STRENGTHENING INTERNATIONAL CAPABILITIES AT THE SUBNATIONAL LEVEL

Results and Lessons Learned from the Application of the International Capabilities Index (ICI)

Cities and Provinces, 2024–2025

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Executive Summary

Cities, provinces, and regions have acquired an increasingly relevant role as international actors. Far from being limited to protocol functions or symbolic representation, **subnational governments are now key players in attracting investment, promoting productive sectors, accessing international financing, attracting talent, positioning themselves as tourist destinations, and participating in global agendas linked to sustainable development and innovation.**

Despite this dynamism, until recently there was no instrument capable of measuring, in a systematic and comparable manner, the level of international capabilities of these actors. The **International Capabilities Index (ICI)**, developed by the **Center of International Strategies for Governments and Organizations (CIG)** of Austral University with the support of the **Organization of Ibero-American States (OEI**), was created to fill this gap by providing a tool aimed at analyzing the institutional capabilities that enable **effective and sustainable international insertion.**

Between 2024 and 2025, the ICI was applied to eight Ibero-American cities. In 2024, a first pilot application was carried out in **Barcelona, Buenos Aires, Madrid, and São Paulo**, with the objective of validating the methodological approach and refining indicators. In 2025, the index was applied to **Bogotá, Medellín, Montevideo, and Santiago de Chile**, incorporating lessons learned from the pilot phase and deepening the comparative analysis.

In parallel, during 2025, a specific methodological adaptation of the ICI was developed for its application to Argentine provinces, recognizing the institutional, jurisdictional, and territorial differences between the urban and provincial levels. This version of the index was applied, on a pilot basis, to the provinces of **Córdoba, Entre Ríos, and Jujuy.**

The aggregated results show that **effective internationalization does not depend exclusively on a territory's size, wealth, or prior international visibility.** Rather, the most consistent performances are associated with the existence of **strong institutional capabilities, clear strategies, professionalized technical teams, and mechanisms of inter-institutional and multi-stakeholder coordination** that enable coordination among the public sector, the private sector, universities, international organizations, and other relevant territorial actors.

Beyond its usefulness for participating cities and provinces, the ICI offers relevant lessons for other subnational governments. By providing **a diagnostic framework and an indicative roadmap**, the index contributes to strengthening international capabilities and guiding internationalization public policies with **greater coherence, strategic focus, and potential impact.**

1. Introduction:

Why Measure International Capabilities at the Subnational Level

Internationalization has become a structural component of territorial development. Cities and provinces now act as key nodes for the circulation of goods, people, capital, knowledge, and innovation, and actively compete for scarce resources such as investment, talent, and international cooperation.

Subnational international action generates **tangible benefits**, such as increased flows of trade, foreign investment, tourism, or cooperation, but also highly relevant intangible impacts such as improved territorial reputation, strengthened state capabilities, the promotion of institutional learning processes, and the possibility of actively participating in global conversations that shape access to future opportunities.

However, **not all subnational governments face this challenge with the same tools nor achieve similar results.** While some territories succeed in consolidating coherent and sustained international projection strategies over time, others develop fragmented actions that are highly dependent on individual leadership, political circumstances, or external agendas, limiting their impact and sustainability.

One of the main obstacles to designing more effective internationalization policies has been the absence of instruments capable of measuring, **in a systematic and comparable manner**, international capabilities at the subnational level. While there are rankings and indexes that evaluate dimensions such as competitiveness, quality of life, sustainability, or urban reputation, these approaches do not adequately capture the full range of institutional, strategic, and operational factors that explain why some territories successfully project themselves on the global stage while others do not.

The **International Capabilities Index (ICI)** was created to address this gap by proposing an approach that goes beyond the visible outcomes of internationalization and instead emphasizes the **institutional, strategic, and operational capabilities** that make it possible and sustainable over time.

In this context, the ICI is conceived as a tool adaptable to different levels of subnational government. While the conceptual approach and the overall logic of the index are shared, the institutional, jurisdictional, and territorial differences between cities and provinces require specific methodological adjustments.

For this reason, the document distinguishes between two versions of the index: **ICI-Cities**, focused on analyzing urban internationalization capabilities, and **ICI-Provinces**, designed to capture the specific characteristics of the provincial level. This distinction enables a more precise reading of results and a better interpretation of the lessons derived from each application.

2. What is the International Capabilities Index (ICI)?

The **International Capabilities Index (ICI)** is a strategic diagnostic tool designed to assess the capabilities of cities, provinces, and regions to engage effectively in the international arena. Its objective is not to rank territories, but rather to identify strengths, gaps, and opportunities for improvement that can guide public policy decision-making.

The ICI conceives **internationalization as a multidimensional phenomenon** that combines assets, institutional capabilities, projection strategies, and concrete outcomes. From this perspective, the index allows subnational governments to answer key questions:

> ***What capabilities exist, which remain underdeveloped, and which should be prioritized to strengthen a coherent internationalization strategy aligned with territorial development and sustainable over time?***

The value proposition of the ICI is based on four central elements:

- Combination of **quantitative and qualitative information**.
- **Adaptability** to different territorial contexts and levels of government.
- **Practical orientation**, with results that can be directly used for public management.
- Focus on **institutional capabilities** rather than solely on final outcomes.

The index is conceived as a tool for direct use by government teams, international relations offices, economic development, tourism, innovation, and investment promotion agencies, as well as by international organizations and universities working to strengthen subnational capabilities.

ICI Objectives

- Provide a **comprehensive measurement tool** regarding the degree of internationalization of cities and provinces.
- Identify strengths, challenges, and areas for improvement to **guide public decision-making.**
- **Generate evidence** that facilitates comparison among territories and the adoption of best practices.
- Contribute to the professionalization of **international affairs offices at the subnational level.**

3. ICI Methodology

The ICI is structured around **four dimensions** that reflect the different components required for effective international engagement:

GLOBAL ASSETS
8 subdimensions – 24 indicators

This dimension analyzes the structural and contextual attributes that shape the international identity of cities and provinces.

It contains **8 subdimensions**: quality of life, talent production and innovation, safety, connectivity and tourism infrastructure, coexistence and diversity, business environment and local economy, cultural attractions, and environment.

LOCAL ECOSYSTEM FOR INTERNATIONALIZATION
3 subdimensions – 9 indicators

This dimension analyzes the institutional capacity and governance of the internationalization process. It contains **3 subdimensions** that consider the existence of public, private, and civil society actors that promote international projection, the existence of a formal internationalization strategy, and the presence of international organizations within the territory.

