The Missing Layer: Why EU-LAC Digital Cooperation Needs an Infrastructure, Not More Initiatives

Policy Debate Agenda | 2026

May 2026

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Suggested Citation:

Arias-Ortiz, W. A., Ardila, J. D., Feria, M. A., Gasser, U., Gómez Ayerbe, P., Vargas, J., & Cala Vitery, F. E. (2026). *The missing layer: Why EU-LAC digital cooperation needs an infrastructure, not more initiatives - Policy Debate Agenda*. HEMISPHERES. Technical University of Munich. https://hemispheres.digital/

Funded by the European Unio

HEMISPHERES is funded by the ERASMUS-JMO-2024-NETWORK Program. This report only reflects the authors' view. The European Education and Culture Executive Agency is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information this report contains.

CALL: ERASMUS-JMO-2024-NETWORKS (Jean Monnet Policy Debate)	**TOPIC:** ERASMUS-JMO-2024-NETWORKS-HEI-NON-EU-LATIN-AMERICA
TYPE OF ACTION: ERASMUS-LS (ERASMUS Lump Sum Grants)	**PROPOSAL NUMBER:** 101176829
PROPOSAL ACRONYM: HEMISPHERES	**TYPE OF MODEL GRANT AGREEMENT:** ERASMUS Lump Sum Grant
REPORTING PERIOD: From 01.11.2024 to 31.11.2027	**TYPE OF MODEL GRANT AGREEMENT:** ERASMUS Lump Sum Grant
REPORT VERSION: 1.0	**DATE OF PREPARATION:** 18.05.2026
BENEFICIARY ORGANIZATION: Technical University of Munich (TUM), Germany	
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Executive Summary

EU–LAC digital cooperation has grown substantially over the past decade. Policy dialogues, investment frameworks, academic networks, regulatory initiatives, and multi-stakeholder platforms now connect both regions across a widening range of digital governance domains. The 2023 EU–LAC Digital Alliance has consolidated this agenda. Yet despite this institutional density, cooperation has the potential to become more cumulative. One main roadblock towards more integration is the lack of a permanent infrastructure capable of transforming dispersed cooperation into institutional memory, reciprocal learning, and timely policy action.

Six interconnected structural gaps explain the persistence of this condition. Cooperation generates activity without preserving institutional memory. Regulatory learning remains asymmetrical, with the Brussels Effect continuing to frame cooperation as the diffusion of EU norms rather than a genuinely reciprocal exchange. Evidence does not consistently reach decision-making: scientific, regulatory, and participatory knowledge remains fragmented across formats, languages, and institutional repositories. Anticipatory governance excludes the actors best positioned to detect emerging risks: young people, whose proximity to digital systems gives them a structural epistemic position that formal governance processes rarely engage at the right moment. Cooperation remains limited by weak interoperability across institutional, technical, and semantic systems. And protection, provision, and participation, three interdependent digital rights, are treated as competing priorities rather than as mutually reinforcing conditions of effective governance.

Each of these gaps reinforces the others, and the response would benefit from being architectural rather than incremental. This report proposes the EU–LAC Digital Governance Hub Ecosystem as its central recommendation: a distributed, university-anchored knowledge infrastructure that brings together governments, regulatory authorities, civil society organizations, youth networks, technical experts, and researchers across both regions. The Hub is not a new cooperation mechanism to be added to an already dense landscape. It is the connective layer through which the existing landscape can begin to function as a learning system.

The Hub Ecosystem is organized around four functional areas. A Digital Evidence Hub addresses the translation gap by connecting fragmented knowledge to policy decision-making through evidence aggregation, policy prototyping, and a federated sandbox model that requires experimentation to produce actionable policy output. A Foresight and Anticipatory Governance function institutionalizes youth-generated early signals through a three-layer methodology: youth signals, AI-assisted structuring, and expert validation. An Interoperability and Digital Commons infrastructure builds the shared tools — repositories, audit templates, semantic standards, and reference architectures — through which cooperation becomes operationally possible without requiring regulatory uniformity. A Participation, Skills, and Democratic Legitimacy function embeds the three rights of protection, provision, and participation as integrated design conditions rather than sequential policy choices, and distributes governance responsibility in proportion to each actor's actual capacity to shape digital environments.

The report also identifies three first visible products that no existing initiative could produce alone: a biregional youth digital governance signal report, a cross-regional regulatory case file series, and a joint protection-provision-participation evaluation framework. These products propose the Hub's value from the outset and create the institutional momentum needed to sustain it beyond its first cycle.

The institutional challenge EU–LAC digital cooperation now faces is less one of expanding its initiative landscape than of building the infrastructure that enables what already exists to compound and learn.

