

POLICY COUNCILS  TOWNHALLS

FUTURE ENVISIONING EXERCISES

VISION DOCUMENT

Reclaiming the Commons

FUTURE ENVISIONING EXERCISES

The Future Envisioning Exercise on the Transformative Power of Commons made it clear that the ambition of the Pact for the Future is far from being a mere commitment by local governments to contribute to a new social contract. The Pact is an exercise of reflection by our multi-stakeholder ecosystem that forces us to review and recast the ways in which we relate to each other, to ourselves, to others and to the planet.

The public and the common often go hand in hand, but they are not the same. Our constituency and its allies have been reflecting for years on the fit between these two issues and between them and the broader notion of the Right to the City. As our [Town Hall](#) and [GOLD VI](#) processes remind us, the Commons are not just about public goods, basic services, and tangible realities. They are also immaterial realities, processes, relationships, memories and expectations. So what characterizes the commons in our territories? The commons are not only public or private; they belong to, they are the fruit of, communities. And who are the communities? The notion of community expands and democratizes the concept of citizenship beyond the legal status and conditions of existence of the people who inhabit the territories.

Looking at the Future from the lens of the Commons is a point of arrival and a point of departure. We got here by striving for universal, accessible and quality public services. We depart from here by acknowledging that these are essential to guarantee the effective Right to the City, but they are not enough on their own. The advancement of environmental degradation, together with global trends that oppress, segregate and hurt our communities (informality, the housing emergency, precarious working conditions, access barriers, structural racism and an array of inequalities embedded in our institutions), confront us with the structural reflection that permeates the Pact for the Future: it is no longer just a matter of expanding the public, but of restructuring it.

The present Vision Document compiles the aspirations and contributions shared by participants who attended the Future Envisioning Exercise; an analysis of how local actions that could be advanced to achieve such aspirations could effectively contribute to urban and territorial equality; as well as a set of policy orientations for doing so.

1. Shared understandings and aspirations for Reclaiming the Commons as an entry point for unfolding the Pact for the Future

- Our constituency and its allies agree that the Commons are not always public. They go beyond the public and have to do with how we co-create: they have to do with the place of communities and the place of new essentials in policy making. Plus, if we want to define these new essentials, we need to change the way we govern and finance, but also what we mean by Commons.
- Our shared aspirations call for us to reflect on time and place as Commons. We can put time into competition or we can put it into caring, sharing and reimagining the future we want. The Right to the City gives us the ability to question the notion of place as a Common, away from the idea of private property and instead, asking what place means in our imagination, in culture, in knowledge. We are compelled to address and move those

frontiers that are currently not governed for the common good: the global financial system and the environment.

- We also need to decolonize and reappropriate our language to stop thinking of nature, of people, as mere resources. Our shared ambition is to reclaim, regain, protect and defend the rights that are intrinsically embedded in the Commons and in the communities that cater for them: the right to water, the right to food, the right to enjoy a healthy life and symbolic spaces where local knowledge and memory flow across generations.
- We owe to the next generations a diverse, inclusive, accessible place where every young person can fulfil their potential. Universal rights and dignity cannot rely on market fluctuations and must be cared for by all communities. For this to happen, the governance of the new essentials must lay on the shoulders of all people, connected and working at unison.
- How do we get there? Through co-creation processes that bring about social innovation, social protection systems that cover the diversity of inhabitants that live in cities, including those providing care, many of whom are women, and many of whom live and work informally. Governance is key and goes beyond rethinking public administration. Our Future Envisioning Exercises require us to reimagine the entire governance ecosystem, which goes beyond institutions and relates to how we work together with different spheres and actors.

