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Subnational Authorities as Key Global Actors

Glocal Diplomacy in Pursuit of World Peace and Security in the Prism of the Vision and Goals of the UN 2030 Agenda

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ABSTRACT

The emerging role of subnational governments on the international scene, characterized by direct foreign engagements and participation in global networks, marks a pivotal shift in the architecture of world governance. This paper examines the essential role of local and regional authorities (LRAs) as key actors in advancing sustainable development, human rights protection, and democratic participation on a global scale, highlighting their involvement in the implementation of the *UN 2030 Agenda* and their multifaceted merits in conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction across the globe. Moving towards the analysis of the central role of Member States' LRAs in the context of the EU/EEA legal framework – with their important contribution to the achievement of EU's objectives both internally and in terms of external projection of the founding values and policies of the EU – this article delves into the dynamics and implications of the so-called paradiplomacy in order to shed light on how subnational actors are redefining the paradigms of traditional state-centric diplomacy. In such perspective, this work explores the relevant impact of informal diplomacy on international relations, international law, and global governance, emphasizing the innovative concepts of glocal diplomacy, global law, and glocal law and their significance for the pursuit of world peace and security.

Keywords: multi-level governance, LRAs, supranational democracy, glocal diplomacy, global law, glocal law

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1. Introduction: The Rise of Decentralized Global Democratic Governance

The Preamble of the *Charter* of the United Nations (UN) states the commitment of all the peoples of the world “to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war,” “to reaffirm faith in human rights” and “to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom.” To this end, it pledges the determination “to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours.” Those who drafted these words in 1945 were not the first to promote a vision of one world in which all humans are *neighbours*, envisaging horizontal and equal relationships and equal coexistence within *the family of mankind*. A similar ideal had inspired the League of Nations in the early twentieth century. And long before then, philosophers and religious and political thinkers had been concerned with the shared fate of humanity and the very nature of human aggregates as communities of *political beings* (i.e., πολιτικὸν ζῶον, *politikòn zôon*; Aristotle, 4th-century BC). As noted already back in the 90s by the work of the Commission on Global Governance: “Governance is the sum of many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, manage their common affairs.” In its renowned Report entitled *Our Global Neighbourhood*, presented in 1995 to the UN Secretary General and the UN General Assembly, the above-mentioned Commission stressed that in the past, governance and law were almost exclusively national concerns. However – just as at the national level, so also in the *global neighbourhood* (and in the subnational dimension where it takes root) – effective governance requires democratic and accountable institutions and the rule of law.

In this regard, effective democratic governance is called upon to function in a bottom-up sense, strengthening the link between legitimacy and effectiveness. Especially in the pursuit of the concrete *materialization* of their *ideal* objectives, as such functionally destined for a necessary *localization*

(e.g., the prism of multifaceted and participatory actions underlying the realization of sustainable development), institutions without territorial roots may prove less effective in the long term, lacking continuity, understanding, and responsiveness to people as well as the cultural, social, economic, and political grounding necessary for structured outcomes (Bouteligier, 2014; Jeannerat and Crevoisier, 2022; Och, 2018). Without *localized* roots and a *place-based* approach, institutions may experience significant challenges in gaining trust, ensuring accountability, maintaining relevance, and effectively implementing and enforcing their policies and programs (see Acuto, 2019, 136; Curtis, 2014, 16 ff; Ljungkvist 2014, 32; Senatore and Bellabarba, 2021; Smith, 2019, 134)¹. In some key fields, State sovereignty might best be exercised at the level closest to the daily life of human communities, especially given the frequent pressing humanitarian and human rights concerns – which often emerge as sources of inequalities and conflicts – and the need to protect the environment and climate, as well as peace and justice in the world. This is evident in an international context marked 1) by the crisis of the top-down global order established at the end of World War II with the creation of the UN Security Council (UNSC) as a kind of “World Legislator” (Talmon, 2005) for the maintenance of international peace and security² (as per Articles 24, 25 and 39 of the *UN Charter*) and the exhaustion of its revitalization following the fall of the USSR in the 1990s, during the so-called *Sanctions Decade*, as well as 2) by the subsequent decay of the post-Cold War global security architecture epitomized by the Western-led *rule-based world*

¹ In an interesting parallel, it is worth considering the *territorial* articulation of the structure headed by the UN Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG), responsible for the systemic coordination of the UN entities and agencies committed to sustainable development (UNDS) with the support of the Resident Coordinator system (RC) managed, under the guidance of the UN Deputy Secretary-General, by the UN Development Coordinator Office (UNDCO). This includes the Resident Coordinators, the Resident Coordinator Offices, and the country teams (UNCT) with the task of following the alignment of UN Members with the SDGs and ensure transparency (A/RES/71/243; A/RES/72/279; see Fulgenzi, 2023, 216-217).

² See The World Bank (2011). *World Development Report Overview: Conflict, Security and Development*, 4-5.

order, following Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the furious outbreak of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 (see Dugard, 2022).

Indeed, global democratic governance remains the only political, legal, and value-based structure in which the founding patterns of global interaction will be determined in a shared deliberative process where all stakeholders can collaborate. This is even more true in view of the multidimensional nature of democracy itself, understood as a specific set of assumptions and procedures that regulate access to political power, its exercise and the consequent accountability to the plurality of citizens, considering both the electoral aspect and the liberal perspective, as well as a multiplicity of (often overlapping) elements that include political control between institutions, the rule of law, civil liberties and social rights (see Dahl, 1971, 13; Freidenberg, 2023, 76). Moreover, fundamental rights and freedoms are universal, but their implementation will always have to be translated appropriately in the specific political, social, and economic contexts of different local dimensions, duly considering the need for coherence and dialogue between all spheres, levels, and interested parties involved (see Cafaro, 2013, 2017, 2021, 2023; Schmidt, 2013). Hence, only political mechanisms that prove useful to configure a global order in the sense of better inclusion, transparency, and proximity can guarantee the realization of global security and justice for all the peoples of the world. Effective participation and rooted democracy at the local and regional level can really help to peacefully and consciously replace ethnic or national interests with universal goals (see Kaldor, 2013; Sisk, 2001), highlighting the remarkable similarities that different countries show today at the grassroots level, together with the close interrelationship between the numerous problems they are called upon to face. These considerations demonstrate the opportunity for continued support and recognition of subnational authorities by international bodies to promote a more inclusive and sustainable future for the Earth, within the programmatic sublimation of the participatory concept of *global citizenship* (Guzmán and Hernández García de Velasco, 2024).

Despite the complexity of the international scenario, characterized by increasing fragmentation and multipolarity, the growing impact of global issues mostly arising from critical asymmetries related to anthropic factors (*e.g.*, pollution, climate change issues, various theatres of war, instability contexts, etc.) turns out to be a good reason to consider democratic governance in its broader international dimension. It is also true that the situation of “anarchy” in the international sphere (Mearsheimer, 2001) that the theorists of structural realism have described regarding international relations is far from being overcome. Therefore, the identification of innovative global democratic governance mechanisms – both formal and informal in nature, although necessarily functioning on legal premises and on a programmatically shared basis – can prove useful in overcoming the lack of guarantees for the effective participation of all the stakeholders affected by global issues, contributing to actively pursuing the suppression of under-representation and inequalities between and within nations starting from the local and regional dimensions that are empirically closest to the reality in which populations (and the various minorities within them) live (see Matusescu, 2013; Umanets, 2018), in full implementation of the familiar mantra *think globally, act locally* originally used for environmental and community planning (see Powell, 2012).

In the changing landscape of global governance, local and regional authorities or governments (*i.e.*, LRAs) have increasingly been recognized as crucial democratic actors in addressing the myriad challenges that define the modern world, from environmental and climate sustainability to human rights implementation (Bouteligier, 2014, 58; Smith, 2019). Subnational authorities refer to the levels of government below the central national level, including regions, provinces, municipalities, and other territorial political and administrative structures. These entities – situated closest to the specific territories and citizens they were created to serve – are deemed to possess unique insights and capacities to effectively tailor global initiatives to local realities, avoiding the disconnect that can lead to policies and actions that are

poorly suited to real local needs and conditions (Acuto and Rayner 2016; Haupt and Coppola 2019; Marks, Hooghe, and Schakel, 2008, 113; Tömmel, 1998; Weiss and Wilkinson, 2022). Hence, LRAs emerge as facilitators of “proximity democracy” (Matusescu, 2013, 282-284). Besides, they still serve as political and cultural incubators to strengthen the concrete basis of otherwise abstract global thinking (Barber, 2013; Curtis, 2016; Gordon and Ljungkvist 2022). Coherently, an ever-increasing number of constitutional systems now recognizes the unique value of the contribution that internal political-administrative bodies operating at local and regional level can make to the full realization of the objectives pursued by the central state apparatus. Moreover, this teleological approach also includes the full adaptation of the inner structure and *modus operandi* of nation-States to the binding obligations that central governments have contracted at an international level.

Moving from this background, the involvement of subnational authorities in global governance has expanded significantly in recent decades, marking a historic shift towards more decentralized and participatory approaches to international relations and diplomacy. This significant evolution reflects the recognition of the position and capacity of LRAs to address global challenges such as sustainable development, human rights protection, and democratic participation. Scholarly perspectives further enrich our understanding of the legal and normative dimensions of LRAs in global governance, arguing for the importance of cities and other LRAs in global affairs and underscoring their potential to drive progressive change and innovation (see Barnett, Pevehouse, and Raustiala, 2022, 18). The concept of “The Global City” (Sassen, 1991) and the query “If Mayors Ruled the World...” (Barber, 2013) provide compelling arguments for the centrality of LRAs in addressing global challenges from a *localized* point of view. Another important implication is the increased global influence of the LRAs themselves. As cities and other levels of subnational government collaborate and form transnational coalitions, they gain greater influence in global governance. This is also evident in the growing presence of LRAs in thematic international forums

such as those sponsored by the UN, where they advocate for *localized* interests and help shape values and trends in global policies (Bouteligier, 2014, 58; Davidson, Coenen, Acuto, and Gleeson, 2019, 3541; Ljungkvist, 2014, 2016).

Furthermore, this concept is supported by the significant moral and programmatic weight carried by the so-called *soft law*, which – although formally not binding – often embodies the very essence of international law, disseminating ethical principles and fundamental values that provide guidance to States, international organizations, and other international actors. These principles reflect a consensus on global critical issues such as human rights, environmental and climate crisis, and social justice, demonstrating the ability to transcend the notion of legal obligation in international law, as well as the sphere of the *traditional* subjects of international law, namely States and international organizations (see Durmus and Oomen, 2022; Jakobi, Loges, and Haenschen, 2024, 12-14; Jurkovich, 2020; Winston, 2018). In the same perspective, the guidelines of the *UN 2030 Agenda* and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – together with the 169 sub-Targets that substantiate them – underscore the essential roles that subnational authorities are called upon to fulfil, aligning with broader international efforts such as the Council of Europe (CoE) initiatives and the implementation of European Union (EU) law, principles, and objectives. This is also true in the wider context of the European Economic Area (EEA), which is the agreement that allows three EFTA countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway) to participate in the EU's internal market without becoming EU Members, while adopting a significant portion of EU legislation relating to the EU single market (see Panara, 2022).

The CoE has played a key role in defining the importance of the functions and rights of LRAs through various resolutions, frameworks, and landmark international treaties such as the *European Charter of Local Self-Government* (1985). All these documents advocate for greater recognition, autonomy, public responsibilities, and resources for local and regional governments,

ensuring that *regionalization* can effectively contribute to the CoE's broader goals in protecting of human rights (as set out in the 1950 *European Convention on Human Rights* – ECHR) and promoting democratic governance and legal standardization (see Marcou, 1998). Additional *soft law* tools further support these efforts by providing guidelines and principles that influence and coordinate local governance strategies. *City-to-city* or *local-to-local* diplomacy – in the sense of *LRA diplomacy* that the CoE itself has helped to affirm – has emerged as a dynamic facet of international relations, where LRAs interact directly with their counterparts across borders to address common issues and share best practices (Acuto and Rayner, 2016; Herrschel and Newman, 2017). This form of diplomacy extends beyond *traditional* State-centric models (*i.e.*, *Track-One diplomacy*) and offers a grassroots approach to global challenges, including city-twinning relationships, cross-border collaborative projects, and transnational *LRA networks*, as well as bilateral and multilateral agreements between LRAs which facilitate knowledge exchange and cooperation on joint initiatives (Davidson and Montville, 1981).

Moreover, it is already widely recognized that the so-called *informal* diplomacy – often referred to as *paradiplomacy*, or as *Track-Two* or *Multi-Track* diplomacy (Acuto, 2013b; Aldecoa and Keating, 1999; Curtis, 2014; Davidson and Montville, 1981; Kihlgren Grandi, 2020; Smith, 2019; Tavares, 2016) – may involve diplomatic activities conducted outside official government channels by non-state actors including, together with LRAs, also private individuals, NGOs, academics, former diplomats, private mediators, and think tanks (see Conley Tyler, Matthews, and Brockhurst, 2017; Jones, 2015; Kaldor, 2013, 75). Nevertheless, this innovative type of diplomacy can even retain a garb of *minoris generis* formality when conducted by subnational subjects, such as LRAs, officially inscribed in the constitutional architecture of their respective countries. In any case, it is characterized by flexibility, confidentiality, results orientation, and not ordinary approaches in the pursuit of shared higher goals and in the pragmatic resolution of potential

or real conflicts. This kind of non-canonical diplomacy certainly plays a crucial role in conflict mediation, relationship-building, and raising awareness on global issues, complementing (Terruso, 2016) – or even compensating on the implementation side – formal diplomatic efforts by setting the stage for subsequent international negotiations, and often helping to overcome (or at least elude) on a practical and effective level, the obstacles posed by central state institutions (Acuto and Leffel, 2021, 1768; Ljungkvist, 2014, 48). This is also demonstrated by the opening of fully-fledged *paradiplomatic* offices (even abroad) dedicated by LRAs to the development of multi-level relations with counterpart bodies in foreign countries or with the international institutions where such offices are activated (Hooghe and Marks, 1996, 2001; Ljungkvist, 2014, 42; Marks, Hooghe and Blank, 1996, 358-359; Tatham, 2014).

