Local governments and human rights in Europe

Report of Barcelona's European Workshop of Local Governments for Human Rights

December 11th, 2018

UCLG Committee | Social Inclusion Participatory Democracy and Human Rights

Foreword

The **European Workshop of Local Governments for Human Rights** brought together dozens of municipal, supra-municipal and regional leaders and policy-makers from across Europe, carrying out a consolidated work on human rights. The Workshop's main objective was to provide a space where to share challenges, actions and commitments related to local human rights action, as well as to explore priorities for networking.

The Workshop was organized by the **Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights of UCLG** under the leadership of **Barcelona, Plaine Commune and Madrid**. It took place at the UCLG headquarters in Barcelona, on December 11th 2018, coinciding with the commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 20th anniversary of the Barcelona Conference "Cities for Human Rights" which launched the European Charter for the Safeguarding of Human Rights in the City drafting process, finally adopted by more than 350 European municipalities.

Introduction
"Bringing together local and regional initiatives on human rights in Europe"

The coordinator of the **Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights** (CSIPDHR) of UCLG, **Amanda Fléty**, welcomed participants to the workshop, recalling how this is an initiative of some of the Committee most active cities to assess the outcomes of 20 years of local human rights policies in Europe. After this time, a policy window is open for sharing and learning from different local and networking initiatives for human rights.

UCLG CSIPDHR Committee is an autonomous network of cities and territories aimed at sharing experiences and promoting political debate on human rights and the right to the city within the framework of UCLG: the world organization of local and regional governments. Under the leadership of its members, the Committee facilitates meetings, advocacy processes or the development of tools (such as the Global Charter-Agenda for Human Rights in the City) that support local governments in realizing human rights.

The Secretary General of **UCLG**, **Emilia Sáiz**, thanks participants for their commitment to human rights. At a global level, Sáiz notes how several current trends are putting human rights into question. At the same time, many people and organizations (including ours) see in human rights a cornerstone for their action and a catalyser for mobilization on issues such as global citizenship or housing. There is hostility against rights, but also a fundamental consensus that they are a pillar for coexistence.

Sáiz note how UCLG as global municipal movement is more than 100 years old. Its longevity shows that local governments have long been aware that the challenges they face can only be addressed through cooperation. Sáiz hopes that these meetings will help put human rights again at the center of international debates. In UCLG, this is a consolidated discussion alongside other strategic priorities such as the Right to the City or SDGs localization.

Dr. **Gyonggyu Shin** speaks on behalf of UCLG CSIPDHR co-presidency of the **Metropolitan Government of Gwangju** (South Korea), which is also the siege of the annual celebration of the World Human Rights Cities Forum (WHRCF). This Forum is organized every year by its Metropolitan Government, its human rights department and the UCLG CSIPDHR Committee.

Gwangju is a city firmly committed to the defense of human rights. In the Asian context, human rights agendas still face major challenges in regards to implementation. It should be noted, however, how many trends are transforming Asia and now human rights are gaining weight in several, thanks mainly to the push of the municipal movement and its collaboration with civil society. Gwangju hopes that European cities bring their commitment and networking capacity to the global scale, encouraging the exchange of views and practices with other regional contexts such as Asia.

First part of the workshop
"Local human rights action: challenges and priorities of European human rights cities"

Before starting the debate, the **UCLG CSIPDHR** coordinator shares with the audience the overview results of the follow-up process on the implementation of the European Charter for the Safeguarding of Human Rights in the City (***see the final annex of this document for a more detailed report on this subject***). This process has involved the participation of more than 30 European municipalities of varying size and geography. Data shows many signatory-municipalities give a strong importance to human rights.

Many answers to the questionnaire show how local governments are implementing policies with a clear, human rights-based approach and are involved in national and European networks of "human rights cities". Policies on education, awareness-raising and training focus municipalities' human rights action in regards to the follow up of the ECSHRC. At the present time, there is a strong interest to reinforce networking among cities in order to share experiences and knowledge and strengthen cooperation with civil society.

Barcelona's Human Rights and Diversity Director, **Aida Guillén**, opens the first round of debate on challenges and priorities regarding cities' human rights action. According to Guillén, human rights localization can be seen as a response from European municipalities to the inaction that many national governments have towards their human rights obligations. In this sense, Barcelona has maintained a fairly firm commitment towards human rights policies for the last 20 years in spite of period of political change.

