Governance of transition

MUNICIPALISM: FROM CITIZEN EMANCIPATION TO SHARED POLITICAL POWER

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September 2017   Translated from French by Rita Savelis (IRG)

On the 9th, 10th and 11th of June 2017, 700 participants, from more than 180 cities in 40 countries came together for the international meeting Fearless cities, organised by Barcelona «en Comú » - a citizen platfom, established by the political party that won the municipal elections in 2015 – and supported by several partners (Commons Polis1) and European foundations (The Charles Léopold Mayer Foundation, Guerilla Foundation, OSIFE, Ford Foundation, Chorus Foundation, Grassroots International, Karibu Foundation, European Cultural Foundation) who belong to the EDGE Funders Alliance network. The belief, «Fearless cities », represents a call to otherness in particular towards women and political refugees (Cities of hope, cities of refuge), as well as a different way of practicing democracy and another kind of relationship to power, and to politics.

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SUMMARY

On the initiative of the citizen platform Barcelona en Comú, the international meeting Fearless Cities (Barcelona 9th, 10th, 11th June 2017) with the credo « Cities without fear, cities of hope, cities of refuge » opened a meeting space for encounters and exchanges on the diversity of expressions of municipalism around the world. It highlighted the strength of demands for citizen emancipation, for social justice and ethics, which permit citizen movements to « win cities » and to exercice shared power. If Spain clearly stands out with election victories in several « municipalities of change in 2015 », others are emerging as well in the United Kingdom, Chile, Brazil, the United States, France… and even Kurdish provinces in northern Syria.

Despite the diversity of contexts, several common features emerge from these municipalist movements. First the similarity of the crises which encourage them. A strong shared ambition has been born from them to « recreate institutions for shared management. » Responding to the needs, expectations and urgencies of populations which have been left only the indifference and injustice of an entire system, is a priority which brings back the notion of common interest and public service at the heart of municipal politics. In order to be set up, the process and tools of municipalism require a level of demand and a certain democratic radicalness. And yet, there are numerous challenges for municipalities who attempt to undertake a true change in practices and perceptions of power and politics. Despite their willingness, the stakes in participation remain uncompromising so that the results of participation do not stagnate around a too low 15%. From the inside, municipalist movements face a true challenge of structure, of change in scale and also position in the difficult passage from activism to public management. The ambition of some to move towards « non state institutions » reveals the profound battle which is taking place in opposition to the neo-liberal State and hierarchic institutions in which citizens no longer have access to the spheres of decision and suffer the injustices of a system which serves only a minority.

Behind these practices of muncipalism, a genuine refounding of the municipal institution is playing out. This refounding invites us to consider differently the democracy of co-construction and the long, even slow, passage of time which it entails. It also engages each of us, elected offcials and citizens, to accept our part in the transformation. At a time when other majorities call for interventionism and withdrawal, this refounding reaffirms the necessity to be a part of a public republican space. A space which enables the encounter of collective action of social forces and public institutions to put politics back in the service of the city and its populations, in their plurality.

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On the 9th, 10th and 11th of June 2017, 700 participants, from more than 180 cities in 40 countries came together for the international meeting Fearless cities, organised by Barcelona «en Comú » - a citizen platfom, established by the political party that won the municipal elections in 2015 – and supported by several partners (Commons Polis1) and European foundations (The Charles Léopold Mayer Foundation, Guerilla Foundation, OSIFE, Ford Foundation, Chorus Foundation, Grassroots International, Karibu Foundation, European Cultural Foundation) who belong to the EDGE Funders Alliance network. The belief, «Fearless cities », represents a call to otherness in particular towards women and political refugees (Cities of hope, cities of refuge), as well as a different way of practicing democracy and another kind of relationship to power, and to politics.

The opening of the meeting by two female mayors, one from Barcelona (Ada Colau – Barcelona en Comú) and the other from Madrid (Manuela Carmena – Ahora Madrid) was representative of this gathering and what it meant about the reinventing of practices and the popular imagination of politics at the municipal level. In fact, by having a simple conversation on a platform in an outdoor public space, these two women shared their experiences and their practice of public and political responsabilities. For the launching of these 3 days of meetings, the two mayors showed political visibility and the establishment of a more open and shared dialogue between themselves and the inhabitants, citizens, travelers, youth, homeless and other curious people who assembled to hear them on that night.

The election of these two women, in the eyes of the Spanish people, represents a collective and popular success, a victorious battle for more well-being, more rights, and more democracy in a country profoundly marked by economic and social crisis, and corruption. They were elected by the people, carried by a desire for change and a popular audacity, and without forgetting their public and institutional responsabilities, are aware that they are creating a space and an ecosystem more favourable to a democracy of co-construction[2].

A closeness, an attentiveness to needs, a stimulation of the forces involved, a sense of social justice, of ethics and a practice which demands power in the framework of a « defined democratic perimeter », as Jo Spiegel – the mayor of Kingersheim - often reminds us. These are some of the prominent features of municipal reinvention, especially in Spain. With this first highlight from the very beginning of « Fearless Cities », followed by the energy of the committed messages of other mayors from Chile, California, Brasil, Argentina, France.... we began to seize the tone of the changes taking place in the practice of politics at the municipal level. The three days of conferences and workshops that followed outlined the contours to better understand the transformations happening in the movement called « municipalist. » Although it is quite heterogeneous, the municipalist tendency observed demonstrates the desire to review the economic relationships in which the neo-liberal economy immerses us in order to introduce more social justice. But even more so, municipalism presents itself as a tendency that is eminently political in the noble sense of the term, to reaffirm, beyond the libertarian approach of Bookchin, the importance of the institution, in this case municipal, to respond to the resounding needs of society to galvanise its force and energy in the service of the « Polis. » Without being a uniform movement, municipalism takes on several characteristic traits which emerged from the intersection of various accounts expressed during Fearless Cities.

