

THE ADJECTIVE VALUE, A CONCEPTUAL APPROACH TO DECENTRALISED COOPERATION

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ABSTRACT

This article proposes an analysis of subnational entities based on the decentralization process, conceptualizing the impact of decentralized cooperation as a tool to rescue the competitiveness and efficiency of territories. In this sense, the article presents some reflections on the relocation of state power, incorporating existing asymmetries in a horizontal relationship with international, national, regional and local actors, and using multilateral tools that increase the direct channelling of resources without falling into the historical dependence on the national order. Thus, a theoretical discussion on territorial actors and their insertion in decentralized cooperation is addressed to analyze later decentralization from the perspective of the insertion of territorial entities in decentralized cooperation.

Keywords: Decentralised cooperation; Decentralisation processes; Regional development; Territorial entities; Territorial internationalisation.

EL VALOR ADJETIVO, UNA APROXIMACIÓN CONCEPTUAL A LA COOPERACIÓN DESCENTRALIZADA

RESUMEN

Este artículo propone un análisis de las entidades subnacionales basado en el proceso de descentralización, conceptualizando el impacto de la cooperación descentralizada como herramienta para rescatar la competitividad y la eficiencia de los territorios. En este sentido, el artículo presenta algunas reflexiones sobre la relocalización del poder estatal, incorporando las asimetrías existentes en una relación horizontal con los actores internacionales y de nivel nacional, regional y local, y utilizando herramientas multilaterales que incrementen la canalización directa de recursos, sin caer en la dependencia histórica del orden nacional. Así, se aborda una discusión teórica sobre los actores territoriales y su inserción en la cooperación descentralizada para posteriormente analizar la descentralización desde la perspectiva de la inserción de las entidades territoriales en la cooperación descentralizada.

Palabras clave: Cooperación descentralizada; Desarrollo regional; Entidades territoriales; Internacionalización territorial; Procesos de descentralización.

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INTRODUCTION

International cooperation is understood as a development mechanism that guarantees integration and global coexistence after World War II, adopting standard global policies to consolidate territorial development based on the connection between developed and developing countries (Ardila, 2019). In this context, decentralised cooperation is a tool that seeks to reduce existing disparities through a system of shared values, where the main objective is the reduction of socioeconomic gaps in the territories, either through technical assistance or the transfer of funds provided by peers at the international level.

For Juste and Oddone (2020), the participation of territorial entities throughout history has been linked through a centre-periphery relationship, where the nation-state applies dependency policies that exacerbate social gaps at the territorial level. However, with the entry of decentralisation processes, territorial legitimisation passes to the productive structures of local and regional governments, many of which are limited because of structural asymmetries that hinder access to different sources of financing (Niño, 2011; Rustemi, 2020).

In this sense, decentralised cooperation links collaborative networks in favour of modifying territorial internationalisation processes due to decentralisation and the entry of globalisation (Maoz & Henderson, 2020; Reinsberg & Dellepiane, 2022). This is where this article seeks to analyse the importance of local and regional governments for sustainable state insertion through decentralised cooperation tools, recognising as a determining factor the economic aspects that make up the inclusion of the subnational order as new actors in international cooperation, given that they are generally taken from disciplines such as International Relations or Political Science and not from Economics.

First, a theoretical discussion of territorial actors from the perspective of decentralised cooperation is conducted, for which the study of decentralisation is based on the insertion of territorial entities in decentralised cooperation (Hernández, 2015; Wilches & Niño, 2017). Subsequently, territorial political legitimacy is emphasised by the decentralised cooperation system. With this, some reflections are made on the tools for territorial development, and finally, the main disparities existing at the local level are presented (Reinsberg & Dellepiane, 2022).

Thus, the central hypothesis that emerges from this context is that after the decentralisation process, subnational entities are representative actors with power and autonomy in search of an efficient insertion in the international arena (Nugroho & Sujarwoto, 2021). Consequently, decentralised cooperation is positioned as one of the best mechanisms for territorial legitimacy, given that it establishes tools to limit disparities and increase territorial development.

TERRITORIAL ACTORS: THEORETICAL DEBATE SINCE DECENTRALISED COOPERATION

After the signing of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, states have historically been considered subjects of supranational authority, exercising power with autonomy and independence over external authorities (Aldecoa & Keating, 2013). From this context, Birle (2018)

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argues that with the advent of globalisation, the concept of absolute sovereignty does not comprise a statocentric conception, but on the contrary, many interactions over decision-making, which make national power greater in sum with the interaction of other actors.

To conduct an analysis of decentralised cooperation, it is necessary to point out territorial legitimacy as a mechanism to achieve competitiveness in the international arena. Juste and Oddone (2020) the globalization process and the transnationalization of the economy reveal that subnational entities actively seek to position themselves effectively in the international arena (Díaz, 2019; McHugh, 2015). However, the dynamics of decentralised cooperation play an essential role in mitigating the dependence of local and regional governments on the central level, incorporating multilevel governance that contributes to the advancement of subnational policy at the international level. As McHugh (2015) highlights, although paradiplomacy and protodiplomacy are not strictly classified as traditional diplomacy, they serve as vital channels for promoting specific regional and commercial interests, expanding the range of influence and resource potential of subnational entities within international frameworks like NAFTA.

In this sense, the theoretical debate revolves around recognising decentralisation as a theoretical tool that explains authority and power from the interests of the various actors interacting through multiple channels and not only from state sovereignty (Niño, 2011; 2021). Thus, on the basis of this theory and the approaches of Keohane and Nye (1977), interdependence is defined as the interaction among actors engaged in specific scenarios, not necessarily driven by the State.

The supremacy of the nation-state as a unitary actor in the international system is questioned and strengthened if processes of interdependence develop across borders. This is why, with an increase in the number of actors with degrees of autonomy and the ability to mobilise resources and exert influence, they become part of international politics (Grandas & Prado, 2017; Juste & Oddone, 2020; Mingus, 2006). Under this logic, subnational entities exercise a diversity of relations by relocating state power to different actors, who are, in turn, responsible for legitimising territorial governance processes.

