



STUDY OF LOCAL
AUTHORITIES
ASSOCIATIONS OF
EUROPEAN UNION
PARTNER COUNTRIES –
LATIN AMERICA
REPORT

Dialogue and capacity building of
local and regional authorities
in EU partner countries
in the fields of development
and local governance

2015



PLATFORMA

The European voice of **Local** and
Regional authorities for development



**Study of Local Authorities Associations of European Union
Partner Countries – Latin America Report**

**PLATFORMA – 2015
UCLG – 2015**

Author: Marga Barcelo Fontanals

**PLATFORMA Partners in the Project: Dialogue and capacity building of local and regional authorities
in EU partner countries in the fields of development and local governance**

**Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)
United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)
French Association of CEMR (AFCCRE)**

**International Cooperation Agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG International)
Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SKL)
Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces (FEMP)
Cités Unies France (CUF)**

**Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR)
Association of European Border Regions (AEBR)
International Association of Francophone Mayors (AIMF)
Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF)**

**City of Paris
Province of Barcelona
Regions Unies – FOGAR**

Disclaimer: This publication has been produced with the assistance of the European Union.
The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of PLATFORMA and UCLG and can in
no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union.

Design: acapella.be – Printing: Daddy Kate – Photo: EuropeAid Photo Library

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons
Attribution 4.0 International License.





Table of Content

BACKGROUND	4
METHODOLOGY	5
THE ASSOCIATIONS UNDER STUDY	5
STUDY BY SUB-REGIONS AND COUNTRIES	7
Local and regional governments in Latin America	7
Local and regional government associations in Latin America	8
North and Central America	8
Belize	9
Mexico	10
Panama	15
Guatemala	17
Costa Rica	18
Andean Region	20
Bolivia	21
Ecuador	22
Southern Cone	23
Argentina	24
Brazil	26
Paraguay	27
Uruguay	28
Chile	29
Regional entities	31
Other entities	31
CONCLUSIONS	32



BACKGROUND

In recent years the European Union has clearly put its faith in promoting the role of local governments in development processes. The Agenda for Change stresses the importance of linking the EU cooperation policy to the promoting of democratic governance also at a local level. Instruments based on strengthening the capacities of local governments have been developed, not only as authorities providing basic services but also as political operators that have as they should a determining effect on the shaping of policies that are developed at a state level.

The Programme “Civil Society Organisations and Local Authorities” therefore concentrates its activities on local governments and the public policies that these develop in the field of inclusive growth and sustainable development. It is a very broad approach that concentrates on the effect of local governments on key aspects of development such as social cohesion, economic development and employment, health, education, and the fight against climatic change.

The Programme also aims to improve the environment in which local governments operate, both in those referring to the organisation of the state (decentralisation processes) and the normative framework and aspects connected with their operating capacities (financing, human resources, etc...).

In this context, associations of local government play an important role as spokesmen for local needs and interests on both national and international agendas. This is why the Programme clearly puts its faith in strengthening them both insofar as they interact with the central government and other operators (the international community) and as they provide their associates with services.

The aim of this study is to analyse the current situation of the associations of local entities of the partner countries of the European Union. Associations of the same nature have been examined on the different continents; their main objectives, methods of action, strategic design, government structure, available financial resources and how they are administered, communication strategies, human resources, etc.

In the case of Latin America, in practice all countries have local government associations. In some cases such as those of Mexico, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Peru, Costa Rica, Bolivia, Panama, and Venezuela more than one association is operative; at the same time other associations also exist in Peru, Ecuador, Mexico, and Colombia that concentrate on the interests of regional governments.

As we will see in the study, local government associations are very varied. Some associations have a great capacity for exerting political influence in their countries and are independent of the central government; these associations have considerable resources and go as far as administering taxes, and provide services of important added value to their associates in the form of specialised training or technical assistance.

However, some also operate under considerable limitations in their efforts to have an effect on the political agenda of their countries insofar as they lack both the necessary financial resources and suitable technical personnel. These associations scarcely provide services for their associates and largely depend on donations from international cooperation or the central government itself.

The final objective of this study is to extract from the information obtained ideas and guidelines for action by the associations with the aim of improving the policies designed to strengthen their capacities and the part they play in the contexts within which they operate.





METHODOLOGY

In order to draw up this study, the methodology proposed for drawing up regional studies and the global study on the situation of local government associations in the member countries of the EU have been followed. Work has been carried out based on the information provided by local government associations themselves in the survey they have been sent by PLATFORMA.

THE ASSOCIATIONS UNDER STUDY

As has been mentioned, all local and regional government associations that have been identified have been invited to answer the survey. The associations that have been contacted are listed below:

Country	Association
Argentina	Argentine Federation of Municipalities
Belize	The Belize Mayors' Association
Bolivia	Association of Municipalities of Bolivia
	Federation of Municipal Associations of Bolivia
Brazil	National Confederation of Municipalities
	National Front of Prefects
Chile	Chilean Association of Municipalities
	Association of Municipalities of Chile
Colombia	Colombian Federation of Municipalities
	Colombian Association of Capital Cities
Costa Rica	National Union of Local Governments of Costa Rica
	National Association of Town Councils of Costa Rica
Ecuador	Association of Ecuadoran Municipalities
El Salvador	Corporation of Municipalities of the Republic of El Salvador
Guatemala	National Association of Municipalities of the Republic of Guatemala
	Guatemalan Association of Mayors and Native Authorities
Honduras	Association of Municipalities of Honduras
Mexico	National Conference of Municipalities of Mexico
	National Federation of Municipalities of Mexico
	Association of Mexican Municipalities
	Association of Local Authorities of Mexico
	National Association of Mayors
Nicaragua	Association of Municipalities of Nicaragua
Panama	Association of Municipalities of Panama
	Association of Mayors of Panama
Peru	Association of Municipalities of Peru
	Network of Urban and Rural Municipalities of Peru
Dominican Republic	Dominican Federation of Municipalities (FEDOMU)

Uruguay	National Congress of Mayors
Venezuela	Association of Mayors of Venezuela

Of the 28 associations detected, 16 answered the survey (just under 60%).

We have also mentioned networks operating at a regional level such as the Latin American Federation of Cities, Municipalities, and Associations of Local Governments (FLACMA), Mercociudades, and Red de Ciudades Suramericanas (Redcisur), in addition to a network that operates at a local level but does not bring together either governments or local authorities but rather directors specialising in the international relations of local and state governments in Brazil, the FONARI.

It should be pointed out that some of the replies received have been only partial (not all questions were answered), which has hindered the analytical process. Moreover, some of the most important associations as far as resources and the capacity for action are concerned did not answer the survey and are therefore not included in the study. We are referring in particular to associations such as the National Front of Prefects in Brazil, the Colombian Federation of Municipalities, the Federation of Municipalities of Bolivia, FEDOMU in the Dominican Republic, and the Corporation of Municipalities of El Salvador.





STUDY BY SUB-REGIONS AND COUNTRIES

1. Local and regional governments in Latin America

Latin America is not a homogeneous region as far as the organisation of the states is concerned. Albeit at a risk of generalising, the countries of the region can be divided into three groups:

1. Federal countries: Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico
2. Decentralised unitary countries: Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Uruguay
3. Unitary countries: Belize, Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, and the Dominican Republic

In federal countries the importance and the power of federal entities, provinces, and states is considerable. In most cases the powers they assume are highly relevant and in order to put them into effect they are able to enact laws (legislature) and have large budgets and considerable human and material resources.

In these countries local governments are of lesser importance except in Brazil, where they have extensive powers and large budgets.