INTERNATIONAL PROJECTION
3 subdimensions – 9 indicators

It measures actions aimed at enhancing the international visibility of the city or province. It includes **3 subdimensions** that analyze leadership in global agendas (such as climate change or urban innovation), participation in networks, the ability to attract cultural, sporting, or academic events, and international reputation as reflected in rankings and awards.

INTERNATIONALIZATION DIVIDENDS
3 subdimensions – 6 indicators

It measures the territory's capacity to transform its international insertion into tangible economic benefits.

It contains **3 subdimensions** that consider the impact of the visitor economy (tourists, students, digital nomads), integration into the global economy (multinational companies and exports), and development financing derived from international cooperation.

3.1 Comprehensive Approach

Evaluating internationalization comprehensively implies understanding the international projection of a city or province as a **complex, multidimensional, and strategic phenomenon.**

The ICI is distinguished by its **comprehensive approach** to analyzing the international insertion of cities and provinces. Unlike other instruments, it considers not only the visible outcomes of international action, but also the conditions that make it possible and sustainable over time. This perspective is essential for understanding why some territories successfully position themselves on the global stage while others face greater difficulties.

The four dimensions that make up the ICI do not operate independently; rather, they are deeply interconnected. A territory's **Global Assets** (such as human capital, productive structure, or cultural heritage) constitute the starting point, but their impact depends on the existence of a **Local Ecosystem for Internationalization** capable of planning, managing, and sustaining international relationships. In turn, this ecosystem enables effective **International Projection** —through networks, cooperation, events, promotion, and territorial diplomacy— which, when consolidated, generates **Internationalization Dividends**, such as investment, strategic partnerships, innovation, or global reputation.

The **Local Ecosystem for Internationalization** and **International Projection** each account for 30% of the total score, while **Global Assets** and **Internationalization Dividends** each represent 20%. This weighting is based on the analysis conducted by the CIG of successful international projection strategies, which show that institutional capacity and active external engagement are key enabling factors that allow a territory's resources and achievements to be transformed into sustainable outcomes. In this way, the ICI evaluates not only visible assets and dividends, but also the conditions that determine the viability and scope of internationalization over the long term.

3.2 Sources of Information

From a methodological perspective, the ICI combines:

- **Secondary data** drawn from official statistics and internationally recognized indexes such as the Global Liveability Index produced by The Economist.
- **Structured surveys** administered to subnational governments.
- **Interviews** with officials responsible for key internationalization areas within governments.

This methodology captures both observable performance and institutional capabilities, providing a richer and more contextualized understanding than can be obtained from public data alone.

3.3 Methodological Adaptation for Provinces: ICI-Provinces

During 2025, the ICI was adapted for application to provinces, recognizing substantive differences with respect to the urban level. This adaptation involved adjustments to indicators related to competencies that are exclusive or predominantly exercised at the provincial level, such as export promotion, investment attraction, access to international financing, territorial planning, and multilevel coordination with municipalities.

Likewise, the **ICI-Provinces** incorporated a stronger emphasis on productive internationalization, public-private governance, and the capacity to coordinate with economic, academic, and social actors across broader territorial scales. The pilot application carried out in the provinces of **Córdoba, Entre Ríos, and Jujuy** made it possible to validate this methodological adaptation and establish the foundations for future applications in other Argentine provinces and throughout the region.

4. ICI-Cities: Participating Cities (2024–2025)

Between September and November 2024, the **first application of the ICI was carried out in four Ibero-American cities.** This pilot sought to assess the validity of the index as a tool for comprehensively measuring the internationalization of these cities. Subsequently, between April and June 2025, it was applied to **four additional cities.**

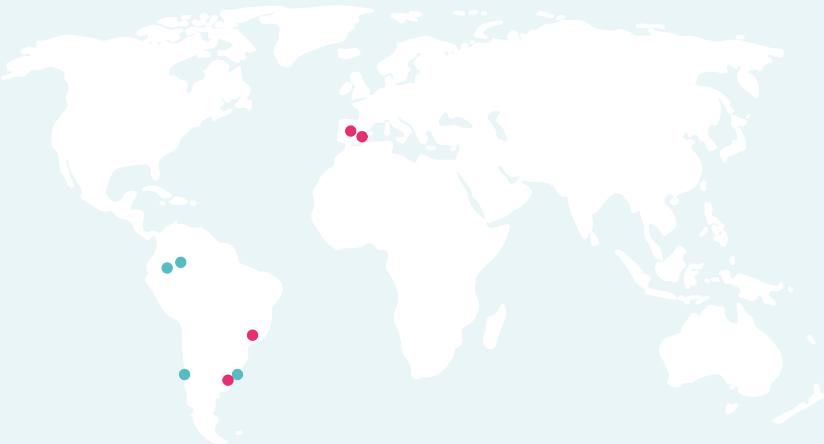
The selection of the eight cities responded to strategic criteria aimed at ensuring regional representativeness and diversity of urban profiles across the Ibero-American space. The first phase included four consolidated metropolitan areas, while the second phase incorporated intermediate and emerging cities, allowing for a richer and more nuanced comparative analysis.

First Phase (2024)

- Barcelona, Spain.
- Buenos Aires, Argentina.
- Madrid, Spain.
- São Paulo, Brazil.

Second Phase (2025)

- Bogotá, Colombia.
- Medellín, Colombia.
- Montevideo, Uruguay.
- Santiago de Chile, Chile.

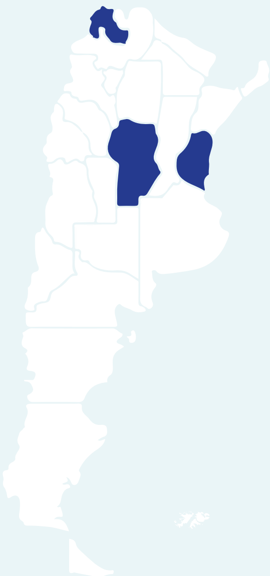


This selection enabled an exhaustive examination of **different internationalization models**, encompassing both consolidated strategies and emerging approaches. In addition, the inclusion of cities of different sizes and with diverse political and institutional contexts made it possible to analyze how local specificities influence internationalization processes. This comparative approach not only enriches the understanding of urban dynamics, but also helps **identify best practices and lessons learned** that may be applied in different environments.

5. ICI-Provinces: Participating Provinces (2025)

The **pilot application of ICI-Provinces** was carried out between April and July 2025 in the provinces of **Córdoba, Entre Ríos, and Jujuy**. The selection responded to strategic criteria aimed at capturing territorial, productive, and institutional diversity, as well as different levels of experience and specialization in internationalization.