From this perspective, subnational units emerge from their peripheral position and insert themselves into the international arena through processes of territorial internationalisation articulated with decentralised cooperation, which in turn strengthens territorial cooperation networks by offering an alternative framework for subnational entities that pursue specific economic and regional objectives, enhancing their autonomy and influence even in the face of these asymmetries (Schiavon, 2019; Pont & Oddone, 2021; McHugh, 2015). Therefore, the difficulties in determining territorial leadership are due to dependency characteristics, which, according to structuralists, respond to the economic-productive dominance of the State, where traditional asymmetries have caused sub-state units to be weakened by governmental instability.

It is essential to highlight the strategic role that decentralised cooperation plays among territorial actors, given that it is relevant in implementing current public policies (Oddone et al., 2018; Paquin, 2021). In this context, the decentralisation of local and regional governments presents an analysis that considers different competencies and

responsibilities for sustainable national and territorial progress (Paquette, 2021). However, this articulation goes beyond the inclusion of territorial entities, given that attention must be paid to the economic aspects that intervene in the development of an adequate process of territorial insertion in the international scenario. As Paquin (2021) discusses, the increased involvement of substate governments in trade negotiations reflects their growing significance in areas traditionally controlled by the central government, as seen in the case of Canadian provinces and Belgian federated states. This involvement helps ensure that trade agreements are aligned with regional priorities, reinforcing the legitimacy of these agreements by incorporating substate perspectives and interests.

Thus, discussions at the territorial level focus on analysing institutional strengthening based on the actions developed within the framework of decentralised cooperation (Grandas & Prado, 2017). It is where subnational units, through cooperation offices or agencies, must efficiently divide functions, with the aim of making better use of articulated resources in favour of territorial legitimacy (Schiavon, 2019). In this way, decentralised cooperation is projected as a tool for territorial representation at the international level, seeking a direct relationship with territorial representatives, in which national and multilateral entities are also articulated.

In the framework of this article, decentralised cooperation is analysed from an economic perspective, without ignoring the contributions of international relations and political science. Decentralised cooperation is, therefore, a concept that goes beyond the inclusion of territorial entities as new actors in international cooperation (Tubilewicz, 2021), which is why it should be highlighted in the first instance that the dynamics of decentralised cooperation integrate three steps: a standardisation of indices, the identification of the territorial actor and its application within the territory (Duchacek, 1984; Araral, 2019). It is where the effects of globalisation address supranational structures and multilateral organisations, from the criticism of the territorial inflexibility of the levels of government and the lack of progress of the territories.

Decentralisation theory is used as a starting point to understand how decentralised cooperation responds to this school of thought and how it can be used as a tool in the revaluation of territories (Duchacek, 1984; Penagos & Niño, 2021; Tubilewicz, 2021). Therefore, decentralisation and its various manifestations join fiscal federalism to form theoretical concepts that help the understanding of decentralised cooperation under the magnifying glasses of efficiency and territorial legitimacy.

From this, the knowledge that decentralising ideas have directly influenced territories and generated both positive and negative effects on them is observed by explaining the different spheres of decentralisation, including political and economic circles (Jackson, 2018). Then, decentralisation establishes the following three areas: fiscal, administrative and political (Falleti, 2010; Finot, 2001; 2002). The first two are directly linked to fiscal federalism and focus on strategies to increase revenues and generate efficiency in the use of their resources.

It is relevant to mention that the fiscal autonomy of sub-national governments under decentralisation generates the administration and provision of social services and public

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goods that are placed in the hands of sub-national governments (Paquette, 2021). The concept of development is equally relevant when analysing the effect of decentralised cooperation on territorial development (Wilches & Niño, 2017; Penagos & Niño, 2021). It refers to its conception from the link between two territories through different actors.

Now that cooperative practises have been redefined and the relationship between territories is more horizontal, cooperation should be seen as a unidirectional transfer of resources and show how a shared problem can have a joint solution if popular and territorial participation and organisations are included in the process. For Grandas and Prado (2017), decentralised cooperation comprises "the activity that is framed in the relations between subnational governments attached to different countries directly or through civil society or various development actors' (p.167). In this sense, stimulating the leadership of sub-national authorities favours the participatory development of local actors by aligning them to various instances and favouring it as an instrument of multi-level planning.

On the other hand, decentralised cooperation in the framework of international relations addresses geographical isolation as a factor in the analysis of territorial realities due to the challenge and cohesion it represents for multilevel governance (Dickson, 2014). Thus, Juste and Oddone (2020) highlight the importance of associativity and networking among subnational units as a key strategy to counteract state isolation. They argue that imbalances in peripheral regions have intensified the difficulty of leveraging territorial uniqueness to achieve competitive productivity.

However, the challenges, threats, and opportunities for subnational units to be incorporated into decentralised cooperation modalities include a lack of knowledge of internationalisation processes and strategies, which in turn translates into the impossibility of dynamiting regional economies due to a lack of resources (Blanco et al., 2017; Schiavon, 2019). Thus, the constraints that hinder territorial competitiveness go beyond the centre-periphery relationship insofar as resolving the incapacity of local and regional levels of government, generating sustainable impacts and transformations that reposition the subnational agenda as a tool for development is necessary.

TERRITORIAL ENTITIES INCORPORATION IN DECENTRALISED COOPERATION

The application of decentralised cooperation tools at the territorial level implies that the cooperation map integrates regional instruments where communities feel represented, for which the institutional strengthening of government levels plays a particular interest in decision-making to foster competitiveness and representation at the territorial level (Blanco et al., 2017; Gallicchio, 2017). Consequently, decentralised cooperation emerges as a dynamic of direct relationship with subnational units, as it is oriented towards developing potential actors that incorporate a cooperative system of integration and good practices.

Changes in the international system and the formation of external agendas articulate dynamics for the consolidation of new actors; in this sense, local and regional governments

understand, from the role of decentralised cooperation, a transnational function characterised by the strengthening of localisation dynamics (Clemente, 2018; Ardila, 2019). Thus, regional integration within the framework of subnational units responds to the promotion and transfer of technical-financial resources, integrated for establishing a continuous dialogue with cooperation agents in the process of sustainable and competitive development at the territorial level.