The countries of the Andean region have evolved in recent years as a result of important processes of constitutional reform towards much more decentralised systems. Albeit with restrictions and limitations, the 4 countries have made a strong bid for the strengthening of the role of both cities and regions. They have been provided with advanced systems regarding powers and although the resources they administer are still limited their involvement in public spending is increasing.

We have included Uruguay in this second group together with the Andean countries as in recent years this country has made great efforts regarding the decentralisation process by means of the new Law on Political Decentralisation and Citizen Participation. This includes among other measures the creation of a third level of government, the municipalities, below that of the state and the provinces.

Finally, the countries in the unitary group, which are the most numerous, are countries in which the decentralisation of power towards subnational (local and regional) governments has been limited and in which the central government (and the remainder of centralised power structures) accumulates the bulk of the powers and resources (legislative, economic, material, and human) in order to develop.

Most of these countries put their faith in the decentralisation of the power of the state by means of the territorial development of the infrastructure of the administration of certain key aspects (in particular health and education) and of the definition of territorial development policies administered from the central power.

In this group we find countries that are attempting to progress towards systems of greater decentralisation and the transfer of power and resources to the territories, although they continue to encounter difficulties. The cases of Chile and El Salvador are no doubt the most paradigmatic, or that of officially federal countries such as Venezuela, which in recent years has experienced significant recentralisation processes.

2. Local and regional government associations in Latin America

As we have already mentioned, with the exception of Cuba all Latin American countries have associations of municipalities or regions that have been created with the aim of encouraging local interests on the national agenda.

As we shall see, these authorities aim to influence the national agenda in order to defend the interests of local and regional governments, and at the same time provide their associates with services of greater or lesser added value.

Some associations have considerable resources and the capacity to have an effect. They are markedly independent from the central governments, although no doubt still too strongly linked to political parties. These associations have considerable technical and financial resources that allow them to position themselves as first-rate operators in the country. This is the case of associations in Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, and El Salvador and to a lesser extent in Mexico.

But weak associations also exist. These associations are generally highly politicised, which limits their capacity of influence; they lack sufficient resources, which limits the quality of the services they offer; and they are highly dependent on contributions from the central government and in some cases from international cooperation, which makes them unsustainable.

It is interesting to note, as we shall see later, that in some countries of the region two or more associations coexist. The case of Mexico is particularly significant, as in that country five local government associations come together (plus a sixth that associates the governors of the States), as is those of Brazil, Bolivia, Colombia, Chile, Peru, and Costa Rica, which have either two or three. The explanation for this situation lies in political dependencies (party-orientated) and in the lack of will for generating spaces in which local players can come together in search of a common interest that goes beyond the symbols of political parties.

3. North and Central America

In North and Central America we find two types of associations corresponding to different state models.

In Mexico, a country with a federal structure, as many as six associations exist that concentrate on the defence and promotion of local and state governments. One of these, the National Conference of Governors (*Conferencia Nacional de Gobernadores*, CONAGO) concentrates on state governments; the remaining five concentrate on municipal governments.

This situation can be explained by the political bias, which has meant that over time the major parties have created associations to bring the mayors together in keeping with their political leanings.

Despite this, some of the associations operating in the country have considerable resources both for affecting the political agenda and for providing services to their associates. This is the case of the National Federation of Mexican Municipalities (FENAM) that is very dynamic with a relevant portfolio of services.

In recent years efforts have multiplied to create and consolidate a plural and non-party-oriented space in which municipalities can come together. The year 2000 therefore saw the creation of the National Conference of Municipalities of Mexico (*Conferencia Nacional de Municipios de México*, CONAMM), an organisation which follows the same logic as the CONAGO and aims to position itself as the main interlocutor with the government. This report does not include a presentation of this platform as they did not reply to the survey that was sent them.



The remainder of the countries in the region correspond to a completely different state model. They are unitary states in which power is heavily concentrated in the government and the central structures, while local governments have few powers and very limited resources.

In all of them associations of municipalities are operating, some of which have done so for a long time, as interlocutors of the government with more or less independence depending on the party balances occurring in the country. Most of them have few resources and are not in a position to provide quality services to their associates. In this scenario COMURES, the El Salvador association, is no doubt an exception in that over the years it has consolidated an acknowledged area of work that has been appreciated by the local governments of El Salvador.

It is also of interest to emphasise the existence of the Guatemalan Association of Mayors and Native Local Authorities (*Asociación Guatemalteca de Alcaldes y Autoridades Locales Indígenas, AAGAI*), an outstanding association in a country in which native presence is very important. We have not however been able to include it in the report because it did not answer the survey.

Of the 14 associations of the sub-region, 9 answered the survey and have been included in this report. Long-term associations such as COMURES in El Salvador or AMUNIC in Nicaragua are not included.

3.1 Belize

The Belize Mayors' Association

<http://calga.org/bma>

General aspects

The main objective of the association is for it to act as the interlocutor for local governments before the central government in order to promote and defend its interests. The association puts its faith in decentralisation and the strengthening of the powers and resources of local entities.

From the survey it transpired that this association is subject to private law and that membership is obligatory.

Design of strategic policy: strategic plan

The survey revealed that this association does not have a strategic plan to implement. For this reason neither does it have systems and methods for assessing and following up the policies it implements.

Moreover, the aforementioned survey also mentions that the association has no self-financing, which means that it has neither sustainability nor financial independence. Its income essentially derives from the State (Ministry of Local Governments) and from donations received from international cooperation.

Structure of Government bodies: operation and separation of duties

It is organised around a General Assembly (representative and deliberative and including representation from all the local governments in the country), an Executive Board, and a Secretariat.

Despite the fact that there appears to be a clear division between the Executive Board and the Secretariat as is revealed in the survey, the structure does not fill the needs of the organisation.



Financial management of the resources

The association has internal financial control rules and regulations that must assure compliance with the management policies and procedures.

Provision of services to the members

Beyond communication with the government, the services that the association offers its members are very limited. In any case, as a result of the agreement with the Ministry of Local Governments guided training is provided for both those elected and technicians.

Communication strategy and policies

As was shown by the survey, the communication strategy is very weak and in fact virtually non-existent. The association has no website of its own but only a space on the website of the Caribbean Association of Local Government Authorities (CALGA).

Human resources: staff organisation, hiring methods, and the distribution of tasks

The association has a considerable lack of human resources and its technical capacities are limited.

Despite this, it states in the survey that the staff is familiar with and in agreement with its tasks, responsibilities, authority, and responsibilities to ensure results, given that most of them are established in an organisation chart where each person is given a role.

The staff is hired depending on its technical knowledge and its training, despite the fact that according to that declared in the survey the association also takes care of the training of its employees.

3.2 Mexico

National Federation of Municipalities of Mexico

<http://www.fenamm.org.mx>

General aspects

The National Federation of Municipalities of Mexico (*Federación Nacional de Municipios de México, FENAMM*) acts with the aim of protecting and guaranteeing the local autonomy of its members. It is a private law association and membership is voluntary.

The main objectives of the organisation are to address the needs of local/regional players at a government level and to provide services to strengthen the local/regional players. In order to do so it declares that its funds amount to approximately 700,000 dollars.

Design of the strategic policy; strategic plan

Despite having a clear mandate based on demand, the association does not have a long-term Strategic Plan. It works on the basis of ad hoc annual plans that are generally agreed with the central government. However, work committees are created for priority matters that allow the combining of the discussions and working efficiently on essential subjects.