Ada Calau & Manuela Carmena - Photo : Empodera & Almedio Consultores

Photo : Empodera & Almedio Consultores

THE CRISIS, THE APPROPRIATION AND MALEVOLANT EXERCICE OF POWER: TRIGGERS FOR MUNICIPAL CONQUESTS

We live in a period of generalised mistrust of oligarchic powers (especially in occidental societies[3]), which are sometimes authoritarian (Turkey, Russia), and which are distinguished by the appropriation of political power by politico-economic elites from the local to the international level. The political systems that result, lead to an exercice of political power which does not even fulfill its function of management and regulation of constraints, especially in the world of finance (see the account of Nicole Alix https://youtu.be/L6gcWL1KW_I). These systems have not stopped producing and building up inequalities. They meet the needs of the populations (housing, health, integration, poverty, etc.) less and less. And worse, they distinguish themselves as well by more or less generalised practices of corruption and with full impunity (Spain, France, Italy, Brazil, European deputies, etc.), which only increases the crisis of confidence of their citizens. This reality now crosses the world from one hemisphere to another, from the local to the most global level. It is a shared weakness in our occidental democracies. If this ember feeds centers of extremism (religious, nationalist) and violence (armies, politics, drug trafficking), it also constitutes fertile ground for the emergence of forms of collective mobilisation and solidarity that are more democratic, inclusive and pacifist. This is the case for forms of organisation around commons, and an economy which is social and solidarity, even collaborative, as well as municipalist movements.

The triggering role of these crises and malevolent exercices of power can be found in the analysis raised during Fearless Cities. As a prelude to municipal political conquests we often find a combination of:

• An economic, social or political crisis…: international (financial crisis), national (economic and political crises of austerity) and/or more local such as housing in Barcelona-Spain, increasing poverty in Buckfastleigh-United KIngdom, the tripling of the local population with a large immigration population in Celra-Spain, the project of a supermarket which threatens the fragile economy of the city center and cohesion in Saillans-France, etc.

• And a vertical, authoritarian and/or malevolent use of power by a former executive: 22 years of an uninterruped mandate of the Populist Party[4] in Torrelodones – Spain, the spread of corruption by the party holding local and national power in Spain, a mayor who makes authoritarian decisions against the advice of and contrary to the well-being of his inhabitants in Saillans-France, etc.

Of course, the triggering elements are specific to each context. In this way, a local tradition of militancy, such as that which can be observed in the case of Saillans (Drôme-France), or in Grenoble (Isère-France) or more explicitly in Barcelona around the expulsion of those inhabitants who became insolvent in the eyes of banks, can also prove to be a favorable element for collective mobilisation leading to local political mobilisation. Moreover, let's not forget the influence and the combination of local, national and international contexts. From the world financial crisis, to national and European politics of austerity, from the refugee crisis to the movement of the indignant and specifically that of May 15th 2011 («15M») which was very important in Spain for example,…these temporalities are many occasions that set off recurrences of mobilisation or help to more strongly structure citizen and social forces.

Joan Subirats[5] gave evidence in January 2017 during the GIS colloquium « democracy and participation » (Mediapart[6]) of the context that made the movement Guanyem appear, which then became « Barcelona en Comú » and put Ada Colau at the head of the municpality of Barcelona in June 2015 : « It is evident that Barcelona en Comú would not exist without 15M, but 15M in Barcelona is much greater than Barcelona en

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note
September 2017

3. Hervé Kempf, *L'oligarchie ça suffit, vive la démocratie,* Éditions du Seuil, 2011 and re-edition in 2013

4. PP - Partido Popular : Liberal conservative popular party in Spain

5. Joan Subirats is a professor at the University Autonome of Barcelona and a member of Barcelona en Comú.

6. Joan Subirats in "Podemos et Barcelona en Comú: les citoyen-ne-s prennent le pouvoir?" Médiapart, 10 February 2017. https://blogs.mediapart.fr/les-invites-de-mediapart/blog/100217/pode mos-et-barcelona-en-comu-les-citoyen-ne-s-prennent-le-pouvoir

Comú. This difference is important. » Joan Subirats goes on to explain that more fundamentally it is the entire democratic system which is in crisis and has allowed for the rise of Barcelona en Comú: « The 15M in this way signifies an overflowing of the political situation which was controlled by traditional parties. This overflowing is not only in number, with massive outdoor meetings. (...) A new political agenda is emerging, linked to the future of young people, of

young, has tripled in 20 years. It has faced a large (30% of the local population) Sub-saharan immigration from Eastern Europe. The arrival to power of the Candidatura Unitat Popular in 2015 allowed the municipality to return to its mission of public service and response to needs: "Ensure that local public politics respond to the needs of its populations "(Mercè).