Therefore, complementing local capacities and encouraging territorial development are characteristics of the potential and elements that are strengthened by the inter-institutional articulation of decentralised cooperation (Torrens, 2020). In this sense, socioeconomic transformations act to link good practises with resources and processes, which go from the local order to the national, regional, and international scenario. As Tubilewicz (2017) notes, paradiplomacy can empower subnational entities to engage internationally, sometimes in collaboration with central governments, to address both local needs and broader state objectives. Similarly, Blanco et al. (2017) recognised that the coordination of the institutional structure is key to providing continuity to the development of capacities and, in turn, promoting sustainable experiences by channelling resources directly.

However, the international actions of subnational entities must involve local public management from the articulation with the institutional order, thereby encouraging the development and consolidation of a diplomacy far from the centre and focussed on territorial governance (Pont & Oddone, 2021; Casson & Dardanelli, 2012). Likewise, the increase in the number of actors on the international agenda provides local and regional governments with a search for competitive skills in their relations with states, international organisations and other actors in the international system. This expanding paradigm, however, requires these governments to navigate complex legal and institutional frameworks, often lacking clear guidelines or established boundaries, which can lead to jurisdictional conflicts or uncertainty in international activities (Casson & Dardanelli, 2012).

In this sense, the decentralisation process meant that the states ceded certain responsibilities, with the aim of reducing the lack of territorial development through the articulation of territorial leadership, which would stimulate the internal conditions necessary for governmental stability, limiting the conditions of economic-productive dependence on the centre (Ojeda, 2019; Juste & Oddone, 2020; Eatmon, 2009). Based on this, decentralised cooperation organisations, whether they are international organisations or NGOs, must have the necessary capacities to ensure that the planned objectives have the technical experience and knowledge of the territory. This approach aligns with horizontal and vertical policy diffusion models that promote bottom-up initiatives where subnational entities can establish international partnerships independently from their national governments, as seen in climate cooperation between American states and other regions (Eatmon, 2009).

It is here where local and regional governments play an important role after the decentralisation process, as they are in charge of deciding which resources to attract through foreign investment. However, many of the capacities for international relations

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are limited due to the lack of a specialised internationalisation team (Nugroho & Sujarwoto, 2021; Tubilewicz, 2021). One of the current challenges of the decentralised cooperation process, according to Rosas et al. (2018), is to determine territorial governance tools that help remedy traditional dependency schemes, establishing sufficient capacities within the territories so that they can manage themselves.

To this end, the process of territorial internationalisation faces the search for and consolidation of sustainable public-territorial participation, based on the financing, participation and control of the civil population and its organisations (Estupiñan, 2012). The above, in permanent articulation from the political and economic spheres, where local and regional governments are recognised for their richness and heterogeneity, reduce existing asymmetries by promoting territorial productivity. This model of participation is also strengthened by paradiplomatic activities, which allow subnational entities to seek new economic and diplomatic channels that complement central efforts, supporting local development while enhancing international positioning (Tubilewicz, 2017)

At the territorial level, decentralised cooperation operates as a network of potential actors that provides institutional guidelines for territorial progress, for which integration practises go beyond the cooperative system. According to Ojeda (2019), the strategic role of local and regional governments is based on the recognition of the real impacts that allow for monitoring the technical capacity of territorial entities. This is based on the incorporation of donor– recipient practises based on common objectives of continuity.

Thus, the management and capacity of territorial entities sustains multilevel planning in the articulation with decentralised cooperation, achieving the recognition of development factors focussed on indicators that deepen the understanding of territorial needs. As Chariatte and Ingenhoff (2021) illustrate, the rise of city diplomacy, especially through digital platforms, has allowed subnational actors, such as cities and regions, to participate in international discourse and contribute significantly to national standing and issue promotion, even in divisive contexts like Brexit. Gautier and Quiñones (2019) analyse how this dynamic has propitiated internationalisation tools from the local level, implementing networks and alliances of global scope with multilateral actors. Therefore, the insertion of subnational actors in decentralised cooperation comprises the practise of a panorama of action focussed on development with strategic potentialities. According to Newland (2022), this decentralised cooperation can also serve as a crucial strategy for non-state actors like Taiwan, enabling them to hedge against challenges in traditional diplomacy, forge relationships with emerging leaders, and assert a distinct international identity, despite increasing geopolitical complexity.

In this sense, the decentralisation practises of territorial entities vis-à-vis state policies do not represent a binding order of execution, which is why many territorial advancement projects will result from the counterweight that exists between local authorities and national governments (Falleti 2010; Gautier & Quiñones 2019; Penagos & Niño, 2021). This dynamic is illustrated by cases such as Gagauzia, where paradiplomacy has been shaped by competing influences from larger powers, highlighting the potential for paradiplomatic efforts to foster regional development while also risking tensions with the central government (Cantir, 2015). It is important to understand that cooperation strategies

incorporate local planning and urban and social development of the territory, from an exchange of experiences and the search for resources that position the competitiveness and sustainability of an attractive territory at the international level.

This type of cooperation ensures that international capacities reach developing states; however, these capacities are not seen solely from the central State. In contrast, they extend their capacities to territorial entities, which, unlike states, are more limited in obtaining resources on the regional and international scene (Villiers, 2018). Thus, local and regional authorities seek to realise their potential in promoting local territorial development, such as citizen participation, based on the direct articulation of the territories.

TERRITORIAL POLITICAL LEGITIMACY FROM A DECENTRALISED COOPERATION SYSTEM

The territorial problems that develop in the implementation of projects and the acquisition of resources to meet local needs are a central aspect that rescues decentralised cooperation insofar as they provide a response to the political legitimacy in the exercise of embracing the needs of communities (Valencia & Karam, 2014; Oddone et al., 2018). In practice, however, the construction of these objectives encompasses competing visions between the state and local governments, whereby a safe and fair space for the recognition of new actors provides a depolarisation of development practises and modalities.