The participating provinces present contrasting profiles in terms of economic structure, international insertion, institutional capabilities, and articulation with local and global actors, making it possible to test the flexibility of the index and adjust indicators to the specific characteristics of the provincial level.



PARTICIPATING PROVINCES – PILOT APPLICATION (2025)

Córdoba: Province with a diversified productive structure, industrial and technology clusters, leading universities, and an active strategy for investment promotion, foreign trade, and international cooperation.

Entre Ríos: Province with a strong agro-industrial and logistics profile, and a growing international engagement agenda focused on productive development, regional integration, and export promotion.

Jujuy: Province strategically positioned in emerging agendas such as the energy transition, critical minerals, and sustainable tourism, with growing international projection associated with productive and cooperation projects.

The application of **ICI-Provinces** made it possible to analyze internationalization models of subnational governments operating on a broader territorial scale and exercising key competencies in productive development, fiscal policy, and planning, thereby complementing the urban analysis developed in previous editions. Likewise, the pilot experience provided essential inputs for refining the methodology, laying the foundations for future applications of **ICI-Provinces** in other Argentine jurisdictions and across the region.

6. ICI-Cities: Comparative Results (2024–2025)

This section presents the main comparative results of the application of the **International Capabilities Index (ICI)** to the four cities evaluated in the 2024 edition (Barcelona, Buenos Aires, Madrid, and São Paulo) and the participants in the 2025 edition (Bogotá, Medellín, Montevideo, and Santiago de Chile). The objective is not to establish a rigid ranking, but rather to identify patterns, gaps, and lessons that help explain how urban internationalization capabilities are currently structured across different contexts.

6.1 Performance Levels and Underlying Profiles

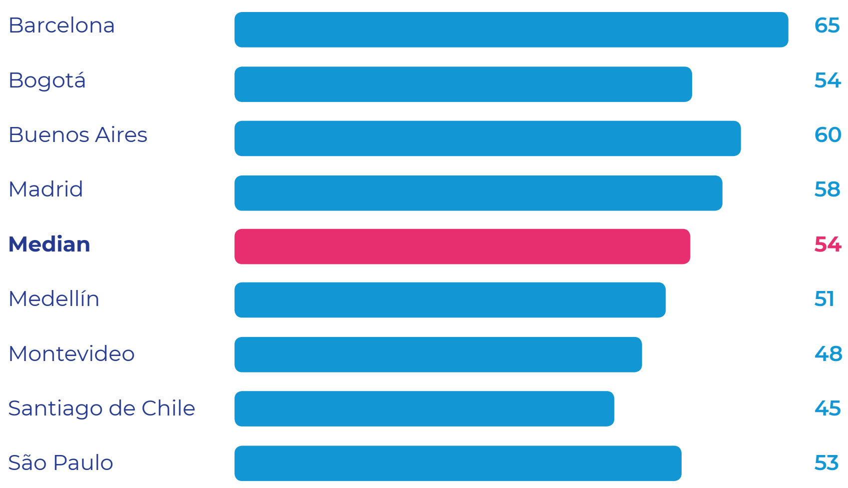


Figure 1. Overall ICI Score in Participating Cities (2024–2025)

The **analysis of the overall ICI-Cities score** for the eight cities evaluated shows a **moderate but significant dispersion** of internationalization capabilities, with values ranging from 45 to 65 points. This distribution suggests that most of the cities analyzed are at an **intermediate stage of development of international capabilities**, with meaningful advances in some areas but without yet achieving high and balanced performance across all dimensions of the index.

Barcelona leads the group with 65/100, followed by **Buenos Aires** (60) and **Madrid** (58), while **São Paulo** (53) and **Bogotá** (54) occupy an intermediate range. **Medellín** (51) and **Montevideo** (48) fall below the group median (54), while **Santiago de Chile** (45) records the lowest value in the sample. This relative concentration of scores reinforces the idea that differences among cities are not explained by extreme gaps, but rather by variations in the internal composition of their internationalization capabilities.

An analytical reading of the overall score allows the identification of **three differentiated city profiles**, which do not strictly correspond to criteria such as size, region, or level of economic development:

- A first group of cities with high and relatively balanced scores, such as **Barcelona and Madrid**, where structural assets, international projection, and the institutional ecosystem reinforce one another.

- A second group of cities with similar overall scores but distinct internal compositions, such as **Buenos Aires, São Paulo, and Bogotá**, which achieve comparable outcomes through heterogeneous internationalization strategies.

- A third group of cities with lower overall scores, such as **Medellín, Montevideo, and Santiago de Chile**, which show clear advances in some dimensions but significant opportunities for improvement in others.

This interpretation confirms one of the central assumptions of the ICI: **the overall score should not be interpreted as a normative ranking or as a homogeneous measure of performance**, but rather as a comprehensive indicator summarizing specific configurations of urban internationalization. In this sense, the analysis of the overall score serves as an entry point for understanding differentiated profiles that must be interpreted in light of performance across dimensions and subdimensions.

6.2 Performance by Dimension: Differentiated Internationalization Profiles

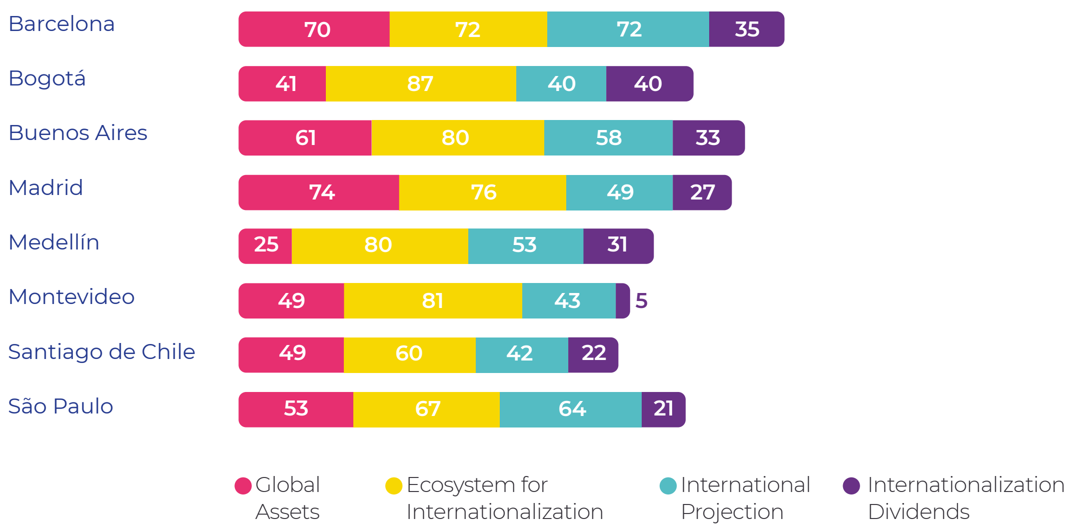


Figure 2. Comparative Performance by ICI Dimension in Participating Cities (2024–2025)