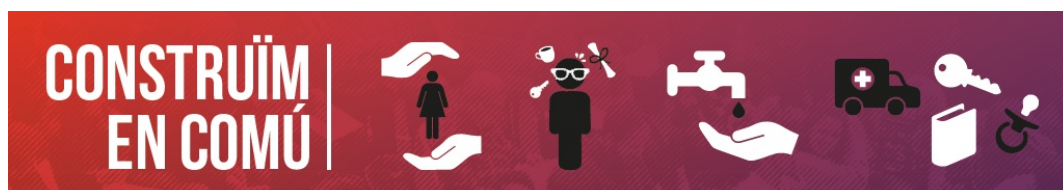For this, we must redefine priorities, especially

Image : Catalunuya en comú https://catalunyaencomu.cat/

everyday life, to the idea that watching out for others is also part of politics. There is a rejection of the association between representation and substitution: they don't represent us because they don't do what they say and they don't live the problems that we live. The democratic quality of the system is questioned, and new political ethics are required. »

In this way the general gloominess, the urgency of the harmful economic and/or social situation, the need for ethics, the feeling of powerlessness, the observation of an oligarchy of political professionals disconnected from reality and incapable of responding to blatant needs for vital public politics, a practice of power that is authoritarian and corrupt....are many arguments that we find behind the emergence of these municipalist movements.

THE ESSENCE OF MUNICIPALISM: RE-INTRODUCING THE DIMENSION OF GENERAL INTEREST AND « CREATING NEW FORMS OF INSTITUTIONS TO MANAGE SHARED NEEDS »

We have seen, behind the questioning of the democratic system in its whole, the targeting both of its functioning and also its inefficiency to respond to the needs, often urgent, of its population. Mercè Amich Vidal of the municipality of Celrà (Gerona-Spain) expresses this well: « there is a need to create new forms of institutions to manage shared needs, institutions in the service of people. » Celrà is a small town of 5000 inhabitants, which has little human or financial resources and whose population, very

since there are so many, blatant, and because financial resources are scarce. Mercé reminded us: « It is even more necessary to co-define political priorities when there are scarce resources in small towns and rural zones. » (Ex : Celrà)

In Buckfastleigh in the United Kingdom, a small town located in a nature reserve but victim of a situation of worrying poverty, Pam Barret – Mayor explained that 8 priority projects were chosen for action by the municipality and for which 90% of local taxes were collected. The action is modest in the number of activities engaged in, but ambitious in its desire to bring concrete and efficient response to a social and economic situation unbearable for the town's population.

And so, from services for the population to services for senior citizens, from measures for children to those to end the politics of speculation on housing, from the setting up of cultural mediators or urban planning, to the re-municipalization of public services (Ex: water in Paris, Barcelona, Grenoble)....the responses to local emergencies are as diverse as the context in which they are found. For they all carry the notion of public service and social justice.

DID YOU SAY « DEMOCRATIC RADICALNESS »?

To reintroduce the concrete expression of politics and the collective in municipal action, the choice of a certain democratic radicalness is taken most of the time. Rather than reinstate verticality in power, it consists of the opposite, to bet on democratic demands, transparency, teaching and the rise in collective competence vis à vis the complexity of public action.... It consists of

enriching the room for manœuvre of municipal institutions, largely horizontal, but also articulated between verticality and horizontalness, at an unmeasured level, not consented upon.

Also, for municipal teams who have been able to defeat an elected official or a party that confiscated power for many years, or who conducted power in an authoritarian or corrupt fashion, the opposite desire to introduce more transparency or collegiality (such is the case of Saillans and Torrelodones) is often found. This is accompanied by a profound will for democratic rigor which for many consists of a coherence of choices and a strong attention accorded to communication and teaching.

This teaching method is, in a certain way, the liaison which allows for the re-establishment, or repair, of the connection and the confidence between the elected and citizens, local administration and its populations. This teaching method is usually based on :

• Communication and media (essentially websites, newsletters, social medias) developed to explain choices and inform about ongoing actions, upcoming meetings, and observed results ;

Image : Municipio de Torrelodones
http://torrelodones.dondevanmisimpuestos.es/es/politicas#view=functional

• A digital participation method for consulting and gathering opinions and propositions ;

• A debate on investment choices, transparency and explanations of the allocation of every piece of public money. « Explain for each piece of money what will be the finality » said Pam Barret – Mayor of Buckfastleigh in the United Kingdom. In Torrelodones, there's a website that is very

thorough and accesible « Where are my taxes going » (http://torrelodones.dondevanmisimpuestos.es/es/) which was set up in the same spirit. More often, we also find participatory budgets of 5% to 10% of the investment budgets, which serve to include the public in making management choices and deciding on allocation of public finances. In this way, and without its being a citizen municipality, the city hall of Paris goes fairly far with its intermediary of participatory budgets because it favors and assists in a better comprehension of the complexity of public action by setting up training sessions for project carriers, and for citizens in general ;

• A collective definition of priorities, as we have seen with the 8 projects retained in Buckfastleigh for example ;

• A change in the relationship and the understanding of the administration as it passes from an abstract understanding to a concrete understanding as underlined by Mercè (Celra) : « We need a debate about concrete subjects otherwise the population will not come » ;

• The accomplishment of public service missions and response to needs to « make sure that local public politics respond to the needs of the populations » (Mercè – Celra), by example in developing services for the elderly in order to end their solitude and reintroduce solidarity.

In this way, for example, in Torrelodones the priorities are information, transparency, participation and a cross sector approach in municipal decisions. This is even referred to as « High quality and efficient services. » The municipality in this way hopes to encourage local politics with a town councillor dedicated to local life, to make the decision to have open and reusable data, to create a media committee and to modernise the administration, notably in terms of planning and local participation as the basis for the process of change.