[250] Thus, political legitimacy influences cooperation and decentralisation, linking the territory that the State has historically abandoned due to centralism and lack of socio-economic recognition (Valencia & Karam, 2014). Despite this, in practice, the cooperation system reconstructs the supremacy of large states over small ones, generating a lack of recognition of territorial entities, exacerbating fragmentation, and increasing socio-economic dependence.

However, for Grandas and Prado (2017), the decentralisation process of local and regional governments reconstructs the discourse of decision-making and management, using their capacities to build agreements and strategies that are in line with the existing challenges. This approach reinforces the idea that decentralised cooperation, although it favours competitiveness and development processes, must be articulated in an institutional manner with local governments to incentivise territorial potentials from the continuity of processes that require external collaboration.

Therefore, it is necessary to legitimise and give deserved recognition to territorial entities and their territorial characteristics to legitimise the construction of an internationally competitive state without imposing conditions of dependence and socio-economic fragmentation (Juste & Oddone, 2020; Paquin, 2021). At the same time, territorial cohesion with the international body depends on the technical or financial resources that respond to specific interests, which are identified in terms of strategic sectors that can guarantee this added value on the international stage. Furthermore, the participation of sub-state governments in trade negotiations is crucial for the legitimacy of international agreements, as it ensures that they take into account the unique socioeconomic conditions and priorities of regional actors. (Paquin, 2021)

The processes of globalisation and reconfiguration of the international scenario generate environments for linking territories through modernisation processes that aim to integrate the main territorial demands into the management of public policies (Balcázar, 2020; Ardila, 2019). In this way, decentralised cooperation actions in articulation with territorial entities respond to the supervision and execution of resources, linking cooperation partners to the issue of social empowerment as a tool for governance to meet the objectives set from transcendental roles that contribute to the legitimisation of the recipient territories.

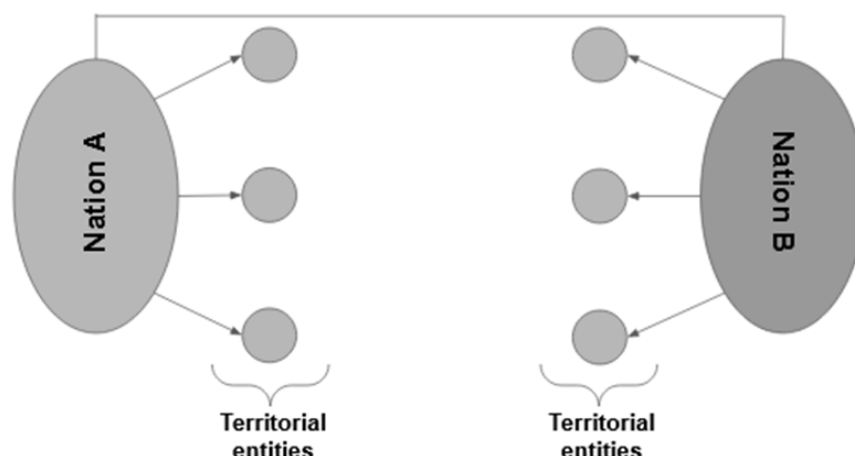
Grandas (2018) argues that building trust and legitimacy in the territories from characteristics that revalue the development of subnational planning processes integrates the understanding of actors from similar objectives as a mechanism to create ties that stimulate the territorial base's productive capacity. Therefore, despite the different territorial conceptions, the purpose of empowering and fostering bottom-up development is one of the main tools of sustainable legitimacy, because this model implies political responsibility under the leadership of local authorities in the exchange of experiences that promote mutual interest (Rrustemi, 2020).

Thus, territorial entities are the only ones in charge of granting legitimacy to international organisations, if they respond to the diversity and coexistence that they develop for the benefit of territorial progress (Corredor, 2016; Estupiñan, 2012; Gallicchino, 2017). In this sense, territorial actors are responsible for establishing sustainable links that provide sufficient resources through the cooperation process, positioning strategic and reciprocal relationships around the donor–recipient figure, and making use of their autonomy for a multilevel articulation.

Therefore, decentralised cooperation is the most appropriate way to address territorial challenges, legitimising this process as a tool to address the asymmetric conditions of subnational economies (Aponte, 2017). By virtue of this, the capacity to articulate interests and mobilise resources includes structural characteristics around the interaction of internal and external factors to ensure the efficiency and strengthening of territorial economic activities.

In this sense, economic dynamics at the territorial level have repercussions at the international level, which means that cooperation at the local level must be converted into resources applied directly to territorial challenges, given that a large part of the territories present asymmetries that have not been resolved from the State's point of view, thus legitimising the cooperation process (Niño, 2011; Aponte, 2017). Decision-making and support mechanisms at the local or regional levels will be focused on determining practical mechanisms for activities that improve the social fabric and the empowerment of communities, based on the interconnection with the actors leading the cooperation process.

It should be noted that in this context, decentralised cooperation strengthens territorial issues in its objectives, which can be explained by the direct transfer of resources between cooperation partners, guaranteeing that the processes are not extended but, on the contrary, that they have the necessary efficiency to limit existing asymmetries. Figure 1 shows the international cooperation process and the existing circle of actors.

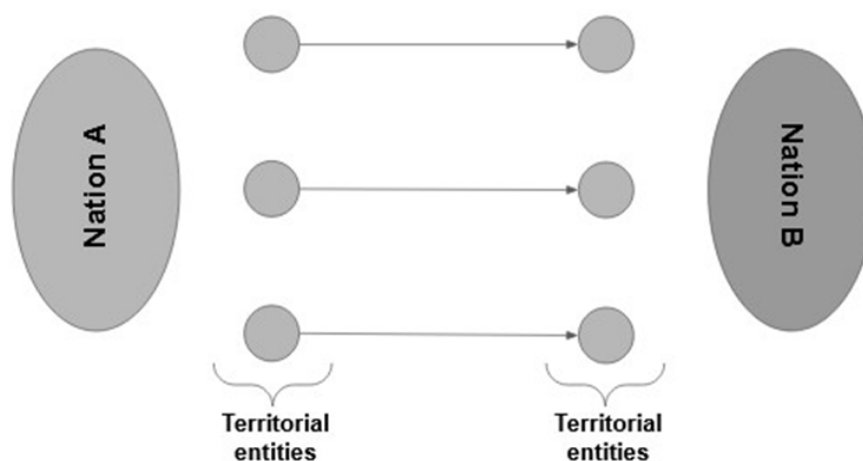
Figure 1. International cooperation cycle.