1. Introduction

Over the past decade, EU–LAC digital cooperation has developed a substantial institutional architecture. It encompasses policy dialogues, academic networks, technical cooperation channels, regulatory initiatives, investment frameworks, and multi-stakeholder platforms connecting both regions across an expanding range of digital governance domains. The 2023 EU–LAC Digital Alliance has consolidated digital governance, connectivity infrastructure, and innovation ecosystems as central pillars of the biregional relationship, building on a multi-layered architecture that includes EU–CELAC summits, subregional cooperation with Mercosur, SICA, the Andean Community, and the Pacific Alliance, and bilateral agreements with countries such as Chile, Mexico, and Brazil.

That architecture reflects genuine political commitment, and also a particular model of cooperation: one organized around discrete initiatives, project cycles, and thematic dialogues that operate largely in parallel. This report reflects on what that model produces and proposes a forward-looking approach grounded in reciprocity, adaptation, experimentation, interoperability, and shared institutional memory.

Both regions bring distinct institutional capacities, economic priorities, legal traditions, governance cultures, and socioeconomic conditions to digital regulation. These differences are not treated here as obstacles to harmonization, but productive raw material of regulatory learning. The aim is not to reproduce a one-way model of norm transfer or to impose identical regulatory solutions across diverse contexts, but to build the connective infrastructure through which both regions can learn from the governance approaches each has developed.

The report is based on the four HEMISPHERES Working Group papers on Cooperation and Stakeholder Engagement, Evidence and Responding to Fast Change, Imagining Digital Futures, and Expertise, Skills and Knowledge. It also draws on the broader HEMISPHERES analytical corpus, including the work on Inverting the Brussels Effect and prior outputs on Artificial Intelligence, Youth & Media, Internet, Platforms, Equity & Safety, Emerging Technologies & Metaverse, Privacy & Security. The Policy Debate Agenda builds on these prior outputs and translates their shared findings into a coherent institutional proposal for adaptive EU–LAC digital governance.

2. Diagnosis: Why EU–LAC Digital Cooperation Has Not Yet Evolved into Regulatory Learning

This section identifies six structural gaps that have so far prevented EU–LAC digital cooperation from developing into a form of regulatory learning. Each problem is paired with its corresponding solution, which will be developed as a function of the EU–LAC Digital Governance Hub in Section 3.

2.1. Cooperation Produces Activity Without Institutional Memory

EU–LAC digital cooperation has become dense, often without becoming cumulative. Investment frameworks, policy dialogues, multi-stakeholder platforms, bilateral initiatives, and operational cooperation instruments reflect genuine political ambition across both regions. Yet when those initiatives operate through different mandates, time horizons, actors, and reporting systems, they generate important activity, while the creation of a shared record of what worked, under what conditions, and with which trade-offs remains challenging (Archegas et al., 2026).

The pattern is visible across the cooperation architecture. The Global Gateway provides an investment framework; the D4D Hub serves as an operational coordination platform; the Ibero-American Data Protection Network offers a reference point for regulatory cooperation. Each mechanism serves a legitimate and important function. What the architecture would benefit from is a mechanism designed to connect these contributions and preserve what the system as a whole has learned.

The structural reason for this is that EU–LAC cooperation is often organized around project cycles that typically end before lessons can be institutionalized. When a project closes, the knowledge it generated: the regulatory conditions it encountered, the trade-offs it navigated, and the adaptations it required, often closes with it, at least where there is no designated actor who carries a mandate to preserve what the system as a whole has learned. Cooperation therefore tends to reset rather than compound: successive initiatives often begin from comparable starting points rather than from the accumulated experience of what preceded them. The Hub Ecosystem is designed to address precisely this gap; its explicit purpose is to serve as the memory layer that the current architecture has not yet developed.

2.2. Regulatory Learning Remains Asymmetrical

The second structural gap concerns the persistence of asymmetrical learning. The Brussels Effect remains an important reference point because EU law and regulatory infrastructure continue to influence digital governance debates beyond Europe. However, The findings developed across the HEMISPHERES research cycle show that EU-LAC digital governance should not be understood as a one-way movement of norms from Europe to Latin America and the Caribbean. LAC countries adapt, translate, contest, and sometimes generate context-sensitive approaches that can inform European debates (Gasser et al., 2025).

Cooperation frameworks that position LAC primarily as a recipient of European regulatory models tend to privilege technical assistance, capacity building, and alignment exercises. Recognizing LAC as a producer of governance knowledge opens a different set of possibilities: mechanisms through which EU and LAC actors can jointly examine regulatory experiments, compare institutional conditions, and draw lessons from both convergence and divergence. This is what the Inverted Brussels Effect means as an operational policy principle.