More than a teaching method, this is a new learning process, that of a democratic operation which gives a voice and role to each person, according to his expertise. In Saillans for example, the municipal operation has been entirely reviewed, internally with elected officials, as well as in the relationship with inhabitants by a collegial and participatory governance. In this way, power is shared beetween elected officials who « divide and share their expertise and job compensation, work in teams of two (or three), come together to make decisions within a steering

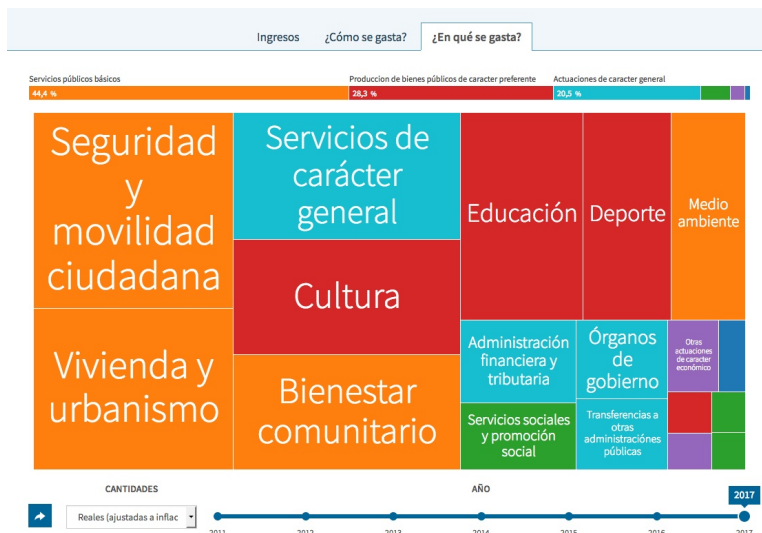committee open to the public, and use collaborative information technology tools. » Moreover, the involvement of inhabitants is done through « thematic participatory commissions » in order to define orientations and priorities for actions to be taken, as well as « action-project groups » to prepare, accompany and set them up. If transparency and information are at the heart of the municipal project, so are the requirements of the method to facilitate participation. And finally an Observatory of Participation (formerly Council of the Wise) fills the role of watching over and supporting, notably to « guarantee the power of inhabitants to react. »

THE CHALLENGES CONFRONTED BY MUNICIPALISM

PARTICIPATION, THE KEY CHALLENGE OF THE DEMOCRATIC MUNICIPAL PROCESS
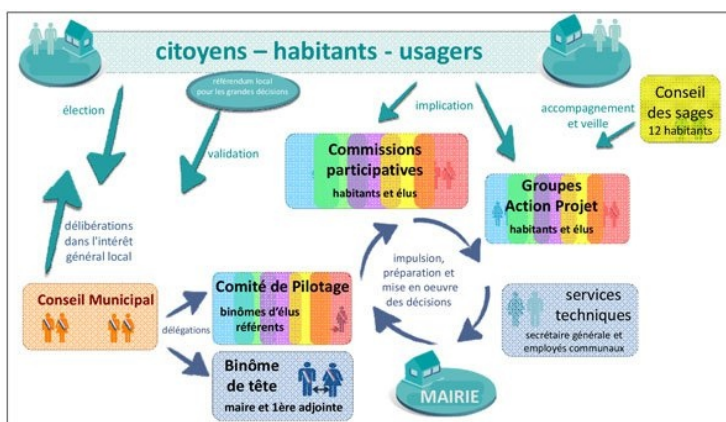
The question of participation is of course a key challenge in democratic municipal processes. We know in fact that from Saillans to Kingersheim, and to Celra or Torrelodones, the rate of participation stagnates around 15% to 20% of the local population (up to 24% in Saillans), with little renewal of its composants (the famous « ATS »: »Always the Same Ones ») with a marginal participation from the most fragile public, distant from public action. So in Torrelodones, where the slogan is « if you want to participate, then participate! », the municipality is trying to enlarge and adjust its process to include the largest amount of participants. In order to encourage participation, meeting times have been revised to include evenings. There is a commitment to the inclusion of young people and children, to open

Presentation of the collegial and participatory governance of Saillans
http://www.mairiedesaillans26.fr/menu-principal/projet-communal/presentation-
de-la-gouvernance-collegiale-et-participative/

up to this public which is often not included. This is a way to encourage the growth of seeds of democratic culture in future generations, to anchor it in the long-term.

The democratic radicalness of the municipalist movement, if it does exsist, is in this profound requirement for democratic quality and a democratic continuity, so dear to Jo Speigel, mayor of Kingersheim. Establishing a permanent general state of democracy in his city, he broke the tradition that the time for democracy was only during elections, to make it continuous and permanent. The measures that have been put into place and tested by municipalist movements – because it is, above all, a process of fumbling and trial and error – give an everyday nature to local democracy. On the other hand, and as Jo Spiegel invites us to see, we would be wrong to start from the assumption that « everyone wants to participate » in order to adjust measures for appropriate participation. In fact, if the enthusiasm for forms of participation is very real for some parts of the population (still too often male, retired and from a high socio-professional category), it would be too hasty to conclude that today this tendency is widely shared. On the contrary, the recent national elections in France, in Austria, in the Netherlands or United States, show that people are very much ready to withdraw into their own concerns, into conservatism and interventionism as long as they are given the impression that they are protecting their own wellbeing (which is relative for that matter) and turf. Much remains to de done in order to combine the plurality of society with the co-construction of municipal political choices.