Note. By the author.

Although prior to Figure 1, the transfer of financial resources shows a diversion of specific technical resources, given that in the process the donor is the one who decides where the resource will go, whether to the State or directly to local and regional governments (Oddone, 2016; Serpa, 2019), traditionally the transfer goes directly to the international partner so that it can decide how to perform the intervention, allocating the execution of limited resources to local or regional government institutions.

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To some extent, the impact of challenges at the sub-national level is often greater than that at the national level, due to the decentralisation process, a key feature of which is the isolation of subsidiarity of available resources (Niño, 2011; Oddone, 2016). In this context, the coordination and consensus of actors will be key to determining the effective linkage of the system in strengthening decentralised cooperation; therefore, Figure 2 shows the direct dynamics at the territorial level without intermediaries.

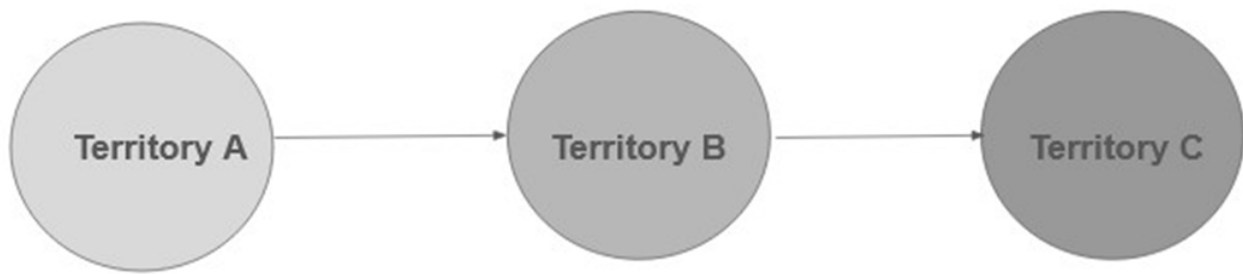
Figure 2. Decentralised cooperation.

Note. By the author.

From decentralised cooperation, it is possible to analyse how a direct dynamic is generated at the territorial level, the key being that the interaction tool is between donor and recipient territories without intermediaries (Gautier & Quiñonez, 2018; Oddone et al., 2018). Thus, the reduced cost of transactions leads to an increase in territorial projects for socioeconomic progress, insofar as the resources available directly are strategic for planning action routes in a sustainable manner.

Triangular cooperation, as shown in Figure 3, seeks to support different territories through the transfer of financial resources, where territory A supports the intervention of actor B to solve a challenge faced by territory C. From this point on, donor– recipient transfers take a longer route that may not efficiently link resources to the territory.

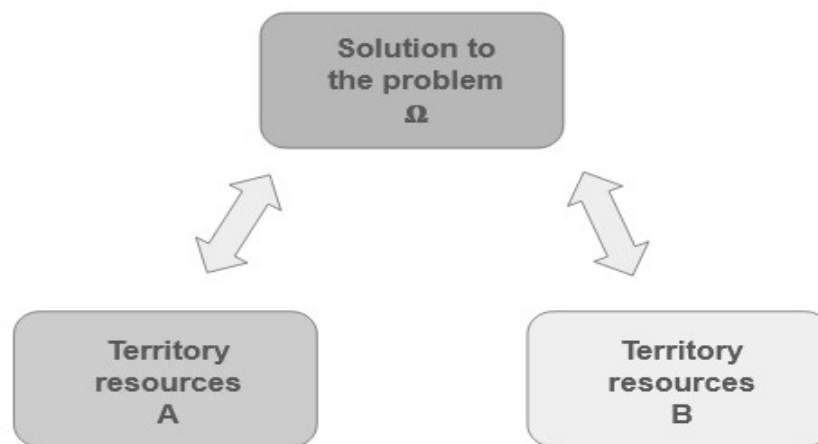
Figure 3. Triangular cooperation.



Note. By the author.

After having analysed these three types of cooperation, support for subnational entities and the degree of social cohesion that improves political leadership, it is necessary to recognise, in principle, the best system of interrelation with international actors, in this case decentralised cooperation. Lequesne and Paquin (2017) emphasise that tripartite cooperation does not solve the problem directly, given that it does not link the territory, but rather tends towards an interrelationship based on similar characteristics. In turn, traditional international cooperation responds to win– lose logics, which, although it has managed to generate sufficient resources, does not provide incentives for the advancement of sustainable competitive development for the territories.

Thus, the decentralised cooperation process represents a progressively more efficient system, given that it recognises the search for tools and mechanisms to achieve sustainable growth at the territorial level, being a horizontal relationship in which donors and recipients perform their actions under shared responsibilities that resolve particular problems within the communities. Figure 4 analyses in this sense the partnership between territorial entities.

Figure 4. Territorial entities association.

Note. By the author.

The dynamism of cooperation has generated a link between territories, which is evident in the existing partnership for capacity building, seeking from related services the consolidation of their own development model that allows the territories to move away from state dependence and solve the problems of fragmentation that arise in their communities (Juste & Oddone, 2020; Torrens, 2020). With the process of globalisation and the porosity of borders, this type of association serves to ensure that resources reach territories in a shared way to address their problems.

Territory A has resources (A1, A2, A3...)

Territory B has resources (B1, B2, B3...).

Ω is the answer to the problem. That is: $\Omega' - \Omega = 0$

With $\Omega_1 = A_1 + B_1$

Therefore, territorial problems cannot be solved unless there is a mechanism that, using its resources, manages to identify the asymmetries existing in the territory and confront them directly. When facing any problem whose solution is Ω , where A and B are needed, the association will act as a bridge in the transfer of resources. This logic can be extended to as many members as the association may have, as well as the amount of resources that each of the territories possesses.