Fig. 1. Results of the interactive consultation conducted using Mentimeter

What word comes to your mind when you think of "commons"? (Write up to three)



What do you think is the opposite of "commons"? (Write up to three words)



2. Contributions shared for achieving these aspirations

Regarding how to **redefine the idea of the commons**, in both practical and conceptual terms, there is a clear need to establish a strong connection between the commons and the notion of co-creation, a need to broaden the conception of the commons, and to develop a new "common sense" around the commons. This means understanding the commons as what life depends on, the opposite of appropriation, what does not belong to a single person. Such understanding thus entails including local communities in the conversation about dimensions of daily life such as health, water, housing, caring, and social protection. We need to understand which are the connections between life, the elements that enable life, the built environment and human societies and communities. That is: how we deal with the planet as commons. Undeniably, this requires

detaching from (or decolonizing) the idea that certain elements such as water, land etc. are resources that can be monetized and thus exploited is a bold step that needs to be taken in this redefinition of the commons. How to co-create public policy with communities for the reappropriation of that which was common or public and was privatized? Nevertheless, the defense of the commons entails danger: it was shared how, in Latin America, 250 people have been assassinated for defending the reappropriation of the commons. How can we redouble our efforts to protect the commons and their defenders, including not only activists but also frontrunning LRGs?

To make this possible, a **renewal of the social contract** was deemed more urgent than ever. But how to ensure the commitment of LRGs as well as of the population to create affordable and liveable conditions for all of them to thrive? The new social contract requires a whole reframing of the current governance architecture. This goes beyond rethinking public institutions, and rather relates to how we work together with different spheres and actors. Indeed, placing a strong emphasis on the idea of trust, it concerns the way we relate to each other, to the planet, and the way we govern ourselves. In this endeavor, working with communities and the peripheries is key. And culture is a key entry point to ensure people have access to education, services and health, and that they coexist in harmony and with mutual affection, which are also important relational commons.

In this effort to reclaim the commons, the renewal of the social contract shall go hand in hand with a **human rights and right to the city approach**, with a specific mention of place, the right to food and the right to health. Certainly, the Right to the City offers us the ability to understand rights as collective, which is crucial given the key role that the collective plays in the management and use of the commons. Regarding ensuring populations' right to food, the management of food systems cannot rely on private processes like market fluctuations, but must be managed as a public service centered on the wellbeing of people, their economic and alimentary needs, while being respectful of the environment. It is thus key to ask what local-national-global development model must be designed to ensure an equitable and inclusive distribution of the common goods related to food. This is tied to understanding what model must be designed to foster an approach to urban planning that is focused on the management of the commons instead of subject to speculation. While the right to health, ensured through universal health coverage, needs to be understood as an investment – not a cost – that is a first step when speaking about the commons, as it is fundamental for establishing the basis for equality (including gender equality, through for instance ensuring access to all women to sexual and reproductive healthcare).

Reclaiming the commons also means **redefining the role of communities**: some commons that are key for people to thrive, such as generational knowledge and symbolic spaces such as parks and public spaces, are owned, reactivated and taken care of by the people. It is also key to consider how the COVID-19 pandemic and the current interconnected global crises and complex emergencies require that we ask ourselves what kind of transformation we need, and which are the new roles to be played by LRGs and local communities. In that sense, redefining the role of communities also entails speaking about life and putting people at the core of public policies, for which tools such as public-public and also public-community alliances can be mobilized. As well as other tools that value local knowledges and culture and are determinant to place the commons as an entry point for a sustainable future, such as those related to the production of data for evidence-based policymaking, or fostering new means for political participation.

The **feminist and the care agenda** represent an opportunity for the commons agenda, and vice versa. Commons are essential not only for life, but also for the reproduction of life. This common agenda has to be cross-sectoral to caring, repairing, rebuilding, finding one another, working together, listening to our communities, favoring endogenous growth, identifying the processes that emerge from the territories and leaving no one behind. In this sense, how can we put the commons in a different place of the agenda so as to go towards a caring society? How to ensure that the role of humans is not to produce but to create, in order to change the way in which we relate with the planet? What is the role of education, and education in gender equality in particular, in the achievement of the transformation we are seeking? A first step can be understanding the social protection of all populations as a critical common, including those providing care, many of whom are women, many of whom live and work informally. In sum, the place we find for the commons in our future decision-making processes will determine how we thrive as a global community.