The following cases demonstrate that LAC has developed governance approaches that address problems EU frameworks have not yet fully resolved, and that a cooperation architecture treating LAC solely as a recipient of European norms is leaving that knowledge unused. Brazil's Internet Bill of Rights (Marco Civil da Internet) participatory drafting process shows how foundational digital law can gain legitimacy through public consultation and multi-stakeholder engagement. Brazil's judiciary and internet governance traditions, including the broader role of multi-stakeholder institutions, show that platform governance can draw on more than specialized digital regulators. Habeas data constitutionalism demonstrates that data rights in Latin America are embedded in broader human rights and constitutional traditions, raising questions of memory, truth, and public legitimacy that do not map neatly onto procedural privacy models. Colombia's and Brazil's sandbox experiences show that regulatory experimentation can function as a learning infrastructure for legal reform. Uruguay's Plan Ceibal shows how access, skills, equity, and digital citizenship can be designed together rather than treated as trade-offs.

2.3. The Translation Gap: Evidence Generation and Policy Action Are Structurally Disconnected

A structural challenge shapes digital governance often before evidence can effectively inform policy: the institutional capacity to generate, access, interpret, and act on evidence remains uneven across governance actors and jurisdictions. Across fast-moving domains such as AI, platform governance, algorithmic accountability, digital safety, privacy, and youth protection, governance actors including researchers, regulators, civil society organizations, communities, companies, and international organizations produce substantial knowledge. The issue is often not a lack of evidence, but rather the ruptured pathway between evidence generation and policy action, with issues emerging at multiple stages and in different ways across the process. (Arias et al., 2026).

The Evidence and Responding to Fast Change Working Group conceptualizes this as a translation gap: a sequence of three interconnected bottlenecks that occur at distinct stages of the policy cycle and require distinct responses. The first is access and fragmentation. Relevant evidence exists but is scattered across formats, jurisdictions, languages, institutional repositories, and policy communities, making it impossible for policymakers to assemble a coherent picture even when the underlying knowledge is present. The second is interpretation and uncertainty. Even when evidence is accessed, institutions struggle to determine what it means for concrete regulatory choices, particularly when technologies are novel, contested, or developing faster than the analytical frameworks available to assess them. The third is institutional inertia. Even where evidence is understood and its implications agreed upon, existing institutional incentives and norms resist action. Governance systems wait for technologies to mature, for harms to become visible and politically salient, or for consensus to consolidate, not because evidence is missing but because the architecture is not designed to act on early signals.

The significance of identifying these as sequential stages is that each demands a different institutional response. A repository or dashboard addresses fragmentation but typically does not offer full interpretation; a deliberative process addresses interpretation but cannot overcome inertia; and an experimental mechanism addresses inertia only if it is connected to the evidence and interpretive work that precedes it. The Working Group flags what it calls a tool-centric obsession: the tendency to treat individual regulatory instruments such as sandboxes, audits, and observatories as solutions in themselves rather than as components of a coherent architecture. The translation gap is a systemic condition, and any measure that addresses a single bottleneck in isolation risks leaving the others intact.

For EU–LAC cooperation, the diagnosis carries a specific institutional implication. Both regions face analogous governance challenges, and the complementarities between the EU's data governance infrastructure and LAC's emerging regulatory experimentation capacity represent a resource that current cooperation arrangements have not yet systematically mobilized. The missing element is the connective architecture that links evidence generation in one regional context to policy activation in another - the gap the Hub Ecosystem is designed to address through its evidence and translation functions.

2.4. Anticipatory Governance Excludes First-Order Signal Detectors

Regulatory and institutional cycles often move over years, while generative AI, platform ecosystems, data infrastructures, immersive environments, and digital labor arrangements can change over months. This mismatch produces reactive governance: institutions respond after risks have become visible, measurable, and politically salient. Yet the challenge of reactivity is not only a question of speed; it is also a question of whose knowledge enters the policy cycle and at what stage. Young people occupy a distinct analytical position in this regard that goes well beyond conventional stakeholder consultation. Their proximity to digital systems gives them a structural epistemic position. They experience AI-mediated education, platform governance, social media dynamics, data-driven services, and emerging forms of digital work from within the systems they govern. Their knowledge is positional as well as analytical, grounded in direct experience of the systems governance is attempting to regulate, and its value lies in that specificity rather than in any claim to replace expert judgment (Angelo et al., 2026).

That difference has direct consequences for how governance processes should be designed. Treating young people as consultees places their contribution after institutional actors have already framed the problem, which means their knowledge arrives too late to shape what is being asked. Positioning them as first-order signal detectors shifts their entry point to the stage of horizon scanning and problem definition, where positional knowledge matters most. The purpose is not to replace expertise with lived experience, but to sequence them differently. The Youth-Driven Foresight Playbook for EU-LAC Digital Governance (Angelo et al., 2026) operationalizes precisely this logic: youth-generated signals inform the first layer of analysis, AI-assisted structuring organizes them into scenario architectures in the second, and expert validation refines those architectures for policy use in the third. Each layer depends on the one before it, which means that excluding young people at the outset compromises the quality of the analysis that follows, independently of any legitimacy considerations.