THE CHALLENGE OF STRUCTURING MUNICIPALIST MOVEMENTS: BETWEEN A POLITICAL MOVEMENT AND A CHANGE IN SCALE

The consolidation of municipalist movements, ever since their existance as local groups (neighborhood, village, urban....) and up to their consolidation as social movements or political parties (Candidatura de Unitat Popular, Marea Atlantica), and their rise to political and public civil servant positions following electoral victories, expresses itself in diversified trajectories. Podemos distinguishes itself because, even if its desire is to open up politics to ordinary people, it acknowledges voluntarily that it is constructed as « an electoral war machine » in order to win the most electoral battles, to the detriment of an internal democracy in the party that they will have to, from now on, rebuild. Podemos was built as a political party, while municipalist movements

stricto sensu such as Barcelona en Comú or Marea Atlanica (Corogne) for example, above all, rested on the construction of a citizens' platform, before being obligated by electoral law to declare themselves political parties in order to be candidates in a municipal election. Barcelona en Comú documented its own experience through a guide: « How to together win the city : a guide to the construction of a municipal citizen platform ». This guide presents how « municipal governments, close to citizens (......) represent the best way to build change from the street to institutions » : the union of powers of change, equality, upward dynamics, shared diagnosis, a code of ethics, transparency, respect for the political balance in place, a horizontal orientation, etc. are many dimensions which were honored to « win the city. »

These paths are interesting because they are glimmers of questionings, internal clashes, and transformations as the movements pass from associative or citizen missions to political missions, from civic to electoral. Their social purpose, their ways of mobilising and their governance can end up greatly modified. In this way Podemos accepted the choice for an internal vertical orientation, around a strong leadership destined to win the elections. Isn't there a risk here of reproducing political and electioneering reflexes that we already know from the present traditional political class? Are we betraying in this way the people and the motivations that we supported up until now by making them campaign arguments? Are these movements capable of going beyond the causes they defend to formulate or co-construct a political project that embraces the diversity and complexity of our societies? The recent electoral victories are great experiences to help us answer these questions.

We understand through them and at mid-mandate (for Spain, and in a smaller measure for France) that the challenge is that of the scaling of these municipalist movements. The challenge is to go further, expand to the regional, national or international level. In Spain, for example, the municipalist movements (Podemos, Barcelona en Comú, Candidatura Unitat Popular...) are organising themselves,

"Nous vivons une époque exceptionnelle exigeant des initiatives courageuses et créatives. Notre capacité à imaginer une ville différente, nous donnera le pouvoir de la transformer"
Ada Colau

COMMENT REMPORTER LA VILLE EN COMMUN:
GUIDE POUR LA CONSTRUCTION D'UNE PLATEFORME CITOYENNE MUNICIPALISTE

Barcelona En Comú   BARCELONAENCOMU.CAT

Image : Barcelona en comú
https://barcelonaencomu.c
at/sites/default/files/-
gagner-la-ville.pdf

notably in networks (platforms, opposition coalitions), in order to weigh in on the regional (like Cataluna en Comú) and the national level. This challenge takes on even more meaning as the state level becomes more and more authoritarian and reduces to forms of austerity and verticality which prevent the democratic respiration so necessary to social cohesion and effectiveness of public action (see the account of Loïc Blondiaux http://www.institut-gouvernance.org/?q=fr/node/245). Additionally, national or supranational legislations are often pointed out as obstacles to public politics that try to promote these municipalities of change (laws on the welcoming of refugees, the tax system for companies like Air Bnb, remunicipalization of public services etc.). Obtaining a critical mass, a more important weight on other scales of governance, national and international, is now a clear goal for these movements. However, they show prudence and willingly admit some weakness. That of movements inexperienced in politics and the mangement of publc affairs, who don't know if the energy of those they are made up of and the popular enthusiasm they received in 2015 (Spain) can carry them in a political continuity towards possible re-election in 2019.

In France, the challenges are not the same, as there is a lower level of municipalist phenomena than in Spain. Progressively, the municipal victory of Saillans is considered to not be an isolated case, and other municipal citizen councils have been elected, either in the past or since 2014 following resignations occurring during mandates. This enthusiasm is today taken up by collectives who are preparing for the building of participatory lists or local assemblies (La Belle Démocratie) in preparation of the municipal elections of 2020. Moreover, the French context is less in the spirit of « rebel » or « changing » municipalities that we can observe in Spain. Also, in France, the spread of other forms of local democracy and citizen dynamics is not limited to participatory citizen lists but is also introduced by municipal and not « municipalist » executives (Paris, Grenoble, Kingersheim, Trémargat, Ungersheim, Nantes, Rennes, etc.), and even on the metropolitan level (Montpelier, Lyon, Bordeaux) or regional (during the previous mandates in North Pas Calais, Rhône-Alpes) onto sector specific politics (food systems, the environment, etc.). Even as this contributes to the renewal of practices of the perception of power, France stays more involved with participatory dynamics and less with a desire for citizen emancipation or an acknowledgement of a veritable citizen power (the power to react). This is the difficulty that citizen candidates such as

note
September 2017

La Primaire.org or Ma Voix encountered at the national level during the presidential and legislative elections. The French municipal elections of 2020 will be decisive in evaluating the strength of a certain municipalism « à la française » and its capacity to bring change to other scales of governance.