Structure of Government bodies: operation and separation of duties

The tasks and duties of the various authorities of the association are clearly distributed in the internal regulations, although as the survey mentions this distribution is not always respected. Likewise, the lack of internal reports, audits, and other internal control mechanisms on the action of the members of the organisation restricts efforts to achieve control and transparency.

The organisation has internal dynamics of positive operation with regular well prepared meetings.

Financial management of the resources

As for the financial management, it should be stressed that less than 10% of the income comes from the fees paid by the members. These amounts are not sufficient to cover the operational costs of the programmes put into practice. Other “self-generated” sources of income also exist but these are not important either (less than 10%), which means that the Federation largely depends on donations from international cooperation and the government.

It does not have a good system for the financial management of its resources. This is the responsibility of the managing director, who together with the technical staff takes care of the treasury, the balance sheets, the liquidity, etc. They declare that they work by means of a “rudimentary” accounting system.

On the other hand, it is indicated that financial and tax legislation in the country has become more complicated to make specialised personnel necessary.

Providing services to members

The association provides services to its associates, essentially training, although the lack of coordination and excessive dependence on the donors hampers their execution.

Communication strategy and policies

The association lacks a clear communication strategy. It has the appropriate instruments: a website, Facebook and Twitter accounts, and a news bulletin, but as the federation itself says there is no predefined strategy.

Human resources: staff organisation, hiring staff, and the distribution of tasks

The Federation has an extensive team although it does not have everything it requires to efficiently address its members' expectations and needs.

According to that mentioned in the survey, the technical and administrative personnel is well prepared and adequately paid, but it is insufficient for everything it has to take on.

Despite the fact that there is a staff hiring system that should guarantee that training and merits are rewarded, according to that mentioned in the survey this is not always the case.

Association of Local Authorities of Mexico A.C. (AALMAC)

<http://aalmac.org.mx>

General aspects

The Association of Local Authorities of Mexico A.C. (*Asociación de Autoridades Locales de México A.C.*, AALMAC) is a public law association of which membership is voluntary that consists of elected individual representatives (town councillors) and legislative and academic bodies.

The association, which has funds of approximately 300,000 dollars, was formed with the objective of addressing the needs of the local/regional players at a government level, creating a national platform for local/regional players, creating services for strengthening local/regional players, and negotiating decentralisation as far as powers and resources are concerned. Over 90% of the local administrations pay their membership fees, which covers the operations and the programmes.

Design of the strategic policy: strategic plan

As in most associations of this kind, the executing of the strategy is hindered by a lack of resources. Despite the fact that a strategic plan and business plans were drawn up in a participative manner as is mentioned in the survey, the fact is that there is a scarcity of technical staff which means that they cannot be executed satisfactorily and that it is impossible to achieve a degree of control to allow knowledge of the level of compliance with the policy and aims of the association at any time.

Structure of Government bodies: operation and separation of duties

Although in the survey it is stated that that the association does not have an organisational structure in keeping with its institutional aims, there is a relatively clear organisation chart of the distribution of duties among the government bodies and the staff. It aims to ensure that both the electing of the Council and its activities are carried out in accordance with the Rules of the association. Moreover, follow-up and assessment is carried out as an internal exercise by the staff without involving the Governing Board.

The fact that there is no response to the internal reports and that no audits are carried out to monitor the actions limits control and prevents the organisation from having a transparent administration.

Financial administration of resources

The administrative staff in charge of the financial management is insufficient. Even so, in general the association follows transparent financial control practices, albeit not in an institutionalised manner, which should reduce to a minimum the possibility of the abusive use or misappropriation of funds.

Provision of services to the members

In accordance with that declared in the survey, the association provides its members with innovative quality services (both individually and collectively) in key local administration areas. The services are provided according to members' needs. No mention is made of what these services are.





Communication strategy and policies

The association has a good communication policy and a good media strategy that facilitates relations with internal and external players and cooperation with governments, NGOs and companies. The communication strategy is duly recorded together with the necessary information for their joining and the methods for treating the information.

Human resources: staff organisation, hiring staff, and the distribution of tasks

Staff members are hired exclusively on the basis of merit, experience, and professional training; in consequence the training plans are better adapted to each member and his/her capabilities. The fact that the staff is motivated makes it easier to achieve the objectives of the organisation. As the survey reveals, there is a lack of technical and administrative staff, which is largely due to the lack of resources.

Association of Municipalities of Mexico (AMMAC)

<http://www.ammac.org.mx>

General aspects

The Association of Municipalities of Mexico (*Asociación de Municipios de México*, AMMAC) is a private law organisation of which membership is not compulsory. The AMMAC consists of institutions (municipalities/groups/territorial entities) and defines itself as a body with the main objectives of addressing the needs of local/regional players at a government level, creating a national platform for local/regional players, creating services for strengthening local/regional players, negotiating the decentralisation of powers and resources, and providing a space for networking.

Design of the strategic policy: strategic plan

The association declares that it has an annual budget of approximately 9 million dollars which originates from local funds (7 million) and cooperation funds (2 million)¹, without including its own funds available to it. Together with the existence of a well-defined organic structure, this allows the shaping and executing of the strategic plan drawn up in a participative manner, in which long-term objectives are established over several years according to the resources available. However, the fact of not designing a business plan and the lack of efficient monitoring and control systems prevents the execution of the strategic plan in the manner anticipated.

Structure of Government bodies: operation and separation of duties

In relation to the structure of the government, despite the fact that in theory the duties of the Governing Board and the Secretariat are clearly differentiated, in practice this is not entirely respected which hampers the achieving of objectives. According to the survey, the Governing Board is not elected in keeping with the rules of the association but meets ad hoc without duly issuing an agenda and the matters to be discussed; it is the President who takes the strategic decisions in contrast to the statutory precepts.

There is no transparency policy. No internal audits are carried out and no monitoring and assessment systems have been established to allow the adjusting of the operation of the institution to the needs of the associates.

¹ This is a considerable amount that represents a strong contrast to the budgets declared by the remainder of Mexican associations. For this reason we consider it should be checked although it is recorded in the survey.

Financial management of the resources

As can be surmised from the surveys, the management of the financial resources does not have an appropriate control system either and there is no monitoring of the finances as such. According to what is indicated in the survey, it is the managing director and other members who take on the duties of financial managers, basing themselves on a rudimentary accounting system and incomplete financial reports.

Provision of services to the members

The lack of suitable management and organisation means that the providing of services by the organisation is not in keeping with the main objectives of the association. Despite this it attempts to achieve a good relationship with the players and the government, the parliament, NGOs, and companies. However, proposals for new legislation will not be issued, owing to which the dialogue may be fruitless as few of the agreements materialise in the form of binding legislation.

Communication strategy and policies

The lack of a communication strategy hinders the dissemination of the institutional objectives. Despite the fact that the association participates on some networks, the lack of clear objectives and goals also hampers the actions of lobbying.

Human resources: staff organisation, hiring staff, and the distribution of tasks

Many of these deficiencies are caused by numerous malfunctions in the management of human resources. The hiring policy has not been defined and is not based on merits or on professional experience, which is why trained technical staff is lacking. Moreover, as the survey reveals, in general the staff is unsatisfied owing among other factors to a lack of recognition and low pay. Consequently the management of joint projects is weak and the obtaining of results is an uphill task.

National Association of Mayors

<http://www.alcaldes.org.mx>

General aspects

Another association responsible for defending local autonomy in Mexico is the National Association of Mayors. Again we are concerned with a private law organisation consisting of mayors, governors, and presidents, the main aim of which is to address of the needs of local/regional players at a government level.