Aida Guillén believes that city-to-city cooperation in this regard is key for local governments. In fact, today "we see how the concept of human rights cities is popular and there is a certain branding around the concept". However, Guillén believes it is necessary to analyze policies that these municipalities have been promoting in the last 20 years. As the report carried out by the UCLG CSIPDHR Committee shows, awareness-raising and training policies have mainly focused municipalities attention throughout this period.

« Cities play a fundamental role in fighting against hate speech and extremism: it is only through the generation of strong social ties, interpersonal relations and vibrant community life that these phenomena can be tackled »

According to Guillén, building self-aware citizens, empowering people so they are aware and demand their own rights, is important but "should only be a part of our work". Guillén believes "We have to take a step further as municipal movement, given that global political trends are going in the opposite direction (against human rights)". Guillén recalls the growth of exclusionary messages that "aim at placing physical, mental, social and political borders" and that "polarization is increasing and now has many more axes". According to Guillén, cities now play a fundamental role to fight hate speech and extremism. It is "only through the generation of strong social ties among peoples, quality interpersonal relationships and vibrant community life, that these phenomena can be tackled. This is where the concept of human rights becomes key for the global municipal movement".

Taking this step further implies developing new and more ambitious human rights policies. According to Guillén, "If we have problems with discrimination and hate, we must take direct actions as a municipality, promote strategic litigation and sanction assailants. If we want to realize the concept of "full citizenship" (human rights universality), then we must promote measures that make social services accessible to all. There are many other topics: public management of common goods, the remunicipalization of basic services …".

According to the Mayor of **Middelburg**, **Harald Bergmann**, democracy and citizen participation are two important axis of this debate. In his municipality, Mayor Bergmann feels how citizens want to get involved in decision-making processes. Strengthening participation channels is therefore a challenge "we cannot ignore". Another key and interrelated issue would be the way municipalities treat minority groups. Refugees, elderly people... According to Mayor Bergmann, "their voice has to be heard so that municipalities develop adequate policies".

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Finally, it is worth mentioning the issue of inequalities and economic and social rights such as housing. Bergmann believes cities should approach this discussion from a human rights perspective, given that "it will allow us to deal with these problems in a better way".

Mayor Bergmann agrees that it is important to put human rights back on the agenda. This means "working among us: colleagues in institutions, representatives and councilors from other parties...". Bergmann believes local leaders must defend the importance of human rights and explain why they are important for local government responsibilities. This entails devising human rights education initiatives, from government institutions to schools.

> *« We must promote human rights also when working among us. We must convince colleagues in institutions, representatives and councillors from other parties of the importance of human rights in our work»*

Mayor Bergman shares with the audience his work as Dutch delegate and thematic spokesperson on human rights to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe. This year his team has completed a report ([available here in online version](#)) that demonstrates why rights are important for local authorities and how they can develop measures on the basis of other experiences regarding vulnerable groups.

The President of the **ECCAR network - European Coalition of Cities against Racism**, **Benedetto Zacchiroli**, notes how ECCAR was one of the results of the 1998 Barcelona Conference. ECCAR is now composed by more than 180 cities in Europe and other world regions, such as Israel. ECCAR is part of an international coalition linked to the UNESCO (ICCAR), with regional sections in Asia, Africa, Latin America... In regards to local action, Zacchiroli stresses the importance of articulating networking and taking into account existing initiatives in the field of racism and non-discrimination.

The Deputy Mayor of **Athens** for migration and refuges, **Lefteris Papagiannakis**, considers that human rights are fundamental for Athens reality in regards to migration and refugees. The Mayor of Athens is, in fact, a former Greek Ombudsman. It must be said, however, that Athens is not working specifically in human rights action, although many of its services and initiatives could be considered as such. In regards to refugees, Athens works on issues such as the right to housing, access to the labor market or access to the health system.