The difficulty of moving from activism to public management

Behind the difficult passage from a citizen or social movement to a political movement there is the question, brought up by Manuela Carmena – the mayor of Madrid, of the passage from activism to public management. How do public action and public administration transform in contact with these new practitioners who are not necessarily « political professionals », don't necessarily belong to an intellectual or economic elite, who are not familiar with the complexity of public action and the forms of management that they entail? How to ensure that once a municipal election is won, citizen or social representatives will be able to take on the burden of political and public representatives ; and will know how to go beyond defending their cause and their interests to be attentive to other needs, other publics, and co-construct public action with other stakeholders ?

All of these questions weren't really discussed during Fearless Cities. We didn't look into the transformations which these questions would involve for actors (within and outside) of political life and local public administration. However some elements came up. Mercé Amich Vidal of the Celra municipality mentioned the fact that the elected officials of Candidatura Unitat Popular have gradually transformed into « community leaders ». This is another way to practice power, to acquire and embody authority. This demonstrates that « once you transform local politics, you find yourself faced with the resistance of your father, your cousin, and generally all the people you know. » These changes in position and in roles are not easy to accept, on the side of the elected as well as on the side of citizens who find their imaginations shaken up. In this position, we can examine again the experience of the mayor of Saillans, Vincent Beillard, who explained that at the beginning of his mandate many citizens found themselves destabilised, even unhappy, by the transparency and the collegiality of Saillans which excluded the practices of favoritism and small advantages negotiated privately with city hall, as is often the case at a municipal level. So the entire ecosystem was affected.

As far as the difficulties faced on the side of new municipal teams and their elected officials in the passage from activism to public management, we can note the municipal experience of Manuela Carmena in Madrid. This woman, a judge, from the highest level of Spanish justice, was able, while admitting to « the lack of institutional experience of her team » and « the errors commited in the difficult passage from activism to managment » to remember « the necessity of applying an administrative process » and the setting up of rules or « protocols to efficiently implement the law »[7]. In this way, these procedures authorised the drawing up of « objective » requirements so that associations could use the public space, « by converting into law (...) that which up until now was a privilege granted in an arbitrary fashion by local authorities. »[8]

These experiences echo those of Jo Spiegel in his town of Kingersheim (France) which has woven, during five successive mandates, a humble and challenging culture of democracy of construction. From the House of citizenship, to Agora 15-20, to the drawing of lots, going through councils and participatory budgets, and more globally the General permanent states of democracy, Jo Spiegel has opened up a new practice of power and local democracy. This transformation has profoundly marked the elected, the municipal administators as well as the inhabitants of the city of Kingersheim. The dormitory city of Mulhouse has become a cultural and ecological suburban city full of life. Its path demonstrates that the change of a democratic cultural from one of delegation to one of involvement and co-construction is a long-term undertaking. Its experience gives evidence also of the importance of being part of a defined « democratic perimeter » respectful of the norms and laws of the Republic. Because the framework is set up and kept in mind citizen and political energies can be expressed and play out their complementary natures in the service of a shared collective project. The move from activism to public management involves remembering the mandate for which one has been elected, the pertaining municipal expertise outside of which it is not possible to intervene, and the republican laws that municipal politics must respect and guarantee. This democratic framework is also a way to assure that municipal behavior does not exclude or favor one community and that it will fulfill its function of serving the common good.

7. El Mundo, 12 February 2016: Manuela Carmena: "A mi equipo le falta experiencia en las instituciones" : « ha reconocido "errores" fruto de la "falta de experiencia" de su equipo en las instituciones. "Nos falta pasar del activismo a la gestión", ha dicho Manuela Carmena. » « la principal razón de los problemas que ha tenido que barajar en estas semanas se derivan de que cuesta aceptar que es necesario cumplir rigurosamente los procesos administrativos". "Necesitamos mejorar, tener mejor funcionamiento en la organización y reforzar el asesoramiento de los concejales", ha dicho. "No tiene reglamentos y por eso se cometió el error. Es fundamental crear un protocolo para cumplir de manera eficaz" la ley. »

8. El Mundo, 25 February 2016: El Gobierno de Manuela Carmena cederá espacios públicos a colectivos con trayectoria asociativa : « Vamos a convertir en un derecho democratizado y regulado lo que hasta ahora era un privilegio que dependía de la arbitrariedad de las autoridades locales", ha señalado este jueves Nacho Murgui, el concejal responsable del proceso. »

Municipalities which claim to be « non-state institutions » : leaving the yoke of the neo-liberal State

Along with these frameworks and norms which can only exist if they live with and thrive on interactions with the populations they serve, Joan Subirats reminds us of the importance for these

http://www.ville-kingersheim.fr/Democratie/Agora-15-20

new municipal teams to handle the evolution of a tension both within and outside of the institution: « Beyond these participatory measures, it is important to maintain the tension between the interior and the exterior, without imagining the change only from the institution. » As the mayor of La Corogne, another municipality of change, says « the day when institutions no longer look at us as intruders, we will have lost our reason for being. »[9] Joan Subirats goes even farther in demanding that institutions play the role of mobilisation against unfair public decisions : « Faced with evictions for example, some town counselors will use twitter to inform that ' there is an eviction this morning on such and such a street, we ask you to be there because we can not stop it without your help.' It is without precedent that an institution would call for mobilisation. » During her presentation at Fearless Cities, she explained this position, highlighting a new role for cities and citizens towards the State, the role of « taking back cities, bringing politics back to everyday life and not only for institutions. » While States are bound hand and foot by neoliberalism, cities represent hope. They are the level at which democracy and the common good can be emancipated. For Joan Subirats, « the Common » is a concept placed between the private and the institutional, and includes a collective response to social problems. »[10]