Thereby, *informal* diplomacy has emerged as a significant trend in global governance, representing a shift from the *traditional* state-centric model of international relations to a more decentralized and polycentric approach. As previously stated, *LRA diplomacy* involves direct engagement between LRAs across national borders to collaborate on common interests (see also Bouteligier, 2014, 67; Herrschel and Newman, 2017, 74-75; Nijman, 2016, 231-232). In their various forms, transnational partnerships between subnational authorities facilitate cultural dialogue, economic collaboration, and the sharing of expertise. They are often institutionalized through formal agreements and approved by local councils and other subnational bodies, providing a solid legal framework for extensive and sustained cooperation (Acuto and Leffel, 2020, 1762; Davidson, Coenen, and Gleeson, 2019, 697). Moreover, the rise of LRAs in global governance following the emergence of *informal* diplomacy have further significant impacts and implications. Cities and regions often serve as veritable laboratories for real policy innovation, addressing global challenges with *localized* solutions and best practices that can be scaled up and exchanged as most notable outcomes. LRAs learn from each other and implement effective solutions to shared problems, creating a

ripple effect that can lead to broader systemic change (Acuto and Rayner, 2016, 1162). For instance, Copenhagen’s approach to urban sustainability in Denmark and Curitiba’s innovative public transportation system in Brazil are models that have been recognized and emulated around the world (see also Tennøy, Hansson, Lissandrello, and Næss, 2016, on experiences in Scandinavian cities). This demonstrates how *localized* efforts can contribute to global solutions, particularly in sensitive areas such as climate change, environmental protection, and sustainable development, which should be understood as a counterbalance to the “positive entropy” that pervades our deeply interconnected world (Friedmann, 2012, 13-15).

Therefore, it is evident that the impact of the international projection of LRAs on the global stage is significant – but often underestimated – as they actively promote sustainable development, human rights, critical policy implementation, and global democratic participation. It is precisely in this perspective, for example, that LRAs play a pivotal role in achieving SDG 16 of the *UN 2030 Agenda*, which focuses on promoting peace, justice, and strong institutions globally. At the grassroots level, subnational governments are indeed responsible for maintaining public order and safety, ensuring the effective delivery of justice, fostering inclusive decision-making processes, and translating the most tangible aspects of social, economic, environmental and climate policies into concrete and durable actions (Oomen, Davis, and Grigolo, 2016). By enhancing transparency, fairness, and accountability, LRAs help build trust between citizens and government bodies. Furthermore, they are often at the forefront of conflict resolution and are actively involved in preventing violence within communities, addressing inequalities and discrimination at their root (SDG 10; see Sisk, 2001, 4, 73)³. Their ability to understand and address specific local issues makes them essential in creating peaceful and inclusive societies, thereby directly contributing to the

³ See the topic of the so-called *Fit-for-Purpose Land Administration* (FFP LA) and its feasible role in UN development and peace-building programs (see Augustinus and Tempra, 2021; Enemark, McLaren, and Lemmen, 2021).

realization of SDG 16 and its sub-Targets. Through this bottom-up engagement, *informal* diplomacy prioritizes the involvement of local communities in the form of “local nodes and global synapses” (Barber, 2013, 106-117), encouraging active participation in peace-building and security efforts.

Hence, LRAs are much more than mere enforcers of rules and directives issued by national and supranational bodies. In this sense, the growing role of LRAs within the EU is paradigmatic and showcases the ever-evolving nature of diplomacy and governance in the 21st century, highlighting the importance of *localized* and bottom-up approaches to global challenges. Coherently, the example of the EU system and the functional principles of its multi-level democratic supranational structure – as well as the external projection of its values and objectives and their significant contribution to the implementation and evolution of the global agenda – can only become a reference methodological parameter in both the theoretical and empirical investigation of the foundations and future prospects of *LRA diplomacy* as a phenomenon inherent in the democratic decentralization of global governance and as an operational model closely linked to the *glocal* essence of the *UN 2030 Agenda*, whose global projection represents a paramount factor in the pursuit of world peace and security in light of the innovative concepts of *supranational democracy*, *global law*, and – ultimately – *glocal law*.

2. The *Glocal* Essence of the *UN 2030 Agenda*

On September 25, 2015 – after endless, extensive, and participatory rounds of intergovernmental negotiations and consultations with a wide range of stakeholders over several years – the UN General Assembly adopted the challenging, multifaceted, and transformative plan entitled *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*⁴ that has been

⁴ UNGA Resolution 70/1 of 25 September 2015, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.

resolutely agreed upon by the 193 UN Member States to preserve the planet and ensure the prosperity of all humanity. This inclusive process helped build broad consensus and make sure that the *UN 2030 Agenda* reflected the diverse needs and aspirations of the entire global community. Its 17 SDGs and 169 sub-Targets are universal, ambitious, and indivisible, and they have been designed to eradicate poverty (SDG 1) and other forms of extreme deprivation (SDG 2), and to protect and secure the Earth and its resources – together with our common socio-ecological memory and the very idea of a liveable environment for future generations (see Barthel, Folke and Colding, 2010; Carrillo-Santarelli and Seatzu, 2024) – from dangerous and unsustainable approaches to economic growth. This was pursued through a global plan of action for people, Nature, and welfare, conceived to strengthen universal peace in larger freedom, equality, and democracy for all.

The unanimous adoption gives legitimacy and authority to the *UN 2030 Agenda*, making it a powerful and universally accepted framework for global sustainable development drawn up both as a consequence and as a foundation of world peace and security. The unanimity underlines the collective responsibility of all the UN Member States to work together to achieve the 17 SDGs. It emphasizes the need for international cooperation and genuine solidarity in addressing global challenges and brings with it a greater sense of accountability among UN Member States to meet their commitments, strengthened by the provision of regular review and reporting mechanisms such as the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) at the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF). Although the *UN 2030 Agenda* remains an example of international *soft law* due to its non-binding character – as is typical of the acts of international organizations, such as recommendations – various constitutive and contextual factors, including 1) the broad and concerted global consensus; 2) political pressure between governments; 3) the integration of its objectives into both national and supranational systems (as in the EU context); 4) the conditionality of financing; 5) monitoring mechanisms; and 6) the influence of non-state actors and other interested

parties, also contribute to its full implementation giving the *Agenda* a quasi-mandatory character in practice (see Swiney, 2020, 271-273). Furthermore, the *UN 2030 Agenda* is grounded in numerous international legal instruments, which provide a normative framework for its implementation. Key references include the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* – UDHR (1948) and the *per se* binding obligations arising from the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* – ICESCR (1966); the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* – ICCPR (1966); the *Convention on Biological Diversity* – CBD (1992); the *Paris Agreement* (2015); and other environmental treaties.

In this perspective, the *UN 2030 Agenda* proves to be inherently *glocal*, again in the sense that it interrelates and combines global and local approaches, visions, and actions through its double focus on both global objectives and their necessary *localized* implementation. In fact, it is through 1) the integration of global goals with local actions, 2) the suitable adaptation of global strategies to different local contexts, and 3) the promotion of decentralized governance and accountability that the *UN 2030 Agenda* guarantees that sustainable development is inclusive, specific to the context, and effective at all levels, giving *localized* content to its universal core principles. This *glocal* approach recognizes that achieving the SDGs requires coordinated efforts that bridge the global-local divide, leveraging the strengths and resources of both global and local actors. This *glocal* essence is fundamental for addressing the complex and interconnected global challenges which require a collaborative *modus operandi* involving both international and local instruments in the pursuit of overriding universal values (Kaldor, 2013, 123). The *UN 2030 Agenda* indeed exemplifies its very *glocal* attitude by integrating multi-level objectives and priorities, supported by a robust framework of international law. This line of action ensures that sustainable development targets are both universally applicable and locally relevant, enabling countries to face their specific challenges while contributing to shared international interests and collectively reinforcing the *glocal* soul of

the *UN 2030 Agenda* as a comprehensive path toward a sustainable future of peace and security for all.

Given the profound interconnectedness and indivisibility of the SDGs, the synergistic relationship designed between SDG 11 (*Sustainable Cities and Communities*), SDG 16 (*Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions*), and SDG 17 (*Partnerships for the Goals*) particularly underscores their relevance in delineating concerted actions towards the attainment of peace, equality, justice, and the establishment of strong multi-level institutions. SDG 16 embodies a dual function as both a consequential outcome and a *catalyst* for *glocal* sustainable development, sinking its deep roots in the creation of renewed communities responsible and capable of redefining the terms of interaction between human beings and Nature – as well as among human beings themselves throughout the world, and between their different communities and associations in a sense of truly *global neighbourhood* – according to the irreversible cornerstone of social, environmental and climate sustainability. The overarching aims of SDG 16 pivot around the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies, ensuring universal access to justice, and fostering the establishment of effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions across all tiers of governance within the scope of the holistic realization of the *UN 2030 Agenda*. The nexus between peace and sustainable development finds further confirmation in the *UN 2030 Agenda*'s assertion that development progresses *hand in hand* with peace and security (see its paragraph 35), as also highlighted by UNSC Resolution 2282 (2016) under which the responsibility for sustaining peace and security throughout the world is largely shared by national governments and all other national stakeholders.

In the field of international law, moreover, the principle of sustainable development is increasingly recognized as a customary norm of international law, as it refers to an approach to development that combines economic growth, social inclusion, human rights, and environmental and climate

protection (Barral, 2012; O’Neill, 2009; Schrijver, 2008; Voigt, 2009).⁵ This concept first gained relevance with the publication, in 1987, of the *Brundtland Report* (entitled *Our Common Future*) by the World Commission on Environment and Development (established in 1983), which defined sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” However, it is also a fact that humanity cannot strive for sustainable development without peace, and cannot enjoy stability, human rights, and effective governance regardless of respect for justice and the rule of law. Consequently, it is clear that “Peace, development and environmental protection are interdependent and indivisible” (*Rio Declaration’s Principle 25*) and that “Warfare is inherently destructive of sustainable development” (*Rio Declaration’s Principle 24*).⁶ Unfortunately – but increasingly true today, considering the worrying international scenario that is emerging against the backdrop of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and the new escalation in the Middle East – it is also necessary to remember that “among the dangers facing the environment, the possibility of nuclear war is undoubtedly the gravest” (*Brundtland Report*, paragraph 86).⁷

⁵ This general principle is supported by the *precautionary principle* which requires that the lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason to avoid or postpone measures aimed at preventing environmental degradation. Therefore, States must adopt necessary *precautionary measures* in their national legislation and international agreements (see *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development*, 1992, A/CONF.151/26/Vol.I, Principle 15). This perspective has been further enhanced in light of the international steps forward marked by UNGA Resolution 72/277 (2018) – *Towards a Global Pact for the Environment*, and UNGA Resolution 76/300 (2022) which recognizes *the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment*.

⁶ See also ICJ, Advisory Opinion of 8 July 1996, *Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons*, paragraph 30; ICJ, Judgment of 25 September 1997, *Case Concerning the Gabcikovo-Nagymaros Project*, paragraph 140.

⁷ See Article 35 (3) and Article 55 of the *Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I)* of 8 June 1977. On this topic, see UN General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution 68/32 of 5 December 2013, declaring “26 September as the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons” (paragraph 7).

2.1. LRAs as Key Operational Actors in Achieving Inclusive and Sustainable Territorial Goals

Peace seems increasingly at risk in a world that appears increasingly divided – where some regions still enjoy peace, security, and prosperity, while others are plagued by seemingly endless conflict and violence – epitomizing a new kind of *global vs. local* divide (Kaldor, 2013, 5). Armed violence and insecurity (or even just the threat of them) undoubtedly have a destructive impact on a country’s development, impacting its social and economic growth and often causing suffering that lasts for generations. Sexual violence, illegality, exploitation, and torture, as well as inequality and discrimination, also prevail in conflict scenarios: “Nothing is more polarizing than violence and more likely to induce a retreat from utopian inclusive projects” (*Ibidem*, 93). SDG 16 aims to significantly reduce these distortions by promoting the rule of law and human rights, and fostering the participation of developing countries in global governance. Since LRAs embody the “operational terminal” of this theoretical framework, improving their powers, capabilities, and representativeness – particularly in promoting holistic sustainability, protecting human rights, and providing economic facilitations – therefore emerges as a fulcrum for crisis and emergency management (see *Ibidem*, 143 ff). This also plays a crucial role in conflict prevention and the post-conflict reconstruction process (see Musch, van der Valk, Sizoo, and Tajbakhsh, 2008; Musch and van der Sizoo, 2009), by addressing the root causes of conflicts related to socio-economic and territorial inequality through an impartial *reality-* and *consent-*based approach aimed at establishing *territorial peace* (see Cairo *et al.*, 2018; Vanelli and Peralta, 2022, with particular reference to experiences in Colombia and the Philippines). At least this is possible among groups sharing a basic ideological background, and in practicable safety conditions for freedom of movement and physical integrity (Ghirladucci and Levorato, 2024; Kaldor, 2013, 133 ff).