3. Shared principles linking the vision with the municipalist movement’s commitment to urban and territorial equality

The organized constituency of local and regional governments committed to not allowing inequalities to continue to grow. As part of such commitment, it identified five key principles that should underpin local actions for them to effectively advance urban and territorial equality, related to the notions of rights, space, governance, finance and time.¹ As seen in the section above, in this Future Envisioning Exercise, several critical dimensions for advancing the commons as an entry point for a sustainable future have been identified. The following analysis contributes to the conversation about how these actions could be shaped for them to buttress urban and territorial equality.

Key topic addressed during the FEE	How can local actions related to this topic be underpinned by the GOLD VI principles for equality?
<p><u>Redefinition of the idea of commons</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopting a rights-based approach can embed the recognition of the rights of communities to access and manage common resources, as well as allow for institutionalizing the expansion of rights that are created through everyday city making practices. • Addressing the spatial dimension of inequalities in redefining the idea of commons can help promote equitable access to common resources across different communities located in different spaces of the territories, reducing spatial inequalities that may exist in the distribution of these resources. • Promoting a new culture of subnational governance can help promote a culture of collaboration, participation, and shared responsibility between different spheres of government and communities in the management and

¹ These five principles emerge as part of the process that led to the production of the 2022 [GOLD VI report](#), the flagship publication of the organized constituency of local and regional governments, produced in partnership with Knowledge in Action for Urban Equality. The principles in their integrity can be found [in the Conclusions chapter](#).

stewardship of the commons.

- Adopting an adequate financing and investment architecture can make sure that communities have access to the necessary resources and investments to build their capacity to manage and protect the commons sustainably.
- Engaging with time: past, present and future can ensure that actions taken contemplate the historical and future implications of the management of the commons, acknowledging histories of past inequalities and ensuring that the interests of future generations are considered.

Renewal of the social contract

- Adopting a rights-based approach to local actions seeking to renew the social contract can contribute to the recognition of the rights of all members of society, including marginalized and vulnerable groups, as well as to ensuring that everyone has access to basic social services and benefits, such as healthcare, education, and social protection. It can foster a culture of human rights and social justice in society.
- Addressing urban-rural disparities in the provision of social services can promote spatial justice by reducing spatial inequalities between territories.
- Involving community members in shaping their own social contracts can also encourage collaboration and shared responsibility, contributing to building trust between communities and different spheres of governance.
- Adopting an adequate financing and investment architecture can ensure that resources and investments are directed towards social programs and initiatives that promote social welfare and benefit communities, prioritizing the needs of marginalized groups in budget allocation and investment decisions.
- Engaging with time: past, present and future can contribute to recognizing the historical and structural roots of social inequalities and promote a long-term vision for social development.

Feminism and care

- Adopting a rights-based approach can ensure that the rights of women and marginalized groups are protected in all decisions related to the commons, including land use, resource management, and infrastructure development.
 - Addressing the spatial dimensions of inequalities helps to consider the ways in which women and marginalized groups are disproportionately impacted by environmental degradation and resource depletion, in response to which many commoning strategies are put in place, such as those led by women's groups.
 - Promoting a new culture of subnational governance can foster the engagement of women and marginalized groups in decision making, resulting in local actions that can promote more equitable and sustainable management of the commons.
 - Ensuring that public budgets and investments are gender-responsive and prioritize the provision of affordable and accessible care services, can help to reduce the burden of care work on women and enable their full participation in public life.
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Ecological transition and changing the relationship with the planet

- Recognizing the historical and ongoing impacts of colonization, patriarchy and other forms of systemic oppression on access to and control over common resources, and taking a long-term perspective on the sustainability of the commons, can help to ensure that the feminist and care agenda is embedded in efforts to protect and restore the commons.
- Ensuring that the rights of nature and local communities are recognized and protected in ecological transition initiatives, and that environmental justice is upheld.
- Addressing the unequal distribution of environmental burdens and benefits across different social groups and geographic areas, and promoting equality in the access of these to participatory decision-making processes.
- Empowering local communities and civil society organizations to participate in the design, implementation, and monitoring of ecological transition policies and programs, valuing local commoning strategies and fostering collaboration between different spheres of government.
- mobilizing public and private funds to support the ecological transition, banking local commoning strategies and initiatives and ensuring the respect the rights of nature and local communities.
- Embracing a long-term perspective, also recognising the past, on the ecological transition and the protection of the commons, and planning for resilience in the face of future challenges.