The councilor of Civil Rights and Gender Equality of **Sabadell**, **Míriam Ferràndiz**, shares multiple examples in regards to the way Sabadell engages in human rights action. Sabadell has a consolidated line of action in awareness-raising. The city also aims at mainstreaming human rights in municipal action not just through departments that are directly involved in it. For example, the municipality has introduced human rights criteria in local public procurement processes and tenders. Another example in this regard is the way in which the city works with citizens and community representatives. Sabadell seeks to empower groups that are normally excluded from local public debate. Fighting against racism and fascism is undoubtedly another priority. The city counts with a Civil Rights Office and a Committee for Conviviality (formed by neighbors, police officers and community leaders) that work on shared strategies and discourses to trump racism and fascism. Sabadell also collaborated with the local Bar Association to take legal initiatives regarding discrimination.

The head of international relations of **Cologne**, **Frieder Wolf,** stressed how his municipality seeks to develop a more concrete action on human rights policies and to do so through international cooperation with other cities. From the field of city diplomacy, Wolf observes how the situation of local democracy has worsened in the last couple years, something which poses a challenge for the global municipal movement. Considering the challenges for human rights protection, Germany faces with concern the growth of anti-Semitism and other forms of hate speech. Refugees and migrants' integration is another challenge.

The representative of the A**ssociation of Local and Regional Authorities of Sweden (SALAR), Cecilia Berglin**, highlights how the context of decentralization is quite advanced in the case of Sweden. This allows for strong local policies in the field of human rights. In addition, municipalities can have access to national funds to work on specific human rights issues such as human rights training for local officers. Alongside the Raoul Wallenberg Institute, SALAR has developed a platform that identifies how cities and regions of Sweden work on human rights. This "allows us to mature our understanding of what human rights cities are". This work focuses on aspects such as non-discrimination, training public workers, strengthening of relations with civil society or human rights and municipal budgets.

Toni Royo from the supra-municipal entity ***Fons Català de Cooperació to Desenvolupament*** (Catalan Fund for Development Cooperation) highlights how his organization focuses on human rights especially through awareness raising. The Fons facilitates the programme "Human Rights Defenders Cities", which seeks to enhance human rights awareness-raising of the population of 26 participating cities in Catalonia on the basis of welcoming, supporting and disseminating the work of human rights defenders threatened in their countries.

Another priority of the Fons is to provide knowledge on what municipalities do in terms of human rights. Municipalities often carry out human rights policies without being aware. The Fons has been conducting studies that analyze local public policies in the light of human rights themes such as water and sanitation, citizenship, public procurement, housing and development cooperation. The Fons aims at knowing what are the actions implemented by municipalities through these local policies: What are cities responsibilities? How are the human rights of its holders guaranteed? It also seeks to train institutions responsible for guaranteeing these rights so that they can carry out a better follow-up and dissemination.

Maribel Vaquero is the Directress of the Division for Human Rights of the Provincial Council of **Gipuzkoa**: a historical territory at the heart of the Basque Country that gathers 89 municipalities. The aforementioned Department's focus on human rights was initially based on strengthening coexistence in the field of peacemaking. Gipuzkoa experienced a violent conflict the inhabitants of which had to live with for five long decades. Gipuzkoa's priority was therefore to promote peacebuilding in the post-conflict period. The Provincial Council's strategy in this area was based on promoting political dialogue in 24 municipalities. The conclusions of the project showed that it was still necessary to work on the "democratic political culture" of Gipuzkoa: at a social level, but also among political actors. In the case of education, Gipuzkoa has promoted a project in local schools in order to promote dialogue and peace according to human rights culture. In the last years, the Department has also ocused on other areas. such as cultural, sexual and gender diversity, as well as accessibility.

« The first value most of our citizens identified with when thinking on how their city should be was respect for human rights: a framework from which to build social justice and inclusion as well as greater respect for diversity»

The Directress of the Area of Participation and Districts of **Bilbao**, **Inmaculada Ereña**, highlights how her city has undergone a process of urban renewal throughout the last year: From industrial city to cultural emporium, center of services and an outstanding tourist destination. After the improvement of the physical and urban environment of the city, the priority of Bilbao was to determine "with what values the city was to be built". A participatory process was initiated. Taking into account the models of open government and participation, various forums were set up with entities and organizations that allowed for a set of 17 values that the city recognizes as its own (Bilbao, City of Values). The first value most of our citizens identified to when thinking on how their city should be was respect for human rights: a framework from which to build social justice and inclusion as well as greater respect for diversity. It is through this work that the City Council discovered the European Charter for the Safeguarding of Human Rights in the City, to which Bilbao adhered in 2018 to follow-up its work in the field.