One of the fundamental reasons for the international community’s inability to prevent conflict and security issues is the reluctance or ineffectiveness that

central state governments may demonstrate in responding effectively to crises – especially those initially arising from causes of a purely internal nature – “ignoring and undermining the very tenets of multilateralism with zero accountability” and underestimating the danger of the world entering an “an age of chaos” (Guterres, 2024), opting instead for procrastination to conserve resources, or to avoid difficult and unpopular decisions on necessary solutions that could however cause the loss of electoral support (see DeLeo, 2017; Harstad and Kessler, 2024). Therefore, it seems evident that some issues can be better addressed at the local or regional level – still in coordination with higher levels of governance – rather than at a national or even global level. This happens, for example, with the *localized* effects of pollution or other natural or even human phenomena (including social degradation and fragmentation) as well as for the concrete adoption of innovative behaviours and standards useful for making social well-being more inclusive and widespread, preserving the environment and effectively combating the climate crisis, thus laying the foundations for peaceful coexistence (Acuto, 2013a). Consequently, the growing significance of LRAs in realizing the SDGs mirrors the escalating complexity of national and global challenges. Evidence underscores the crucial role played by LRAs in fostering initiatives pertaining to climate change mitigation – as well as, recently, in pandemic management amidst the COVID-19 crisis – along with their unique capabilities in addressing social, economic, and territorial vulnerabilities where conflicts, instability and insecurity can take root (see Kaldor, 2013, 150).⁸

In this challenging context, the *UN Agenda 2030* serves as a guiding framework that empowers LRAs towards achieving inclusive and sustainable territorial goals. This governance paradigm places emphasis on the inclusion and valorisation of marginalized groups and populations, epitomized by the universal principle enshrined in the *Agenda*’s central transformative promise:

⁸ See UNSC, 9299TH MEETING (SC/15249), 30 March 2023.

leave no one behind (see Preamble, and paragraphs 4, 26, 48 and 72). As outlined above, transnational coordination and peer monitoring between LRAs can also significantly contribute to the *quasi*-obligatory character of the whole *UN Agenda 2030*. All subnational entities can play a crucial role in implementing the SDGs and promoting international cooperation for sustainability and peace. Even when looking more specifically at the world's most critical situations – such as those closest to the stage of civil or ethnic war – a transnational, interregional, and cross-border approach can help overcome historical enmities by establishing closer economic and political ties, creating economies of scale, developing common infrastructures, and experimenting with inclusive methods and solutions to deepen integration and understanding (Bulkeley and Castán Broto, 2013; Acuto and Rayner, 2016, 1162-1164). As observed about the principle of subsidiarity which permeates the EU regulatory architecture, multi-level global governance provides a framework to efficiently distribute responsibilities and resources between global, national, regional, and local institutions, configuring a new paradigmatic value for *functional interregionalism* (see de Prado, 2007, 105), and the relevance of *informal multilateralism* and *multi-stakeholderism* as *omnilateral* pathways towards sustainability, stability, and peace (see Cafaro, 2021; Pape, 2009). All this, moreover, leads to the affirmation of a complementary meaning of the broad concept of security as *proximity (policy for) peace*, understood as the first brick on which to build solid and shared progress at both global and local levels (see Prodi, 2002)⁹ in the growing awareness of the interdependence between peace and sustainable development since “there can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development.”¹⁰

⁹ See UNGA Resolution 79/1 of 22 September 2024, *The Pact for the Future*, paragraph 34 (Action 13), recognizing “the interdependence of international peace and security.” Significantly, the Russian Federation and Iran opposed the adoption (by consensus, without a vote) of this resolution, also proposing an amendment (A/79/L.3) reaffirming the principle of non-intervention under Article 2(7) of the UN Charter. Also notable is the abstention of other BRICS Members such as China and Saudi Arabia.

¹⁰ UNGA Resolution 70/1 of 25 September 2015, *UN 2030 Agenda, 2 (Peace)*.

2.2. *The Voice of the Global South: The Multipolar Path to Global Action*

The so-called *Global South* – comprising Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Developing Countries, and Emerging Economies in Africa, Asia, and Latin America – usually presents a distinctive approach to sustainable development as well as a different, *multipolar* conception of global security and peace, based on full adherence to the principles of equality of all sovereign States and non-interference in their internal and external affairs. This approach is deeply rooted in the diverse political, economic, and social contexts of these countries, as well as informed by historical injustices, and a pressing need for economic growth and poverty reduction (see Bianchi, 2016, 205 ff; Mutua, 2000, 31). Indeed, the principle of *Common But Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) and respective capabilities, in the light of different national circumstances* is central to the *Global South's* vision. This principle is widely advocated by major world players such as the BRICS (*i.e.*, the ever-expanding group led by Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) and is enshrined in key international instruments, such as the 1992 *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development* (Principle 7), the 1992 *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change – UNFCCC* (Article 3.1), the 1997 *Kyoto Protocol* (Article 10) and the 2015 *Paris Agreement* (Preamble, Articles 2.2, 4.3, and 4.19). The CBDR principle – considering the different structural conditions and levels of development, as well as the varying capacities of different countries to deal with global challenges – underpins the posture of the *Global South*, supporting a fairer distribution of obligations among States and a more equitable framework for international cooperation to address global problems (Ziero 2015, 318-320; see also Fulgenzi, 2023).

This *contextualizing* and *relativizing* approach to global issues and international principles elevates the BRICS to the rank of primary supporters of the *UN 2030 Agenda* and its *holistic* spirit (see Ziero, 2015, 306 ff). On the other hand, it characterizes the *Global South's* interpretation of key principles

of international law – such as the sovereign independence of States¹¹, and the indivisibility of security (*Ibidem*, 310) – in their interaction with other fundamental assumptions of contemporary international law such as the universality, indivisibility, interdependence, and interrelatedness of human rights,¹² or with *ius cogens* norms such as the imperative prohibition of the threat or use of force, pursuant to Article 2(4) of the *UN Charter* (*Ibidem*, 311-313, 316-318). With a view to fully realizing a renewed global supranational democratic architecture that can truly put equality and participation at its centre, the bottom-up approach enhanced through LRAs' *glocal* efforts allows for a direct sharing of contents, values, objectives, and solutions among the populations who directly and collectively benefit from sustainable development and all its presuppositions, including respect for human rights and – first and foremost – peace and security (see Löhr, Morales Muñoz, Bonatti, and Sieber, 2022). In particular, the path traced through *glocal* diplomacy also allows to evade and even compensate for cognitive and operational *biases* linked to the historical and political backgrounds of different countries and national governments, or relating to the economic specificities or various contingencies of each nation (see Bianchi, 2016; Gur, 2023; McCullagh, 2000).¹³ In conducting international relations with the *Global South*, it therefore appears increasingly desirable to apply a *glocal* approach to transnational dialogue and development cooperation, especially due to the need to appropriately translate the CBDR principle – together with the above-mentioned *Westphalian guarantees* of State sovereignty, recalled as cornerstones of the nascent multipolar world – into a more equitable and adaptive global implementation of the international obligations to which all States are bound, and not into an excuse to dissipate the obligations that each

¹¹ See Articles 1-2 of the UN Charter; Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, *Final Act* (Helsinki, 1975), 3. See also: PCA, *Island of Palmas case (Netherlands, USA)*, Award of 4 April 1928, 838 ff.

¹² See UNGA Resolution 79/1 of 22 September 2024, *The Pact for the Future*, paragraph 13.

¹³ For reference, see also the UNGA reports and resolutions *on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (among the most recent: A/RES/78/189, 22 December 2023; A/78/477, 21 November 2023).

country has towards its own citizens, towards other States and towards the planet.

3. *Glocal Diplomacy as a Catalyst for Supranational Democracy in Pursuit of World Peace and Security within the Systemic Framework of the UN 2030 Agenda*

In the last few decades, the increasing stratification of international institutions and decision-making – with the growing involvement of LRAs as leading referents in the pursuit of global priorities – has marked a turning point in the field of international relations. Once adopted in a vast international context, dominated by the heterogeneous relational dynamics that occur between States, some international policies, and objectives – especially if not of immediate economic or financial relevance – may tend to no longer be structured and adequately implemented by national governments (see Cole, 2015; Harstad and Kessler, 2024). Consequently, the relationship of trust between citizens and the institutional system of the central State is often exposed to negative consequences, leading to poor management and unfair distribution of public goods with widespread, serious, and *ex ante* criticism accompanied by potential political disaffection, often heralding the rise of so-called “populism” (see Bergmann, 2020; Cafaro, 2021, 96 ff). Therefore, democratization of global governance and its multi-level participation are essential to fill this gap and meet the parameters of the *minimum democratic standards* which require that values and objectives of global relevance be pursued through *localized* participatory actions and procedures consistent with the same globally shared values and objectives (see Coppedge, 2023; Skaaning and Hudson, 2023). The concept of multi-level or (multi-layered) democratic governance implies that authority is not only centralized but rather *dispersed* across various layers of governance, including local and regional governments into an ever-evolving global policy

framework (see Habermas 2012; Tortola, 2017). This *dispersion* or *stratification* of power reflects the complexity of modern democratic governance where LRAs become flagships for policy innovation and international diplomacy. Historically, cities and regions have always been hubs of trade and cultural exchange, but their contemporary role as direct actors in international affairs is a distinct characteristic of modern globalization (Bache and Flinders, 2005).

To understand the growing influence of LRAs in global governance, one must first look at the broader theoretical landscape. The contemporary concept of global governance itself is wide and multifaceted, encompassing a multitude of institutions, mechanisms, relationships, processes, and practices through which collective decisions are made and implemented on a global scale. This theoretical underpinning of multi-level governance has provided a new lens through which we can view the *dispersion* of authority. Emerging primarily from European integration studies, multi-level governance posits that decision-making power is spread across multiple institutional levels, ranging from supranational to national, regional, and local (see Cafaro, 2017, 2021; Marks, 1992; Triggiani, Nico, and Nacci, 2018). This theoretical framework helps explain the growing involvement of LRAs in global affairs, as it acknowledges the complexity and interconnectivity of modern governance. As emphasized by the *New Urban Agenda* (Habitat III UN Conference, Quito, Ecuador, 20 October 2016), urbanization has further amplified the role of cities as critical nodes in global affairs. With more than half of the world's population now living in urban areas (Toly, 2008, 343), cities have become central to addressing global issues, although *City diplomacy* is not a new phenomenon and *transnational city networks* are on average about 40 years old and progressively expanded their topical coverage in the so-called *urban age* (Acuto and Rayner, 2016, 1152; Barber, 2013, 3-24; Friedmann, 2012). This demographic shift has bolstered the political and economic relevance of municipal authorities, enabling them to engage more effectively in global interactions. Cities – as well as provinces and regions –

also increasingly enter into bilateral and multilateral agreements to address specific issues such as trade, public health, and climate and environmental protection (Acuto and Rayner, 2016, 1153; Acuto and Leffel, 2021; Acuto, Kosovac, Pejic, and Jones, 2021; Bouteligier, 2013, 20-21; Kahler, 2009; Kendall, 2004, 59-73). As stated before, remaining within the legal framework of established national institutions and procedures, such agreements allow LRAs to *bypass* national governments and engage directly with their international counterparts, fostering cooperation on common challenges (see also Högenauer, 2014; Jeffery, 2000; Jeffery and Peterson, 2020; Schakel, 2020, 2; Tatham, 2010, 2014, 2017).

The narrative of international law and international relations has historically been dominated by States and international organizations such as the UN, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). However, as previously indicated, the relentless forces of globalization have propelled cities, provinces, and regions into the forefront of global issues, such as sustainable development, and – certainly not least – peace and security (see Swiney, 2020, 233 ff). This powerful transformation has given rise to the intriguing phenomenon of *city-to-city* or *local-to-local* diplomacy. LRAs across the globe are increasingly engaging in international actions. They form networks and partnerships that outflank *traditional* diplomatic channels, framing international engagement within the broader discourse of multi-level democratic governance and global policy-making (Jakobi, Loges and Haenschen, 2024, 14). This shift in global diplomatic dynamics represents a significant facet of current international relations, where subnational units such as LRAs participate in foreign affairs *independently* of their national governments (Swiney, 2020, 229, 271), although according to the powers granted to them in the context of national constitutions and international treaties, and by citizens through popular vote (because “Civil society needs a State.” Kaldor, 2013, 129). This phenomenon is directly driven by globalization and brings with it the growing recognition of urban centres, larger metropolitan areas, and regional authorities as pivotal actors

on the global stage, capable of addressing complex transnational issues such as those set out in the *UN 2030 Agenda* while – for a long time already – they have been facilitating economic and cultural exchanges together with mutual understanding, bridging gaps between diverse communities and promoting social justice, inclusion, tolerance, and respect (Hsiao and Hwa-Jen, 2002).

This interplay between local and global dynamics has given rise to the concept of *glocalization* as a term that encompasses the *simultaneity* and *interdependence* of global and local influences and actions, as well as integration and fragmentation, homogeneity and differentiation (Kaldor, 2013, 73; Robertson, 1995). This phenomenon has profound implications for the field of diplomacy, as it introduces a new *glocal* approach to transnational dialogue and cooperation, characterized by the interaction and integration of global and local efforts. Indeed, *glocal* diplomacy can serve as a significant pull factor to innovate the concept of *supranational democracy*,¹⁴ enhancing and completing the feasibility of democratic multi-layered governance at the inter-state and supranational levels, particularly within the framework of a *sui generis* international organization such as the EU¹⁵ and in the context of its external action. Legally, the engagement of LRAs in international relations is a complex issue, as it intersects with principles of national sovereignty and the legal frameworks that delineate the powers of local governments. The *Treaty of Lisbon* (2007) acknowledges the role of LRAs in contributing to the EU's objectives, particularly in areas like environmental and climate policy, along with sustainable development. Internationally, the *Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations* of 1961 does not preclude subnational authorities

¹⁴ *Supranational democracy* refers to a model of governance in which democratic principles, such as representation, responsibility, and participation, are applied at a level above the nation-State, within the layers of international or regional organizations where formal decisions are taken by institutions that represent both citizens directly and Member States collectively, operating with a degree of autonomy from national governments and with consequent accountability (in critical perspective, see Neyer, 2012, 56-70).