4. Policy orientations: Key takeaways

1. *Redefining the New Essentials*

The new essentials are innovative public services that our constituency must protect, strengthen and promote in alliance with the whole of society.

Local and regional governments are responsible for taking care of the places and the people that ensure that communities grow, live, move, work, share and learn every day. Our role is also to protect and care for those that protect and care for our communities. Our responsibility is to value their contributions to society, to ensure decent work and to foster a model of production that is people-centered and that puts service provision, and providers, at the forefront. It is further imperative to acknowledge the jobs, mostly done by women in the care sector, often underpaid or even unpaid. Their care is not only an

indispensable safety net but also a critical feature of our socioeconomic relations.

Access to adequate **housing** is a critical condition for living with dignity and for fulfilling other human rights, such as those related to access to basic services. The pandemic further demonstrated the extent to which adequate housing is a critical aspect of societal welfare, central for caring for our populations. The local housing emergencies across the world, triggered by the financialization of housing and related to unaffordability, inadequacy and homelessness, have shed light on the urgency to localize the housing agenda, expanding the capacities of local and regional governments to acknowledge, protect and fulfil populations' right to adequate housing. This entails expanding the notion of what local housing policy can look like by increasing local capacity to

regulate housing markets, in order to prevent discrimination and evictions, as well as to enable local and regional governments' engagement with communities' housing-related commoning strategies, such as community land trusts, among others. As long as housing is a universal human right, its governance must come back to the hands of our communities.

Universal Health Coverage must not be a goal anymore but a shared reality. Access to health must not depend on legal status and global health is only possible if individuals are covered. The right to a healthy life goes beyond healthcare assistance and our territories have a critical role to play in its achievement.

Formal and informal **education** is critical at all stages of life and the key to achieve equality and shared prosperity. A feminist, ecological and non-discriminatory approach to education starts in our streets and must permeate all institutions. As a constituency, we owe a sustainable future to the youngest generations and we need to equip them with the knowledge, the capacity and the space to come up with solutions to restore, repair and rebuild the world where we live.

The quality of livelihoods largely depends on our daily lives unfold in cities, in towns and territories. Ensuring **lifelong learning and decent work** for all is a beacon to ensure inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities. This requires rethinking public space and public works, from procurement to service delivery, are continuously rethought and assessed with the communities that offer and enjoy them.

Digital inclusivity is not just a source of innovation, but a fundamental right. Well managed, digital inclusion can be instrumental in overcoming physical barriers and in opening new pathways for co-creation and social innovation. Poorly managed, the

digital divide can be a dangerous source of discrimination that may leave many people and territories behind.

The right to food and water must be at the core of multilevel and multilateral agreements, and the management of food systems cannot rely on private processes like market fluctuations. The food cycle must be managed as a public service and led by proximity, centered on the wellbeing of people, their economic and alimentary needs, while being respectful of the environment. Care work must be redefined, redistributed and dignified, so as to allow for the emancipation of those that have traditionally endured its conditions and for the mainstreaming of the benefits and impacts of caregiving across all segments of society.

2. Strengthening the link between the Commons and Human Rights through the Right to the City

A *new common sense* around the Commons is needed that puts rights at the centre and protects those that protect and defend them. The Right to the City framework allows us to understand the commons as collective rights, not individual ones. In particular, allowing to advocate for, and advance a new generation of rights pertaining to equality in the use of public spaces and services, inclusive citizenship, the social functions of property, as well as to reinforce actions around non-discrimination, gender equality, enhanced political participation and more just and balanced urban-rural relationships.

Moreover, in the face of criminalization and manifold obstructions, the global community needs to redouble efforts to protect not only defenders of human rights and the commons (e.g. climate-related commons) but also local and regional governments. Making human rights a top priority also implies that accessibility must be taken into account by

local governments, from public procurement to the redefinition of public services and spaces.