The representative of the **Nuremberg** Human Rights Office, **Sophia Brostean-Kaiser**, highlights how Nuremberg is the only German city with a Human Rights Office. For Brostean-Kaiser, one of the main challenges refers to the growing polarization of society, together with new social needs derived from demographic change, migration and the aging of the population. Nuremberg has a consolidated work in the fight against discriminations and racism within the framework of ECCAR.

The Directress of Citizenship Services of **Terrassa**, **Mercè Soler**, highlights how her city has maintained a consolidated commitment in the field of human rights action throughout the last years; something which is reflected in Terrassa's own municipal action plan. This commitment goes back to the city's adhesion to the European Charter for the Safeguarding of Human Rights in the City, and was renewed in the last mandate with the creation of a Citizens Commission on the ECSHR Follow-Up (where the municipality and 13 civil society entities cooperate to follow up on the city's implementation of the Charter).

Terrassa municipality seeks to promote human rights as a global, all-encompassing vision for the city. According to Soler, "human rights must be transversal axes of action and

political discourses of all municipal action. In line with other participants, soler also notes how "many times cities focus on awareness-raising, but now it's time to look at other more specific issues". Terrassa has been one of Spain's first large cities to opt for direct municipal water management as a guarantee of public service. Terrassa is also working on human rights and public procurement; it has recently opened sanctioning files to banks that speculate with vacant houses at a time of housing emergency and to defend the right to housing; and works for equality through methodologies based on intersectionality.

The representative of **Naples** Department for Citizenship Rights and Social Cohesion, **Alessia Piccirillo**, highlights the worsening conditions and political situation in her country. Naples has recently experienced the dismantling by order of national authorities of self-constructed residential areas and the forced expulsions of Roma camps. Her department works to promote and defend fundamental rights within the framework of a national political situation that is worsening and that carries the municipalities capacities to the limit.

Second part of the workshop
"Cities for Rights: Articulating initiatives and commitments at the international level"

In the second part of the debate, local government representatives and partner organizations discussed what should be the main priorities for relaunching and better articulating initiatives on regional and international human rights cities networking. Meeting such as this might open a process of dialogue that ends up by cities uniting their voices and commitments in human rights as the basis of a transformative municipal project.

On behalf of the human rights Commission of UCLG, some members are promoting a global process where municipalities from different regional environments (Europe, Africa...) share their work and priorities on human rights and the right to the city to further articulate networking initiatives at a global level. This session would therefore assess what could be the role of European cities in a global network of human rights cities. This process occurs in parallel with a progressive recognition of the role of local governments in the promotion and protection of human rights (UN Human Rights). There are several open advocacy process in this regard that the CSIPDHR and UCLG have been facilitating in recent years.

Barcelona's Director of Citizenship Rights, **Aida Guillén**, believes "network diversity" shouldn't be seen as a problem: there are some networks which have a technical purpose and others which focus on political debates, where cities come together to advance shared messages. Exchanging practices or conducting field visits are positive experiences according to Guillén, but human rights action also has a strong political components.

In a second turn of the debate, Guillen recalls the need for local governments to work together in order to claim recognition by the UN system. Local governments should nonetheless be alert because the United Nations is an interstate organization that often interacts with municipalities on the basis of their relationship with states. The advance of decentralization and advocacy processes before the UN such as the one led by UCLG has already provided recognition for local governments, but "we must keep pushing".

The mayor of **Middelburg**, **Harald Bergmann**, mentions the case of national networks of cities that can be supportive in technical and political aspects of human rights governance. We must also consider the support that municipalities receive from national associations of municipalities (as VNG - Vereniging van Nederlandse Gemeenten - in the Dutch case). For Mayor Bergmann, networking should give priority to exchanging experiences, success stories and lessons learned in carrying out human rights policies.

According to **Benedetto Zacchirolli, ECCAR** promotes knowledge and learning tools that can be used by everyone, such as a [Toolkit for equality](). Zacchiroli believes that "we must raise citizen's awareness on the activities that their own cities have in city networks".

