SDG Local Solutions Series

SHARING LOCAL ACTION

Providing common services to municipalities: the experience of the Barcelona Provincial Council

29 May 2024
9 am New York time

Providing common services to municipalities: the experience of the Barcelona Provincial Council

29th May 2024, 15h Barcelona time

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Many municipalities struggle with improving public services delivery with limited resources, both human and financial. As society changes rapidly, municipalities face increasing challenges, with citizens demanding more and better public services. This is especially relevant for small, rural, or remote municipalities, that finds difficult to obtain the human resources or skills to innovate, or to provide certain services that can be accessed by residents of larger cities.

Association of municipalities for the purpose of providing services in common has a long tradition in many countries. In others, is often unknown or very difficult to implement. In practice, it's a very simple idea: municipalities in different adjacent areas create a municipal association that takes care of providing certain services, such as interurban transport, garbage collection, water treatment, etc.

Sometimes, national legislation does not allow the creation of institutional figures with a public-private condition; municipalities may not be able to participate in public companies, transfer resources, or simply associate among themselves.

In other cases, there have been experiences of association that have ended in failure due to lack of effective governance systems, professional management, capacity, or situations of financial deficit or even mismanagement of funds.

In Europe, there is a great tradition of municipal associations to pool common municipal services. In Spain, the Constitution recognizes provinces as an integral part of the state organization. Article 141 defines them as "a local entity with its own legal personality, determined by the grouping of municipalities and territorial division for the fulfillment of state activities".

Provinces (as territorial divisions, which also coincide with the electoral district) are governed by provincial councils, which is the name for the governing bodies at the provincial level. Provincial councilors are elected among the mayors and local councilors of the province, there is no direct elections to govern the province, but they are constituted by directly elected representatives during the municipal elections, held every 4 years.

The same article 141 also establishes that other associations of municipalities, beyond the province, may also be created, allowing the association of municipalities belonging to different provinces, or establish special purpose associations.

For smaller municipalities, or those with fewer resources, it is crucial to have the services provided by the provincial councils. For example, many of them may not count with their own legal service to advise on public contracts, or a team of engineers to design public works. Many of these services are provided at the provincial level, ensuring that, regardless of where one lives, quality services similar to those living in the capitals can be available. In Europe, the role of these types of services has been fundamental to access European funds, which would hardly have been granted without the capacities to know about this opportunities, prepare projects, implement or justify the use of funding.

Not all Spanish provincial councils have the same capacities or resources. The case of the Barcelona Provincial Council is quite interesting, as it has historically been a relevant institution, accumulating its own heritage throughout its history and knowing how to adapt to the new challenges of public management, becoming an example of innovation, good management, concern for the environment, and contribution to its European and international context.

Webinar objective

To discover how the Barcelona Province provides common services to its 311 municipalities, and to know more about how it operates, its added value, and its current and future challenges.

The "Local Solutions" series of local action for the SDGs aims to establish networks and share knowledge to identify solutions and strengthen the capacities of local governments in their efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda.

Methodology

The Barcelona Provincial Council will present its services to the 311 municipalities distributed in an area of 7.726 square kilometers. Following the presentation, there will be a question-and-answer session for the audience. The webinar will be translated into Spanish, English, and French.

Guiding questions

1. What are the main services provided by the Provincial Council to its municipalities?
2. Where do you observe trends or increased demand of services?
3. How does the institution adapt to the opening of new service areas?
4. What are the greatest difficulties for small municipalities to fully participate?
5. From the challenges encountered, what solutions have been useful for progress?
6. How relevant are international partnerships in improving the institution?
7. What are the most visible impacts of the action?
8. What are the future challenges ahead?

AGENDA

2 min	Presentation of the Initiative: "SDG Local Solution Series", logistical notes on translation, recording, use of chat, etc. by Diana Lopez Caramazana, Advisor for Cities and Local Governments, UNDP.
	Introduction by the Moderator, Gricel Avila, Coordinator, Territorial development programme, UNDP Bolivia
25m	The experience of the Barcelona Provincial Council, by Antoni Montseny, Director, International Relations. ✓ Mandate and political governance ✓ Main services provided ✓ Innovation in public management, new services, and trends ✓ Financial situation ✓ Future challenges
25 min	Questions and answers from the audience
5 min	Closing and Conclusions