This optimisation of resources to increase the productivity of territorial conditions depends to a large extent on the correct identification of problems related to the contribution and development of sub-national entities (Torrens, 2020). In this sense, decentralised cooperation is correctly articulated to territorial legitimacy by acting as a function of territorial levels from the duplication of efforts, without ignoring the linkage of territorial dynamics and the connexion with socio-economic development.

In conclusion, decentralised cooperation has shown that the insertion of territorial entities in the international system in a competitive and productive way for communities obeys the principles of decentralisation (Rrustemi, 2020), given that it produces results

that legitimise territorial institutions through the potentialisation of networks and connectivity that stimulate insertion in new economic spaces from added value. Local and regional levels of government enhance the effective articulation of territorial efforts to develop developed economies with global competitiveness.

TOOL FOR TERRITORIAL DEVELOPMENT

Decentralisation and territorial development emerge as the central debate of the current paradiplomacy. This action for Lequesne and Paquin (2017) favours the international management of the local level due to the territorial planning strategies that emerge from the insertion of international actors, directed towards the more efficient functioning of public structures. At first, international cooperation responded to centralist state logics that subjected its actions to the national interest and not to the real needs of the territories, causing this international aid tool to be viewed with mistrust if subnational entities were not recognised for their economic, political, social or cultural value.

Therefore, strengthening the international agenda of territorial entities does not only depend on the articulation with international peers, but also on the development of networks and alliances that enhance the resources available to the territory to make them more competitive. Thus, the internationalisation of local and regional governments presents horizontal guidelines that articulate agencies and governments towards a strategy in common agreement and vertical guidelines at the territorial level that seek to strengthen social empowerment (Gautier & Quiñonez, 2018).

From these tools, territorial development for projection on the international scene requires that territorial entities seek to be competitive economic actors, given that the main objective is the construction of a favourable environment for interactions from territorial progress (Costamagna & Menardi, 2019). Therefore, the internationalisation process takes up two perspectives: first, direct intervention actions where the State is in charge of connecting with funds to try to close territorial gaps, or second, the promotion and creation of competences with other international bodies.

This is where territorial competences, although not the same in different territories, given that some have more capacities than others, need to be addressed through decentralised cooperation, considering existing asymmetries based on territorial realities. This seeks to ensure that the territorial approach responds to the different dimensions of local development, recognising that the particular problems of a territory can find technical or financial assistance in the international arena (Juste et al., 2021).

Revaluing the territory through decentralised cooperation takes as a transcendental aspect the geographical continuity for the transformation of areas fragmented by state-centric constructions (Lequesne & Paquin, 2017). In this sense, promoting the international action of subnational entities involves structural processes where governance is implemented from the grassroots so that social empowerment manages an efficient articulation that administers resources within the framework of existing problems.

In this way, the leadership of local authorities and international actors is interrelated

with the concept of development, which links the actions carried out in favour of the objectives outlined horizontally, generating instruments for the exchange of knowledge and experiences that will serve to provide the added value that has so limited territorial competitiveness (Ardila, 2019; Birle, 2018; Garcia et al., 2020). Although territorial development is not an immediate process, to incorporate a project with sustainability and development, it is important that both local authorities and international organisations act as a single actor, as this will allow the experience to be more meaningful.

Decentralised cooperation historically refers to the creation and participation of cooperative practises that redefine the socio-economic contexts of recipient communities, with the strengthening of civil society and local institutions being essential for the structural design of local development programmes under the accompaniment of international cooperation (Rosas et al., 2018; Cuervo & Délano, 2019). This relationship shows how a shared problem can have a joint solution only if there is popular and territorial participation in horizontal articulation with the organisations that are included in the process.

However, Rosas et al. (2018) show that although this inter-institutional articulation exists, it is necessary that the strategies implemented by cooperation rescue traditional values, with the objective that territorial resources have effective added value in the local and regional economy, generating that the cooperation mechanisms achieve insertion in the global scenario in a competitive manner. This tool is the transversal axis for territorial development after the decentralised cooperation process to achieve effective internationalisation that reduces asymmetries and increases the productive consolidation of the territory.

Therefore, closing social gaps and reducing asymmetries at the territorial level requires the development of planning processes that take advantage of the territory's comparative advantages through the insertion of both technical and financial resources through decentralised cooperation (Corzo and Cuadra, 2020). However, the perspective of growth for communities must go beyond the receipt of aid from the donor, with the aim of encouraging processes of involvement and participation by the population and institutions to respond to the great demands that emerge from the context from different actors and at different levels.

In this sense, Balcázar's analysis (2020) suggests the development of strategies and priorities aimed at improving citizens' living conditions, which involves leveraging decentralized cooperation tools to continuously enhance socio-economic sustainability. This is how the relationships between actors increase networks and mutual trust for the development of resources aimed at compensating for the asymmetries of the environments based on criteria of mutual responsibility that respond to emerging notions of competitiveness based on what territories do best.

Therefore, the main beneficiary of decentralised cooperation is the territory, not only at the institutional level but also from a bottom-up analysis where civil society has the support of externalities that balance the context of thousands of forgotten communities that are part of the periphery (Villiers, 2018). The revaluation of the territory promotes

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the achievement of objectives based on the tools of decentralised cooperation, given that the concept of development encompasses a conception that articulates the fluctuations of socio-economic dynamics, evaluating the value of territorial aspects to encourage alliances that positively affect the territories that lag behind (Grandas, 2019).

Therefore, it should be noted that although decentralised cooperation performs actions for socio-economic progress by linking resources directly with the territory, it does not have the same asymmetries as other territories, which must be addressed through inter-institutional tools that can be used under multilateralism, generating autonomy and balance in decision-making (Benedetti & Arroyo, 2018; García et al., 2020). The fundamental aspects involved in the increase of inequalities should not be overlooked, given that these factors directly affect the progress of cooperation due to the lack of opportunities that limit sustainable socioeconomic progress.