Global Assets

Structural Advantages and Persistent Gaps

Relevant differences can be observed among the cities, although they are less extreme than in other dimensions. The European cities (**Barcelona** and **Madrid**) and **Buenos Aires** present the highest values, driven mainly by their performance in subdimensions such as quality of life, security, cultural attractions, and environment. In the case of **Barcelona** and **Madrid**, these strengths are complemented by higher levels of connectivity and infrastructure, whereas **Buenos Aires** exhibits more pronounced gaps in the latter subdimension.

The cities evaluated in 2025 display more heterogeneous profiles. **Montevideo** and **Santiago de Chile** achieve relatively balanced values across several subdimensions, while **Bogotá** and **Medellín** present more pronounced gaps in security, connectivity and infrastructure, and cultural attractions. These results confirm that urban assets continue to be a relevant component of international positioning, but also show that their explanatory power is limited when they are not articulated with institutional capabilities and active strategies.

Ecosystem for Internationalization

Institutional Capacity as a Critical Factor

This dimension emerges as one of the main differentiating factors among cities. **Bogotá** clearly leads this dimension, followed by **Montevideo**, **Buenos Aires**, and **Medellín**, reflecting the existence of formal strategies, dedicated administrative structures, and relatively dense articulation with territorial actors and international organizations.

In contrast, cities with important structural assets, such as **São Paulo** and **Santiago de Chile**, present lower values in this dimension, suggesting a deficit in the institutionalization of the international agenda. This pattern reinforces the idea that urban internationalization capacity depends largely on organizational and governance decisions rather than on structural attributes that are difficult to modify in the short term.

Likewise, the analysis shows that a strong institutional ecosystem can act as a compensatory mechanism, allowing cities with limitations in assets to sustain intermediate or high overall performance.

International Projection

Visibility, Networks, and Thematic Leadership

In this dimension, differences among cities become more pronounced. **Barcelona** and **São Paulo** lead this dimension, associated with the capacity to actively participate in international networks, attract global-scale events, lead thematic agendas, and sustain a visible international reputation. **Buenos Aires** and **Madrid** show intermediate-to-high values, consistent with their role as political and economic capitals.

Within the 2025 cohort, international projection tends to fall within lower ranges, with one important exception: **Medellín** (53) stands apart from the rest of the group (**Bogotá** 40, **Montevideo** 43, **Santiago de Chile** 42), suggesting that it is possible to build relative visibility even without starting from strong structural assets. The analysis by subdimension further shows that projection can be built through focused strategies, such as leadership in specific agendas or selective participation in networks.

Internationalization Dividends

The Persistent Gap Between Projection and Results

This is the most challenging dimension from the standpoint of methodology and data availability. In most cases, there are no systematic public data at the urban level that allow for precise measurement of the economic benefits associated with internationalization. Many cities do not regularly collect key information—such as the number of international visitors or the attraction of foreign investment—or such data are only available at the provincial or national level without territorial disaggregation. This limitation not only constrains the analysis but also highlights a critical area requiring attention from subnational governments: **measuring in order to evaluate and improve.**

In this context, the dimension consistently records the lowest values in the sample and the greatest relative dispersion. Even cities with high levels of assets, institutional ecosystem development, and international projection show difficulties in transforming international insertion into tangible economic benefits.

Bogotá and **Barcelona** achieve the highest values in this dimension, although through different pathways: **Bogotá** stands out in sustainable financing, while **Barcelona's** performance is driven mainly by the visitor economy. In contrast, **Montevideo**, **Santiago de Chile**, and **São Paulo** show particularly low results, highlighting a persistent gap between international visibility and the capture of economic value.

This pattern reinforces one of the most relevant conclusions of the ICI: **urban internationalization has advanced more rapidly in terms of positioning and governance than in the generation of dividends**, which poses a major strategic challenge for local governments.

6.3 Analysis by Subdimensions

	Barcelona	Bogotá	Buenos Aires	Madrid	Medellín	Montevideo	Santiago de Chile	São Paulo	Median
GLOBAL SCORE	65	54	60	58	51	48	45	53	54
Global Assets	**70**	**41**	**61**	**74**	**25**	**49**	**49**	**53**	**51**
Quality of Life	95	61	85	91	0	80	81	70	81
Talent and Innovation	40	29	47	51	21	20	27	53	34
Safety	88	23	72	90	21	38	55	56	56
Connectivity and Tourist Infrastructure	56	33	24	63	3	0	13	24	24
Coexistence and Diversity	70	53	70	74	55	81	68	50	58
Business Environment and Local Economy	60	39	40	60	40	53	59	40	47
Cultural Attractions	60	34	50	65	5	18	34	40	37
Environment	80	50	90	90	90	100	50	80	85
Local Ecosystem for Internatio-nalization	**72**	**87**	**80**	**76**	**80**	**81**	**60**	**67**	**78**
Actors for International Promotion	50	100	100	100	100	100	80	100	90
International Strategy	74	74	60	60	75	62	32	54	67
International Organizations	100	100	100	80	60	100	100	50	90
International Projection	**72**	**40**	**58**	**49**	**53**	**43**	**42**	**64**	**51**
Global Agendas	76	43	66	50	68	70	58	68	63
The City on the Global Stage	87	21	60	55	29	14	21	67	25
Reputation	40	58	35	35	48	20	33	50	36
Internationaliza-tion Dividends	**35**	**40**	**33**	**27**	**31**	**5**	**22**	**21**	**29**
Visitor Economy	66	35	60	51	17	7	39	40	37
Global Economic Integration	7	7	3	5	9	0	9	3	7
Development Financing	0	100	10	0	100	10	10	0	5

Figure 3. Score by ICI Dimensions and Subdimensions in Participating Cities (2024–2025)
Color intensity represents the level of performance.