¹⁵ See CJEU, Judgment of 5 February 1963, *van Gend & Loos*, case 26/62, EU:C:1963:1, Summary, paragraph 3. See also CJEU, Judgment of 15 July 1964, *Costa v E.N.E.L.*, case 6-64, EU:C:1964:66; CJEU, Judgment of 9 March 1978, *Simmenthal*, case 106/77, EU:C:1978:49. Lastly, see CJEU, Judgment of 26 September 2024, *Energotehnica*, case C-792/22, EU:C:2024:788, paragraph 67.

from participating in *informal* international relations, although it addresses nation-States alone as bearers of international responsibility. The involvement of LRAs in global governance is also directly supported by various international legal instruments and references.¹⁶ The CoE's *European Charter of Local Self-Government* enshrines the principles of local autonomy and decentralization (Preamble, Articles 2, 3, and 4). Thus, it provides a legal basis for the empowerment of LRAs and their direct engagement in international relations. The UNFCCC also acknowledges the importance of non-governmental entities in addressing climate change through cooperation in education, training, and public awareness (Articles 4.1.i, and 6), as well as the relevance of the services, support, and information they can provide (Article 7.2.1), admitting their possible representation at sessions of the Conference of the Parties (COP) as observers (Article 7.6). Similarly, the *Paris Agreement* emphasizes the effective role of subnational bodies in achieving its global goals, especially through participatory, cross-cutting, and gender-responsive capacity-building activities (Articles 7.2, 11.2, and 16.8).

In the contemporary global landscape, the pursuit of world peace and security remains a paramount objective for international relations and global governance. As previously mentioned, *traditional* diplomatic efforts often focus on *State-to-State* interactions, engaging in high-level negotiations and binding treaties. However, the emerging paradigm of *glocal* diplomacy is gaining traction, highlighting the pivotal role of LRAs in addressing international challenges and particularly in fostering peace and enhancing security, both locally and globally. The decentralization movement has significantly contributed to the empowerment of LRAs around the world (see Brenner, 2014; Hofferberth and Lambach, 2022). In the context of the establishment of interregional networks of transnational local actors, promoting cooperation on global challenges, many countries have already

¹⁶ See UNSG, Report *Our Common Agenda* (A/75/982) of 5 August 2021, announcing the creation of the Secretary General's Advisory Group on Local and Regional Governments (paragraph 119).

embraced decentralization, granting greater autonomy and resources to their subnational bodies. This fundamental change in the complex architecture of global governance – made *more democratic* precisely by this greater grassroots participation – has allowed LRAs to play more active roles in international affairs, redefining the *traditional* paradigms of diplomacy (Acuto and Rayner, 2016, 1159). For instance, regions such as Catalonia in Spain, and Flanders in Belgium, have developed their own *foreign policies* and maintain representative offices abroad, acting almost like *quasi*-States on the international stage. Similarly, the Italian regions of Emilia-Romagna and Veneto have intensified relations with a plurality of LRAs from countries across all continents in terms of multi-sectoral exchanges and collaboration, through the signing of memoranda of understanding (MOUs) and agreements always in compliance with national laws and foreign policy guidelines.

3.1. LRAs as Bearers of a “Post-Westphalian” Global Law

LRAs are increasingly at the forefront of implementing the SDGs due to their direct interaction with communities and their peculiar ability to mobilize local resources. SDG 11 tasks subnational governments with making cities inclusive, safe, just, resilient, and – in one word – sustainable. This involves all levels of urban planning and infrastructure management, as well as ensuring full and fair access to essential services and the active participation of citizens, consistently with SDGs 12 and 13 which respectively highlight the deep link between responsible consumption/production and climate action as a further prerequisite for systemic equality and non-discrimination. Accordingly, SDG 16 focuses on promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, guaranteeing justice while building effective and accountable institutions at all levels. LRAs are crucial in realizing all these goals by fostering the engagement of local communities, ensuring public safety, and enhancing institutional transparency. They can adapt the 17 SDGs to their local contexts, making targets more relevant and actionable. By integrating the *UN 2030 Agenda*’s framework into their concrete local policies, plans, and budgets,

LRAs can help make sure that global commitments are translated into practical actions at the level closest to that of citizens. As previously outlined, cities, regions, and other subnational authorities often serve as testing grounds for innovative solutions to development challenges and these initiatives can be shared and replicated throughout the world, creating a widespread participatory approach to implementing the SDGs globally. LRAs and their representatives can play a critical role in raising awareness about the SDGs among citizens, businesses, and other local or regional stakeholders. Moreover, international organizations and NGOs can support *local-to-local* diplomacy by providing funding, expertise, and facilitating connections between local and regional realities.

SDG 17 emphasizes the importance of partnerships between public authorities, the private sector, and civil society actors, highlighting the role of LRAs in forming and sustaining these collaborations, and in pursuing each SDG as an integral and indispensable part of a single and indivisible project. In their cross-border interactions, LRAs significantly contribute to the *quasi-binding* legal nature of the *UN 2030 Agenda* by *localizing* and *materializing* its *ideal* global goals, building networks, increasing awareness, advocating for supportive policies, promoting accountability, leveraging resources, and sublimating the elements of international *soft* and *hard* law in the programmatic instruments (*i.e.*, MOUs, pacts, covenants, etc.) of an innovative and comprehensive “post-Westphalian” *global law* permeated by the ever-increasing LRAs’ *soft power* (see Swiney, 2020, 230-232). These *territorial* efforts create a solid foundation for consolidating the vision of the *UN 2030 Agenda* at the level of citizens while promoting, supporting, and complementing national and international initiatives. The impact of transnational collaborations between LRAs reinforces the collective commitment to the SDGs, making adherence to the principles of the *UN 2030 Agenda* more compelling, convincing, and widespread globally. By sharing common challenges, cross-border interactions between LRAs help build public support and demand for the adoption of common behaviours,

standards, and practices that are in line with the SDGs also beyond the different national circumstances (Acuto and Rayner, 2016; Bouteligier, 2013; Davidson, Coenen and Gleeson, 2019; Fraundorfer 2017). Furthermore, through these efforts LRAs can advocate for funding at both national and international levels, and influence national governments to prioritize the SDGs and integrate them into national frameworks, overcoming the *systemic resistance* that may persist in dysfunctional ways in national bureaucracies (Barber, 2013; Swiney, 2020; in critical perspective: Acuto 2019; Bassens, Beeckmans, Derruder and Oosterlynck, 2019).

In their SDGs implementation endeavours, LRAs insist on fostering strategic partnerships across different sectors and tiers of both national and supranational governance. Their orientation towards decentralized synergies and multi-stakeholder dialogue and planning proves their strong commitment to accountability, responsiveness, peer-learning, and dissemination, as well as their coherence within the 17 SDGs implementation context, also from an effective transnational and cross-border perspective (see Acuto and Rayner, 2016, 1165). As is evident, it is through the cultivation of such horizontal and heterogeneous partnerships that LRAs hold the core potential to offset knowledge asymmetries, fortify institutional capacities, and galvanize resource mobilization even circumventing certain national interests and *systemic reluctances* towards the changes needed to comply with international commitments and obligations (see Ku, Henning, Stewart and Diehl, 2019; Le Gales, 2002; Bache and Flinders, 2005, 88, 97). Besides, LRAs can mobilize interregional investments, human capital, *localized* know-how, and technological innovations (SDG 9). By leveraging local resources, they can contribute *on the ground* to the overall achievement of the *UN 2030 Agenda's* targets, also facilitating public-private partnerships (Bulkeley and Castán Broto, 2013, 361; Spies, 2019). These collaborations can attract financial flows and expertise from the private sector, enhancing LRAs' capacity to achieve the SDGs. Moreover, subnational authorities can develop their own mechanisms for monitoring and reporting progress in implementing these

common objectives. Local reports can complement national reviews and provide a more detailed picture of progress made or still to be made, highlighting areas where additional efforts are needed.¹⁷ For these reasons, *informal* diplomacy and network participation often involve benchmarking and peer reviews through which LRAs compare their adherence to shared global goals, creating a form of peer pressure that encourages continuous improvement in SDGs implementation.

3.2. Initiatives and Successes of Glocal Diplomacy Across the Globe

A prominent example of successful *informal* diplomacy is the engagement between California and China on climate change initiatives. Lacking for a time a comprehensive national climate policy in the United States, the government of California – whose economy, if it were a country, would rank as the fifth largest in the world – engaged directly with Chinese LRAs (lastly with the province of Hainan, in 2023) and even with the Ministry of ecology and environment of the People’s Republic of China (in 2018, renewed in 2022) in activities regarding environmental and climate protection, such as the signing of MOUs focused on reducing greenhouse gas emissions, promoting clean energy technologies, and sharing best practices in sectoral regulation. These efforts exemplify how LRAs effectively use *informal* diplomatic channels to address global challenges, fostering international cooperation and achieving outcomes *independently* of actions at national level. Moreover, LRAs engage in *informal* diplomacy through networks which often see the leading role of city governments. *Local Governments for Sustainability* (ICLEI), *United Cities and Local Governments* (UCLG), and *Global Parliament of Mayors* (GPM) are further examples illustrating the successful use of *paradiplomacy* by LRAs. These networks enable cities to pool resources, coordinate actions, and amplify their voices in international

¹⁷ See UNSG, Report *Our Common Agenda* (A/75/982) of 5 August 2021, paragraph 106; Lastly, see UNGA Resolution 79/1 of 22 September 2024, *The Pact for the Future*, paragraphs 25 (Action 6), 56 (Action 32), and 83 (Action 55).

forums providing platforms to collaborate on global issues, share know-how and best practices, and influence international agendas (Acuto and Rayner, 2016, 1161; Acuto, Kosovac, Pejic and Jones, 2021, 1-2; Nijman, 2016, 231-232). These *transnational municipal networks* facilitate the exchange of knowledge and resources, strengthening the global movement towards achieving the SDGs and advocating for local perspectives in global forums (see also Acuto and Leffel, 2021; Acuto and Rayner, 2016; Bouteligier, 2014; Leffel and Acuto, 2018; Toly, 2008).

Similarly, the *Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy* (CoM) – an initiative funded by the European Commission – brings together city governments committed to achieving and exceeding the EU’s climate and energy targets. *Eurocities* is a network of major European (EU and extra-EU) cities that aims to influence EU policy and access funding for innovative projects, promoting cooperation and the exchange of ideas to address common challenges, with a focus on the areas of social inclusion, environment, mobility, and urban governance. Likewise, the *C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group Inc* is a global network of mayors of the world’s major cities (New York, Tokyo, London, Paris, Rome, Milan, etc.) united to tackle the climate crisis and affiliated with the global coalition *Mission 2025*, urging national governments to align their climate action plans with the *Paris Agreement*’s target of limiting global heating to 1.5°C ahead of the UN’s crucial deadline in February 2025, when countries are required to submit their enhanced climate plans (*i.e.*, *Nationally Determined Contributions*) to the United Nations for the period 2025-2035. Thus, the *C40 Group* enables mayors to collaborate on urgent climate action in line with science-backed targets, lobbying, planning, and collaborating across borders with the aim to protect lands, peoples, and communities, and build a more sustainable, resilient, and equitable future. Not least, the *Under2 Coalition*, which is the largest network of LRAs committed to reaching net-zero emissions by 2050 (or earlier), involves subnational governments like those of California, Catalonia, Scotland, Ontario, Lombardy, and others in reducing carbon

emissions as a vital part of efforts to keep global temperature rise to 1.5°C, through thorough and short-term planning to ensure both progress and transparency. All these initiatives work mainly on the conscious and voluntary pursuit of global priorities (see Swiney, 2020, 232, 268),¹⁸ translated into coordinated actions by citizens and their representatives at local and regional levels, preceding the slowness in defining or enforcing binding international obligations on the part of central governments (*Ibidem*, 2020, 247 ff, 260 ff). In fact, it could be argued that “nations talk, cities act” (Curtis, 2014, 1, quoting a statement by Robert Doyle, Lord Mayor of Melbourne, Australia).

