



Workshop summary:

Communicating about the international action of local governments

Friday, 6 July 2018 from 9am to 3pm – Cités Unies France¹, 9 rue Christini 75018 Paris

Objective:

Communication is a priority that helps democratize the process that all public policies must go through. The aim is to involve the different stakeholders, disseminate messages by adapting them to the relevant audience and mobilize shared knowledge and experiences.

With internationalization actions, creating a comprehensive communication strategy helps raise awareness and get the different local stakeholders involved as well as develop a shared message and perceptions based on local identities. This awareness-raising process seeks to promote greater participation, dialogue and cooperation in building the international relations policy of local governments.

Participants:

The workshop was jointly organized by the United Cities of France, the General Coordination of the Euro-Latin American Alliance of Cooperation among Cities, AL-LAs, and PLATFORMA.² It was attended by around thirty people: elected officials, representatives of the international relations offices of the French local governments; members of CUF, European members of Platforma; and Latin American members of AL-LAs, as well as representatives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, United Cities and Local Governments, UCLG, and Union of Ibero American Capital Cities, UCCI.

¹ Written by Estelle Hédouin for Cités Unies France based on the simultaneous interpretation.

² The organizers are grateful to Jeannette Velez, director of Glocal Actions and Solutions and Anne Szejnberg, international consultant for their support in the preparation and realization of the workshop.

Background information from the AL-LAs General Coordinator

While “internationalization is not an end in itself and must be used as a tool to support the democratic process³”, communication is, by definition, the spokesperson. Communication on internationalization is a formidable opportunity to build visions to underpin regional social cohesion. It is also a constant challenge given that international relations occur at a scale likely to attract criticism from the local opposition government. A foreign trip by the mayor or members of their team is sure to be labelled “administrative tourism” or called out by the press as a poor trade-off to the detriment of local priorities.

To get around, soften or even entirely avoid this type of criticism, a communication strategy needs to be developed in advance. This strategy must get across clear and credible messages to raise awareness among three target audiences:

- 1 Internal communication within the local government:** after having learned about the international action, civil servants develop a shared vision of it and become stakeholders.
- 2 External communication to local organizations and stakeholders:** the aim is to get stakeholders involved in every stage of the international strategy depending on specific objectives.
- 3 External communication to citizens:** share simple messages with citizens to build a common vision to support internationalization.

As Anne Szejnberg, AL-LAs consultant, explained, the AL-LAs network has worked at each of these levels so that participating cities can create a **public, participatory and cross-cutting international action** policy that addresses each level, as illustrated by the various cities represented at the table.



“Communicating about the international action of local government is challenging but it is also an opportunity. It must be strategically implemented.”

Anne Szejnberg, international consultant

³ Closing remarks by Nelson Fernandez, AL-LAs, at the seminar on 5 July 2018 held at the Hôtel de Ville de Paris: “Achieving sustainable internationalization in cities – Comparing Latin American and European perspectives.”



Internal communication: How do you involve other departments in the international action?

"Communication is far from obvious to the areas of international relations in cities," says Paola Arjona, Technical Director of the AL-LAs network. AL-LAs has accompanied some of its members, in co-construction of communication strategies. For example, the communication strategy of the Metropolitan District of Quito, during Habitat III, in 2016, was conceived with the support of the general coordination of AL-LAs; and the one for Montevideo, in 2018 as part of the internationalization policy of its local government.



Create a coherent and coordinated internal structure

In Montevideo, the first step was to "centralize the international action" to be able to justify each trip by an employee or elected official as a way to support international relations. Next, the director of international relations preferred to head off problems by not communicating about international relations directly. "If there is an international meeting on the environment, or on economic development, we send someone from the relevant department. We do it, but don't communicate about it because with social media, you can't control everything. You have to communicate on the positive results, but not on how you got there. International relations are not an issue but rather a way to coordinate actions between a department and the office of international relations."

