Juan Esteban Belderrain: “Synodal conversion is also a call to action for cooperation agencies”

The implications of synodality for Lasallian non-profit organisations was one of the topics addressed at the international meeting *‘Bridging the Gap’*, organised by the La Salle Foundation at the end of March.

What have we learnt from the Church’s synodal process? The Argentinian political expert Juan Esteban Belderrain, who is also a consultant in international cooperation, in sharing his experience and reflections during the meeting and in conversation with ***LaSalleOrg Interviews***, states that “we have learnt a great deal so far and I believe we will continue to learn much more (…). “Those of us who have been working in international cooperation with this call to synodality have realised that perhaps one of the first groups that must take the invitation to synodal conversion very seriously are the cooperation agencies (…). Perhaps that is the first lesson: that **as entities which collaborate with the Church, or which are part of the Church, synodal conversion is a call for us too**”.

Cooperation and Synodality

Indeed, for the past three years, a group of 15 international cooperation organisations linked to the mission of the Catholic Church have been asking themselves what it means to cooperate synodally. For Belderrain, this implies, on the one hand, “**moving away from fragmentation and organisational individualism**”, since “very often, cooperation agencies are supporting the same projects in the same areas, yet we do not communicate with one another the work we are doing there”.

On the other hand, the Argentinian consultant also emphasises that “the call for solidarity is fundamentally a call to **overcome the power imbalances that naturally arise in any organisation, and even more so in aid organisations**, which, by distributing resources, place us in a position of power in front of the recipients of those resources”. This is undoubtedly a sensitive issue which, if not handled appropriately, “often places us in situations that some call paternalism and others call colonialism”, warns Belderrain.

Similarly, one of the greatest demands of cooperation in a synodal framework, according to the Argentinian political expert "is transparency: that we – donors, recipients and beneficiaries of the actions – **may have complete transparency** regarding **the administration of resources, needs**, and the allocation of resources for that collaboration".

"Breaking out of the walls"

To take steps towards synodal cooperation, Belderrain emphasises that it is necessary to "break out of the walls" of one's own organisation. "I believe we need to create more spaces like these", he says, referring specifically to *Bridging the Gap*, "where those of us working in international cooperation can get to know one another and where **we allow ourselves to be challenged by others' ways of working, including those who work in ways that are completely different from our own**, because we have something to learn from everyone".

Secondly, there is **'the Samaritan imperative**'. "That is to say, recognising that in a context where international cooperation resources have diminished so much (…), there is an increasingly explicit duty that our opportunities for cooperation must reach the poorest of the poor, and that we must take a careful, strategic understanding of who the victims are (…) and clearly allocate resources to their needs", concludes Belderrain.

Watch below the interview Juan Esteban Belderrain gave to *LaSalleOrg Interviews*.

* *Photo: La Salle Foundation*