Further to previous comments, city-twinning agreements – such as those between Chicago and Milan (since 1973), and Los Angeles and Guangzhou (since 1981) – can foster cultural and economic exchanges. As an additional example, the Great Lakes Council comprising US states and Canadian provinces provides a binational and multi-sectoral forum for collaboration on key risks and opportunities in this North American region. These solutions are not too different from the cross-border clusters inaugurated under the auspices of the EU in the framework of the EUREGIO initiative (*e.g.*, *Meuse-Rhine* between Belgium, Germany, and the Netherlands; *Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino* between Austria and Italy) or in the perspective of the European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs) set up to facilitate transnational and interregional cooperation between LRAs to implement joint projects, share expertise, and improve cross-border planning coordination. All these examples show empirically how LRAs effectively address

¹⁸ LRAs adopt joint statements, MOUs, declarations, pacts, charters, policy plans, and other forms of *global law* close to international legal agreements and designed to implement and complement state-made international law at the level of transnational cooperation between local bodies. Similarly, LRAs have developed their own specific language for *soft law* (Swiney, 2020, 265 ff). They enter into voluntary or *quasi*-voluntary arrangements and their disputes are resolved through dialogue and negotiation considering the absence of any enforcement mechanism. Therefore, *trust is essential to produce order*, and the *hybrid customary practice* inspired by such widespread voluntariness will shape the further concept of *glocal law* (see the fifth section of this research work; see also Barnett, Pevehouse and Raustiala, 2022, 14-15; Martins Casagrande, 2009; Podolny and Page, 1998, 59; Rhodes, 2000, 61; Thompson, 2003, 31).

transnational challenges and strengthen international relations through direct cooperation. These actions lay solid foundations for a widespread *glocal* approach capable of translating major global issues into concrete local priorities and actively involving people in the democratic definition of the dynamics of global governance. The decentralized specificity of each territorial reality therefore emerges as a basis for the consolidation of a renewed supranational conception of democracy and its instruments of participation, decision, and action in the face of global challenges, precisely as an inclusive and equitable transnational communion of intent between peoples: a new “global ecosystem” (Acuto and Leffel, 2021).

All these initiatives also fall within the broader concept of *People-to-People* (P2P) diplomacy understood as intentional and programmatic transnational interactions between organized groups of people for public, rather than private, interests that have – or aim to have – foreign policy implications (Ayhan, 2020). As already noted, such P2P activities aim to exert political influence through bottom-up actions that can challenge central governments’ top-down policies, as for transnational advocacy networks through which civilians aim to indirectly influence government decisions. In this context, a renewed concept of *City diplomacy* – pursuant to Recommendation 234 (2008) of the Congress of LRAs of the Council of Europe, in accordance with the *European Charter of Local Self-Government* and its Article 10 – has evolved to encompass various forms of intra- and inter-state engagement and cooperation between LRAs, with a growing emphasis on their role in peace-building and security efforts. Strengthening partnerships between *LRA networks* and international actors can further improve the implementation of global policies. This is even more true on a global scale as the degree of institutionalization of these multi-level interactions increases, as demonstrated by the phenomenon of the creation of secretariats by *LRA networks* (Lecavalier and Gordon, 2020, 1-36). Furthermore, integrating local policies and practices into global frameworks can enrich international law and diplomatic practices with diverse

perspectives and solutions (see Swiney, 2020, 265 ff). Not least, the integration of *paradiplomacy* into national and international policy frameworks can increase its legitimacy and effectiveness, ensuring a cohesive approach to global challenges (Barber, 2013, 140-145). Aligning local development with the global SDGs – particularly SDG 16 – enables subnational governments to contribute to peace and security *glocally*. In the foreground, this involves promoting transparent institutions, combating corruption, ensuring inclusive and fair development, and fostering equal economic opportunities that reduce social disparities, divisions, and tensions as hotbeds of conflict (see Tschudin, 2018).

3.3. The Creation of a Peaceful and Resilient World in the Face of Global Challenges

In its functional projection throughout the world, *glocal* diplomacy can indeed play a key role in peace-building by addressing the root causes of conflict and fostering human development. Joint education and cultural exchange projects promote understanding and respect between different communities, which is essential for lasting peace (see Boyadjieva and Grozev, 2004; Mallik, 2013). LRAs can promote peace education in schools and support cultural initiatives that facilitate social inclusion, fairness, diversity, and dialogue for the purpose of building bridges between different cultural groups (SDG 4). Effective public safety measures and community policing can prevent violence and enhance security. In bordering territories, LRAs can engage in cross-border cooperation to address common challenges such as migration (Durmus and Oomen, 2022; Geddes and Maru, 2020; Oomen and Baumgärtel, 2018), public health (SDG 3; see Acuto, Morissette and Tsouros, 2016; Jakobi and Loges, 2021), gender-equality¹⁹ (SDG 5; see

¹⁹ See UNSC Resolution 1325 (2000) of 31 October 2000, reaffirming the significance of the equal participation and full involvement of women in all efforts for maintaining and promoting peace and security. Lastly, see UNGA Resolution 79/1 of 22 September 2024, *The Pact for the Future*, paragraph 40 (Action 19).

Och, 2018, Runyan and Sanders, 2021), youth participation,²⁰ and sustainable development, contributing to the creation of stable, secure, and peaceful border regions, and reducing the potential for internal and external conflicts. The same collaboration scheme can even ignore the constraint of geographical proximity and involve LRAs united by common interests regardless of directly sharing geographical borders. As previously explained, LRAs can implement strategies that foster trust between law enforcement and local communities, improve public safety, and address the root causes of hatred, violence, and crime, while advocating for *localized* interests and perspectives in national and international policy-making forums, influencing policies that affect their territorial reality, helping to remove cognitive biases, and ensuring that local needs are considered in land planning as well as in peace and security strategies (see Bouteligier, 2014, 58; Curtis, 2014, 1-15; Davidson, Coenen, Acuto and Gleeson, 2019, 3541; Dayton and Kriesberg, 2009; Ilcan and Phillips, 2008; Ljungkvist, 2014, 41; Vargas-Lama and Osorio-Vera, 2020).

As detailed above, *LRA diplomacy* can drive economic development by facilitating cross-border economic relations, investments, and innovation. In fact, collaborative projects between LRAs can create jobs (SDG 8), improve livelihoods, and reduce poverty, thereby mitigating economic instability as one of the primary drivers of conflict (see Abramo, Cecchini and Morales, 2019; Mallik, 2013). Leveraging digital platforms and technologies can facilitate the participation of local actors in global decision-making processes (Acuto and Leffel 2020, 1762) and improve communication and collaboration among LRAs, expanding the reach and impact of *glocal* diplomacy and valorising citizens' initiatives (Acuto and Rayner 2016, 1162; Lecours, 2005, 230-233). In any case, the peace-making and -keeping effects of *paradiplomacy* transcend the economic, programmatic, or purely *ideal*

²⁰ *Ibidem*, paragraph 41 (Action 20). In the same spirit, see UNGA Resolution 75/1 of 21 September 2020, paragraph 17; UNSG, Report Our Common Agenda (A/75/982), 5 August 2021, paragraphs 45-47.

horizons, to instead take on empirical traits of absolute relevance. LRAs are often the first responders to emerging crises and conflicts. By engaging in *informal* diplomacy, LRAs can share best practices and efforts both locally and transnationally in conflict prevention and resolution, implement early warning and land management systems, and facilitate dialogue and appeasement between conflicting parties, directly contributing to peace and security on multiple levels (see Augustinus and Barry, 2006 ; Gaynor, 2016; Kyamusugulwa, Hilhorst and Van Der Haar, 2014; Huggins and Clover, 2005; Musahara and Huggins, 2004; Haslam and Tanimoune, 2016; with references to Kosovo, Latin America, and Sub-Saharan Africa). These *localized* efforts can prevent the escalation of disputes into larger, more destructive “new wars” that “are both global and local” and can be “different both from classic inter-state wars and classic civil wars,” involving “networks of state and non-state actors” (Kaldor, 2013, vi; see Friedmann, 2012, 55, 150-153). *Paradiplomacy* insists on fostering social cohesion through inclusive and diffused governance and community engagement. Initiatives such as intercultural dialogues, community-based projects, and local peace committees help build trust and cooperation among diverse groups (Kaldor, 2013, 149; Sisk, 2001, 71 ff; Wolff, Ross and Wee, 2020). Addressing social grievances and promoting equity and equality, LRAs’ *de facto* diplomacy thus contributes to creating stable and harmonious societies, developing a culture of peace, solidarity, and identification with global issues within a framework of international law, universalism, and multicultural values “which could perhaps be termed cosmopolitan law, and it would put emphasis on various forms of transitional justice” opposing particularism and exclusivism (Kaldor, 2013, 7, 12; see also Mignolo, 2011, 270 ff).

It is certainly no mystery that security challenges such as terrorism, organized crime, and cyber threats require coordinated and pragmatic responses that often go beyond national jurisdictions. Coherently with the previous examples, *glocal* diplomacy can enhance peace and security by improving cooperation and information sharing among LRAs, which are also

often on the front lines of counter-terrorism efforts. By collaborating with cross-border counterparties, LRAs can share intelligence data, coordinate responses, and implement community-based solutions that integrate and support the policies of higher levels of government. This *glocalized* approach ensures a more effective and targeted response to security issues (see Rosenau, 2003, 120-123). Cyber-attacks also pose significant risks to global security.²¹ *Glocal* diplomacy facilitates the exchange of cybersecurity expertise and best practices among LRAs. By collaborating on cybersecurity, LRAs can enhance their resilience and protect critical infrastructure.²² Finally, natural disasters and humanitarian crises often have transnational origin and implications. LRAs can jointly develop comprehensive disaster preparedness plans, invest in resilient infrastructure, and involve communities in resilience-building activities, thereby reducing the overall impact of natural and man-made disasters and building resilient communities capable of withstanding and recovering from emergencies (see Imperiale and Vanclay, 2020). The tools of *glocal* diplomacy in fact allow LRAs to coordinate disaster prevention and response efforts, share knowledge and resources, and provide mutual aid. This collaborative approach ensures a more efficient and effective reaction to any kind of emergency, and helps limit damage and suffering for affected communities (see Toly, 2008) as well as cascading consequences such as poverty, instability, conflicts over scarce resources, and migration for economic, human rights or climatic-environmental reasons (on this last fundamental perspective, see Homer-Dixon, 1991, 1994; Gemenne, 2011; Kälin, 2010, 84-86, 92; Myers, 1993, 752; Picone, 2024).

²¹ See UNSG, Report Our Common Agenda (A/75/982), 5 August 2021, *A New Agenda for Peace*, paragraphs 88-89.

²² See UNGA Resolution 79/1 of 22 September 2024, *The Pact for the Future*, Annex I, *Global Digital Compact*, Objective 4, paragraphs 43-45, *Cross-border data flows*, paragraphs 46-47, and Objective 5, paragraph 62 (in broad realization of SDG 17, also considering an inclusive and risk-based approach to the governance of artificial intelligence – AI).

LRAs, through their *glocal* action, are therefore essential to pursuing and maintaining world peace and security. They emerge as bottom-up catalysts of a supranational democratic vision that places inclusion and sharing, as well as participation in decision-making and implementation processes, at the basis of the reaffirmation of a renewed awareness of the meaning of *global neighbourhood* (see Chan, 2016; Kosovac, Acuto and Jones, 2020; van der Heijden, Patterson, Juhola and Wolfram, 2019; Wolff, Ross and Wee, 2020). Dealing with local issues and priorities from a global perspective (and vice-versa), engaging in transnational and interregional networks, and aligning their efforts with international goals, they can significantly contribute to creating a peaceful, just, and secure world. Nevertheless, while LRAs' *glocal* efforts offer significant potential, they also face some challenges. These include limited operational resources, varying levels of governance capacity, lack of coordination, and potential conflicts with national policies and interests. This is because LRAs' autonomy does not imply that they also have the power to shape final results, considering that "mobilization and influence are not synonymous" (Bache and Flinders, 2005, 157; Jeffery, 2000, 3). Again, most of these problems can be overcome through capacity-building, and by promoting partnerships between LRAs and the international organizations of which their States are members (and whose obligations States are required to fulfil), thus aligning local efforts with national and global commitments. Moreover, inter-institutional relations are not necessarily a *zero-sum game*: strengthening the regional level does not necessarily have to be interpreted as weakening the national level, and vice versa (Piattoni, 2005, 430; see Keating, 2014, 176-190). However, ensuring coherence between local and global actions can still be difficult. Different levels of governance may have varying priorities and political approaches (see Ku, Henning, Stewart and Diehl, 2019). Limited human, technical, and (limited ability to raise) financial resources at the local level can also hinder the initiative of local actors in *glocal* diplomacy and undermine the effectiveness of territorial actions (see Gancheva, Gea, Jones, O'Brien and

Tugran, 2019, 34; Loessner, 2001, 57; Vanelli and Peralta, 2022). Therefore, continuous multi-level coordination, sharing of know-how, and mutual support is needed to ensure that LRAs can effectively participate and contribute to global efforts and – first and foremost – to the creation of a peaceful and resilient world in the face of global challenges common to all humanity.

4. The Subnational Dimension of Governance in the EU Legal Framework

In the European Union (EU), the implementation of EU law is a complex process that involves various subjects and different levels of government, including subnational authorities. The participation of these entities in the implementation of EU law is crucial because they possess the detailed *localized* knowledge and administrative capacity required for effective enforcement and compliance (Kafyeke and Srebotnjak, 2015). This is why, within the EU, LRAs have a defined role in implementing EU policies and legislation. The EU legal framework – in particular the *Treaty on European Union* (TEU) and the *Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union* (TFEU) – stresses the importance of local and regional autonomy and self-government, empowering LRAs to act as real engines of sustainable development, human rights promotion, and democratic participation. The *Treaty of Lisbon* (2007) truly represents a salient model for innovative and democratic global governance where global and local levels can be functionally synthesized in a *glocal* approach. In the axiological prism drawn by the Preamble of the *EU Charter of Fundamental Rights* – EUCFR (2000) as well as by Article 4(2) TEU, and Article 3 (paragraphs 3 and 5) TEU, the EU fully embraces the principle of subsidiarity enshrined in Article 5 (paragraphs 1 and 3) TEU, and the proportionality principle articulated in Article 5 (paragraphs 1 and 4) TEU, also referred to in *Protocol n. 2 on the application of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality*, annexed to

the Treaties. This occurs in conjunction with the principle of proximity referred to in Article 10(3) TEU which, in its paragraph 2, also reaffirms the principle of participatory and representative democracy. Accordingly, LRAs have clearly gained a crucial role in implementing EU law. Directives, regulations, and decisions thus shape and specify tasks for subnational authorities in areas ranging from climate and environmental protection to public procurement and social policy (see Borghetto and Franchino, 2009; Carter and Pasquier, 2010; Galletti, 2019).