2.5. Youth Digital Policy Treats Protection, Provision, and Participation as Competing Rather Than Mutually Reinforcing Rights

Governments across both regions increasingly restrict access to smartphones, social media, and digital environments in the name of protection, in large part in response to the design choices of platforms and technology companies whose architectures shape the environments young people navigate. At the same time, digital skills programs expand as provision-oriented interventions. These two tracks often develop in parallel, with limited dialogue between them.

The result is a policy gap in which protection, provision, and participation are treated as competing rather than mutually reinforcing rights (Cortesi & Gasser, 2016; Aguerre et al., 2026). Restricting access without building the conditions for provision and participation leaves young people unequipped the moment the restriction lifts. Building digital skills without attending to protection leaves young people alone in navigating environments engineered to capture their attention. And designing protection measures without reference to equity means the same ban that creates a boundary in one context removes the only reliable point of digital access in another. Protection, provision, and participation are most effective when designed together.

Two mechanisms illustrate this condition. The first concerns how the design of protection shapes whether protection actually works. Parental monitoring tools and school surveillance platforms collect data on intimate dimensions of young people's lives, even when deployed with care. When these tools erode the relational trust that young people depend on during moments of genuine digital distress, their protective purpose may ultimately be undermined by the way they are implemented. A school device ban may function as a protective boundary in one context and as the removal of the only structured digital access available in another. What a measure does depends on the conditions in which it operates, and governance that does not ask that question is not governing effectively.

A second structural problem is that responsibility is often assigned where capacity is weakest. Families and schools are expected to manage young people's digital lives, even though the platforms young people use are environments that may be deliberately engineered to maximize engagement through personalized algorithms, recommender systems, and attention-capture architectures that families and schools have no structural capacity to reshape. Governance that places the heaviest obligations on the actors least equipped to change platform conditions risks directing attention away from the companies whose design choices define those environments in the first place. More effective governance would distribute responsibility in proportion to each actor's actual capacity to shape outcomes: platforms, states, schools, families, civil society, and young people each have roles, but they do not carry the same structural weight.

2.6. Fragmentation Is Also Technical, Semantic, and Organizational

EU–LAC digital cooperation has accumulated a substantial institutional landscape such as investment frameworks, policy dialogues, operational platforms, regulatory networks, and multi-stakeholder forums. The challenge is not the absence of mechanisms but how to bolster coherence among them. The Global Gateway operates with an investment logic, the D4D Hub with a coordination logic, and the Ibero-American Data Protection Network with a standards logic. Each serves a legitimate function, yet connecting them with each other, evaluating what works across them, or converting their combined outputs into cumulative governance knowledge remains a challenge (Archegas et al., 2026).

This architectural fragmentation includes organizational, political, and structural dimensions. It reflects a broader asymmetry: cooperation mechanisms are predominantly EU-driven in their design, funding, and agenda-setting, while LAC actors particularly universities, civil society organizations, and youth networks remain systematically underrepresented in the processes that shape cooperation priorities. Disparities in institutional capacity across the LAC region carries the risk to reinforce dependence on EU-funded technical assistance, limiting the development of LAC-led approaches and constraining the long-term sustainability of cooperation outcomes.

The practical result is a form of cooperation that is extensive, but not always sufficiently reciprocal, and active without always producing genuine co-ownership. Shared values such as human-centered digital transformation, rights-based governance, inclusive innovation coexist with incompatible vocabularies, data structures, governance templates, and evaluation criteria that make operational coordination difficult even where political alignment exists. In the absence of connective infrastructure through which shared principles can be translated into jointly owned tools and processes, cooperation runs an inherent risk of remaining a collection of parallel initiatives rather than a coherent learning system.

The six shortcomings identified above should not be read as separate problems. Taken together, they point to a broader structural challenge: EU–LAC digital cooperation has produced a substantial landscape of initiatives, but not yet a fully integrated system. Each shortcoming reflects, in a different way, this gap between activity and institutionalized learning. Cooperation already generates evidence, relationships, and regulatory experience. What remains underdeveloped is the durable connective infrastructure needed to translate these inputs into governance knowledge that can persist over time, accumulate across projects, and travel across institutional cycles and jurisdictions.

This matters for how the response is designed. Addressing any one of these gaps in isolation risks reproducing the others. Building an evidence hub without resolving the asymmetry of who sets the research agenda will not close the translation gap. Institutionalizing foresight without treating youth as first-order signal detectors will not reduce the temporal mismatch between technological change and governance response. Creating interoperability tools without co-ownership will not convert them into shared infrastructure. Because the gaps are interconnected, the response must also be.