AL-LAs recently assisted Montevideo in putting together a workshop on communication. The participants understood the importance of raise awareness and communication as two of the axes of Montevideo's internationalization strategy. This activity allowed to establishing a channel of dialogue and interinstitutional articulation to identify issues and priority axes of Montevideo's internationalization strategy with a public policy vision.

The government of Mexico City aimed to create a well-coordinated and shared vision and ensure strong knowledge of rules to follow for internationalization. These rules are then shared with the other departments so they can see what can be done at their level. "In Mexico, without structured guidelines, nothing gets implemented," said the General Coordinator of Administrative Modernization of Mexico City, before adding, "If there are no ties between departments, there is room for criticism. The more they work together, the less criticism there is of the International Relations Office."



Build a communication strategy

To this end, the initial step is to consider the following: Who is the audience? What are the priority messages and key ideas to be communicated? Which areas should be communicated first? This first step helps determine what needs to be shared internally and then externally in a more precise way.

Next, thought needs be given to which tools and channels should be used to communicate. For example:



Newsletter sent to all city employees to communicate on positive results of international activities



An awareness-raising workshop to help people understand the priorities as well as the difficulties of international action

Training courses, as some civil servants do not have an opportunity to learn about the international scope

The viewpoints of other departments, for which international relations may first appear to simply be an additional burden to which communication must also be added, must be taken into account. In Mexico, a training course for various city departments, communication staff and journalists helped share the vision, technical language and best practices of the local government's international action.

Local governments can create training courses on how to represent themselves and the city internationally and developing intercultural and language skills, which, when lacking, can be a genuine barrier to including other city employees.

Friendly, inclusive debates on the international dimension of each of the city's departments

Sharing international action between departments: The example of the city of Córdoba

The city of Córdoba has experienced its share of criticism and difficulties with regards to its internationalisation. The Director of International Relations for the city of Córdoba explained the constructive process that she has gradually been able to implement in the city's various departments and key resources such as the university, chamber of commerce, and several civil society organizations. The international relations department has a team of eight people and a small conference room. City employees are regularly 'invited' to use the space. "We are known for our friendliness. We created a forum for discussion to let employees – who are often working under pressure – talk together for half an hour. They get a break from their everyday routines and feel appreciated and responsible for issues outside their usual scope of responsibility. If you don't feel responsible, you can't expect your team to feel responsible. It is also important to raise the awareness among mayors."

"This creates a genuine cross-cutting approach within the city. They often have a hard time seeing how they are connected, but with these internationalization meetings, they understand better. It's a space that creates links and synergy and brings departments together."

Noelia Erika Wayar, Córdoba

Create a link with the international agenda and/or with sustainable development goals

It is then possible to share the mayor's agenda as well as the international agenda to see which departments are affected by the upcoming deadlines. However, as Adrien Licha from PLATFORMA mentioned, it is impossible to become an international relations specialist overnight, and not just any employee can be sent to represent the city as an expert in the field without prior training. Assistance from international relations specialists is needed.

Create a shared culture and vision of internationalization between the departments

International action of local government is a recent development in political history and time should be taken to share positive experiences to support change.

Planning ahead: The example of the city of Rio de Janeiro

Before each of the Rio de Janeiro mayor's trips, his agenda is shared during a meeting with the various city departments to identify the different areas covered by the trip. The communication department is also involved in the lead-up to control the narrative in all media with regards to the priorities and reasons for the trip to avoid criticism and develop awareness about the importance of this level of public policy. For Aline Abreu, international relations advisor for the City of Rio, "there is always criticism. You have to take it into account and think about what you can accept or not."