The EU intrinsically promotes its multi-level functioning, configuring close cooperation between different levels of government (supranational, national, subnational) in order to ensure the cohesive implementation of its objectives, together with the structural reallocation of competences, resources, and fundings according to the proper semantics of multi-level governance (Acuto and Leffel, 2021; Piattoni, 2005, 419). This to the point of having fuelled the enthusiasm for a future “Europe of the Regions,” foreseeing the development of an EU policy in which supranational and regional levels would gradually gain more and more competences at the expense of Member States, which might eventually even disappear (Loughlin, 1996; Tömmel, 1998). LRAs are essential for achieving the EU’s objectives, both internally and externally to this international organization. Internally, they drive economic growth and cohesion, sustainable development, and social inclusion by leveraging EU funds and policies (Bache, 2004; Friedmann, 2012; Hooghe, 1996). Externally, they project the EU founding values of peace, the rule of law, democracy, human rights, sustainable development, and respect for international law through decentralized initiatives and cross-border cooperation. The mobilization of local expertise, and their autonomy, enable LRAs to effectively address diverse challenges and opportunities (Hooghe, 1995, 175 ff), making regionalism a crucial factor for the legitimacy and functioning of the EU multi-level system (Borghetto and Franchino, 2009, 759-761).

Consistently, Article 300 TFEU defines the relevant mandate of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR), requiring, in its paragraph 3, that members of this additional consultative body of the EU hold an official electoral mandate within – or be politically accountable to – an elected subnational assembly. The European Parliament, the Council of the EU and the European Commission shall consult the CoR in the cases provided for in the Treaties and in all other cases where one of these institutions deems it appropriate, particularly in cases concerning cross-border cooperation, as per Article 307(1) TFEU. Through its consultations and opinions, the CoR ensures that political decisions at EU level consider the needs and specificities of the various regions and municipalities, promoting dialogue, inclusion, and respect for the European multifaceted territorial and cultural diversity, in line with the EU motto “United in diversity.” Indeed, the role formally assumed by the subnational dimension of international cooperation within the EU legal framework cannot but appear emblematic, especially in view of the pursuit of objectives of primary importance and urgency, shared globally. In recent years, the EU has in fact increasingly recognized the strategic functions of LRAs in driving real social and economic growth, and fostering inclusive representation of citizens (including marginalized and minority groups) at supranational level (see Friedmann, 2012, 53). This is also achieved through the primacy attributed to the criterion of territoriality over that of nationality in enriching the sphere of rights associated with European citizenship (Articles 2, 3, 7 and 9-12 TEU; Articles 18-25 TFEU; Articles 39-46 EUCFR) with the right to vote and to stand as a candidate in local level elections of the EU State – other than that of nationality – where the EU citizen resides, under the same conditions as nationals of that State (Articles 20.2(b) and 22 TFEU, and Article 40 EUCFR).

Despite the challenges, the composition and work of institutional bodies such as the CoR (Articles 305-307 TFEU) certainly facilitate transnational, cross-border, and interregional cooperation within the EU, ensuring that the different voices and demands of subnational authorities and the citizens they

directly represent are duly heard in the EU legislative process, and leading to more effective problem-solving and use of resources. Nevertheless, the structures, powers, and capacities of LRAs – which vary significantly across Member States – can lead to inconsistencies or delays in the implementation of EU legislation (Borghetto and Franchino, 2009, 776). The Commission cannot exert pressure directly on LRAs as central governments are the only responsible *vis-à-vis* the EU for infringements (*Ibidem*, 760), and this is so even if, on the part of citizens, “the provisions of a directive could be relied on against local or regional authorities.”²³ In implementation, LRAs may not possess an “understanding of the EU policy process as a whole, which then enables them to have a clearer view of potential or actual infringements and the stance the Commission is likely to take” (Dimitrakopoulos and Richardson 2001, 339), whereas they may also face financial, infrastructural, connectivity or human resources shortfalls that can affect their ability to effectively implement EU regulations (Bache and Flinders, 2005; Jeffery, 2000). Navigating the various regulatory and administrative requirements can be complex and time-consuming, as can aligning the interests and priorities of the EU’s multiple regions and entities, while communication difficulties arising from language differences can hinder effective collaboration and understanding between partners. Different cultural backgrounds, historical legacies, local practices, or institutional capacities can also influence ways of cooperation, requiring sensitivity and adaptability to different working styles and expectations. Ensuring the participation of local communities and stakeholders can therefore be a challenge, also because of the difficulty of obtaining and maintaining the commitment of all parties involved, especially in the face of ever-changing political scenarios. However, it is essential for the success of initiatives such as the EGTCs. Likewise, balancing the interests and priorities (even potentially conflicting ones) of the various stakeholders – including LRAs, private entities, and civil society – always requires careful

²³ CJEU, Judgement of 12 July 1990, case 188/89, EU:C:1990:313, paragraph 19, recalling CJEU, Judgment of 22 June 1989, *Fratelli Costanzo SpA*, case 103/88, EU:C:1989:256.

dialogue, negotiation, and compromise. This is a sensibility deeply rooted in the organic structure of the EU (Kosovac, Acuto and Jones 2020; Tavares 2016), which is also institutionalized through the creation of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) as a consultative body representing the voices of organized civil society in the EU (Articles 300-304 TFEU).

4.1. LRAs as Key Functional Incubators of EU Policies

Mechanisms like the above-mentioned EGTC have been established to support and coordinate cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation between EU Member States through their LRAs to implement joint projects, share expertise, and improve planning capabilities both at the policy formulation and implementation levels (Estelle and Engl, 2018) according to the Regulation (EC) 1082/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006. This act established the EGTC as an EU legal entity, outlining its structure, objectives, and operating procedures, and was subsequently amended by Regulation (EU) 1302/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013, which aimed to simplify the creation of EGTCs and broaden their scope, facilitating cooperation between the subnational authorities involved. Through the designation of new *European regions* (*i.e.*, EUREGIONS), EGTCs contribute significantly to regional development, addressing common challenges, promoting sustainability, and strengthening economic, social, and territorial cohesion by allowing public authorities and other relevant stakeholders from EU (and non-EU) countries to improve their dialogue and collaboration, as well as by providing a clear legal framework, with reduced administrative and legal barriers. EGTCs can manage and implement programs and large-scale projects co-financed by the EU, such as those under the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the Cohesion Fund, and other European structural and investment funds. They represent a significant innovation in the EU's approach to regional cooperation, offering a flexible and legally

certified framework to tackle common problems and promote shared development across borders.

In line with this, the EU cohesion policy (Articles 174-178 TFEU) particularly emphasizes the role of subnational governments in fostering sustainable development and reducing disparities across EU regions, underpinning the essential involvement of LRAs in deploying EU funds and implementing measures to achieve EU's main goals such as economic recovery and growth, social inclusion, and climate neutrality. In the period 2021-2027, the EU cohesion policy has coherently identified five policy objectives (POs) for the ERDF, the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), and the Cohesion Fund, namely: 1) *A smarter Europe*, innovative and smart economic transformation (PO1); 2) *A greener, low-carbon Europe* (PO2); 3) *A more connected Europe*, mobility and regional ICT connectivity (PO3); 4) *A more social Europe*, implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights (PO4); 5) *A Europe closer to citizens*, sustainable and integrated development of urban, rural and coastal areas through local initiatives (PO5). The steps in this programmatic document help to further outline the leading role of subnational bodies in pursuing the EU's existential interests. Therefore, LRAs prove to be much more than mere administrative entities. They are key players in implementing EU policies, reducing and preventing inequality, ensuring sustainability, protecting human rights, and enhancing democratic participation, thereby demonstrating their unique potential to concretely contribute to a new era of decentralized global governance starting from the multi-layered concept of a "Europe *with* the Regions" (Hooghe and Marks, 1996, 2001; Friedmann, 2012, 36; Piattoni, 2010; Schakel, 2020).

This programmatic outline consistently pervades the entire regulatory structure of the EU, taking shape in the allocations of the ERDF, in the European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) programming for EU funds (open to partnerships with non-EU countries) and, lastly, also in the leading role attributed to LRAs in the definition and implementation of the national recovery and resilience plans (NRRPs) of the EU Member States, funded

through the *NextGenerationEU* (with its *React-EU* component) and *RepowerEurope* chapters. Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on specific provisions for the European territorial cooperation goal (INTERREG) supported by the ERDF and external financing instruments, has indeed focused on transnational and interregional cooperation projects based on collaborative efforts meant to address common challenges and opportunities in European cross-border regions. Furthermore, it is not surprising that European LRAs play a crucial role in implementing EU environmental and climate directives, considering that they directly manage local infrastructures, water supply, waste collection and treatment, as well as road and maritime traffic, energy grids, and the usage and maintenance of various types of public goods, while enforcing pollution control measures and sustainability programs (Artioli, Acuto and McArthur, 2017; Portney, 2003). All this fits perfectly within the axiological and programmatic framework of the *European Green Deal*,²⁴ pursuant to Regulation (EU) 2021/1119 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 June 2021 (*European Climate Law*) and the related *Fit for 55 package*,²⁵ as well as according to the EU action on environment, climate, and sustainable development based on the values, goals, and competences inscribed in Articles 3(3), 3(5), and 21(2)(d) TEU; Articles 9, 11, and 191(1)

²⁴ See Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the EESC, and the CoR (11 December 2019). *The European Green Deal* [COM(2019) 640 final]. It aims to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050, outlining strategies to foster economic growth while changing the concept for the use of resources. Accordingly, the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for 2021-2027 allocates significant funds for climate action and sustainable development projects, indicating the EU's structural financial commitment to climate and environmental sustainability.

²⁵ The *Fit for 55 package* was presented by the EU in July 2021 and emerges as part of the EU's comprehensive strategy to achieve significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and promote climate neutrality, comprising a series of legislative proposals and reforms across various sectors, including energy, industry, trade, transportation, and land use, *i.e.*, the *EU Emissions Trading System (ETS) Reform*; the *Social Climate Fund*; the *Effort Sharing Regulation (2021-2030)*; the *Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)*; the *Renewable Energy Directive* and the *Energy Efficiency Directive*; and regulations for specific sectors (including CO₂ emissions standards for cars and vans, infrastructure for alternative fuels, and rules for the aviation and maritime sectors to reduce their carbon footprint).

TFEU; and Article 37 EUCFR.²⁶ This configures the role of LRAs as key functional incubators of EU policies at both internal and global levels, including the *European Citizens' Initiative* (ECI) provided for in Article 11(4) TEU and Article 24(1) TFEU, and now regulated by Regulation (EU) 2019/788 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 April 2019 (text with EEA relevance), which replaced the original Regulation (EU) 211/2011, enhancing democratic legitimacy and citizen participation inside the EU (see Cafaro, 2023). Accordingly:

The Commission should also encourage and support local and regional elected representatives in spearheading the efforts to inform their citizens about the ECI instrument. [...] The ECI provides European citizens with an instrument which allows them to participate actively in European policy-making. The European Committee of the Regions recognizes its own role and responsibilities and, in this context, flags up the decision of its Bureau (3) on the CoR's involvement in European Citizens' Initiatives. It reiterates its commitment to support ECIs which fall within the CoR's political remit and which are deemed politically relevant, for example by: supporting the European Commission in its screening of proposed ECIs from the perspective of their local/regional relevance and subsidiarity; hosting events linked to the ECI; supporting decentralized communication action on the ECI; where appropriate, drawing up own-initiative opinions on the subject of the ECI; participating actively in EP hearings and the political follow up; supporting the implementation of successful ECIs and where appropriate the legislation in response to them.²⁷

²⁶ See CJEU, *Opinion 2/15* (Full Court), 16 May 2017, EU:C:2017:376, paragraph 147; CJEU, Judgment of 11 June 1991, case C-300/89, EU:C:1991:244, paragraph 10 ff.

²⁷ CoR (2018). *Opinion – European Citizens' Initiative* (2018/C 247/10), 70, paragraphs 19-20. In a similar teleological perspective, see: Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the EESC, and the CoR (3 May 2022), *Putting people first, securing sustainable and inclusive growth, unlocking the potential of the EU's outermost regions* (COM/2022/198 final); Council of the EU (30 May 2022), *Conclusions*

Similarly, Regulation (EU) 2021/241 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 February 2021, establishing the *Recovery and Resilience Facility* (RRF), provides for the primary involvement of EU Member States' LRAs in the preparation and implementation of the NRRPs recognizing their importance in ensuring that EU funds are used effectively to support sustainable economic recovery and systemic resilience without neglecting the active involvement of civil society. Pursuant to letter (q) of its Article 18 (*General provisions on recovery and resilience plans*), NRRPs must be in fact prepared by EU Member States in dialogue with the European Commission, considering the views of subnational authorities as well as the positions of social partners, civil society organizations (CSOs), youth organizations and other relevant stakeholders. Coherently, recital 34 of the *RRF Regulation* emphasizes the importance of partnerships and multi-level governance, so that EU Member States are strongly encouraged to involve LRAs and other relevant stakeholders during the preparation and implementation of NRRPs, in accordance with their respective national legal frameworks. The NRRPs can also include cross-border or multi-national projects as foreseen in recital 39 of Regulation 2021/241. *Annex V* also contains the *Assessment guidelines* for the European Commission on NRRPs, which require EU Member States to provide information on consultations carried out with LRAs and other stakeholders and how their opinions and contributions have been taken into consideration.