The following section therefore does not propose six parallel measures, each responding to one gap in isolation. It proposes a single institutional architecture designed to address all six as interdependent problems: the EU–LAC Digital Governance Hub Ecosystem[1]. The Hub's value lies in its integrative function; it is the connective infrastructure through which the other components become operationally possible.

3. EU–LAC Digital Governance Hub: A Policy Architecture

What the diagnosis calls for is likely not a new layer added to an already dense cooperation landscape, but a permanent connective infrastructure designed to make the existing landscape function as a system. The envisioned EU–LAC Digital Governance Hub Ecosystem might offer such an architecture. Its functional components: the evidence hubs, foresight mechanisms, sandbox federation, digital commons, interoperability frameworks, and youth participation structures are interdependent functions of a single distributed ecosystem. Each addresses one of the diagnosed gaps and depends on the others to deliver its intended effect.

3.1. Establishing the EU-LAC Digital Governance Hub Ecosystem

The proposed EU–LAC Digital Governance Hub Ecosystem, anchored in universities and research centres across both regions, would function as a networked knowledge infrastructure through which academic institutions bring together governments, regulatory authorities, civil society organizations, youth networks, technical experts, educators, communities, and private-sector actors, creating the conditions for cooperation that no single government channel or project-based initiative can sustain on its own.

The Hub would serve as the memory layer of EU–LAC digital governance: a permanent structure where regulatory experiments, policy prototypes, foresight exercises, evidence summaries, stakeholder processes, implementation barriers, and evaluation findings can be stored, compared, and reused across cycles. Universities and research centres are particularly well suited to this custodial function. They persist across political cycles, operate across borders, and carry an institutional mandate to produce, translate, and circulate knowledge in ways that are difficult for government mechanisms and project-based initiatives to replicate.

The Hub Ecosystem also responds to the second structural gap: the persistent asymmetry in how regulatory learning flows between the two regions. By documenting how different jurisdictions adapt digital governance tools to their own legal traditions, social priorities, administrative capacities, and technological conditions, the Hub institutionalizes genuine reciprocal learning. This is what operationalizing the Inverted Brussels Effect means in practice: not a rhetorical reversal of the direction of influence, but a structured infrastructure through which both regions contribute to and draw from a shared body of governance knowledge. This principle is not confined to a single Hub function; it organizes how the entire ecosystem selects

[1] This proposal builds on earlier work developed within the HEMISPHERES, where related ideas were first identified and have since evolved into a more structured and consolidated form. See: Policy Innovation Blueprint

cases, documents experiences, designs prototypes, and evaluates outcomes across all thematic areas.

The distributed model follows from the same logic: A distributed ecosystem of university and research nodes, each embedded in its own regional and institutional context, allows specialization across evidence translation, foresight, regulatory experimentation, digital commons, youth participation, skills development, and data governance, while remaining connected through shared protocols, repositories, evaluation tools, and learning cycles.

3.2. Functional Architecture of the Hub Ecosystem

The Hub Ecosystem is organized around four functional layers. Rather than mapping one-to-one onto the six structural gaps identified in section 2, these layers address those gaps as an integrated whole, each depending on the others to work. What follows describes those functions in sequence.

3.2.1. Digital Evidence Hubs: Turning Knowledge Into Policy Action

As discussed above, across AI governance, platform accountability, privacy, digital safety, youth protection, internet governance, and emerging technologies, the problem is often that the pathway from evidence generation to policy action is interrupted at three distinct points, each requiring a different response.

The first bottleneck is access and fragmentation. Relevant knowledge exists but is scattered across formats, languages, jurisdictions, and institutional repositories in ways that prevent policymakers from assembling a coherent picture when they need one. The Digital Evidence Hub addresses this by operating as an active policy interface rather than a passive repository. Anchored in universities and research centres across both regions, it would bring together scientific research, regulatory data, civil society knowledge, and comparative policy lessons, and translate them into policy-ready signals routed into decision-making forums and regulatory processes. A repository makes evidence findable. The Hub makes it usable.

For regulatory cases specifically, usability requires a structured method for converting governance experiences from both regions into comparable, reusable knowledge. The Hub would therefore approach each case through a consistent analytical framework: documenting what governance problem was addressed, under what institutional and social conditions the response was developed, what trade-offs emerged, what evidence informed the design, how affected communities participated, and which elements are transferable to different legal and administrative contexts. Through this analytical framework, diverse regulatory experiences from both regions can accumulate as a shared body of governance knowledge rather than remaining a catalogue of isolated cases.