Design of strategic policy: strategic plan

The staff of the organisation is not particularly large, but its members have undergone technical training that qualifies them to carry out the Strategic Plan, which as it is implemented in a participative manner allows the compiling of the various stances regarding the actions to be undertaken in order to achieve the proposed objectives. Likewise a business plan is drawn up and work committees are established for those priority matters with which it is easier to achieve the social aims. Nevertheless, the project management capacity is diminished by the lack of staff.



Structure of Government bodies: operation and separation of duties

According to the survey, the association operates based on the correct separation of duties between the Governing Board, the Secretariat, and the respective Directors.

There is an organisation chart showing the duties of the members and reports are also drawn up in order to control and monitor the management. Meetings of the members are duly provided for and the Governing Board is elected in accordance with the rules of the association, thus facilitating staff transparency and the legal security of the duties.

Financial management of the resources

The association has funds estimated at 900,000 dollars of which less than 10% represents income from members' joining fees, which makes it difficult to cover operating costs. The financial management is carried out by the managing director, who together with duly selected technical staff is in charge of managing treasury flows, the budget, the follow-up of liquidity, financing, etc.

Provision of services to the members

As far as the services provided are concerned, the association offers a series of services directed by a series of local governments, but they are not duly coordinated and depend on donors to a large extent.

Communication strategy and policies

The correct use of communication technologies and strong negotiation with the players is insufficient for the creation of a solid communication strategy that allows the organisation to be present internationally and have an influence. There is participation on computer networks that are selected in a satisfactory manner according to the field in which an effect is desired.

Human resources: staff organisation, hiring methods, and the distribution of tasks

According to the survey, staff is hired based on professional training, merits, and experience, which means that although the staff is small it has the technical capacity to achieve the institutional aims. An aspect to be highlighted is the motivation felt within the association which leads to greater productivity.

3.3 Panama

Association of Municipalities of Panama (AMUPA)

<http://amupa.org.pa>

General aspects

The Association of Municipalities of Panama (*Asociación de Municipios de Panamá*, AMUPA) is a public law association of which membership is voluntary. It is made up of both municipalities, groups, and territorial entities and their mayors and the presidents of municipal councils. Its income comes from local funds (20,000 dollars), donations (150,000 dollars), cooperation funds (50,000 dollars) and other sources (8,000 dollars).

The main objectives of the association include: creating a national platform for local/regional players, creating services to strengthen local/regional players, and negotiating the decentralisation of skills and resources.

Design of the strategic policy: strategic plan

As the association reveals in its survey, although its capacity for managing projects is weak owing to the lack of technical staff, the association has a long-term strategic plan that has been drawn up in a participative manner. The plan describes the long-term objectives and the ongoing activities. Moreover, as far as possible an attempt is made to assess the achieving of objectives, together with the efficiency of the plans and programmes traced by means of follow-up systems and quantitative and qualitative indicators that allow the identifying of the strengths and weaknesses of the plans.

The association acts in a proactive manner; it uses appropriate local, regional, and international networks to try to achieve its goals and objectives.

Structure of Government bodies: operation and separation of duties

The government structure of the association and its duties are well delimited. It has an organisation chart that shows the distribution of the tasks among the governing board and the secretariat; according to that stated in the survey this distribution of duties is respected.

The board is mainly responsible for the political orientation of the association, the search for funds, and the assessment of the strategic plan. In any case, the higher authority of the association is the General Assembly which in general can count on the dynamic participation of the associates.

The association has work committees that allow the follow-up and the tackling of specific themes in areas of municipal interest.

Despite the fact that a transparency policy has not been expressly defined, the association issues reports on its activities and carries out audits to ensure the correct administration of the funds at its disposal.

Financial management of resources

The financial management is carried out through the managing director and the administrative personnel in charge of it. Based on what is indicated in the survey, the association has internal financial control systems and an attempt is made to comply with the financial management policies.

It is pointed out that the administrative staff is a small one but it has the necessary skills and training.

Provision of services to the members

According to the survey, the high quality of the services provided to the members, both individually and collectively, is one of the strong points of the organisation.

Communication strategy and policies

The association declares that it has a good communication policy that has its effect at both internal and external levels. The communication strategy has therefore made it easier to reach improved cooperation agreements with governments and to improve dialogue with the parliament, NGOs, and the private sector.





Human resources: staff organisation, hiring methods, and the distribution of tasks

The system for hiring the personnel is not exclusively based on merit and professional training. In general all the staff is familiar with its duties and the level of its responsibilities thanks to a clear organisation chart that specifies the duties of each worker and is updated regularly. All this leads to greater productivity and means that there is no overlap to slow down the achieving of objectives.

3.4 Guatemala

National Association of Municipalities of the Republic of Guatemala

<http://www.anam.org.gt>

General aspects

The National Association of Municipalities of the Republic of Guatemala was formed as a private law organisation that is national in scope. Its main objectives are the creating of a national platform for local/regional players and the creating of services to strengthen local/regional players.

The association is formed of municipalities and other groups and territorial entities; membership is compulsory. It has funds of some 600,000 dollars, of which 90% are local funds. It covers its operational costs with the contributions of its members, which for the most part are up-to-date with the payment of their fees.

Design of political strategy: strategic plan

According to that stated in the survey, the association has a high-quality strategic plan and the right staff to manage it. Although the projects included in the plan are not followed up and monitored by means of either quantitative or qualitative indicators, an ad hoc assessment considers the results in accordance with the designated objectives.

Structure of Government bodies: operation and separation of duties

According to that stated in the survey, the rules of the association take into account the appropriate separation of duties among the various government bodies of the association. The governing board is the body in charge of guaranteeing the political orientation of the institution, while the managing director is responsible for ensuring compliance with the strategic plan and the administrative management of the association.

Provision of services to the members

The providing of services largely depends on the support of international cooperation donors. The lack of coordination leads to overlapping.

Communication strategy and policies

The communication of the association has neither a clearly defined strategy nor the capacity to develop it, as the association itself declares in the survey. However, it participates on certain specific networks and makes good use of information technologies with the local administrations. This leads to an improved relationship with the players but this is insufficient to allow entering into cooperation agreements with governments or to count on international positioning.

Human resources: staff organisation, hiring methods, and the distribution of tasks

The tasks are correctly allocated to the staff and this is recorded in the association's organisation chart that is updated regularly. In accordance with that noted in the survey, the association has sufficient technical and administrative personnel. The staff receives reasonable pay and has undergone appropriate training. Despite this, the selection process is not always based on merit.

3.5 Costa Rica

National Association of Town Councils of Costa Rica (ANAI)

<http://anai.cr>

General aspects

The National Association of Town Councils of Costa Rica (*Asociación Nacional de Alcaldías e Intendencias de Costa Rica, ANAI*), which has its headquarters in the region of Heredia, is a private law organisation of which membership is voluntary. It is made up of mayors, governors and presidents and its main objectives are addressing the needs of local/regional players at a government level and defending the rights and guarantees of mayors as figures of local development.

Design of the strategic policy: strategic plan

The association has a strategic plan that has been developed in a participative manner and that brings together the medium-term and long-term objectives together with the programmes to be developed. A work committee is responsible for tackling priority matters and complying with the business plan. The fact of having good communication with the players involved allows the directing of the actions depending on the demand and the needs. In its turn, the association has assessment and monitoring systems for the policies and actions with qualitative and quantitative indicators that facilitate the follow-up of the strategic plan.

Structure of Government bodies: operation and separation of duties

The structure of the government bodies is well delimited. The separation between the duties of the Governing Board and the Secretariat is satisfactory.

The Board assumes the political orientation of the association together with decision-making on key matters. The managing director, who acts as a board member as far as decision-making is concerned, informs and proposes policies and actions and assumes leadership in the execution of the strategic plan in addition to its follow-up and assessment.