Structural and Strategic Subdimensions: Potential versus Activation

The comparative analysis of **ICI-Cities** distinguishes between two broad types of subdimensions that play different roles in subnational internationalization processes. On the one hand, structural subdimensions, primarily associated with **Global Assets**, reflect relatively stable attributes of the territory, such as quality of life, security, environmental conditions, cultural offerings, or certain economic and urban characteristics. On the other hand, strategic subdimensions, linked to the **Ecosystem for Internationalization** and **International Projection**, refer to capabilities more directly associated with public policy decisions, institutional arrangements, and deliberate international insertion strategies.

This distinction is key for interpreting the results of the index. **Structural assets** constitute a starting point—or a potential for internationalization—but **do not by themselves determine outcomes**. The evidence shows that territories with similar asset profiles can exhibit very different levels of projection and dividends depending on their ability to strategically activate those assets.

Successful internationalization does not necessarily require achieving high scores uniformly across all subdimensions that make up **Global Assets**. On the contrary, the results suggest that it is possible to build **effective international insertion strategies** based on one or a few **particularly strong assets**, provided that these are recognized, prioritized, and deliberately activated.

Thus, specific attributes such as environmental quality, security, a distinctive cultural profile, or particular advantages in quality of life can become the foundation of a **differentiated international strategy**, even when other structural subdimensions perform more modestly. In these cases, the key lies not in the indiscriminate accumulation of assets, but in the territory's ability to identify those **attributes with the greatest strategic potential** and connect them with coherent policies, institutions, and projection actions.

From this perspective, **strategic subdimensions** acquire a central role, such as the existence of a **formal internationalization strategy, coordination with specialized actors** from the private sector and/or civil society for international promotion, or **leadership in global agendas**. These are the elements that transform potential into results by connecting available assets with clear objectives, appropriate instruments, and multi-stakeholder coordination mechanisms. The absence or weakness of these strategic capabilities helps explain why, in many cases, territories with significant assets fail to translate them into sustained international positioning or tangible dividends.

Taken together, this interpretation reinforces one of the central conceptual contributions of the ICI: subnational internationalization should not be understood as a race to maximize all indicators, but rather as a **process of strategic construction**, in which the identification of specific advantages and their deliberate activation are more decisive than homogeneous performance across all subdimensions.

The institutional ecosystem as an enabling factor for internationalization

The analysis of **ICI-Cities** shows that the subdimensions that make up the **Local Ecosystem for Internationalization**—Actors for International Promotion, Internationalization Strategy, and the presence of International Organizations—play a **central explanatory role** in the overall performances observed. Unlike structural assets, these subdimensions reflect capabilities directly linked to public policy decisions, institutional arrangements, and coordination mechanisms that can be strengthened in the short and medium term.

Comparative results indicate that cities with stronger overall performance tend to show consistent progress in at least two of these three subdimensions. This pattern appears repeatedly among the cities with the highest overall scores, where the existence of a **formal internationalization strategy** is usually combined with the presence of **specialized actors** for promotion or with **active participation in international networks and organizations**. In these cases, the convergence of institutional capabilities provides greater coherence and continuity to the territory's international action.

Conversely, cities with lower overall performance tend to exhibit simultaneous weaknesses in more than one of these subdimensions. The absence of an explicit **strategy**, the fragmentation of the **actors** involved, or limited **articulation** with international organizations and networks tend to constrain the ability to transform isolated initiatives into a sustained international agenda. This lack of institutional density often translates into reactive actions or actions dependent on specific circumstances, with limited long-term impact.

Furthermore, the analysis highlights that achieving high performance across all subdimensions of the ecosystem is not essential for obtaining relevant results; however, having a **minimum core of articulated institutional capabilitie**s is critical. The evidence suggests that the combination of a **clear strategy** with at least one of the other two components—specialized actors or integration into international networks and organizations—constitutes a significant threshold for explaining meaningful differences in overall scores.

Taken together, these findings reinforce the idea that the **institutional ecosystem** acts as a **key enabling factor** for subnational internationalization. More than the sum of individual initiatives, it is the **articulation among strategy, actors, and international linkages** that explains the ability of local governments to sustain a **coherent and impactful international agenda** over time.

International Projection: thematic leadership versus generalist presence

The analysis of the International Projection dimension shows that cities do not follow a single model for positioning themselves on the global stage. On the contrary, the results reveal the coexistence of **differentiated strategies**, ranging from generalist approaches to more focused forms of thematic leadership.

In some cases, international projection is built through broad and diversified participation in networks, forums, and global agendas, combined with active engagement across multiple themes. This **generalist approach** increases the territory's international visibility and supports an extensive relationship-building agenda, although it often requires robust institutional capacities to avoid the dispersion of efforts.

However, the ICI analysis clearly shows that effective international projection does not necessarily depend on uniformly high performance across all subdimensions associated with this dimension. Consistent with the findings from the analysis of Global Assets, several cities have succeeded in building significant international positioning by relying on one or a few clearly defined **strategic attributes or themes** around which they concentrate their international action.

In these cases, **thematic leadership**—for example in areas such as urban innovation, environmental sustainability, culture, social policies, or development financing—acts as a

vector of projection that allows the territory to integrate into specific international circuits, gain recognition, and establish deeper relationships, even when its presence in other areas is more limited. The key lies in the **coherence between territorial attributes, public policy priorities, and the international arenas** in which participation is pursued.

This **focused approach** reinforces the idea that international projection should not be understood as a race to maximize the number of networks, events, or agendas addressed, but rather as a strategic process of selection and prioritization. This finding is particularly relevant for **intermediate cities**, which often face greater resource and capacity constraints when attempting to sustain broad international engagement strategies. In these contexts, thematic focus emerges as an effective pathway to maximize impact, avoid the dispersion of efforts, and build a recognizable international identity.

Taken together, the results suggest that both **generalist strategies and thematic leadership strategies** can be effective, provided that there is a clear strategic definition and sufficient institutional capacities to sustain them over time. However, for many cities—especially those with more limited resources—building international projection around one or a few **priority areas** appears to be a particularly relevant pathway for maximizing impact and avoiding the dispersion of efforts.

Dividend subdimensions: persistent gaps and divergent trajectories

The subdimensions associated with **Internationalization Dividends**—Visitor Economy, Global Economic Integration, and Development Financing—collectively display the lowest values in the index and the widest gaps among cities. This pattern confirms that the generation of dividends remains the **principal challenge of urban internationalization.**

Furthermore, as noted previously, the research shows that the **availability of systematic and disaggregated urban-level information** to measure these dividends remains limited. This constraint not only affects the analysis but also highlights the need to strengthen **subnational capacities for impact measurement** and for evaluating the dividends generated through international action.