Athens' representative, **Lefteris Papagiannakis**, believes it's important to connect initiatives among them. Papagiannakis also believes that being part of networks that defend human rights is more important than ever in a moment of rising extremism. In the case of Athens, cooperation between Greek and European cities has allowed to better respond to challenges posed by the lack of resources / centralization, hampering municipal action. Athens has promoted for example a national network of Greek cities that works on this subject.

Athens recently participated, along with other European cities, in an OHCHR meeting in order to raise-awareness on the way cities can offer access to health services to migrants without documentation. Papagiannakis believes that this discussion has just begun but that it is necessary for multilateral entities to take the initiative. Papagiannakis also believes there has been much progress in recent years in terms of recognition.

Sabadell's representative, **Miriam Ferràndiz**, highlights the need for intermediary cities to make their voice heard in these kind of processes. One of the networks top priorities should be to offer ways by which cities can participate more easily avoiding complex structures.

In the case of Cologne's, **Frieder Wolf** believes city networks are a useful tool to connect politicians, strengthen links between them and influence institutions. There is a long way to enhance recognition among citizens of their own cities' participation in networks. Given cities experience, participation in networks and, in general, at the international level, is a key contribution to overall processes on sustainability, development and global governance.

According to **Gwangju's Dr. Shin**, the collaboration of South Korean cities with their national government can be seen as an example of successful multilevel cooperation. Bottom-up mobilization of Korean cities has led the permanent mission of the ROK in the UN Human Rights Council to bring their voice and key political messages in the discussions, leading to the 2015 report (A/HRC/30/49) and 2016 resolution (A/HRC/33/8) that opened the process of recognition of local governments role in the promotion and protection of human rights. This last resolution not only recognizes local governments, but also encourages national governments to take them into account in the definition of national strategies in the field.

« 33/8 resolution by the Human Rights Council opened the process of recognition of local governments role in the promotion and protection of human rights. It didn't only recognize local governments, but also encouraged national governments to take them into account in the definition of national human rights strategies »

Maribel Vaquero from the Provincial Council of **Gipuzkoa** highlights how her administration facilitates a regional network of municipalities working on human rights. These kind of initiatives allow small municipalities (of 500 inhabitants) to start working on these issues. Likewise, the Provincial Council has also launched collaborations with local universities, so that they can support municipalities in adopting the human rights-based approach in local policies. This allows to share materials and access to good practices. On the other hand, in the case of defining new alliances of municipalities and regions in human rights, it seems that a fundamental issue should be the fight against hate speech.

The representative of the **Global Platform for the Right to the City** and the **Habitat International Coalition**, **Álvaro Puertas**, highlights how the Global Platform brings together hundreds of social movements and grassroots organizations that fight for human rights and the right to the city. On the basis of the alliance with UCLG CSIPDHR, the Platform has had the opportunity to continue advocating in global agendas hand by hand with local governments, providing experiences and dialogue with grassroots initiatives that allow the advance of human rights and the right to the city (the latter as an emerging concept). It is important that civil society actors are at the table, because there is a lot to learn.

Marina Canals represents the **International Association of Educating Cities**, a network of cities that addresses human rights in the field of education. Member-local governments of the Association believe many human rights challenges must start in the minds of people and in learning processes. Education is therefore key to promoting all human rights.

Joshua Cooper brought to the meeting the experience of a **North American human rights cities alliance**: a regional experience of networking in a different continent. Cooper believes that having this conversation is so important and that it is necessary to continue promoting and supporting the participation of cities in international forums on human rights and sustainable development (two increasingly interrelated agendas). In the United States "we have examples of cities like New York, taking the initiative in localizing the Sustainable Development Goals". Many cities accompany New York in this exercise of leadership also in the monitoring of human rights and their participation in the "Universal Periodic Review". Cities must continue seeking alliances with other key actors in the multilevel governance of human rights, such as national human rights associations.

Amanda Fléty (**UCLG CSIPDHR**) closes the debate inviting attendees to participate in the Human Rights Committee of UCLG and those mechanisms from which municipalities can advance global discussions on human rights in the framework of the global municipal movement. In the next year, the UCLG World Congress in Durban (November) will also represent a good occasion to relaunch the global commitment that cities have regarding the global defense of human rights.