According to the survey, the internal work dynamics of the association is very well managed to allow the satisfactory coordination of the actions carried out and the obtaining of better results.

Financial management of the resources

According to the survey it is the managing director who carries out the financial management together with technical personnel trained for the purpose. They put into practice policies for administering the funds at their disposal, which amount to some 150,000 dollars. The duties carried out include the follow-up of liquidity at the appropriate time, the management of treasury flows, the budget, the financial statements, the financing operations, auditing, insurance management, the tax system, and solvency planning.



Provision of services to the members

The association provides services that are described in the survey as innovative and of high quality, although it is not specified to what extent this is so.

Communication strategy and policies

Despite having a website and being present on social networks, the association does not have a written and well organised communication strategy.

Human resources, staff organisation, hiring methods, and the distribution of tasks

Human resources are one of the main weaknesses of the association as it notes in the survey; there is a lack of technical and administrative personnel. Nevertheless, this small staff is selected rigorously based on criteria of training, skills, and experience and is therefore capable of managing high quality projects and of obtaining additional financing. Moreover, the motivation of the members of organisation encourages efficient work methods that increase productivity and make it easier to obtain results.

National Union of Local Governments

General aspects.

The National Union of Local Governments is a national association with the objectives of addressing the needs of local/regional players at a government level, creating services to strengthen local/regional players, negotiating the decentralisation of skills and resources, and providing a space for networking. The association has an income of 1 million dollars from local funds.

Design of the strategic policy: strategic plan

The Union has a strategic plan that has been drawn up in a participative manner, and which according to the survey is based on the actual concerns of the association. The plan includes a system of quantitative and qualitative indicators that allow its follow-up and assessment.

Structure of Government bodies: operation and separation of duties

The distinction of the roles of the governing board and the secretariat is clear.

The Board is chosen and acts in accordance with the internal rules of the association; it is mainly concerned with decision-making regarding key matters and the political orientation of the association.

The association also has working groups that take care of the association's priority matters.

Despite the fact that it has no specific transparency policy, the association draws up reports on activities and also holds internal audits to ensure the correct execution of the actions it carries out.

Financial management of the resources

The managing director, supported by the administrative team, assumes the financial management of the association. Internal financial control rules and regulations exist in order to ensure compliance with the policies and procedures of financial management.



Provision of services to the members

The association declares in the survey that it provides innovative high-quality services to its members (both individually and collectively) in key areas of the local administration, although it does not specify which these are.

Communication strategies and policies

The association does not have a duly established communication strategy orientated towards a common objective. From the survey it transpires that the media strategy and the communication with the players need to be strengthened. Despite everything, interaction occurs on some computer platforms and an electronic bulletin is produced to keep the members up-to-date.

Human resources: staff organisation, hiring methods, and the distribution of tasks

A surplus of administrative staff is noted and a shortage of technical staff with updated knowledge. The personnel selection process is not based on merit and there are no ongoing training strategies.

4. Andean Region

In recent years the Andean region has undergone an important process of reform, which in most cases has allowed progress in the bid for decentralisation. To a lesser or greater extent all the countries in the region have redefined their territorial organisation model, although some have done so by recovering power towards the central structures and others, the majority, by allocating powers to different levels of subnational, municipal, and intermediate administration (regions, provinces, or *departamentos*).

Venezuela is the only country in the region that takes the form of a federally organised state. Despite this, because of its political situation it seems to have moved in the opposite direction to the remainder of the countries, as it has experienced a highly relevant process of the recentralisation of powers and the weakening of sub-national entities.

In contrast, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru have made decentralisation a political priority which in some cases has given rise to major constitutional reform. The decentralisation processes have been accompanied by the transferring of more resources and a considerable effort has been made to promote the institutional and operative capacities of sub-national governments. Logically on the other hand, much work still remains to be done.

In parallel with these processes, associations of municipalities and regions have played an important part as political interlocutors with the central governments. In any case their potential depends on the countries. Colombia and Ecuador have long-established associations that are relatively well structured and consolidated and their ability to influence governments is far from negligible.

In contrast, the associations of Bolivia and Peru are still relatively weak and lack the resources that are needed to bring real pressure to bear on governments. Finally, in Venezuela the Association of Mayors of Venezuela has very few resources and little visibility in a country in which the confrontation between some mayors and governors and the central government has become notorious and is causing concern.

It should be noted that some of the most experienced associations in the region, such as the Colombian Federation of Municipalities or the Federation of Municipal Associations of Bolivia (*Federación de Asociaciones Municipales de Bolivia*, FAM) have not answered the survey and are therefore not included in the report. The situation is the same with the Association of Mayors of Venezuela; although it replied to the survey it gave so little information that we have not been able to present it.



4.1 Bolivia

Association of Municipalities of Bolivia

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Asociacion-de-Municipalidades-de-Bolivia-AMB/286327128239944>

General aspects

The Association of Municipalities of Bolivia has become one of the interlocutors of Bolivian municipalism to the central government in the process of decentralisation and the strengthening of local and regional governments in the country. It is an entity that has been formed on the basis of private law and voluntary membership.

According to what is indicated in the survey, the relationship of the association with the government is not a fluid one, which hinders the establishing of cooperation agreements to strengthen the services offered to the associates.

Design of the strategic policy: strategic plan

The association has a Strategic Plan by means of which it approaches the development of the priorities agreed by the members. It does not however have follow-up and assessment mechanisms, which makes it difficult to adapt the plan to new needs that arise deriving from the changing political and social situation.

Structure of Government bodies: operation and separation of duties

The Association is recognised as an independent organisation with its own internal rules and regulations. It is structured around a governing board and a secretariat, two authorities which according to that stated in the survey have clearly identified the tasks and responsibilities they are to assume.

Financial management of the resources

As transpires from the survey, the Association shapes its budget by means of the obtaining of local funds, donations, or cooperation funds. Less than 10% of its income comes from contributions from the members themselves, it being evident that these resources alone are not sufficient to cover the costs of the operations programmed.

It is also revealed that the Association operates by using a rudimentary accounting system as many of its financial reports are incomplete.

The financial management corresponds to the managing director, who has administrative personnel in charge of this aspect.

Provision of services to the members

The association concentrates a large part of its activities on having an effect on politics and on defending the interests of the association itself and its members.

Communication strategy and policies

The association does not have a well-defined communication strategy. It is present on Facebook but does not have a website.

Human resources: staff organisation, hiring methods, and the distribution of tasks

The Association has an organisation chart with the descriptions of the tasks that must be carried out by each member of its staff. One of the main difficulties of the association is that it has insufficient staff for implementing all its projects, which is closely linked to the shortage of resources.

4.2 Ecuador

Association of Ecuadoran Municipalities

<http://www.ame.gob.ec>

General aspects

The Association of Ecuadoran Municipalities was established with the double aim of on the one hand becoming an authority for the communication of municipalism with the central government and on the other of providing services to its associates.

This institution has been legally incorporated and is governed by public law; membership is compulsory.

It has a budget of some 12 million dollars proceeding from transfers (although this is not specified we assume these come from the central government) and from the fees paid by its members (90% of which are up-to-date with their payments).

Design of the strategic policy: strategic plan

This association has a strategic plan that has been drawn up with the participation of all interested members and players. The plan develops the medium and long term objectives, the specific strategies, the programmes to tackle, and a financial plan.

The plan also includes a follow-up and assessment mechanism based on a system of predefined indicators. The follow-up and the assessment allow the Executive Board to tackle its revision and adaptation to the context of the country.