Further to previous arguments, European LRAs also play a pivotal role in implementing and enforcing EEA legislation at the subnational level. These authorities can represent their interests through various EEA bodies and networks – such as the EEA Joint Committee, the EEA Consultative Committee, and the EEA Joint Parliamentary Committee – where specific local and regional issues can be raised and discussed. Since EEA/EFTA countries (*i.e.*, Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway) adopt a significant

on the Communication from the Commission COM/2022/198 final (9514/22), in particular recalling Article 349 TFEU.

portion of EU legislation relating to the EU internal market, their LRAs are responsible for applying EU law in their jurisdictions within their areas of competence. Subnational authorities in EEA/EFTA countries can also benefit from participating in EU programs and initiatives aimed at interregional development and cohesion. These programs can provide funding and technical support for local projects in line with EU's objectives, involving economic resilience, environmental sustainability, climate protection, and social inclusion, and enhancing cooperation and integration across borders in strategic areas such as communication and infrastructural development. Even in the broader EEA/EFTA dimension, the functions carried out by LRAs are of primary importance, often being responsible for providing public services that are affected by EU regulations, such as the definition and monitoring of environmental standards and procedures, public health, and consumer protection, and ensuring that supranational policies translate into practical benefits for citizens.

Therefore, once again the EU proves to be a unique political and economic supranational union that emphasizes interregional cooperation and cross-border integration. While the EU's objectives are broad and multifaceted, the role of LRAs in achieving these goals proves to be paramount both within the borders of the EU and in terms of the EU's external projection, pursuant to the axiological and paradigmatic construction of Article 21 TEU and the relevant references to external "action on the international scene" – within the European continent, as well as with "the rest of the world" – contained in Articles 2 and 3.5 TEU, and Article 205 TFEU. Indeed, the external action of the EU is heavily influenced by its commitment to peace, democracy, sustainability, human rights, respect for international law and affirmation of the rule of law. EU LRAs contribute to the development of the EU's external action through decentralized transnational and cross-border cooperation, programmatic arrangements, and *informal* institutional dialogue with municipalities and regions outside the EU. These partnerships often involve exchanges of best practices in governance, public administration, and civil

society engagement, thereby promoting EU values and goals globally with the provision of technical assistance, capacity-building, and logistical support, and the sharing of expertise in crucial areas such as infrastructural planning, and environmental and climate protection. Furthermore:

[...] with many LRAs working towards the same objectives, potentially facing the same problems, the role of social learning should not be underestimated. This also highlights the need for robust and active networks, where ideas and experiences can be exchanged (McNeill, Tugran and McGuinn, 2020, 33).

4.2. EU LRAs as Pillars and Catalysts for the Materialization of the UN 2030 Agenda

On the international stage, the EU recognizes the interconnectedness between peace and security, the challenge of sustainability, and the importance of international cooperation. Consistently with this assertion, the EU played a fundamental role in shaping the *UN 2030 Agenda* adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2015 and is also actively involved in global initiatives – such as the global framework of the *Addis Ababa Action Agenda (2015)* for financing sustainable development by aligning all financing flows and policies with economic, social, and environmental priorities – that address crucial issues such as poverty, hunger, health, education, and gender equality towards the creation of fair, inclusive, and peaceful human communities. The *EU Strategy for Sustainable Development (EU SDS)* – revised in 2016 by the Heads of State and Government of the EU – already outlined objectives and measures to foster sustainable development within the EU and in its external actions, setting forth requirements as well as concrete priorities while aligning the EU legal framework with the 17 SDGs.²⁸ In 2017, the EU adopted the *European*

²⁸ The report entitled *Sustainable Development in the European Union*, published annually by Eurostat, analyzes the EU's progress in meeting the SDGs. Furthermore, since 1994 the EU has also been a party to the 1992 *Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)*, a key international instrument for sustainable development (along with its subsequent protocols).

Consensus on Development – entitled *Our World, Our Dignity, Our Future* – which sets out its policy on development cooperation structured around the “5 Ps” framing the *UN 2030 Agenda* (i.e., People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnership). Then, in 2021, the EU launched the *Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument* (NDICI) – *Global Europe*, its latest development cooperation instrument, which further deepens its global commitment to sustainability.

The EU supports interregional integration to promote peace and security, together with sustainable development, shared economic growth and human progress through social inclusion and justice. EU LRAs can already engage in cross-border cooperation with counterparts in neighbouring non-EU countries, fostering regional integration beyond the borders of the EU through joint projects that enhance connectivity, economic cooperation, and cultural exchange, and contribute to overall stability and cohesion in the EU’s neighbourhood²⁹. These initiatives, moreover, can be framed in the broader global context of EU international cooperation pursuant to Title III of the TFEU (Articles 208-214) and binding agreements signed by the EU with third countries under Title V of the TFEU (Articles 216-219). The restrictive measures that the EU adopts based on the legal framework outlined by Chapter 2 of Title V of the TEU and Article 215 TFEU – which EU LRAs must comply with – also aim to support the achievement of the EU’s foreign policy objectives set out in Article 21 TEU, including global peace and security. In a similar vein, by means of trade policy and the use of conditionality the EU seeks to promote its principles and goals in the international trade deals that it signs with partner countries, functionally

²⁹ In this functional context, it is useful to recall *U-LEAD with Europe: Ukraine Local Empowerment, Accountability and Development Programme*, a multi-donor action financed under the European Neighbourhood Instrument, operating in all regions of Ukraine to strengthen municipalities and promote transnational partnerships between Ukrainian and EU LRAs aimed at local reconstruction during the war and in view of the post-war period (Pillar III). See Commission Implementing Decision of 2 December 2015 *on the Special Measure 2015 for Decentralisation Reform in favour of Ukraine to be financed from the general budget of the European Union* and the attached Action Document concerning this program (see also Umanets, 2018).

exploiting its influence as a major global economic power.³⁰ Besides, Articles 208(1), 212(1) and 214(1) TFEU reiterate verbatim that “the actions of the Union and those of the Member States complement and reinforce each other,” thereby paving the way for the operational involvement of EU Member States’ subnational authorities in pursuing the EU’s global objectives both *formally* – by virtue of the principles of subsidiarity, proportionality, and proximity – and at the *informal* level of *local-to-local* dialogue and activism as true *glocal* diplomacy (Chan, 2016; Swiney, 2020, 229), including various aspects such as peace and security, international trade, development cooperation, and humanitarian aid, to the point of further defining the EU’s

³⁰ By means of its trade policy, the EU seeks to promote sustainable development in the international trade agreements that it signs with third countries or international organizations (Articles 207-209 and 216-218 of the TFEU). This is also the case with agreements concluded within the framework of the 2003 *EU Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) Action Plan*. Bilateral instruments include free trade (FTAs) and investment agreements, development cooperation agreements, and economic partnerships. By embedding conditionalities in these agreements, the EU aims to leverage its economic and political credibility and influence in order to promote sustainable practices globally and contribute to a more sustainable future, while preventing practices of unfair competition. Therefore, these agreements include incentives for compliance, supported by monitoring and enforcement mechanisms. In case partners violate human rights or sustainability provisions, several enforcement and remedial measures can be employed, ranging from diplomatic engagement and dialogue to the recourse to dispute settlement mechanisms, other legal actions, and even economic sanctions (*rectius*, countermeasures) passing through the possible suspension of trade preferences (like under the *Generalised Scheme of Preferences Plus* – GSP+) or the imposition of tariffs. This is in line with the assertive approach announced by the European Commission (see *The power of trade partnerships: together for green and just economic growth*, COM/2022/409 final). The EU’s international agreements increasingly feature sustainability clauses, reflecting EU’s dedication to global environmental standards. These clauses often cover environmental protection, labor rights, and corporate social responsibility. The *EU-Korea Free Trade Agreement* (FTA) includes the dedicated Chapter 13 on trade and sustainable development (TSD). Its Articles 13.1 to 13.16 require both parties to uphold and implement international labor and environmental standards, underscoring the EU’s strategy to promote sustainability within its trade relationships. Similarly, the *EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement* (CETA) includes a robust TSD chapter (Chapter 22). Its Articles 22.1 to 22.5 reaffirm the parties’ commitments to high levels of environmental and labor protection, and broad cooperation on sustainable development. Furthermore, the *Economic Partnership Agreement with African, Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP) countries* emphasizes the value of sustainable development. The *Samoa Agreement* (which succeeded the 2000 *Cotonou Agreement* in November 2023) outlines that the partnership shall be guided by inclusive and sustainable economic growth and development in line with the *UN 2030 Agenda*, involving social, economic, and environmental sustainability (Part II, Title IV). Hence, all these agreements incorporate provisions on sustainability, integrating this fundamental value as a core component of the EU’s external policy (see Oberthür and Rabitz, 2014; Young, 2015).

external projection as a truly global stabilization and peace-building effort to achieve a peaceful, resilient, and sustainable world, with EU LRAs increasingly emerging as pillars and catalysts for the materialization of the *UN 2030 Agenda*.

It is therefore clear that the role and actions of the EU Member States' LRAs – understood both as official operational offshoots of the central state power and as autonomous political entities capable of engaging in *local-to-local* transnational interactions – can effectively implement and complement EU external policies, sustaining international efforts to achieve all the SDGs and sub-Targets of the *UN 2030 Agenda* and to implement key international commitments such as those set out in the *Paris Agreement* (FCCC/CP/2015/10/Add.1, *Annex*). The cooperative approach of the *Team Europe Initiatives* (TEIs) established between the EU, the EU Member States (including their implementing agencies and public development banks), the European Investment Bank (EIB), and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) can certainly prove to be a decisive vector in this direction, focusing on identifying critical priorities that constrain sustainable development (and then peace, justice, and security) in a given country or region, where coordinated and coherent activities would achieve results with a transformative impact. TEIs have already emerged as the backbone of the above-mentioned NDICI – the main financial tool for EU international cooperation from 2021 to 2027 – and its programming. By targeting its resources at the subnational level of governance and promoting transnational cooperation between LRAs, the *Global Europe* instrument could even more effectively support LDCs in overcoming development challenges posed to them by regional conflicts, instability, and insecurity, together with climate change and environmental criticalities, in full coordination with the structures of the UN Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) and all the UN bodies, funds, and programs, thus contributing significantly to the bottom-up creation

of the sustainable, secure, and peaceful world envisioned in the *UN 2030 Agenda* (see Fulgenzi, 2023).³¹

5 Concluding Remarks: *LRA Diplomacy* as a Foundation of the Evolutive Concept of *Glocal Law*

Glocal diplomacy refers to the *informal* diplomatic practices that bridge global and local levels of democratic governance, and facilitate cooperation between subnational, national, and supranational actors in the broader framework of international diplomacy, recognizing that local issues often have global implications and vice-versa. By fostering a multi-level dialogue, *glocal* diplomacy ensures that local voices are heard in global forums and that global policies are attuned to the different needs and capabilities of local and regional realities. By incorporating the diversity of local and regional voices into transnational and supranational decision-making and implementation processes, this multifaceted *glocal* outlook ensures that a broader spectrum of perspectives is taken into account, leading to more equitable and representative policies that resonate with the diverse needs of citizens in various parts of the world. The economic and social ramifications of *glocal* diplomacy are profound. From an economic point of view, LRAs-led endeavours can stimulate foreign direct investments and enhance trade relationships, as mentioned in relation to sister city partnerships and other *glocal* cooperation formats that often include such economic components. On the social side, *glocal* relationships can foster cultural exchanges and mutual understanding, contributing to global stability and prosperity while leveraging international connections to improve local quality of life. This integrative and synergistic interaction between LRAs across the globe is crucial to tackle transnational challenges such as migration, pollution, climate

³¹ In the same perspective, see UNGA Resolution 75/1 of 21 September 2020, paragraph 16; UNSG, Report *Our Common Agenda* (A/75/982), 5 August 2021, paragraphs 106, 119 and 130.

change, and economic inequality, which require coordinated cross-border efforts between different levels of governance and different countries, together with the active involvement of CSOs and grassroots movements in facing global issues, promoting peace and ensuring security.

Glocal diplomacy aims to fill the *physical* gap between the territorial dimension of LRAs and global policies. As outlined above, *traditional* diplomacy is designed to operate at the inter-state level, often overlooking the more nuanced challenges and potentials at the local and regional levels. Acting as a multiplier of the capacities of LRAs (and other local stakeholders), *glocal* diplomacy seeks to guarantee that the policies and frameworks developed at the global level are effectively adapted for implementation in local contexts. Therefore, it refers to the direct engagement and cooperation between subnational entities – such as municipalities, regional authorities, and other relevant local actors – *bypassing* the conventional state-centric diplomatic channels. This *informal* way of doing diplomacy leverages the special strengths, perspectives, and capabilities of local and regional governments and communities to address global issues from the ground up. As widely argued, the *glocal* approach emphasizes bottom-up initiatives and collaborative problem-solving, encouraging an innovative reading of the dynamics of the global scenario.

