and regional authorities to act and deliver responses, demanding levels of action that many times go beyond their capacities, resources and competencies.

In this sense, **strengthened collaboration with civil society under collective management schemes can allow for local and regional governments to improve their ability to act by widening the available strategies to act effectively and collaboratively in order to and to respond to increasingly complex challenges, in articulation to the needs and demands from the communities. However, it is key to note that rather than withdrawing LRGs from these growing responsibilities and demands, the commons are an opportunity to find more collective and democratic ways of fulfilling their duties.**

As pointed before, it is clear that the present moment calls for an assessment of the current models and approaches in place in several domains and for the introduction of new practices and strategies that better respond to the pressing challenges and that are more equitable and inclusive. If such logic is applied to basic service provision, commoning approaches have the potential of giving responses to limitations to the capacity of action of public authorities in terms of delivery of essential services that privatization has sought, and failed, to address in the last decades. **Moreover, collective arrangements for the management of commons by public authorities and civil society are not only more equitable, since their underlying logic does not rely on profitability, but they also reinforce the ties and cooperation between the public management and community spheres.**

Thus, the commons introduce not only a new approach to management and delivery of resources and services, but also new models for collective governance through the promotion of a culture of collaboration. This is of key importance to create more diverse and effective channels for inclusion and participation of communities that are historically marginalized and experience under-representation and exclusion at, such as women, children and youth, racialized populations, migrants and refugees, LGBTQIA+ populations; indigenous peoples, people with disabilities and older persons.

Enabling environments - what do the Commons need to flourish?

Under such an approach, 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 this sense, both action and inaction by local and regional governments can have either positive or negative impacts for ensuring the protection of joint management of commons in the short, middle and long terms.

This is particularly relevant in terms of **regulating the commons**. Introducing a regulatory framework can be a key stepping stone for the recognition and formal support of existing commoning initiatives, as well as for opening the door for the creation of new ones. However, this should be done carefully, in a manner that does not overburden organizations but that instead addresses their needs and proposals, providing them with the elements and security they need to guarantee their permanence and growth. **It is key to recognize that commons should not be regulated in the same way that collaborations with private actors are**. In this sense, relying on an ad hoc, participatory and gradual approach for regulation can be helpful in terms of reducing any negative impact that could be caused and leaving room for learning, flexibility and adaptation.

Taking into account the diversity under which commons can be collectively managed, public authorities can adopt a tridimensional strategy to support and spur commoning initiatives: respecting and trusting; protecting; and, realizing.

Respect and trust

One key question is in regards to the **proactivity of government action**. Taking into account that there are many initiatives around the commons being led by civil society organizations and communities, institutional support to commoning strategies can involve both an **active leadership** and involvement of public authorities, or an empowering **approach that gives community initiatives the space and tools to flourish and thrive and that seeks to remove potential (legal, regulatory, financial, political, attitudinal) obstacles and biases for such**. For this, flexibility and having a good understanding of the community organizational landscape is key, so governments can calibrate their actions from more “leading support” to a position of “supporting and accompanying”.

Protect

Beyond their direct involvement, governments can play a key role in **protecting commoning initiatives (and commoners) from possible resistances or retaliation under adverse configurations** in terms of supporting commons development. For example, it is key to have a clear commitment towards the well-being and protection of commoners, and mechanisms to counteract their stigmatization, such as in the case of informal workers or slum inhabitants, for example. Moreover, it is also key to advance mechanisms that protect and ensure the continuity of commoning arrangements in the future, so that common goods are not privatized and commodified.

Realize

Social engagement and management does not imply that the state can withdraw from its **human rights commitments and obligations for addressing structural inequalities**; on the contrary, it should guarantee the maximum of available resources and continued support. In fact, when actively fostering commoning strategies, local and regional authorities can play a central role in **ensuring that these act indeed as levelers for greater equity and equality**. In this sense, a key guiding principle for support of initiatives must be that they are aligned with a rights-based approach and adopt an intersectional perspective. **Initiatives around the commons should always align with human rights principles¹².**

It is also key to remember that commons are not accessed by all groups in the same manner, often reproducing structural inequality patterns. To be truly aligned with the goal of advancing equality, joint management of the commons must be arranged in a way that addresses and reverses such patterns. **In other words, commoning should be intrinsically feminist, anti-racist, anti-ableist, anti ageist, inter-generational and aligned with the emancipation and autonomy of those traditionally marginalized and excluded.**

Recommendations for fostering and protecting the Commons

Local and regional governments have a crucial role to play in protecting, strengthening and multiplying the commons. Even in the context of limited competences and resources, relevant and effective measures can be implemented in collaboration with grassroots organizations, civil society and academia. **Bold actions are necessary and possible, connecting immediate interventions and long-term transformations, from the local to the national, regional and international levels.**

¹² Based on international standards and commitments, substantive measures should comply with the obligation to respect, protect and guarantee human rights while promoting the commons. Fundamental human rights principles include self-determination, non-discrimination, equity and priority attention for people and groups under vulnerable conditions, solidarity, participation, accountability, co-responsibility and distributive justice. Additionally, local and regional governments are obliged to dispense the maximum of available resources, under criteria of incremental allocation and non-retrogression.