Structure of Government bodies: operation and separation of duties

The association is structured around an Executive Board and a Secretariat. Both have different functions and responsibilities that are correctly delimited.

As far as the Executive Board is concerned, its main function is that of making decisions in relation to political matters, fundraising, and the implementation of the strategic plan. Moreover, it will be in charge of the supervision of the managing directors, the main duty of which will be the execution of the decisions adopted by the Executive Board.

As for the Secretariat, its main duty is to provide advice to the Executive Board, informing it of the actions that are being carried out.

A general assembly has also been created in which all associates take part; it meets once a year with the aim of defining the priorities of the Association.





Financial management of the resources

It has a well-structured system of financial and accounting management. The administrative personnel has the necessary skills and training to carry out this management and to ensure that it is done in a transparent and rigorous manner.

Strategy and communication policies

Despite the fact that the association has a website and is present on several social networks, it does not appear to have a well-defined communication strategy.

Human resources: staff organisation, hiring methods, and the distribution of tasks

The survey mentions that both the technical and administrative staff of the association is appropriate and well trained in order to carry out the activities that it assumes. The staff members therefore know their tasks and responsibilities according to the predefined organisation chart.

5. Southern Cone

Of the 5 countries included in the region, two are federal republics (Argentina and Brazil); one is structured around a unitary decentralised system (Uruguay); and the two remaining countries are unitary with a clearly centralised power system (Chile and Paraguay).

In both Argentina and Brazil sub-national governments, municipalities, and states or provinces have considerable powers and resources. It is significant to note that in both countries there are associations representing the interests of municipal governments, while intermediate governments, provinces, and states do not have associative authorities that facilitate dialogue with the government of the nation.

It should also be pointed out that of the two main local government associations of Brazil, the National Confederation of Municipalities (CNM) and the National Front of Prefects, only the former answered the survey. These are two consolidated associations that have considerable resources and powers of influence at a national and international level.

Uruguay, for its part, has been involved for some years in a decentralisation process that has been designed to implement among other things a third level of government (municipal) in a country that has been traditionally structured around provinces as basic territorial units. It is for this reason that the only associative authority of local representation is the National Congress of Mayors, a consolidated space that brings together the 17 mayors of the country and which currently aims to open up to the new municipalities.

Finally, in both Chile and Paraguay decentralisation is still a matter pending. In both countries associations of municipalities operate (and in Paraguay also associations of provinces) that are recognised as interlocutors of the central government, although their effect is very limited.



5.1 Argentina

Argentinian Federation of Municipalities

<http://www.famargentina.org.ar>

General Aspects

The Argentinian Federation of Municipalities is a national entity, the membership of which by the municipalities is voluntary. It transpires from the survey that its main objective is that of defending municipal autonomy from state institutions, thus exercising a principle that is recognised in the National Constitution. In consequence, the association holds the representation of the associated municipalities before the representative powers of the State, the provincial authorities, the agencies, foreign and international bodies, organisations, associations, and programmes linked to municipal tasks.

Moreover, it aims to achieve a common direction among the municipalities in such a way that joint strategies can be drawn up with the clear aim of defending municipal interests. This aim is tackled not only in the establishing and pursuing of common objectives, but also in the exchanging of information on all matters linked to any municipal affairs, which makes the coordination and organising of programmes attainable.

It also tries to encourage government decisions favouring the decentralisation of powers in favour of municipal bodies.

Finally, the association maintains links with similar associations in other countries with the aim of encouraging the exchanging of information, documentation, and experiences so as to improve the development of programmes and actions of common interest.

Design of the strategic policy: strategic plan

The Federation has a strategic plan that reflects all the objectives that it aims to achieve. Despite this, it transpires from the survey that it has not created formal mechanisms of assessment and follow-up in accordance with the objectives established in the strategic plan.

Structure of Government bodies: operation and separation of duties

This association was created by National Law 24.807, which defines it as a non-state public entity. Membership is voluntary.

As far as its internal structure is concerned, it transpires from the survey that there is a clear division between the objectives and responsibilities attributed to the Executive Board and the Secretariat, in such a way that there is a balance of power between both bodies. The Executive Board is attributed powers such as decision-making in relation to key political matters, fundraising, bringing orientation and experience to the Federation, and even establishing the policies and the follow-up and supervision of the Managing Directors.

On the other hand, the main function of the Secretariat is to advise the Executive Board on decision-making and the proposing and informing of the policies and actions that could fit in with the organisation.

Both bodies are therefore attributed the mission of leading and managing the activities of the Federation in a strategic manner and in such a way that its main objective is the implementing of the strategic plan.





On the other hand, the Federation also has a General Assembly with a clear constitution and a rationalised structure. Essentially the Federation meets once a year, establishing an open debate that aims to define the political stance and priorities of the association. The holding of the General Assembly is an important milestone for local authorities as it allows them to become familiar with the activities carried out by the Federation.

Finally, it also transpires from the survey that the Federation has a technical advisory body, the CECAM, which is made up of professionals from various disciplines.

Financial management of the resources

Despite the fact that the origin of the funds is not identified, the survey reveals that the Federation implements and follows a complete set of written policies for the administration of the funds, which cover the authorisation of the expenses and other procedures of financial and accounting management. In this manner they maintain a strategy of the monitoring of the cash flow management, the budgets, the balance sheets, the financing operations, the auditing, taxes, insurance management, and solvency planning.

Provision of services to the members

In the field of the providing of services, the association has the capacity and sufficient resources to put forward project proposals to generate additional funds itself and thus implement the activities corresponding to its strategic objectives.

Communication strategy and policies

The Federation declares that it has a good communication policy.

As for new technologies, the Federation is visible by means of its website but shows no active communication on social networks. This corresponds with that established in the survey, in the sense that no communication strategy has been defined but rather several options are considered concerning these activities but always on an ad hoc basis.

Human resources: staff organisation, hiring methods, and the distribution of tasks

In contrast to other associations, in its survey the Federation reveals that its staff has a clear idea of the tasks, responsibilities, and authority attributed to it, in such a way that this tends to guarantee the results obtained within the organisation. There is an organisation chart for this purpose that reflects the various roles and is regularly updated.

Those in charge of the Federation declare in the survey that the personnel in its entirety is hired based exclusively on meritocracy and professional experience. The training plans take personal development plans into account. All staff members have the same training opportunities in order to improve their skills and performance. This means that the staff is highly motivated to obtain results and productivity is high.

5.2 Brazil

National Confederation of Municipalities

<http://www.cnm.org.br>

General aspects

The National Confederation of Municipalities (CNM) of Brazil is one of the most important associations and with the greatest resources of the region. It consists of 3196 associated local governments of the 3799 found in the country.

This entity is subject to private law and membership is voluntary.

It has a considerable budget of some 12 million dollars, of which some 75% comes from transfers (which are not specified) and somewhat over 15% from international cooperation.

Its fundamental objective is to promote the interests of Brazilian local governments, to support the process of decentralisation and local autonomy, and to provide a space for local governments to meet and make arrangements.

Design of the strategic policy: strategic plan

The organisation has a strategic plan that defines the objectives of the association and the main areas of work that it proposes. It does not however have a formalised monitoring and assessment system.

The survey declares that it has an unwritten strategy of financial viability and sustainability.

Structure of Government bodies: operation and separation of duties

The CNM has a regulation that specifies the operation of its government bodies. In the survey it declares that there is a clear separation of roles between the governing board and the secretariat. The board assumes the political management of the organisation while the secretariat carries out the technical and administrative tasks to ensure the correct operation of the various government bodies and the satisfactory providing of services.