According to **UCLG**'s Secretary General, **Emilia Sáiz**, this debate has proven to be a good opportunity to observe how each municipality defends human rights in different contexts. However, it is still important that cities continue to get involved and take this work to global processes on development agendas. It would be important that human rights leaders and officers inside municipalities also participate in global networks like UCLG and share their political visions there. For UCLG, housing and migration have been key issues for 2018 regarding the Right to the City; in 2019 we hope that accessibility and human rights can become major discussion topics for our Policy Council on the Right to the City.

Annex 1
"Main outcomes of the follow-up process on the implementation of the ECSHRC"

The Secretariat of the UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights has carried out, throughout 2018, a process to monitor the implementation of the European Charter for the Safeguarding of Human Rights in the City (hereinafter, ECSHRC) among 365 municipalities-signatories. This process has been promoted by member-local governments of the Committee, and has also focused on the overall situation of local human rights policies and priorities regarding networking among European cities.

This process has been conducted through questionnaire. Answers to the questionnaire were collected between June and December 2018, reaching a number of 33 responses by municipalities-signatories in 7 different countries: Spain, Italy, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Albania and Croatia. 8 of the participating cities had more than 500,000 inhabitants; 10 were between 100,000 and 500,000 inhabitants; and 15 had less than 100,000 inhabitants.

Participants to the follow-up process are the following: Alcalá de Henares; Badalona; Barcelona; Bologna; Budapest; Canet de Mar; Cardedeu; Castellar de n'Hug; Cerdanyola del Vallès; Cubelles; Esparreguera; Genova; Granollers; Lleida; Madrid; Manresa; Molins de Rei; Mülheim an der Ruhr; Naples; Nurnberg; Poggio a Caiano; Reus; Riga; Rijeka; Sabadell; Sant Boi de Llobregat; Sant Feliu de Llobregat; Santiago de Compostela; Sevilla; Sitges; Terrassa; Tirana; and Trecate.

The questionnaire is structured in 3 blocks:

> **(i) local human rights policies;**
> **(ii) commitments towards the implementation of the ECSHRC;**
> **(iii) and priorities for international networking.**

In the questionnaire's first block, 11 municipalities out of 33 have given the highest score in relation to the importance that human rights have in their municipal action (on a scale of 1 to 5). The average of this distribution is found in 3.7. When assessing the way in which cities concretize this commitment, the preferred option by municipalities has been (i) to participate in networks of municipalities that defend human rights (28), followed by (ii) establishing measures to raise awareness and promote human rights culture (25); (iii) promote concrete policies with a focus on rights, such as a municipal measure against discrimination (24); (iv) develop strategies for the protection of minorities and for the social inclusion of vulnerable groups (24); and (v) developing trainings for local officials and workers on human rights (22). The least preferred options in this block have been (i) to advocate for human rights at the national level (10); (ii) review municipal legislation (11); or establishing local programs for human rights guarantee (12).

27 municipalities have declared to be somehow familiar with the ECSHRC while 6 have acknowledged not knowing it. Regarding the importance of the ECSHRC in municipal action, the average answer marked 2.9 out of a distribution of 1 (less important) to 5 (more important). The preferred option for municipalities with respect to ECSHRC implementation was (i) education and awareness-raising programs (20) and (ii) training for local officials (14). Otherwise, the least frequent options were (i) create a local monitoring commission with the participation of civil society (4) and (ii) establish guarantee mechanisms in light of the rights set forth in the Charter (8).

Asked about whether if relaunching networking among human rights cities at an international level would be a positive idea, 25 municipalities out of 33 have responded affirmatively. From these responses, the preferred option in regards to what should be the focus of networking has been (i) facilitating learning sessions between cities on human rights policies (19), followed by (ii) promoting advocacy for human rights at the national, European and international level on issues such as migration, housing or democracy (18); (iii) promote dialogue between local and international civil society (17); and (iv) re-launch municipal commitment towards the ECSHRC and with the concept of human rights cities at an institutional level (17). The least preferred options have been (i) holding regular meetings (9) and (ii) defending the role of local governments in the promotion and protection of human rights at the national, European and international levels (10).