The second bottleneck is interpretation and uncertainty. Even when evidence is accessible, institutions struggle to determine what it means for concrete regulatory choices, particularly when technologies are developing faster than the analytical frameworks available to assess them. A further interpretive difficulty arises when evidence is itself contradictory: the case of AI companion systems, examined in the Evidence and Responding to Fast Change working group, found substantial research both supporting and questioning their use, leaving policymakers with no clear evidential basis for deciding whether to promote or restrict them. Regulatory frameworks rarely provide guidance for navigating this kind of ambiguity. Policy prototyping addresses this by shifting the question from what does the evidence say to what would governance look like if we acted on it. Working through universities and research centres as convening institutions, regulators, researchers, civil society organizations, technical experts, and affected communities would translate evidence into testable policy objects: draft regulatory provisions, model clauses, audit templates, and implementation scenarios. These are not final rules but structured experiments in regulatory design, built to make uncertainty visible and allow comparison of governance choices before any become institutional commitments. The process is iterative by design, moving through prototype drafting, compliance simulation, operational feedback, and refinement, allowing governance to develop alongside the technology it is trying to regulate.

The third bottleneck is institutional stickiness. Even where evidence is understood and prototype tools have been developed, policy systems resist action, waiting for technologies to mature or harms to become politically salient before committing to regulatory change. Regulatory sandboxes break that cycle by creating defined environments in which products and services can be tested under real-world conditions, generating empirical evidence about regulatory options before full market deployment. The Hub Ecosystem adds federation to this model: connecting EU and LAC sandbox experiments through shared documentation standards and evaluation frameworks, so that what is tested in one jurisdiction informs what is designed in another. To prevent experimentation from becoming an end in itself, the working group proposes a 120-Day Mandate, requiring sandbox processes to produce a formal policy recommendation within a defined timeframe and ensuring that what is learned re-enters the policy cycle rather than remaining confined to it.

The three instruments function iteratively rather than independently: the Evidence Hub ensures policymakers are working with assembled, legible knowledge; prototyping converts that knowledge into testable governance choices; and the sandbox federation tests those choices under real-world conditions and feeds findings back into the policy cycle. Deploying any single instrument in isolation tends to reproduce the very fragmentation the architecture is designed to overcome. For EU–LAC cooperation, this integrated approach draws on the complementarity between the EU's data governance infrastructure and LAC's emerging regulatory experimentation capacity, transforming what are currently underutilized regional assets into a shared biregional learning system.

Even a well-functioning evidence architecture has limits: it processes what is already visible. The outputs of the evidence and prototyping cycle are most valuable when they feed forward into anticipatory governance - the capacity to detect emerging risks before they consolidate into harms, and to design governance responses before political urgency forces them. This requires a complementary function within the Hub Ecosystem, one that uses what the evidence cycle produces as the foundation for structured foresight. That foresight function cannot operate effectively without integrating the actors best positioned to detect early signals - young people, whose positional knowledge of digital environments places them at the frontier of what governance has not yet learned to see. The following section develops that function.

3.2.2. Foresight and Anticipatory Governance Hubs: Institutionalizing Early Signals

The second functional layer responds to the fourth structural gap identified in section 2: anticipatory governance has consistently been designed without the participation of the actors best positioned to detect emerging risks. The evidence and translation cycle developed in the previous section processes what is already visible. This function addresses what is not yet visible but is already being experienced.

Foresight Hubs within the Hub Ecosystem would operate through the three-layer methodology developed in the Youth-Driven Foresight Playbook for EU-LAC Digital Governance (Angelo et al., 2026). Youth-generated signals inform the first layer, drawing on the positional knowledge that young people hold by virtue of living inside the digital systems that governance is still learning to see. AI-assisted structuring organizes those signals into scenario architectures in the second layer. Expert validation then refines those architectures for policy use in the third. Each layer depends on the one before it. The function of this section is not to reproduce the full foresight methodology but to establish how it becomes operational within the Hub architecture.

The policy consequence is a shift in where participation enters the governance cycle. Rather than consulting young people after institutional actors have framed the problem, the Foresight Hub positions youth-generated signals at the stage of horizon scanning and problem definition, where they shape what questions get asked rather than which answers get endorsed. This is not a legitimacy argument. It is an analytical one: governance that excludes first-order signal detectors at the outset degrades the quality of the foresight that follows, regardless of how rigorous the expert validation stage is.

For EU–LAC cooperation, the Foresight Hub creates a biregional early-warning capacity that neither region currently has on its own. Digital risks and emerging governance tensions do not distribute evenly across the two regions, and the divergences are as analytically valuable as the convergences. A youth-led foresight function that operates across both regions would surface signals that single-jurisdiction approaches miss, feeding them into the evidence and prototyping cycle where they can be tested and refined before they become crises requiring reactive response.