In other words, additional development in a region does not automatically translate into development for all the populations within the region and vice versa, which is why increasing the networks and means of action at the international level, whether from cooperation strategies or from territorial internationalisation programmes, can provide the added value that has cost the territories so much due to the lack of resources and connections with their international peers (Llorens & Sánchez, 2019). Thus, we can see that adapting to the territories implies the intervention of national governments and the international cooperation system.

Given the above context, it is necessary to clarify that the categorisation of cities within the local level does not respond directly to the interests of state advancement, but rather integrates socioeconomic development tools focussed on the territory and the existing asymmetries in the social fabric. This process strengthens organisations that form an area of influence around the possibility of generating articulated spaces of productivity and competitiveness to intertwine processes of territorial progress from the insertion in the international system, taking up the processes of internationalisation as an essential characteristic.

LACK OF NATIONAL COORDINATION AND LOCAL DISPARITIES

The current development panorama shows a fragmentation between the national level and local or regional governments. Perhaps this scenario is more evident in peripheral areas where state aid or the presence of international entities is practically null, where the determining factors for social fragmentation coexist from development plans to the lack of adequate conditions for a structural development of life (Benedetti & Arroyo, 2018). The above evidences an asymmetry at the local and regional levels, which a priori could translate into a disconnection of the national order with the local one. In this framework, this section will provide tools to understand the disparities that the local level presents despite the disconnection with the national order.

The level of integration of the municipalities is practically null due to the decentralisation process in which the capacities for interaction were relegated to the financial capacity of

the municipalities, given the lack of competencies and capacities to generate processes of territorial balance (Costamagna & Menardi, 2019). This situation is evident when municipal entities are small or medium-sized because, depending on the capital, decisions will affect the entire area of influence, create large-scale development, or widen the centre– periphery gap.

As observed in Table 1, socioeconomic indicators reveal a wide variability among the intermediate cities analyzed, highlighting significant contrasts in poverty, inequality, and economic dynamism. Cities such as Cuenca (Ecuador) and Valdivia (Chile) stand out for their low poverty levels and relatively high GDP per capita, while Salta and Paraná (Argentina) face high poverty rates and lower income levels. In terms of inequality, Huancayo (Peru) and La Paz (Mexico) exhibit low Gini coefficients, in contrast to Quetzaltenango (Guatemala), which demonstrates a pronounced concentration of income. Business environment efficiency also varies, with Cuenca and Paraná leading in administrative ease, while Huancayo experiences significant delays that could hinder its economic development.

Thus, variables such as the percentage of the population below the poverty line, income Gini coefficient, days required to obtain a business license, city GDP per capita, average annual unemployment rate, and adult literacy rate can act as centripetal forces driving the internationalization of a city, making it attractive to external stakeholders (Wilches & Niño, 2017).

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Table 1. Indicators.

CITY	Percentage of population below the poverty line	Gini coefficient of income	Days to obtain a business license	City GDP per capita -USD	Average annual unemployment rate	Adult literacy rate
La Paz (Mexico)	20,60*	0,36*	16,5*	9180*	3,8%*	98,23%*
Campeche (Mexico)	32,5%	0,371	11,0	5241,14	2,0%	94,18%
Santiago de los Caballeros (Dominican Republic)	31,4%*	0,457*	22,5*	7370*	5,6%*	96,12%*
Huancayo (Peru)	24%	0,30	55	6530	3,5%	95,2%
Quetzaltenango (Guatemala)	28,92	0,65	47	4386***	1,97%	95%
Manizales (Colombia)	17,6%	0,460	9,0	4024,80	11,1%	98,8%
Valdivia (Chile)	10,45%	0,45	11	5560	5,80%	96,75%
Paraná (Argentina)	46,7%	0.402	5**	6266,591**	3,7	98,19%**
Salta (Argentina)	52,2%	0,415	15,5**	3901,686**	5,5	98,85%**
Cuenca (Ecuador)	4,3%	0,427***	5	13158	5,54%*	95,67%

Source: own elaboration.

Therefore, geographical space at the territorial level entails visions and interpretations of paradigms such as dependency. From this perspective, it is possible to analyse from a Latin American perspective the strategies to mitigate the economic backwardness that prevents modernisation and development (Corzo & Cuadra, 2020; Llorens & Sánchez, 2019). Thus, the existence of asymmetries within territorial adjectives and decentralised cooperation is not directly linked to the national level, so its impact is observed at all levels.

At the national level, cooperation was initially seen as a purely centralised role, which has generated a disconnection from the territorial level (Cuervo & Délano, 2019), given that the strategic value of both communities and local or regional scenarios is not recognised. Decentralisation policies have encouraged the creation of links with different international actors, generating the inclusion of sub-state entities in economic transformation scenarios that revolutionise and assimilate the possibility of encouraging sustainable economic transformation.

In the case of the insertion of sub-national entities in Latin America and the global south, it is possible to see how local and regional governments have not created insertion capacities at the institutional level, because of limited resources to face international challenges or even a lack of knowledge about the internationalisation process. In this sense, for Cuervo and Délano (2019), to take advantage of the opportunities presented by the international scenario, it is necessary to create bodies that are responsible for promoting and coordinating these activities, based on leverage with the needs of the subnational level.

In this context, the direct effect of the development of nations and territories comprises at first the direct intervention of central bodies, where there is a loss of decentralisation, but at the same time it guarantees funds for the more remote areas that have been left behind (Nugroho and Sujarwoto, 2021). On the other hand, it is emphasised that national bodies that give absolute freedom to territorial entities will help to promote the creation of competencies in local and regional bodies, encouraging greater efficiency in the decentralised cooperation system, whereby existing resources are used in the best way (Correa et al., 2019).

Territories make better use of decentralised cooperation due to the creation of cross-border territorial collaboration networks that will determine strategic positions in the internationalisation process, relatively modifying productive structures to make them more competitive (Niño, 2021; Cuervo & Délano, 2019). Therefore, to develop their territories, national entities should pursue decentralised cooperation policies in areas with a shortage of technical resources and provide intermediate bodies with these resources, once again revaluing the territory from this form of cooperation.