Comparative analysis reveals that cities with similar levels of assets and projection can display very different performances in these subdimensions, suggesting the existence of **divergent trajectories**

of benefit capture. In particular, **Development Financing** emerges as a subdimension capable of improving dividend performance even in contexts where other variables—such as the Visitor Economy or Global Economic Integration—show more modest results.

These findings highlight, on the one hand, the need to analyze dividends not as an automatic consequence of international visibility, but rather as the result of **deliberate strategies** aimed at aligning international action with economic, productive, and local development agendas.

On the other hand, they confirm that urban internationalization has advanced more rapidly in terms of positioning, networks, and governance than in the generation of economic dividends.

Reducing these gaps constitutes a major strategic challenge for local governments, which must not only strengthen their internationalization strategies but also develop **better measurement and evaluation tools** to guide international action toward clearer and more verifiable economic impacts.

Subdimensions with systemic gaps and shared challenges

Finally, the analysis helps identify a set of subdimensions that display relatively low performance across most of the cities evaluated. Among them, **Global Economic Integration** stands out, as well as, to a lesser extent, the **Visitor Economy** in cities that are not yet consolidated international tourism destinations.

These systemic gaps suggest that, beyond the differences among cities, there are shared challenges of urban internationalization that require **coordinated responses and long-term policies**. These include not only strengthening capacities to attract investment, promote exports, and secure sustained access to international financing, but also improving measurement and evaluation tools capable of monitoring the impact of international action and adjusting strategies on the basis of verifiable results.

Taken together, the subdimension analysis confirms that urban internationalization cannot be understood solely through aggregate indicators. On the contrary, it requires a relational reading that makes it possible to identify how different combinations of subdimensions shape differentiated trajectories, with direct implications for the design of public policies and international positioning strategies at the local level.

7. ICI-Provinces: Analysis of Results
(2025 Pilot Application)

The pilot application of the **International Capabilities Index (ICI)** at the provincial level was conducted on a limited universe of three cases (**Córdoba, Entre Ríos, and Jujuy**). While this sample is insufficient to draw generalizable conclusions or establish robust regularities, the exercise helps identify **patterns, relevant contrasts, and initial analytical hypotheses** regarding how internationalization capabilities are configured at the provincial level. In this regard, the results should be read as **preliminary lessons**, aimed at validating the tool and guiding future applications of the **ICI-Provinces** to a broader sample.

	Córdoba	Entre Ríos	Jujuy
GLOBAL SCORE	**70**	**25**	**43**
Global Assets	**61**	**49**	**48**
Quality of Life	75	65	65
Talent and Innovation	55	35	40
Safety	80	70	90
Connectivity and Tourist Infrastructure	40	50	35
Business Environment and Local Economy	75	50	35
Cultural Attractions	40	20	40
Environment	40	40	40
Local Ecosystem for Internationalization	**82**	**7**	**32**
Actors for International Promotion	88	25	25
International Strategy	68	33	33
International Organizations	100	0	45
International Projection	**66**	**14**	**54**
Global Agendas	92	16	84
The Province on the Global Stage	86	20	34
Reputation	0	0	68
Internationalization Dividends	**65**	**18**	**41**
Visitor Economy	60	0	10
Global Economic Integration	54	36	36
Development Financing	100	0	100

Figure 4. Scores by Dimension and Subdimension of the ICI in Participating Provinces (2025)
Color intensity represents performance level.

7.1 Overall Results and Initial Correlations

The overall scores of the three provinces reveal significant differences in the level of international capabilities: **Córdoba** achieves a high overall score (70/100), **Jujuy** ranks at an intermediate level (43/100), while **Entre Ríos** records a lower score (25/100). This dispersion reflects markedly different provincial profiles and allows for an analysis of how different combinations of dimensions influence the final result.

A first relevant finding is that the provincial **overall score** is not determined exclusively by **Global Assets**, but rather by the way these assets are combined with the institutional capabilities of the **Local Ecosystem for Internationalization**, **International Projection**, and, especially, the capacity to generate **Internationalization Dividends**. **Córdoba** records the highest overall score not only because it possesses relatively strong assets, but fundamentally because of its outstanding performance in **Local Ecosystem for Internationalization**, International Projection, and **Internationalization Dividends**. At the opposite end, **Entre Ríos** displays comparable assets in some subdimensions, but lower performance in the institutional ecosystem and international projection, which limits its overall result.

The comparison between **Jujuy** and **Entre Ríos** is particularly illustrative. Both provinces present similar values in **Global Assets** (48 and 49, respectively), yet obtain very different overall scores. This gap is explained by Jujuy's stronger relative performance in **International Projection** and **Internationalization Dividends**, reinforcing the hypothesis that, even at the provincial level, structural assets constitute a necessary but insufficient condition for effective internationalization.

7.2 Dimensions and Subdimensions Explaining Provincial Differences

The analysis of dimensions and subdimensions within the **ICI-Provinces** provides a deeper understanding of overall results and the factors underlying the differences observed among **Córdoba**, **Entre Ríos**, and **Jujuy**. While the pilot nature of the exercise requires caution in interpretation, the comparison provides relevant insights into how internationalization capabilities are configured at the provincial level.

Global Assets

Structural Foundation and the Limits of an Asset-Based Approach

This dimension presents, in relative terms, **lower levels of dispersion** among the provinces analyzed than other dimensions of the index. **Córdoba, Entre Ríos, and Jujuy** display relatively similar values (61, 49, and 48, respectively), suggesting that, at the provincial scale, structural assets tend to exhibit less pronounced differences than institutional capabilities or projection strategies.

In this regard, the results also confirm that successful internationalization does not necessarily require achieving high scores uniformly across all subdimensions that make up Global Assets, but rather **identifying and strategically activating those attributes with the greatest differentiating potential** for the territory.

The analysis by subdimension provides further insight into this interpretation. The three provinces show relatively homogeneous performance in Quality of Life and Environment, as well as high values in Safety, particularly in the case of **Jujuy**. In contrast, larger gaps are observed in subdimensions associated with Talent Production and Innovation, Connectivity and Infrastructure, and Cultural Attractions, where **Córdoba** achieves stronger performance.

This pattern reinforces a central hypothesis of the ICI: **Global Assets constitute a necessary foundation, but not a sufficient explanation, for levels of internationalization**. Provinces with similar asset profiles can achieve very different overall results depending on their capacity to activate those assets through specific policies, institutions, and strategies.

Local Ecosystem for Internationalization

The Main Differentiating Factor

This dimension exhibits the **highest levels of dispersion** among the provinces analyzed and emerges as one of the principal factors explaining the differences observed in overall scores.