The organisation has a specific transparency policy that is well defined and implemented.

Financial management of the resources

It has the appropriate technical and administrative resources to ensure satisfactory financial management with duly formalised specific procedures. Audits are carried out.

Provision of services to the members

The CNM is essentially an organisation that concentrates on its political effect and on communication with the national government in order to promote local government interests. It also provides a space for dialogue and exchange between members (and with other national and international players). By means of its various communication channels it provides its members with information and knowledge. It also provides services of technical assistance and in fields such as training.





Communication strategy and training

It has an important communication strategy although this has not been formalised.

It has a well-known and acknowledged web portal together with considerable presence on social networks.

Human resources: staff organisation, hiring methods, and the distribution of tasks

The CNM has a team of 124 people with an important technical component (106 technicians). According to that stated in the survey, the profiles of the organisation are satisfactory and it pays competitive wages. It has the necessary organic structure to carry out its missions.

5.3 Paraguay

Inter-municipal Cooperation Organisation of Paraguay (OPACI)

<http://www.opaci.org.py>

General Aspects

The Inter-municipal Cooperation Organisation of Paraguay (*Organización Paraguaya de Cooperación Intermunicipal*, OPACI) is the main interlocutor of local governments with the central government of Paraguay. It focusses its attention on strengthening the decentralisation process and on providing services that strengthen the capacities of its associates.

It is a private law association of which membership is voluntary.

Design of strategic policy: strategic plan

The OPACI has a strategic plan on which it structures its activities. According to that noted in the survey, the plan contemplates follow-up and assessment tools, which should allow its adjusting to the real needs of local governments.

Structure of Government bodies: operation and separation of duties

The organisation is structured around a governing board, a secretariat, and a managing director. The duties of these bodies are duly defined.

It has no formal policy of transparency and accountability.

Financial management of accounts

According to that stated in the survey, the OPACI has a suitable financial management system together with the necessary human resources to follow up the accounts of the association.

Provision of services to the members

As a result of this financing strategy, the OPACI can provide several services to all its members in the developing of their proposals as a local government. It therefore not only has the capacity to develop projects but also obtains the necessary results to carry them out. All this is in line with its strategic objectives.

Communication strategy and communication policies

Despite the fact that it has various communication channels, a website, and a Facebook account, the association does not seem to have a consolidated communication strategy.

Human resources: staff organisation, hiring methods, and the distribution of tasks

According to that expounded in the survey, the OPACI has the appropriate human resources to carry out its duties.

5.4 Uruguay

Congress of Mayors

<http://www.ci.gub.uy>

General aspects

The Congress of Mayors is the main interlocutor of the central government in the decentralisation process. It consists of a platform for coordinating the strategy of the various town councils, together with a body that provides services to its associates.

The Congress recently acquired legal personality of its own in the form of an institution subject to public law of which membership is compulsory.

Its budget originates from contributions of the town councils, from transfers from the central government, and from donations from international cooperation. It also manages the collecting of road tax which gives it certain economic stability.

Design of strategic policy: strategic plan

Despite the fact that the association states that it has a clear objective it does not have a strategic plan. It transpires from the survey that all its activities are based on short-term planning drawn up by the staff in charge of the association, which is often affected by financial cycles and economic crises.

An attempt is made to carry out a follow-up and an internal assessment of the activities carried out by the association.

Structure of Government bodies: operation and separation of duties

Despite the fact that its regulations clearly delimit the duties of the various bodies, the survey states that there is confusion concerning the responsibilities of the Governing Board of the entity and the Secretariat.

It is also indicated that the institutional structures are suitable for the purposes of the association as there are efficient control and internal transparency mechanisms.

Financial management of the resources

The survey reveals that financial management has certain limitations both as far as the mechanisms established and the powers of the staff responsible are concerned.





Provision of services to the members

For its part the association also offers a series of services aimed at local governments, but there are major coordination difficulties insofar as the resources for carrying them out are insufficient. The sustainability of these services depends to a large extent on contributions from international donors.

Communication strategy and policies

The Congress neither has a communication strategy nor the appropriate tools, especially as far as social networks are concerned.

Human resources: staff organisation, hiring methods, and the distribution of tasks

The survey notes major weaknesses in the shaping of the staff and its powers.

5.5 Chile

Association of Municipalities of Chile

<http://www.munitel.cl>

General aspects

The Association of Municipalities of Chile is one of the two associations operating in that country. It is the institution that brings together Chilean local governments and watches over their interests. The association channels political dialogue with the central government as far as the process of decentralisation and the strengthening of the powers of local governments is concerned. It provides services that aim to strengthen the powers of its associates.

This association is subject to public law and membership is compulsory.

It has a budget of approximately half a million dollars that mainly originates from local funds.

Design of strategic policy: strategic plan

The association has a written strategic plan, the development of which depends to a large extent on the economic resources at its disposal. According to what is indicated in the survey by the association itself, the plan includes a follow-up and assessment system that concentrates on its implementation.

Structure of Government bodies: operation and separation of duties

As transpires from the survey, the association is structured around a general assembly, a governing board, and its corresponding secretariat. Despite the fact that it should be the higher authority, the survey reveals that the assembly takes on few genuine responsibilities.

The survey reveals that the association has rules that regulate its internal operation and also a specific transparency strategy that includes the drawing up of management reports and the carrying out of internal auditing.



Final management of the resources

The association has established a financial management system in keeping with its objectives. In the survey it is noted that it has the necessary resources and administrative personnel with suitable training and powers.

Provision of services to the members

The association claims to provide innovative high quality services in key areas of local administration. Its main activity is concentrated on its political influence and the promotion of the role played by local governments. It provides services in the fields of training and the generating of knowledge and the exchanging of experiences. Its international projection is very limited.

Communication strategy and policies

Despite the fact that it has no specific communication strategy, the association has tools suitable for the dissemination of its activities and those of its members. It has a structured presence on social networks.

Human resources: staff organisation, hiring methods, and the distribution of tasks

The association notes in the survey that it has sufficient technical and administrative personnel to carry out the tasks entrusted to it. Working conditions are satisfactory insofar as competitive wages are paid and ongoing training is provided in fields related to the responsibilities assumed by the staff.





6. Regional entities

As we have noted, there are platforms operating in Latin America that provide regional or sub-regional cover. The following should be emphasised:

The Latin American and Caribbean Federation of Towns, Municipalities, and Local Government Associations (*Federación Latinoamericana y del Caribe de Ciudades, Municipios y Asociaciones de gobiernos locales*, FLACMA) (<http://www.flacma.com>) was founded in 1981 as the Latin American branch of the International Union of Local Authorities (IULA), which is today United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG). It is the federation of local government associations of the region and its activities concentrate on promoting decentralisation and local autonomy. Its headquarters is in Quito.

Mercociudades (<http://www.mercociudades.org>) was founded in 1995 and is the network of cities and local governments of Mercosur. For years it has been an important player in the regional integration process in the Southern Cone. It also seeks to provide a space for dialogue and exchange between the cities of the region. The official leadership of the network corresponds to the Executive Secretariat, a rotating authority chosen for periods of one year and which has the support of the Permanent Technical Secretariat, with its headquarters in Montevideo.

The Network of South American Cities (*Red de ciudades sudamericanas*, Redcisur) (<http://www.redciudadessudamericanas.org>) is a regional platform that has recently been created (2012) and brings together some of the main cities of the region with the objective of establishing a platform of integration and union to encourage dialogue, to strengthen democracy and governability, and to build a collective South American identity. Redcisur also aims to constitute a platform for the exchanging of good practices to consolidate social cohesion and equity policies. It is structured by means of a general assembly, an impulse committee, and a Secretariat and has its headquarters in Bogotá.