2 External communication towards regional organizations: adapting the message to the target audience

In line with the AL-LAs project, the aim is to take a participatory approach to building international action in the region. After determining what needs to be communicated externally, the international relations department can, for example:

- Identify the key stakeholders with which to implement the international action, with the aim of gaining a better understanding of the actions they are already involved in and their expectations for the region and to hear their proposals
- Share how the International Relations Office action is also relevant to key stakeholders Show the impact of the Office of International Relations in the different key actors and sectors involved in local internationalization.
- Create joint working spaces that allow people to learn about and understand the strategy for international action of local government and adjust it to other international relations stakeholders with a view to harmonizing expectations and goals and taking all needs into account
- Get help from communication professionals to be able to react skilfully and quickly update essential communication tool such as a website or intranet site
- Build narratives based on the work carried out jointly with other regional stakeholders
- Small local governments can also get support from networks such as Cités Unies France (CUF), the Andalusian Fund of Municipalities for International Solidarity (FAMSI), and the Alianza eurolatinoamericana de cooperación entre ciudades (AL-LAs) to work on their communication strategies and access resources to learn about small-scale initiatives.

"We are not communicators but rather communication facilitators. We help create the right conditions to ensure there is always an emitter and a receiver. You always need two people to communicate; otherwise, communication is pointless."

Juan Carlos Diaz, FAMSI





The support of local government networks to communicate about internationalization

The example of UCCI

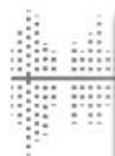
The Union of Ibero-American Capital Cities in Madrid has built a network of communicators and identified the key points for developing a narrative for the best social communication. It has just published¹ “*Procesos de comunicación social para hacer locales los ODS*” (Social communication processes to make the SDGs local) based on examples of cities connecting their actions with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Programs and training courses have also been created to assist cities such as Quito in communicating about internationalization.

Communicate about global citizenship and solidarity education developed by regional stakeholders

Certain citizen-focused events can be organized to talk about the international action of local government and, more broadly, regional internationalization, such as:

- the **European Days of Local Solidarity** (EDLS) organized annually for the past three years by Platforma, which calls on European cities and regions to raise citizen awareness of global sustainable development challenges and the need to take action at the local level.⁴
- the **Festival des solidarités**⁵ in France, the new name for the “International Solidarity Week” which has been held every year in November for 20 years to bring together thousands of people over two weeks for friendly, engaged events to talk about solidarity at the local to international levels. All across France, an array of stakeholders take part in this event in each region, including associations, schools, local governments, sociocultural organizations, social economy players, citizens and more.



“In Europe we talk more about being open to global citizenship than about education on development and international solidarity. But in both cases, efforts must be made based on regional resources and on what stakeholders are already doing. This requires prior assessment of these stakeholders.”

Félicia Médina, CUF

3 External communication to citizens: the real challenge to

⁴ www.localsolidaritydays.eu

⁵ www.festivaldessolidarites.org/

internationalization by local governments

Oliver Castaneda from Mexico City sums up this issue in all seriousness as “How do you communicate about something that no one cares about?” In other words, how do you explain and justify to citizens in simple terms the commitment of a local government to international issues?

- Identify or create pathways for communication and awareness about the international action of local government.
- Regularly inform and communicate with the public about tangible and positive results of international action. “While the action is not interesting in and of itself – such as the signing of an agreement or twinning with another city – there needs to be communication about what will happen afterwards,” says Castaneda.
- Do not communicate about the importance of international action from a technical point of view but rather about the purpose of this action and its impacts. Achieving these results also takes a certain amount of time.
- Help the public understand the link between international priorities and local emergencies. Making the connection with the SDGs is useful for explaining the objective and the policy being implemented and linking it with the city’s situation.

Connecting with the international agenda: The example of the city of Quito

The Third Conference of the United Nations on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) was held in Quito, Ecuador from 17 to 20 October 2016. This agenda was an exceptional opportunity to capture the imaginations of citizens and city employees in the city of Quito on the focus of the conference, and more broadly the city’s international action. Workshops and preparatory meetings were necessary between conference participants to ensure that the messages to share were well understood.

However, “communication did not reach the citizen level, for whom the messages were not clear enough,” said Cristian Espinosa, Director of International Relations for the Quito Metropolitan Area. “Even if the administrative services involved in international actions did a great job, we still received political criticism where people were saying, ‘Why is the mayor working on that instead of our waste management problems?’” For Habitat III, more than 400 forums were held, not including the meetings with civil society organizations held at the same time as the conference. This was a success, but when feedback from the city’s residents was assessed, it came out that people did not connect the basic priorities discussed during the conference and their local issues.