This contrast is primarily driven by differences in the existence and articulation of **Actors for International Promotion**, the presence of formal **Internationalization Strategies**, and the degree of integration of **International Organizations** within the territory.

Córdoba displays a relatively dense and active institutional ecosystem, with consolidated capabilities to articulate internationalization policies in a sustained manner. **Entre Ríos** and **Jujuy**, by contrast, exhibit lower institutional density and remain at earlier stages in the process of building institutional capabilities for internationalization, which affects both their level of projection and their ability to capture benefits.

Furthermore, the analysis indicates that the strength of the Local Ecosystem for Internationalization does not necessarily depend on the size or density of the institutional network of the private sector and civil society, but rather on its **degree of alignment with the strategy** defined by the subnational government. The highest-performing cases tend to feature **explicit mechanisms**—formal or informal—for **public-private coordination** and dialogue with universities, business associations, civil society organizations, and other relevant stakeholders, allowing these actors to be coherently integrated into an internationalization strategy with clearly defined roles, priorities, and coordination mechanisms.

Taken together, the analysis confirms that, at the provincial level, **the institutional ecosystem acts as a critical enabler of the internationalization process**. In the absence of adequate organizational and governance capacities, existing assets and external opportunities are unlikely to translate into sustainable results over time.

International Projection

Visibility, Strategic Focus, and Reputation

This dimension also reveals significant contrasts among provinces, although with distinctive patterns.

The analysis by subdimension suggests that provincial international projection can be built through **focused strategies**, rather than through broad and diversified presence on the global stage. **Jujuy**, for example, achieves a high score in Global Agendas and Reputation, indicating strategic positioning in specific agendas such as the energy transition or international development financing.

Córdoba, by contrast, combines a more diversified international projection with a strong presence in networks and on the global stage, consistent with its greater institutional density.

Internationalization Dividends

Different Pathways to Capturing Benefits

This dimension offers a particularly rich perspective for provincial analysis, as it demonstrates that multiple pathways exist for transforming international engagement into tangible benefits. **Córdoba** and **Jujuy** achieve relatively high values, although through very different internal compositions.

Córdoba combines strong performance across all three dividend subdimensions, suggesting a more diversified capture of benefits. **Jujuy**, by contrast, concentrates its performance almost exclusively on access to international development financing, which explains its high score in this subdimension despite more modest results in other areas.

In the case of **Entre Ríos**, the results in dividends reflect an internationalization agenda that is still under construction, with clear opportunities to strengthen mechanisms that enable international engagement to be transformed into tangible benefits.

These results reinforce the idea that, at the provincial level, dividends do not emerge automatically from existing assets, but rather require clear strategies and specific institutional capabilities in order to be captured.

8. ICI-Cities and ICI-Provinces: Cross-Cutting Findings

The combined analysis of the results from **ICI-Cities** and **ICI-Provinces** helps identify a series of cross-cutting findings that, even considering the differences in scale, competencies, and sample size between the two levels of government, are relevant for understanding how subnational internationalization capabilities are currently configured. These findings should not be interpreted as universal regularities, but rather as recurring patterns and analytical lessons emerging from the comparative application of the tool.

Subnational internationalization is a multidimensional and non-linear phenomenon

One of the principal contributions of the ICI is to demonstrate that internationalization does not follow a simple cumulative logic in which stronger structural assets automatically lead to better results. Both cities and provinces display similar overall scores achieved through very different combinations of dimensions, confirming that there is no single valid pathway to internationalization.

This finding challenges approaches focused exclusively on urban or territorial attributes and reinforces the need to analyze the interaction between assets, institutional capabilities, projection strategies, and benefit-capture mechanisms.

Global Assets as a structural foundation, not as a homogeneous requirement

The comparative analysis confirms that Global Assets remain relevant for international positioning, particularly in dimensions such as Quality of Life, Safety, Environment, and Cultural Attractions. However, their explanatory power is limited when overall results are analyzed in an aggregated and homogeneous manner.

The results show that a successful internationalization strategy does not necessarily require strong performance across all the subdimensions that make up Global Assets. On the contrary, cities and provinces with similar asset profiles—or even with uneven performances across subdimensions—can achieve very different results in terms of projection and dividends, depending on their ability to identify and strategically activate one or a few attributes with the greatest differentiating potential.

This evidence reinforces the idea that assets operate as a foundational condition, but not as a sufficient explanatory factor in themselves. In this sense, the ICI shifts the focus from "what the territory has" to "what the territory does with what it has," placing the strategic dimension of subnational internationalization at the center of the analysis.

The institutional ecosystem emerges as a key enabling factor

At both levels of analysis, the Local Ecosystem for Internationalization dimension appears as one of the most decisive factors in explaining differences in overall results. Cities and provinces with strong institutional ecosystems—understood as the existence of active stakeholders, formal strategies, and coordination mechanisms—generally succeed in compensating for limitations in other dimensions.

Conversely, territories with reasonable structural assets but lacking minimum institutional capabilities experience persistent difficulties in sustaining coherent international action and transforming external opportunities into concrete results. This pattern is especially evident at the provincial level, where institutional gaps tend to be more pronounced.

International Projection as an intermediate link: enabling, amplifying, and limiting factors

The ICI analysis helps identify a consistent sequence in subnational internationalization processes. A strong institutional ecosystem tends to enable higher levels of International Projection, and in turn, a more active and strategic projection is usually associated with better positioning outcomes and, potentially, with stronger dividend generation. This relationship appears consistently across both cities and provinces and reinforces the idea that international projection plays a key role as an intermediate link between institutional capabilities and results.

However, the results also show that international projection, while necessary, is not sufficient to guarantee the capture of tangible economic dividends. Cases can be observed with similar levels of external visibility, network participation, or thematic leadership, yet with divergent performances in the dividends dimension.

This variability suggests that projection operates primarily as a mechanism for amplifying capabilities and opportunities, rather than as a direct and automatic generator of economic outcomes.

Part of these differences can be explained by persistent limitations in the measurement and monitoring of the economic impacts of international action, particularly at the subnational level. In many cases, the absence of systematic and comparable data makes it difficult to accurately assess the relationship between projection and results. At the same time, the evidence suggests that even where significant international projection exists, the absence of an explicit strategy aimed at generating dividends—economic, productive, or financial—limits the ability to transform visibility and international linkages into concrete benefits.

Taken together, these findings reinforce the need to conceive international projection not as an end in itself, but as an instrument that must be clearly aligned with development objectives and deliberate value-capture strategies.