As we understand it, behind municipalism there is the confrontation of the neoliberal State and institutional forms which have excessively served special interests and subjugated populations that are today to a great extent victims of the elimination of politics to the advantage of economics. But the radicalness of this posture (ideology?) can not express all of the intentions behind this municipal resurgence. There is a whole spectrum of motivations, meanings, engagements and ideologies with varying degrees of radicalness; including internally with municipal teams. In this way in Saillans, for example, a tension can be felt between those who see in this experience of collegial and participatory governance the seeds for a more systemic change, while others prefer to put aside a more global impact and restrict themselves to the precise demands of the mandate that they are held to in regards to their inhabitants and electors.

This position of resistance to an injust political order through democratic non-state institutions was brought up during the Fearless Cities meeting in the account of the autonomous Kurdish region of Rojava in Northern Syria. This decentralised institution is a true place of democracy in Syria. It stems from, notably, the strong connection that links Murray Bookchon and Abdullah Öcalan (Workers Party of Kurdistan – PKK) and which strongly inspires Kurdish political leaders. Since the advent of their liberation in 2014, the cantons of Rojava have united themselves around autonomous communes and a high democratic demand. Their mission is to respond to the demands of the population and strengthen local administrations. In Rojava, a true « feminine revolution » is expressing itself. A total equality between men and woman has been established in the sphere of local decision-making (legislative and executive) as well as a large female presence in the democratic force of Syria, the military protection set up to protect local democratic institutions. « Our local democratic system doesn't depend upon a nation but on our coexistence » revealed Sinam Mohamed, the Foreign Envoy to the Rojave Administration North Syria.

This rejection of the State and hierarchical institutions is obviously found in the initial libertarian municipalism philosophy of Murray Bookchin. This social ecology activist also promoted the idea of a coalition of communes (communal confederalism) favorable to undoing the supremacy of the nation-State. His daugher, Debbie Bookchin, explained in a recent article[11], as well as during Fearless Cities, that for him «all ecological problems are social problems. » « We can not solve ecological problems without solving our addiction to domination and hierarchy »[12] she

9. Ib idem "Podemos et Barcelona en Comú: les citoyen-ne-s prennent le pouvoir?" Médiapart, 10 February 2017 https://blogs.mediapart.fr/les-invites-de-mediapart/blog/100217/podemos-et-barcelona-en-comu-les-citoyen-ne-s-prennent-le-pouvoir

10. Notes of Richard D. Barlett from the round table « Democracy from the bottom up : municipalism and other stories », Medium, June 2017 https://medium.com/@richdecibels/fearlesscities-notes-democracy-from-the-bottom-up-municipalism-and-other-stories-7fa1395dbfbc

11. Debbie Boockchin, "Radical Municipalism: The Future we deserve", ROAR Magazine, 21 July 2017 https://roarmag.org/magazine/debbie-bookchin-municipalism-rebel-cities/

12. Op cit, Notes, Richard D. Barlett, « Democracy from the bottom up : municipalism and other stories », Medium, June 2017 https://medium.com/@richdecibels/fearlesscities-notes-democracy-from-the-bottom-up-municipalism-and-other-stories-7fa1395dbfbc

reminds us. But it is exactly this that the institution seems too often to embody. However, through his search for a form of organisation that could guarantee an emancipated society, egalitarian and in harmony with nature and which would lead it towards his philosophy of social ecology, Murray Bookchin progressively held a more nuanced way of looking at the institution. Debbie demonstrates this as she emphasizes that where Marxist, anarchist or street protest approaches carry little weight to shake off the politics of the all powerful State, municipalism presents another way forward. Today, behind ecological municipalism an even larger transformation of the world appears. In this way, she says, because it rests « on active citizen movements and insists that candidates above all draw upon the mandate of citizens, » municipalism « reinvents politics and citizenship, » and it allows for the « return to power of ordinary citizens ». And « contrary to parlementary politics (...), it is transparent, with candidates 100% indebted towards their citizens, delegates and non representatives. » And Debbie adds that the characteristics of the former are « based on creativity, community, free association, liberty and decentralised democracy, in which people react together to draw their own rational future. » However, as she doesn't forget to underline, « municipalism takes us beyond anti-state or anti-capitalist environmentalism. »[13] And she concludes: « We need lasting local institutions, not just politicians with a social justice agenda, but institutions that are directly responsable to assemblies that are anti-capitalist. This will require time and education, but is our only hope of creating deep change, becoming the new humans we must be to create a new society. »[14]
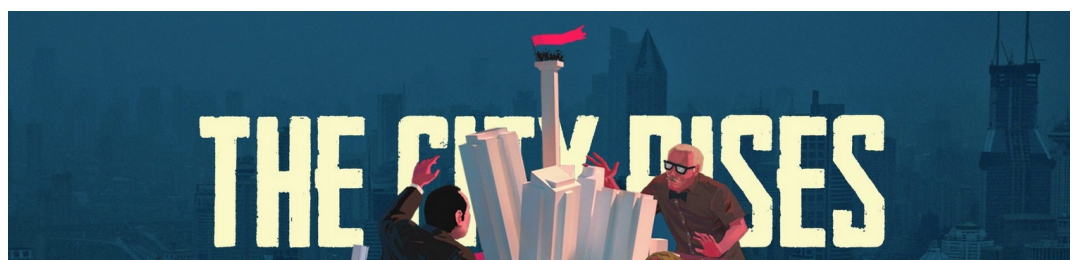
MUNICIPALISM: A REFOUNDING OF THE PUBLIC MUNICIPAL INSTITUTION