- Show that it is not about taking leisure trips but rather field visits to identify useful solutions to issues affecting local residents and which may even save money.

“Citizens need to understand that efforts take place on two levels: local everyday issues (public lighting, waste management, mobility) and international action. Solutions will not emerge if no one ever leaves their office. We need to have discussions with others at the global level, draw inspiration from what is happening elsewhere, see other practices in action. They need to understand that all action requires these two levels.” *Nelson Fernandez, Montevideo*

Messages need to be adapted to the target audiences using modern communication tools (videos, social media such as Instagram, Twitter or even WhatsApp).

For example, travel is very important to young people. Showing them how their city is connected to the rest of the world can lead them to be more committed to the city’s international action. In Quito, for example, young people wanted to make videos themselves using their own words and codes.

“It’s important to mobilize networks of young people who can, for example, express their points of view about the SDGs.” *Fernando Santomauro, UCLG*

Communicating on internationalization is possible: The example of Medellín

The Agency for Cooperation for the City of Medellín created a short video¹ presenting the city’s international action and its local impacts. This video sets an example for its design and simple, appealing messages. The title sets the tone in one sentence (the ‘pitch’): “What does ACI do? We create links with the world for Medellín’s development.”

This video was designed as a citizen communication tool. The Agency for Cooperation’s site also posts videos about international actions, creating a link that connects international priorities with local issues through typical citizens and an appealing design to speak to young people as well as other city stakeholders such as businesses, chambers of commerce or universities.

Carolina Bernal, Medellín

1: *¿Qué hace la ACI? Creamos lazos en el Mundo para el desarrollo de Medellín y Antioquia*”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VlqbWeKNz-Q>



Mexico City has also developed a communication campaign through short ad spots to raise citizen awareness about international action. The aim is to explain the following message in a way that is easy to

understand and suited to social media: by opening to the world, you quickly reap the mutual benefits. “We had planned for the campaign to last just 15 days, but we were able to extend it by updating it to link it to other events, such as the International Friendly Cultures Fair, which showcases Mexico’s cultural richness and diversity every year,”.

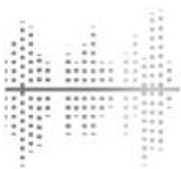


“It is important to interact with citizens to tell a story – that of international action by local government.”
Oliver Castaneda, Mexico City

● **Transparency and credibility of political leadership**, especially by ensuring a balance between what is promoted in messages and what actually happens on the ground

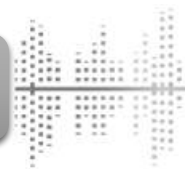
Creating a shared culture of international action with citizens: **The example of the city of Chartres**

While the city is internationally renowned for its cathedral, the city constantly communicates with citizens to keep them informed and maintain transparency about its international actions. “There is always a page in the city newsletter about the importance of international relations and best practices. It is always the mayor or another elected official who explains the purpose of the action, which lends a sense of credibility. This is a long-term approach, and the more the usefulness of actions is explained to citizens, the more we talk about it abroad and increase the region’s appeal etc., the better they understand the approach. In the end, we have never been criticized about a foreign trip,” says Patrick Géroudet, Deputy Mayor of Chartres. “There is no need to fear internationalization if we explain it.”



“International action is its own best spokesperson, whether internally or externally, and especially with regards to citizens. Efforts must constantly be made to ensure the credibility of the political leadership.”
Adrien Licha, Platforma

“You have to be ready to address citizens’ opinions as a final assessment of our international action.” Oliver Castaneda, Mexico City



Communicating about internationalization must be done with the goal of educating and sharing. It is in this spirit that CUF decided to share the lessons from this exceptional round table that brought to light the experiences of cities and networks in Latin America and Europe, especially through the AL-LAs platform. It is also a base from which country groups can enhance their work.