Internationalization dividends remain the weakest dimension

Finally, the cross-cutting analysis shows that the Internationalization Dividends dimension is, on average, the most lagging dimension in both cities and provinces. It is also the dimension in which the greatest weaknesses are observed in governmental capacities to systematically measure, monitor, and evaluate the economic impacts of international action. Even territories with strong assets, developed institutional ecosystems, and high levels of international projection face difficulties in translating their international engagement into sustained and verifiable economic benefits.

The contrast between cities and provinces provides additional insight. At the urban level, cases such as Barcelona and Bogotá show partial progress in capturing dividends through differentiated strategies, although these results have not yet reached fully consolidated levels. At the provincial level, the experience of Jujuy demonstrates that it is possible to achieve relatively high performance in specific dividend subdimensions—particularly in access to international development financing—even in contexts where the institutional ecosystem is still in the process of consolidation.

However, these results should be interpreted with caution. Far from contradicting the centrality of the institutional ecosystem, this type of partial performance tends to rely on specific opportunities, targeted financing windows, or ad hoc arrangements whose long-term sustainability ultimately depends on strengthening organizational, governance, and measurement capabilities. In the absence of a more robust ecosystem and adequate information systems, the possibility of scaling, diversifying, or sustaining these dividends remains limited.

In this regard, the analysis reinforces the need to move from strategies centered on positioning or isolated results toward deliberate value-capture strategies, integrating internationalization with productive, tourism, innovation, and development-financing agendas. Only through strengthened institutional ecosystems and improved measurement and evaluation capacities will it be possible to transform short-term opportunities into structural and sustainable dividends.

9. Lessons for Non-Participating Subnational Governments

The results of **ICI-Cities** and **ICI-Provinces** make it possible to draw a set of relevant lessons for other subnational governments interested in strengthening their international engagement.

Internationalization must be conceived as an explicit public policy

As the results of **ICI-Cities** demonstrate, the territories with the strongest overall performance are not necessarily those with the greatest structural assets, but rather those that have incorporated internationalization as an explicit public policy, with defined objectives, clear priorities, and dedicated administrative structures. The experience of cities such as **Buenos Aires** and **Bogotá** illustrates the importance of having formal strategies that guide international action and allow it to be sustained beyond political cycles.

Strengthening the institutional ecosystem is a prerequisite

Comparative evidence confirms that the existence of a minimum institutional ecosystem constitutes a necessary condition for territorial assets to be translated into concrete internationalization outcomes. However, the analysis shows that the mere presence of public, private, academic, or civil society actors with an international vocation is not sufficient; it is essential that these actors be strategically identified, coordinated, and incorporated into the internationalization strategy according to clear and prioritized objectives. A small but aligned ecosystem may prove more effective than a broad but fragmented one.

Strategies can—and should—be selective

The results of **ICI-Cities** show that not all dimensions need to be developed simultaneously or with the same intensity. Cities such as **Medellín** and **Santiago de Chile** demonstrate that thematic specialization in specific agendas can constitute a viable pathway to international engagement, particularly in contexts of limited resources. The provincial experience of **Jujuy** confirms that focused strategies—for example, in international financing—can generate tangible results even without a broad generalist projection.

Generating Dividends Requires Deliberate Strategies

In both cities and provinces, the **Internationalization Dividends** dimension consistently appears as the most underdeveloped. While visibility and international projection constitute foundational components of internationalization processes, the evidence shows that the generation of economic, financial, or cooperation-related benefits is not an automatic consequence of a stronger external presence. Dividends emerge when international projection is deliberately oriented toward concrete objectives and aligned with productive, tourism, and development agendas, confirming that international visibility is a necessary means, but not an end in itself.

Measuring and Communicating Results Is Part of the Strategy

The ability to measure and monitor the dividends generated constitutes a central component of deliberate internationalization strategies. Without information systems capable of tracking the results of international action, assessing its impact, and adjusting policies based on evidence, even well-designed strategies tend to lose effectiveness over time. In addition, the systematic measurement of results is essential for communicating progress and achievements to strategic partners, ecosystem stakeholders, and citizens, thereby strengthening the legitimacy of international action and political support for these agendas.

Scale Matters, but Does Not Determine Success

Both intermediate cities and provinces with specific productive profiles can achieve meaningful results if they succeed in aligning assets, institutional capabilities, and projection strategies. The key does not lie in replicating the models of large metropolitan areas, but rather in designing internationalization strategies that are consistent with the identity and comparative advantages of the territory.

Measuring Capabilities Strengthens Decision-Making

Finally, the experience of the ICI demonstrates that measuring international capabilities constitutes a valuable tool for public management. By enabling the identification of strengths, bottlenecks, and differentiated trajectories, the index contributes to setting priorities, allocating resources, and designing policies that are more consistent with the territory's actual capabilities.

10. Conclusions and Next Steps

The application of the **International Capabilities Index (ICI)** to cities and provinces confirms the value of having a **comprehensive diagnostic tool** to analyze subnational internationalization from a multidimensional perspective.

Far from being limited to a comparative measurement exercise, we conceive the ICI as a **management tool** designed to support public **decision-making** and the design of more effective **international insertion strategies.**

One of the ICI's principal contributions lies in its ability to make visible the **diversity of internationalization trajectories** that exist across territories, avoiding homogeneous approaches or one-size-fits-all models. Nevertheless, this diversity does not imply that any combination of factors is equally effective. By bringing together structural assets, institutional capabilities, projection strategies, and dividend-capture mechanisms, the index helps **identify consistent correlations and key factors** that shape the results achieved. In this way, the ICI not only shows where a territory stands, but also why certain configurations tend to produce stronger outcomes in terms of effective internationalization.

At the same time, the findings of this report underscore the need to **expand the sample** in future editions, particularly in the case of **ICI-Provinces.** The pilot experience demonstrates the analytical potential of the tool, while also highlighting the importance of incorporating a larger number of cases in order to strengthen the findings and move toward more representative comparative analyses.

Looking ahead, the ICI offers multiple avenues for further development. These include its use as a **monitoring tool** to track progress and setbacks in internationalization capabilities; its application as an input for the **design and evaluation of public policies**; and its potential to **facilitate cooperation and learning spaces** among subnational governments, promoting the exchange of best practices and the construction of shared agendas.

In this regard, the ICI is envisioned not only as a measurement tool, but also as a **platform for knowledge and dialogue** aimed at strengthening the role of subnational governments on the international stage.

STRENGTHENING INTERNATIONAL CAPABILITIES AT THE SUBNATIONAL LEVEL

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Cities and Provinces, 2024–2025

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