3.2.3. Interoperability and Digital Commons: Making Cooperation Operationally Possible

The third functional layer addresses the sixth structural gap identified in section 2: that fragmentation across EU–LAC cooperation extends across institutional, technical, semantic, and organizational dimensions.

Universities and research centres within the Hub Ecosystem would anchor the progressive development of interoperable Digital Commons infrastructures across both regions. The governing principle is alignment without uniformity: the goal is to build the shared tools through which actors operating under different legal traditions and institutional conditions can compare cases, reuse evidence, adapt policy prototypes, and evaluate outcomes without requiring identical rules. Countries and institutions retain their regulatory autonomy. What interoperability adds is the practical capacity to work across jurisdictions, languages, and governance frameworks without rebuilding shared foundations for each new cooperation effort.

In practice, this infrastructure would include shared repositories of governance practices, open-source tools developed in Spanish and Portuguese, common accountability and audit templates, semantic interoperability criteria, model terms for data-sharing and evidence governance, and reference architectures for cross-border cooperation. These are not abstract standards, but the working materials through which the evidence cycle, prototyping function, and sandbox federation become usable across the institutional diversity of both regions.

The Digital Commons function also directly addresses the co-ownership deficit identified in the diagnosis. Given that fragmentation in EU–LAC cooperation has reflected predominantly EU-driven design and agenda-setting, shared infrastructures jointly governed from the outset constitute a structural rebalancing as much as a technical improvement. Resources built together, maintained together, and accessible to regulators, researchers, educators, civil society organizations, and technical teams across both regions create the conditions for cooperation that is extensive and reciprocal, rather than extensive and asymmetrical.

Shared infrastructure, however, is a necessary but not sufficient condition for co-ownership. Tools and repositories can be jointly governed on paper while remaining inaccessible in practice to the actors who most need them, particularly those without the institutional capacity, technical preparation, or formal standing to participate in the processes that shape cooperation priorities. The Hub Ecosystem therefore requires a fourth functional layer that addresses not only who has access to shared resources but who has the skills, voice, and legitimate standing to contribute to and challenge the governance decisions that determine how those resources are built and used.

3.2.4. Participation, Skills, and Democratic Legitimacy

Access to shared infrastructure and the capacity to use it meaningfully are not the same thing. As noted before, across both regions, governance has developed through two parallel tracks that rarely speak to each other: restrictive measures designed to protect young people from platform-driven harms, and skills-oriented programs designed to equip them for digital participation. The gap between them is a serious governance design challenge.

The Hub Ecosystem responds to this by treating protection, provision, and participation as an integrated design challenge rather than a sequence of policy choices to be addressed in turn. This means embedding participation mechanisms and skills development into the Hub's own operating architecture, not as outreach activities added after governance decisions have been made, but as inputs that shape how problems are framed, how pilots are designed, how outcomes are evaluated, and how responsibility is distributed. Universities and research centres anchoring the Hub would convene youth participation protocols, transregional digital literacy initiatives, participatory policy design processes, and rights-based evaluation frameworks that assess protection, provision, and participation together rather than measuring each against its own isolated metric.

The distribution of responsibility is a central design principle of this function. The Expertise, Skills and Knowledge Working Group is explicit: governance frameworks that place the heaviest obligations on the actors least equipped to change platform conditions risk directing attention away from the companies whose design choices define those environments in the first place. The Hub should support regulatory frameworks and pilot evaluation tools that assign responsibility in proportion to each actor's actual capacity to shape outcomes. Platforms, states, schools, families, civil society, and young people each have roles in youth digital governance, but those roles do not carry the same structural weight, and governance that treats them as equivalent will continue to produce the gaps it claims to close.

Across the working groups, a consistent finding is that adaptive digital governance requires moving beyond exclusively expert-driven processes toward governance architectures that are participatory and socially grounded. This function gives that principle institutional form within the Hub: participation contributes not only to consultation but to agenda-setting, evidence generation, policy design, implementation, and evaluation. In doing so, it connects the legitimacy argument to the analytical one established in the foresight function: the actors whose positional knowledge makes them first-order signal detectors are also the actors whose structured participation makes governance more responsive, more equitable, and more durable.

3.3. Governance and Implementation Conditions

The Hub Ecosystem will not succeed by design alone. The architectural logic developed in the preceding sections: evidence translation, foresight, sandbox federation, digital commons, and participation depends on implementation conditions that are themselves governance choices. How the Hub is built will shape whether it reproduces or corrects the asymmetries the diagnosis identifies. Moving too quickly toward formal governance structures, financing models, and oversight boards risks crystallizing arrangements that reflect the institutional weight of the parties already at the table, rather than the biregional co-ownership the Hub is intended to embody.