3. *Placing finance and economy at the service of the Common good*

Global finance and economy appear as abstract and separate entities from our communities. However, they come from human labour and from the ways in which we relate to each other and to nature. Our financial and economic systems are structurally unequal and deeply exclusive. We need to rethink in both practical and conceptual terms what it means to rebuild a system of governance that serves the common good. The global financial ecosystem alienates less economically developed countries and marginalized communities: we need to pilot new financial systems that work for all.

4. *Regaining trust by enhancing accountability and leveraging proximity*

As the sphere of government closest to the people and territories, our constituency has for decades vindicated the efficiency and pragmatism of our solutions and responses to global and local challenges in a changing world. Now, faced with the galloping growth of misinformation and mistrust in institutions, accentuated by dynamics like corruption and inequality, we must restore our governance of the commons on the foundations that have made us strong. The solutions to all the crises that are currently overlapping are necessarily of proximity. Local governments hold the key to be at the forefront of this change, but also have the duty to do so with responsibility, transparency and by opening up spaces for true participation.

5. *Reshaping multilateralism*

A new governance architecture is needed to promote the Commons, which are at the same time global and local. We need to link different spheres of government and civil society to create alliances and ensure participation. We need to acknowledge the co-responsibility between private and public sectors to ensure equal participation in this process, with particular attention to bridging the gender, race, class, capacity and age gaps that permeate current power dynamic

6. *A shift towards feminism with a renewed notion of care at the centre*

Commons are essential not only for life, but also for the reproduction of life. This is a key connection between the commons and care discussions that cannot be dissociated. Our shift towards feminism is a pathway towards equity through proximity. Proximity plays a key role in relation with people and trust, but also with time. In this endeavour, quality, universal education, is critical to accompany this shift.

7. *Accessibility as a fundamental right*

As long as the Commons belong first and foremost to the communities, our duty is to make sure that all communities are involved in their governance. Through the lens of the commons, accessibility means shifting the way we think and provide public services. Making human rights a top priority also implies that accessibility must be taken into account by local governments when carrying out public procurement. It is important to rethink public spending to include social responsibility clauses in procurement, as it is important to educate the public in new consumer habits.

**8. *A shift in the narrative:
decolonizing our language to
reappropriate reality***

Our language shapes reality as much as our actions do. Talking about water as a resource relates to the extractivist understanding. If we continue to speak of nature, people, time and space as resources, it will be difficult to decommodify the rights that are intrinsic to our very existence. It will continue to be possible to exchange our livelihood conditions in financial markets. We need to decolonize and reappropriate our language to reclaim and regain the rights that are embedded in the Commons.

**9. *Culture as the backbone of the
Commons***

Culture is the essence of many of our local and global Commons, including health and housing, food, water and many other. All of them together are part of the way we are shaping our sense of belonging, our

coexistence as communities. Working with communities and the peripheries is key, and culture is a key entry point to ensure that diverse people coexist in harmony and with mutual affection.

**10. *Stronger partnerships and tailor
made solutions to unlock the
potential of subsidiarity***

Just as the 2030 Agenda will not be achieved if it is not implemented at the local sphere, the Commons will not be protected without localization. Likewise, local governments cannot defend the Commons alone. Innovative partnerships with all spheres of government and all sectors of society are more necessary than ever. Many of these partnerships will not come to fruition without a seat at the global table where critical issues such as the fight against climate change or the human rights of people fleeing precarious situations in dangerous conditions are negotiated.

5. Pool of resources

Title
UCLG, KNOW (2022). 04 Commoning. <i>Pathways to urban and territorial equality: Addressing inequalities through local transformation strategies</i>. GOLD VI.
UCLG Town Halls (2022). “(Global) Commons Policy Paper”.
UCLG (2022). <i>The Lampedusa Charter for Dignified Human Mobility and Territorial Solidarity</i>
UCLG Caring Systems Documentary (2022)
UCLG 2023. “Towards Caring Territories for Women Victims of Violence”
UN Secretary General’s <i>Our Common Agenda</i>
United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) “SEEING THE UNSEEN. The case for action in the neglected crisis of unintended pregnancy”
United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) “State of the World Population Report”
International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) - Resources
Action Agenda from the UHC Movement - Universal Health Coverage 2030 (UHC2030)
UN Global Issues - Water