Let's not mistake the enemy! We have heard a lot during the debates that the problem comes above all from public institutions that don't respond to the urgent or fundamental needs of their populations. But, the problem comes not as much from institutions as from some of those in power who govern through the choice of public politics which only benefit a very small proportion of the population, and secondly, from the attitude of a certain electoral consumerism and an irresponsable delegation of political power coming from citizens. Of course, between the two, a structure of neo-liberal government has been strengthened that separates its citizens from centers of decision and makes it slow and difficult to reconquer their sovereign power and their power to react. But, at the hour of refounding our democracy, returning to the demands of co-responsability permits us to be a part of the process of co-construction in which each person has a part to play (inhabitants and elected officials).

We see then that municipalism is the result of a slow transformation, at the crossroads of the wearing out of an institutionalised and centralised verticality which, in service to a politico-economic elite, has produced only exclusion, inequalities and injustices and which is almost out of breath, and is now causing, on one hand, the anger of populations and an ecological disaster, but also – and this is the second important factor in municipal renewal – is provoking forms of mobilisation that progressively cross over into democratic legitimacy through elections at the local level. The encounter between collective action and public action brings hope for the refounding of institutions and their oxygenation with a shared political project, with a democratic radicalness that is more horizontal and even occasionally with a certain militancy. The face of this municipalism can't only be summarised with the Spanish and French experiments that we have spoken about. Other approaches, including those supported by elected officials without preceding citizen coalitions, or even those of internal agents in the administration, add strength to these city halls of change. The municipalist movement today reminds us of deep transformations in the practice and perception of political power, and in the positive consequences that are produced when social forces and institutions meet and mutually re-seminate (Ex : municipalism, ESS, commons, etc.).

However, this change in position (monopolistic power/shared power, activism/public management, militant/elected official, social legitimacy/democratic legitimacy) is not obvious to retain, it needs a learning process and a

13. *Op cit,* Notes, Richard D. Barlett : "Municipalism takes us beyond anti-state or anti-capitalist environmentalism"

14. *Op cit*, Notes, Richard D. Barlett: "We need lasting local institutions, not just politicians with a social justice agenda, but institutions that are directly responsible to assemblies that are anti-capitalist. This will require time and education, but it is our only hope of creating deep change, becoming the new humans we must be to create a new society"

Radical municipalism : The Future we deserve, Debbie Bookchin, ROAR Magazine
https://roarmag.org/magazine/debbie-bookchin-municipalism-rebel-cities/

building of collective expertise (elected officials and citizens) in order to better understand the complexity of public management and to know how to organise the co-construction of politics in this renewed relationship to power, both on the elected and the citizen's side. This change will not happen without personal transformation from everyone, because democracy is above all our relationship to ourselves and to others. This renewal of the figures and practices of power, which touches also our imagination, requires time and vigilance, and even higher democratic demands. This challenging practice of power is one which, without fail, in a position of humility and coherence, attempts to remain faithful to its engagements and values, to an approach of co-construction, to a goal of democratic quality and public service, to ethics, to a spirit of social justice, in the framework of a defined « democratic and republican perimeter... »

Total vigilance is required to make sure that in the (progressive) passage from a collective action to a public action, collective action solutions don't (re)produce forms of exclusion (communal or excluding). Being part of a democratic republican framework at the time of the passage from activism to public management, is important in reminding us of the priority for community service which must transcend the defensive positions of special interests. Knowing how to distinguish collective action from public action and how to restore a strong public municipal institution will permit politics to go back to the service of its populations and put energy into constructing links or transitional spaces (see the article by Jean-Louis Laville http://blog.cnam.fr/actu/de-l-evenement-au-mouvement-les-initiatives-citoyennes-868455.kjsp?RH=1479917336977) to mobilise the best of the community in the service of efficiency and quality of public action.

From Celra to Saillans, Torrelodones, Barcelona, Kingersheim and many other cities in Chile, Brazil, the United States, etc... the cards of local democracy have been reshuffled. They leave room for the construction of a new relationship between the elected and citizens, municipal institutions and populations. They reaffirm the value of community and public service, solidarity and social justice. They combine public action and militancy, sometimes with a confusion of roles. They admit their fragility and that of the movements (citizen, social) that are testing the passage to public and political responsability. After getting a taste of this, after providing scarce energy so that this fragile power could be, above all, an open power, sustained by contributions

from inhabitants and rich in their collective intelligence, what will result? What will happen at a time when, on the other side, forces, also citizen, advocate withdrawing, interventionism and the delegation of power to accompany that, as long as daily life gives the illusion of being better? At the crossroads of these opposing dynamics, a unanimous dissatisfaction with the economic and democratic capitalist neo-liberal system that produces inequality and injustice in an exponential way is appearing. Does the future of these municipalist movements play out in their capacity to respond to this crisis locally by restoring municipal institutions? Isn't the best we can expect from them that they are able to increase this reassertion of politics in a noble sense, to decisions at the national and even international level?