The evolving role played by LRAs in global governance and the rise of their *city-to-city* or *local-to-local* diplomacy indeed represent a significant change in the *classical* landscape of international relations. This fundamental development reflects a broader understanding of the importance of global democratic participation, recognizing the dynamic contribution of multi-layered governance and the pivotal function of subnational actors in tackling global challenges and complementing national and supranational policy levels. As in the case of the moral and programmatic essence of *soft law* – which lies in its capacity to influence the behaviour of States through ethical norms and flexible policy frameworks of a strong voluntaristic nature, albeit without the coercive power that is typical of binding instruments of

international *hard law* – it is highly plausible that the growing significance of *paradiplomatic* cooperation in shaping the present and future of international relations through the synthesis of a new *global law* – animated by the LRAs’ *soft power* – can end up influencing the behavior of States on the international scene. This is particularly true in the internal and external legal landscapes of the EU. In the EU architecture, *LRA diplomacy* already fosters transnational cross-border cooperation, guides policy development, and promotes global adherence to EU values and principles, contributing to the progressive realization of the EU’s international objectives.

In the context of the *UN 2030 Agenda* – in particular of SDG 16 – effective, accountable, inclusive and just institutions are vital for peace and security around the world. As repeatedly pointed out, *glocal* diplomacy empowers LRAs by providing them with the tools, knowledge, and networks needed to engage in transnational dialogue and cooperation, in order to endorse the responsible achievement of all the SDGs. Strengthening local and regional institutions ensures that they can effectively contribute to and implement global peace and security initiatives. LRAs’ unique position within the structure of democratic governance allows them to directly address local issues while aligning with global goals. Furthermore, inclusive governance makes sure that also marginalized and minority groups can truly have a voice in decision-making processes and policy implementation. LRAs can establish platforms for public participation and enable policies to effectively respond to the different needs and aspirations of populations, thus favoring better inclusion and social cohesion and reducing potential conflicts, while pursuing the establishment of a real supranational democratic order rooted in the open, active, and informed participation of every human being and every community.

Indeed, *Supranational democracy* concretely refers to a comprehensive system of multi-layered governance where – also through the local branching of powers and competences – democratic values, principles, and processes simultaneously pervade the internal structure and transcend the *traditional*

boundaries of the nation-State, allowing for collective decision-making at a higher, transnational, and *beyond-national* level, yet rooted in the territorial dimension. This represents a pioneering approach to governance in an increasingly interconnected world. The EU's experience provides valuable insights into the potential and limitations of this model. As global challenges go beyond national borders, the model of *supranational democracy* is likely to become increasingly relevant though addressing its inherent criticalities will be crucial for its evolution and effectiveness. The EU, with its characteristic multi-level governance structure, nevertheless provides fertile ground for the practice of *glocal* diplomacy in view of its eventual projection and affirmation at a global level.

The EU multi-tiered system – encompassing local, regional, national, and supranational levels – mirrors the essence of *glocalization*. EU institutions such as the CoR and the EESC embody the ontological assumptions of *glocal* diplomacy by incorporating the demands and perspective of local and regional governments and populations into EU policy-making in a manner consistent with the EU pivotal principles of subsidiarity, proportionality, and proximity. Though the EU democratic model still faces several challenges, including the still limited participation of citizens, the perceived distance between the EU institutions and the public, and the different degrees of democratic practices among its Member States, the EU – given the supremacy and direct effect³² of EU Law, and its action as a catalyst for democracy in the domestic legal systems of the Member States (see Neyer, 2012) – clearly is the most advanced example of *supranational democracy*, in which Member States pool sovereignty in certain areas to pursue shared values and achieve common goals both in their relations within the EU and in the external and

³² See CJEU, Judgment of 5 February 1963, *van Gend & Loos*, case 26/62, EU:C:1963:1; CJEU, Judgment of 15 July 1964, *Costa v E.N.E.L.*, case 6-64, EU:C:1964:66; CJEU, Judgment of 9 March 1978, *Simmmenthal*, case 106/77, EU:C:1978:49. Lastly, see CJEU, Judgment of 26 September 2024, *Energotehnica*, case C-792/22, EU:C:2024:788.

global projection of the EU's axiological horizon, through EU's foreign policy and investments and trade tools.

On these premises, *glocal* diplomacy can serve as a mechanism to strengthen the EU's democratic legitimacy. By promoting the participation of local and regional actors in supranational decision-making processes and policy realization, transnational and cross-border cooperation between LRAs can address the often-cited democratic deficit within the EU. As previously highlighted, this inclusive approach ensures that policies reflect the diverse needs and interests of EU citizens, thereby fostering a more responsive and accountable system of governance, capable of evading the ever-present *national resistances*, and – at the same time – accompanying the external *propagation* of the EU model and the bottom-up *contamination* of non-European countries with EU values, sensitivities, and objectives. The EU should certainly exploit this great potential by facilitating the creation of platforms for *paradiplomacy* and leveraging the increasingly influential role of LRAs across the globe in steering and integrating global initiatives, for example by expanding the coordination support and the technical and financial means provided through the *Team Europe* and *Global Europe* frameworks.

In light of the documentary and empirical evidence collected and the logical-deductive arguments proposed in this analytical work, it is therefore increasingly evident that LRAs can play a central role in international efforts for world peace and security. LRAs and other local actors often have a deeper understanding of the root causes of instability and conflicts in their regions. This grassroots approach can complement *traditional* state-centric diplomacy and foster more equitable, durable, and locally calibrated solutions. *Glocal* diplomacy makes the most of this knowledge in conflict resolution and peace-building efforts, considering that LRAs have a greater comprehension of local culture and are better equipped to involve stakeholders and local people in their actions and policies. LRAs, in fact, are not only executors but also *de facto* co-authors of global governance paradigms, being active participants in

the realization of global policies affecting human rights, democracy, and sustainable development in their hybrid substance of both presuppositions and consequences of global peace and security. The *glocal* essence of international documents of historical relevance, such as the *UN 2030 Agenda*, emphasizes the need for continued recognition and effective support of the capacity of LRAs to deal with global issues through *localized* actions. This fundamental acknowledgment will empower LRAs to strengthen their contributions to global goals, ensuring more cohesive, sustainable, peaceful, and secure human communities across the globe.

In this regard, *informal* diplomacy is reshaping the landscape of international relations, offering a dynamic and *localized* approach which is turning global governance into *glocal* governance. As LRAs continue to grow in influence, their role in international affairs will likely expand, necessitating thoughtful integration into the *traditional* frameworks of diplomacy. This evolution would not only improve the capacity of LRAs to tackle global challenges, but would also enrich the entire fabric of international relations. By integrating local insights with international expertise, *glocal* diplomacy creates more effective and sustainable peace and security processes. Local committees, customary conflict resolution mechanisms, and community dialogues can also be recognized and supported as interlocutors and actors of primary importance within broader international frameworks. Through transnational and cross-border peer collaboration, *paradiplomacy* facilitates the establishment of local institutional structures, practices, and mechanisms in line with international human rights standards as a cornerstone of world peace and security. Local NGOs, community representatives, and legal practitioners can also work with LRAs and international bodies to ensure that local judicial and administrative systems are accessible and equitable, consistent with SDG 16. Moreover, security is not only about the absence of threats and conflicts but also about the resilience of communities to resist and recover from crises and emergencies. *LRA diplomacy* can enable the creation of resilient communities by facilitating horizontal *glocal* partnerships that

enhance economic stability, disaster preparedness, and social inclusion and cohesion.

Therefore, *glocal* diplomacy is a catalyst for peace and security in the world (see Wolff, Ross and Wee, 2020). By integrating LRAs and other local actors into the actual dynamics of the global diplomatic framework, it ensures that peace and security initiatives are inclusive, fair, sustainable, contextually relevant, and thus effective and durable. *Glocal* collaboration between local and global bodies not only bridges the gap between different levels of governance but also enriches the overall efforts towards the outcome of a truly and lastly peaceful and secure world. As humanity faces complex and interconnected threats, definitively integrating this transformative approach into the fabric of *supranational democracy* offers a promising path to a better future of peace and security for all. As underlined above, by fostering inclusive and participatory governance *glocal* diplomacy can contribute to the development of international norms that really reflect the collective will of diverse communities.

This bottom-up attitude – or, at least, “from the middle” (Román, 2010) – to international norm-making can enhance the legitimacy and acceptance of international law (see Swiney, 2020). By building networks of cooperation between local and global actors, *glocal* diplomacy encourages a common sense of responsibility and solidarity, leading to sustainable and effective solutions to transnational issues and strengthening solidarity in the structure of the international community. Furthermore, the central roles played by local politicians (see Setzer and Anderton, 2019), CSOs, citizens assemblies, journalists, and academia – together with the challenge of opening international organizations to their participation (see Cromm and Volk, 2024) – cannot be underestimated for the coherent pursuit of SDG 16 and in the perspective of the broader realization of the *UN 2030 Agenda*.³³ As has been

³³ Lastly, see UNGA Resolution 79/1 of 22 September 2024, *The Pact for the Future*, Annex II, *Declaration on Future Generations*, Actions, paragraph 29. Moreover, see UNSG, Report Our Common Agenda (A/75/982), 5 August 2021, V. *Purposes and principles: adapting the United Nations to a new era*, paragraph 109; UNGA Resolution 79/1, *The Pact for the Future*,

widely detailed, *glocal* diplomacy can effectively connect all multi-level actors helping to *overcome* many of the bureaucratic mechanisms and systemic interferences that may persist at the national level by fostering *glocal* learning and collaboration for stronger democracy, sustainability, stability, and resilience, thus facilitating the affirmation of *inclusive informal multilateralism* as the *glocal* soul of the “explosion of spaces” (see Brenner, 2004, quoting Lefebvre, 1979).

Despite its merits, *glocal* diplomacy still faces several challenges. While it offers opportunities for fostering international cooperation and addressing local issues with global implications, it also suffers several limitations and problems, raising fundamental questions about coordination, legitimacy, and resource allocation. There is indeed a potential for conflict with national foreign policies, particularly when LRAs’ initiatives do not align with national interests, which can sometimes restrict the autonomy of local governments on the international stage (see Herrschel and Newman, 2017, 23 ff). Moreover, the disparity in resources and expertise among LRAs can lead to structural inequalities in engagement, bargaining power, visibility, and benefits as well as to unequal participation and influence, with wealthier areas dominating the general agenda (Leffel, Derudder, Acuto and van der Heijden, 2023; Leffel and Acuto, 2018).

The proliferation of actors in global governance and the lack of a comprehensive legal framework for *paradiplomacy* can also lead to various inefficiencies, excessive fragmentation, and incoherence in policy-making. Especially in the extra-EU application of these practices – outside the paradigm of legitimacy provided by EU Treaties for the action of EU LRAs within the EU as well as on the global scene – LRAs can suffer from the lack of sovereign status under international law, which limits their ability to enter into binding agreements and affects the formal recognition and enforceability of those agreements. To optimize the benefits of *glocal* efforts, it is therefore

Annex I, *Global Digital Compact*, Objective 1, paragraph 17(f), in broad implementation of SDG 17.

decisive to set clearer legal guidelines and support structures at both national and international levels. It is essential to create frameworks that facilitate *informal* diplomacy while preserving alignment with national foreign policies. Additionally, international organizations such as the UN could play a more active role in integrating LRAs into *formal* diplomatic processes, officially recognizing their importance in dealing with global challenges (see Acuto, Kosovac, Pejic and Jones, 2021).

Once again, this may raise pertinent questions regarding the *traditional* concept of diplomacy as an exclusive attribute of nation-States, as well as about the rationale behind LRAs' commitment in peace-building endeavours, their real capacity to undertake such initiatives, or the geographical and thematic scope of their involvement (see Miyazaki, 2021). However, the concept of *glocal* diplomacy highlights the global contributions of LRAs to conflict prevention, peace-building, and post-conflict reconstruction – both within and outside conflict-affected areas – acting as interlocutors of the institutional bodies of the international organizations to which their countries have adhered, as well as catalysts for the full implementation of international obligations undertaken by States and full respect for the supreme commitment to guarantee peace and security for all the peoples of the world, enshrined in the *UN Charter*.

Therefore, the *glocal* diplomacy of LRAs emerges as a foundation of the evolutive concept of *glocal law* – borrowed from the contemporary image of the law constructed on the theoretical basis of *critical legal pluralism* – in which all *informal* instruments of *global law* (*i.e.*, covenants, strategies, synergies, practices, etc.) activated at transnational level by LRAs for shared responsiveness and accountability on global issues and recognition of cultural diversity collaterally to international law created by States (see Jurkovich, 2020; Kleinhans and Macdonald, 1997; Martins Casagrande, 2009; Swiney, 2020) converge towards a hybrid form of *soft customary law* that calls for compliance with existing international values, objectives and obligations, but which is also capable of transforming into *hard customary law* once nation-

States decide to follow the example of their *virtuous* territorial articulations with regard to the challenges that will mark the future of humanity.³⁴ And this not only by fulfilling their already binding duties under international treaty law – as also prompted through the *soft power* of their LRAs – but even by fully embracing, in their constant practice (*diuturnitas*), the inherent legality and necessity (*opinio iuris ac necessitatis*) of the *glocal* essence pervading acts of historical and vital importance such as the *UN 2030 Agenda*.

As globalization continues to shape institutions and societies, the integration of *glocal* diplomatic practices into supranational governance structures will consequently be crucial to building a more inclusive, fair, democratic, participatory, and collaborative global order. This innovative scenario emerges as the global projection and the growing acceptance of *glocal* actions and approaches define new horizons of transnational cooperation between LRAs, which could lay the foundations for a genuine democratic *regime change* in the current model of global governance. As we move forward in this complex world, it will be of the utmost importance to continue to explore and refine the mechanisms through which LRAs can actively and legitimately contribute to global affairs, ensuring that their growing involvement in the multi-layered governance of the *global neighbourhood* is effective, equitable and accountable.

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³⁴ In this regard, see UNGA Resolution 79/1 of 22 September 2024, *The Pact for the Future*, Annex II, *Declaration on Future Generations*, Actions, paragraph 28.

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