Taking these aspects into account, the productive gaps imply the creation of networks that, through access to different sources of financing, grant direct investments that limit the existing asymmetries, either through cohesion and social well-being that arise from the relationship with the management of the participation of the actors in the social fabric (Correa et al., 2019). These characteristics are visible mainly from the contribution and intervention of leadership associated with the transnational interests of states (Maoz &

Henderson, 2020), which means that the social instability granted at the national level is disconnected from the search for institutional stability in local and regional governance, given that this would imply greater costs and state presence.

It is worth noting that if there were coordination between the national and local levels, international insertion links could be strengthened for a more competitive economy, which implies that social improvements respond to an economic growth that is not transitory but is competent with social welfare (Maoz & Henderson, 2020). However, the leverage of factors such as unemployment, inequality, and inequity has a close relationship with public policies incentivised at the state level (Correa et al., 2019; Llorens & Sanchez, 2019), which is why the lack of coordination at the national level is undoubtedly one of the main consequences of disparities at the local level.

Finally, the redefinition of territories must be a consensual relationship between the state and local or regional governments, because the material basis of socioeconomic growth and development implies permanent interrelationships between sectors and dimensions of the national context for subsequent international consolidation. The needs, desires, and aspirations of local and regional governments to reduce existing disparities represent a notion that goes beyond territorial fragmentation, based on the interrelationship with decentralised cooperation to strengthen the realities of the territory at the international level, with empowerment and competitiveness on the international stage.

CONCLUSIONS

The territorial impacts of decentralisation analysed above reflect the fact that after the globalisation process, the dynamisation and insertion of sub-national entities in the international scenario is subject to cooperation processes that facilitate the competitiveness of the local economy in conduction with transnational connectivity. Beyond simply facilitating competitiveness, these cooperation processes are transforming the dynamics of internal governance, fostering an interdependence that, while empowering, can also generate new forms of dependence if not properly managed. Sub-national autonomy responds to the creation and strengthening of an institutional level that can reduce local asymmetries, for which it is important that communities feel identified with their territory to ensure that interaction with international peers is sustainable and competitive.

The restriction of international negotiations implies that cooperation processes provide capacities for those actors who, with their own resources, cannot connect with the international arena. Under this premise, local and regional governments seek internationalisation processes that increase their visibility and strengthen their territorial structures. However, the lack of articulation with the national State means that interaction with cooperation processes is limited to those sub-national governments with greater financial capacity. In the long run, this disconnection risks reinforcing structural inequalities that go beyond the economic and extend into the political and social spheres, raising questions about the sustainability of decentralization without effective integration between levels of government, where decentralised cooperation, as shown above, plays a determining role in achieving the long-awaited development process that eliminates the

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existing disparities in the social fabric.

Multilateral organisations play a key role in the creation and strengthening of concepts that have been implemented worldwide, both at the national and territorial levels. However, while these organizations foster local capacities, their role as key actors can also impose models that do not necessarily reflect the specific needs of each territory, creating tensions between local autonomy and global standardization. In this context, decentralised cooperation fosters an environment that promotes new concepts in the field of international cooperation. Thus, in territorial interaction, the articulation consists of creating a counterbalance with other levels of government to strengthen local and regional capacities from the potentialities that, lacking state support, have been relegated to the background.

Decentralised cooperation not only responds intrinsically to the process of territorial decentralisation but also positions itself as a tool for international articulation where subnational entities can, with the help of international partners, perform socio-economic projects through the attraction of financial and technical resources as a tool for territorial development. While decentralized cooperation has proven to be an effective vehicle for legitimizing socioeconomic empowerment at the local level, it is essential to ask whether this empowerment is truly inclusive and sustainable. While some territories have made significant progress, others may be left behind and reproduce new forms of exclusion or dependency, especially in a context of limited international resources. The legitimacy of articulation between local and regional governments through decentralised cooperation processes legitimises the socio-economic empowerment of communities for their subsequent insertion in international spheres.

First, aspects such as the empowerment of the civilian population and competitiveness make the participating territories feel supported by civilian actors, both within their constituency and at the international level. In turn, it cannot be denied that decentralised cooperation plays a vital role in supporting the decentralisation process in developing countries, as the availability of financial mechanisms and technical support gives territories a greater level of independence from their centres.

Second, decentralised cooperation shares its final objective with traditional cooperation and decentralisation, that is, the development of territories is articulated with cooperation mechanisms for the use of resources to solve existing problems. Furthermore, it is essential to understand that decentralized cooperation mechanisms respond to territorial dynamics that are not always replicable at the global level. This distinction is key to explain why some regions achieve significant progress while others continue to face persistent obstacles. Local adaptability, context and institutional capacity play a key role in differentiating decentralized cooperation from other forms of cooperation. However, the competitiveness and sustainability demanded by the international scenario obliges sub-national entities to constitute an added value that is only possible if communities feel included and represented by the institutional order.

Thus, the solution to socioeconomic disparities in one territory may well be based on the resources of another territory, making cooperation the mechanism for transferring

responses from the international arena. At the same time, the functions of each level of government must be considered, as institutional operations may change from one country to another. In this scenario, the know-how of each territory must be analysed, as well as the context in which they are located, as they will result in resources being correctly translated into efficient use of resources, something that differentiates decentralised cooperation from other cooperation practises.

In turn, decentralised cooperation has allowed for a horizontal relationship between actors, which means that the integration of territories and organisations responds to similar interests to put in place tools to respond quickly to the socio-economic problems of sub-national entities. Therefore, the efficiency and optimisation of resources depend to a large extent on existing administrative structures, given that subnational structures are beginning to assume a political role on the international stage, which was previously only associated with the central State.

Finally, the importance of territorial development for the implementation of a decentralised cooperation policy consists of implementing cooperation programmes in a complementary manner with local or regional development plans, as well as horizontally linking all the actors involved and playing an important role in order for the donor-recipient relationship to be strategically consolidated at the territorial and international level. This new configuration translates into a development that is seen at the local, regional, national, and international levels, given that the objective is to reduce existing gaps and enhance the performance of the territory as a whole.

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