In this process, building relationships that enable collaborative work is key, harnessing partnerships that involve multiple actors, and building upon the knowledge and initiatives of local constituencies.

It is also vital to recognize that these collective processes of co-creation and collective governance around the commons imply profound cultural and social changes, which can lead to disputes, tensions and resistance. In this sense, **it is particularly important to emphasize the dimension of commoning as a process**, which involves both a component of self regulation and negotiation led by commoners, but also a pedagogic component as well, based on learning through concrete experiences, the elaboration of shared set of values and norms that respond to challenges and questions that emerge, consolidating a favorable environment for these spaces and process to grow. For this, setting up channels of communication, learning, transparency, accountability and follow-up of initiatives is key, as well as models for assessing and highlighting the social and community impact of initiatives¹³. Building trust takes time and deliberate efforts to remain inclusive and open to new ideas and approaches.

Given its characteristics and trajectory, **United Cities and Local Governments** is ideally placed to push forward a shared agenda on the commons, visibilizing what is already happening, as well as inspiring and facilitating innovations and alternatives within a collaborative framework. At the same time, as local partnerships around the commons can play a crucial role in reimagining and strengthening the public sphere at the local level, once transposed to the international realm they can support the creation and identification of shared agendas and strategies that can set the basis for reimagining joint action at the international level under a renewed multilateralism.

The following recommendations are focused on strategic actions oriented towards supporting existing commoning initiatives and creating a favorable environment for new initiatives to flourish. Thus, they are of a general character, focusing on how local and regional governments can create broad frameworks for commoning initiatives. Further and more structured exchange and debate between actors inside and outside UCLG, building on existing mappings and repositories, can create the conditions for an enhanced shared knowledge and comprehension on concrete commoning initiatives, in order to inform in detail and provide guidance for implementation of specific commoning policies in particular areas.

Immediate action

- A. Implement, with constituencies involved, **consultations and participatory mapping exercise/s** of existing commoning initiatives and identification of main achievements, challenges and support available from different actors/sectors. At the same time, provide mechanisms for data collection at the very local level, with the participation of grassroots organizations, women and LGBTQIA+ leaders at

¹³ The use of a methodology of community balance for quantifying the social return of community initiatives was instrumental in the negotiation of the agreement for the concession of use of the deactivated Can Batlló factory in Barcelona by a neighborhood organization. has been applied to a non-profit social project. According to the calculations, this social return means 1.4 million euros per year that Can Batlló is contributing to the city through self-managed activities and that for every euro that public institutions contribute, Can Batlló generates four. More information can be found in: <https://lahidra.net/programa-de-desarrollo-de-los-comunes-urbanos-en-barcelona/>

neighborhood level, including children and youth, migrants and refugees, people with disabilities and older persons

- B. Identify gaps and possibilities within the **regulatory framework**, and suggest modifications and improvements needed in order to foster and protect the commons, including the (re)municipalization under collective management of land, basic infrastructure and services (i.e. energy, water and sanitation, waste management, food production, health care and services, education, employment, communications and internet).
- C. Analyze existing **public policies**, programmes and budgets, identifying gaps in services and opportunities that are not being offered equitably and that could be adapted or modified in support of commoning initiatives, such as community land trusts, social housing cooperatives, slum upgrading, cultural facilities and community services.
- D. Identify existing **public goods such as land, buildings and other facilities like community centers, local shelters and more** that are not being utilized to their potential and that could be temporarily ceded and adapted for shared collective management by community organizations.
- E. Establish **permanent two-way, accessible and inclusive communication channels** between public authorities and community actors, based on a commitment to advance commoning initiatives through dialogue, collective learning and action.
- F. Engage in **international debates** regarding the relevance of the commons as an integral part of a renewed social contract that puts people and the planet at the center.

Medium-term action

- A. Promote **peer-to-peer sustained learning and capacity-building** exchanges on common initiatives at multiple levels (local, national, regional and international), facilitating access to pedagogic and communication materials and tools through permanent programmes, in partnership with civil society organizations, academia and other relevant actors/sectors, including children and youth.
- B. **Participatory design regulatory innovations and mechanisms for collaboration and social control** that guarantee that initiatives meet local needs and securing their long-term sustainability of commoning initiatives, such as “public-community partnerships”, “pacts of collaboration”, “commons accords”, “commons regulatory framework” and “chambers of the commons”.
- C. **Strengthen and amplify existing mechanisms**, such as public procurement and participatory budgeting, in order to prioritize social and solidarity economy enterprises/associations, particularly those contributing to gender equity and diversity, racial justice and inclusion of women, children and youth, migrants and



refugees, LGBTQIA+ populations, indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities and older persons. Make sure that different groups are properly taken into account and included in budget allocations and budgeting processes..

- D. **Design and implement specific policies and programmes** that target structural inequalities and protect and foster the commons, mobilizing support and resources (monetary and other) from public sector and other institutions, including international cooperation agencies and the UN system, setting guidelines that help prioritize support based on the potential of initiatives to contributing to larger equality and inclusion under an intersectional approach.
- E. **Design and launch public campaigning** initiatives focused on amplifying the spectrum of cultural references of what is understood as commons and raising awareness about the critical role of the commons in fostering more democratic, just and sustainable communities, cities and territories for all.

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