The design process should therefore precede the formal establishment of structures. Before defining legal form, staffing, or financing strategy, the actors convening the Hub should map the existing cooperation infrastructure, institutional power relations, knowledge sources, language capacities, legal constraints, available resources, and participation gaps across both regions. That mapping should also establish the governance rules that will define who sets priorities, who validates outputs, how regional balance is maintained, and how civil society, youth networks, technical experts, and public authorities participate in decisions rather than merely in consultations. This mapping phase is not merely a preliminary administrative step; it is itself a governance act, one that should embody the Hub's own principles: reciprocity, co-design, institutional memory, interoperability, and participation as a source of knowledge rather than a means of legitimation.

Several conditions are necessary for the Hub to function. It requires a coordinating institution, not a centralizing one. A coordinating institution provides the administrative and logistical structure that allows the distributed ecosystem to function coherently, without concentrating decision-making authority. This means maintaining commonly agreed work pathways, supporting the flow of information among participating nodes, facilitating joint prioritization processes, and ensuring that the outputs of each functional layer reach the actors who need them. The coordinating institution gives the Hub operational continuity without imposing a hierarchical logic that would contradict its distributed architecture.

Beyond coordination, the Hub requires a political and institutional champion with sufficient authority to advocate for resources and convene actors across regions. It requires a sustainable resource model that prevents the Hub from becoming a project deliverable that expires with its funding cycle. And it requires a learning and evaluation mechanism that documents what changes because the Hub exists, so that the institutional memory the Hub is designed to build for others is also applied to itself.

Implementation should begin with a limited number of high-value use cases rather than an overly broad mandate. Possible initial areas include youth digital safety, AI and platform accountability, data governance for public-interest innovation, regulatory sandboxes for emerging technologies, and interoperable evidence sharing for digital rights. Each use case should generate outputs that can be compared, reused, and evaluated across regions.

The Hub's first visible products should be outputs that no existing initiative could produce alone. Three candidates meet that standard. The first is a biregional youth digital governance signal report: a structured, co-produced foresight document combining youth-generated signals from both regions with AI-assisted analytical structuring and expert validation, producing a comparative early-warning output that single-region institutions and existing EU–LAC dialogue mechanisms are not designed to generate. The second is a cross-regional regulatory case file series: a living institutional product applying a consistent comparative methodology to high-priority governance cases from both regions, documenting conditions, trade-offs, and transferable elements in a form that academic studies approximate but no biregional infrastructure currently maintains. The third is a joint protection-provision-participation evaluation framework: a shared assessment tool, co-developed with youth networks and researchers from both regions, that enables any jurisdiction to evaluate whether its youth digital governance measures are functioning as an integrated system rather than as parallel tracks — advancing existing child rights impact assessment work into biregional co-production territory that current tools do not occupy.

Alongside these initial products, the Hub should maintain a living use case observatory: a structured, continuously updated record of ongoing projects, cases, studies, and governance experiments drawn from both regions. Unlike a static repository, it is the mechanism through which the Hub learns from what is already happening, identifies what is working under which conditions, and enables practitioners, regulators, researchers, and policymakers to understand how models developed in one context can be adapted to the legal traditions, institutional capacities, and social priorities of another. Together, the first visible products and the use case observatory are what transform the Hub from a producer of one-off outputs into a learning system that compounds knowledge over time.

4. Conclusion

The central argument of this report is institutional rather than programmatic: what EU–LAC digital cooperation most needs at this stage is not additional initiatives but an infrastructure capable of making its existing and future initiatives learn from one another. The six structural gaps identified in section 2 are not separate problems requiring separate solutions. They share a common root: cooperation has developed as a collection of activities rather than as a system, and that architecture cannot be corrected through further activity alone. What is needed is a permanent connective infrastructure designed to preserve institutional memory, enable genuine reciprocity, translate evidence into policy action, surface emerging risks before they become crises, and distribute participation and responsibility in proportion to each actor's actual capacity to shape outcomes.

The envisioned EU–LAC Digital Governance Hub Ecosystem is that architecture. Anchored in universities and research centres across both regions, it is not conceived as an innovation centre, a dialogue platform, or a project deliverable. It is the institutional condition under which the other things EU–LAC digital cooperation is already trying to do can begin to compound rather than reset with each funding cycle.

The governance challenge is acute. Artificial intelligence, platform governance, and data-driven systems are evolving at a pace that institutions structured around multi-year rulemaking cycles struggle to match and come with great uncertainty about goals and means of governance. That gap will not narrow through procedural acceleration alone. Closing it requires infrastructure: a permanent system that learns from what is already happening, integrates early signals before they become crises, and treats the regulatory diversity of two regions as an asset rather than an obstacle to coordination.

The frontier question for EU–LAC digital cooperation is whether it can learn from itself. The Hub Ecosystem provides the architecture for that transition.

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