7. Other entities

Apart from the networks operating in a regional or sub-regional capacity, it is worth emphasising the interest and the outstanding character of the experience of the National Forum of Secretaries and Municipal Managers of International Relations (*Fórum Nacional de Secretários y Gestores Municipais de Relações Internacionais*, FONARI) (<https://blogfonari.wordpress.com>), a platform that brings together the secretaries and managers of international relations of the main cities and states of Brazil.

Its objective is to promote the interest and coordinate actions of local governments and the Brazilian states in the field of international relations. It seeks to strengthen its powers of operation as a legitimate player on the international scenario and to maintain a fluid dialogue with other levels of government and with learned society, the private sector, and civil society.

It is a platform with voluntary membership and with no legal personality of its own. Neither does it have a specific budget.

CONCLUSIONS

The first point that needs to be made before proceeding to the conclusions of this report is the difficulty of undertaking a valid analytical study starting from a limited baseline. In effect the information contained in the surveys sent by the local government associations identified provide limited knowledge of their functions and the context within which they operate.

Without going as far as assessing the relevance of the questions included in the survey, it does seem clear that it is a tool of subjective self-assessment. Moreover, the fact that a significant part of the surveys are incomplete has further hindered our aim of drawing a more detailed picture of the situation of Latin American associations.

It is also appropriate to point out that some of the most experienced and best consolidated associations in the region such as the National Confederation of Municipalities and the National Front of Prefects in Brazil, the Colombian Federation of Municipalities, the Federation of Municipal Associations of Bolivia, FEDOMU of the Dominican Republic, and the Corporation of Municipalities of El Salvador did not reply to the survey and are therefore not included in this study.

In any case, and once we have mentioned the difficulties encountered in analysing the information available, some conclusions can be drawn which are no less important for being generic.

Firstly it can be said that Latin America has institutionalised associations in practically all of its countries. These institutions have long experience and are duly acknowledged in the national context within which they operate.

However, Latin America is a heterogeneous context as far as local government associations are concerned. The associations operating in the region do so under varying situations. Some countries have strong associations with major resources and a contrasted capacity to influence the political agendas of their countries; others on the contrary have much weaker associations that lack resources and have considerable difficulties in complying with their foundational objectives.

Practically all Latin American associations have a legal personality, which facilitates their recognition as valid interlocutors and their capacity of providing services for their associates. It should also be mentioned that there is no homogeneity as to the law by which they are bound (public or private). In general, when they are regulated by public law they are recognised as public institutions and are of compulsory membership. On the contrary, when they are governed by private law they take the form of private associations with voluntary membership, although exceptions do exist.

The study also reflects the degree of Independence of the associations from central governments and political parties. In general, most of them declare their independence from state, executive, legislative, and judicial powers and from political parties. From their very nature however, associations tend to be subject to the party situation of their countries, which on occasion constitutes a difficulty in the assuming of the duties allocated to them.

There is no doubt that the case of Mexican associations is the most paradigmatic, as four of the six associations coexisting in the country correspond to a strongly defined party slant. The situation is the same in Brazil with one association closer to the current government and the other more distant from it. In Venezuela and Bolivia the associations correspond to the parties of the opposition and reveal in the surveys their open confrontation with the central government.





As for their governance, it should be pointed out that most of the surveys reveal a correct division of duties between the government bodies and the technical and administrative management structures. Although in some cases it is indicated that there are weaknesses in these political bodies, especially in the general assemblies, others reveal the lack of resources in order to ensure satisfactory financial management and the establishing of appropriate internal and external control mechanisms.

The survey examines the powers of the associations in detail.

Firstly it is mentioned that most associations have a formalised strategic plan or strategic orientations included in ad hoc work plans. Most of the surveys analysed point to the clarity of the mission, the objectives, and the areas of work established in the plans in addition to the will to open up the definition of the strategies and the priorities to the whole of the operators concerned (local governments, central governments, civil society, the private sector, etc...) and to establish efficient follow-up and assessment mechanisms.

At the same time however, the limitation of technical and administrative resources suffered by some associations is revealed, which affects the implementing of the projects and actions included in the plans. In these cases the written approved plans are not complied with or are complied with only partially and the instruments for following up and assessing their implementation are deficient, which makes it difficult to obtain knowledge that allows the adjustment of the strategies and areas of work.

The surveys also focus on their budget and financial capacity. Here too the differences are evident. Some associations, such as the CNM in Brazil, operate with large budgets which allows them to count on considerable human and material resources. This has a strong effect on the quality of their attitudes and on the visibility and the quality of the services they provide.

On the contrary, others lack sufficient resources and this has an impact on the activities they carry out. It is recorded that a large proportion of the associations operate with local resources (which originate from state subsidies) and contributions from international cooperation donors; they can only count on the fees of their members to cover their operating costs. Financial sustainability is very relative, which in some cases limits their capacity of providing services and the quality and appropriateness of the latter.

In general the lack of financial resources explains the lack of human resources for assuming the duties entrusted to them. It is not merely a case of a lack of numbers but of the people contracted having the necessary skills and training and also of the existence of programmes designed to strengthen these skills.

The dependence on external resources, in particular on international cooperation, means that in some cases the actions include heterogeneous themes or those of less demand. The surveys reveal the difficulty of coordinating the actions financed by international cooperation and questions the efficiency of some of the projects financed.

There is no doubt that the field in which the associations operate with the greatest solvency, recognition, and legitimacy is that of political influence. Most countries recognise the role of interlocutors with the central government in everything referring to local matters and the legislature in all laws affecting the powers of local governments. Here too there is a great contrast between the capacity to exert an influence of the associations with the greatest resources and those that operate with serious limitations.

Another of the relative elements that is revealed in the study is the gap between the bid for transparency and the establishing of actual effective mechanisms that make it possible. Therefore, while most of the associations analysed clearly reveal the will to count on tools guaranteeing transparency, an analysis of the replies received as a whole reveals that not all associations have instruments to guarantee access to information or accountability beyond the drawing up of the habitual management reports. The case of the Associations of Municipalities of Ecuador (AME) and the CNM in Brazil, which appear to have made a clear effort in this direction, should be stressed.

Finally, the study analyses the communication strategies of the associations identified. Here too the disparities are considerable. Some associations have an important presence in the media and on social networks and have the necessary means to obtain visibility. Others show important deficiencies. Almost all the associations have websites and Facebook and Twitter accounts but there is not always a clear strategy of what they wish to communicate and how they wish to communicate it. It is a field in which support is needed as communication is decisive in order to ensure the satisfactory visibility of local governments in environments in which they coincide and “compete” with other operators with greater resources and powers.

In order to bring this study to an end we must stress the contrast and the differences that exist between the associations of the various Latin American countries. As we have noted, it is not a homogeneous sector; associations with long experience, great potential, and a strong capacity for exerting influence coexist with associations with structural weaknesses that prevent them from fulfilling their function.

In any case, local government associations play an important part in the governability of Latin American countries, owing to which in many cases they require considerable support in order to strengthen their structures by professionalising their teams, ensuring their autonomy and opening them up to citizens by means of more efficient and transparent management.







PLATFORMA

The European voice of **Local** and
Regional authorities for development

www.platforma-dev.eu

Secretariat ensured by CEMR

Square de Meeûs, 1

B-1000 Brussels

Tel: +32 2 265 09 30



With the financial support of the European Commission

The Commission is not responsible for any use
that may be made of the information contained therein