

# THE ORDER OF BARCELONA

## CITIES WITHOUT FEAR

ARTICLE BY  
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In Europe and beyond, the hegemonic liberal vision that has hitherto dominated global politics is being challenged. This impetus is not emerging from nation-states themselves, but from new alliances and constellations of power that fight the inertia of the nation-state. Today it is especially in cities that new conceptions of citizenship, development and sovereignty are being shaped, bridging the global and local.

Confronted with the lack of action and proposals by their countries, many cities have been trying to assume a leadership role regarding some of the most pressing issues of our times, from the reduction of inequality to the struggle against climate change. They do so thanks to their capacity to involve civil society – and all its diversity of views and ideas – to an extent which is difficult to achieve at the national level. This has allowed municipalist movements to assume power in various large cities, grounding their actions in democratic and participatory values, reinforcing the historic role of cities as progressive and cosmopolitan places, places of tolerance and of intercultural meeting.

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**A ORDEM DE  
BARCELONA:  
AS CIDADES  
COMO PEÇAS  
FUNDAMENTAIS DA  
GLOBALIZAÇÃO**

Podem as cidades moldar ideias e conceitos políticos de modo a ter sucesso onde os estados-nação falharam, enfrentando os principais problemas da atualidade?

A key characteristic of the current municipalist vision is the fact that, besides the attention given to the city itself, there is a clear global vision: a cosmopolitan sense, in which all citizens feel part of the city but also part of the global community. It was precisely under the banner of municipalism and a vision of a global *polis* that more than 700 mayors and activists from 180 countries came together in Barcelona, in June 2017, to discuss what ‘fearless cities’ can do. It might not be too optimistic to argue that this has planted the seeds of a new global and municipalist order – the ‘Order of Barcelona’ – that could potentially supplant the previous Westphalian order. This new order is one where

fearless cities and regions have a more preponderant role in the definition of global politics, bringing decision-making processes closer to the people. This municipalist vision can support the development of republicanism, a political theory that has been kept in the shadows for too long and is increasingly worth exploring.

## RETHINKING REPUBLICANISM

Republicanism as a political theory has its roots in Ancient Greece and Rome, with figures such as Aristotle or Cicero amongst its main thinkers. Central to the definition of republicanism are the notions of freedom as non-domination, civic virtues (Cicero talked of four: justice, prudence, courage, and temperance), participation in the political life of the community and the debating of ideas, public over private interest, combatting all forms of corruption, and also the defence of a state based on strong laws – the “empire of laws and not of men”, to use the words of the 17th century political theorist James Harrington.

Within republicanism, there are two different lines of thought: on the one hand, civic humanism (or the neo-Aristotelian line) and, on the other, civic republicanism (the neo-Roman line). The first, similar to communitarianism in its defence of a single vision of the common good, defends the positive concept of freedom, in which the individual is free through active participation in the political life of the community. The

second, clearly the most popular amongst current defenders of republicanism, argues for a vision of liberty in which individuals are free as long as they are not dominated – either by the state (*imperium*) or by other individuals (*dominium*) – and are protected from arbitrary forms of power.

Non-arbitrary interference that serves to reduce domination over individuals – i.e. actions taken (by the state or the city, for example) in order to increase one’s liberty – is not only accepted but defended. To give an example, when we think of the fight against economic inequality and climate change, it is difficult to make much progress without any kind of interference from public powers, such as a stronger taxing system or better economic (re)distribution. And this interference is politically more difficult to justify through a liberal vision of freedom based on non-interference, than through the republican approach of non-domination.

A classic example used to distinguish between non-interference and non-domination is the case of the slave and the master. If the slave has a good relationship with the master and doesn’t suffer any punishment throughout their life, the vision of liberty as non-interference would consider such a slave to have more liberty than another one who is regularly punished. On the other hand, the republican notion of liberty as non-domination would say that although this slave has slightly better life conditions, they

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are not free, because all the actors – slave and master – are aware of the difference in terms of power and know that, whenever the master decides – an arbitrary form of power – the slave can be punished. Thus, in this view, the bigger the difference in power, the bigger the risk of domination. This offers the political justification to avoid the (increasing) inequality between states, cities, and individuals.

The political participation defended by republicanism implies the existence of a political community, which is, in theory, more easily promoted at the municipal level. At this level, it is easier to give a voice to citizens, and for them to be able to disagree openly, debating and deliberating the matters that interest them. Complementarily, municipalism contends that the local is extremely important and that it is at this level that citizens have a greater capacity to actively participate and to know the problems that affect them, and are being better prepared to resolve them. Obviously, in an interconnected world, there are a number of problems that cross borders, with inequality and climate change being at the forefront of this.

Republicanism needs therefore to be conceptualised in such a way that it can be applied globally, but the answer is unlikely to lie in a hypothetical global government. Rather than concentrating power in one entity, it would be better to distribute it among cities, states, and regions linked in a network. International institutions could, nevertheless, ensure that basic liberties are respected, guaranteeing a common minimum of republican freedom to every individual around the globe. The exact shape of a global republican approach is subject to big discussions between those who defend a statist view (where people are represented by their states) and those defending the civil society view (representation via non-state actors such as NGOs). Municipalism provides strong arguments in favour of a third view, a more expansive one that keeps the best of both other approaches, by facilitating the multi-layered representation of citizens at the international, national, *and* city level. With greater opportunities to participate politically in their own republics,

citizens' voices would carry more weight, both locally and globally, proving the advantage of this local/global republicanism when compared to the nation-state and the intergovernmental approach. And, after all, who better than the citizens themselves to put forward solutions to the problems directly affecting them?

## THE SUN IS SETTING ON WESTPHALIA

For the first time in human history, the number of inhabitants in cities has overtaken that of inhabitants in rural areas. This is a fundamental change in the way that societies organise themselves, and everything indicates that this trend of migration from the country to the city will continue. Although this reality must not mean a lack of investment at the level of territorial cohesion policies, or the abandonment of the rural world, it is also clear that cities will assume an increasingly important role in the definition of public policy. This is a moment in which states are increasingly losing control and sovereignty, to use Saskia Sassen's words.

A world governed by sovereign, independent nation-states, coming out of the Peace of Westphalia, has been questioned by the advancement of globalisation. While it is true that states remain an essential element in governance and can be expected to stay this

way in the near future, the progressivists who aim to achieve a more just and sustainable world should start to think about how a new model of global organisation could be designed. We do not want a retreat to a world of siloes that do not communicate, therefore it is of primary importance to think of alternative globalisation models. This is where municipalist cities come in.

There are a number of cities and their respective metropolitan areas which today represent what in the past was considered a state, in terms of their size, population, and income. However, the autonomy of cities in various domains is still very limited by the definition of national laws, which creates conflict at the level of sovereignty between state and city. This conflict is seen most clearly in the notion of citizenship rights. The European Union provides a case in point and can define the role of cities in the future. Currently, access to European citizenship is granted solely through the intermediary of national citizenship – people can enjoy European rights only when they enjoy the citizenship rights of one of the Member States. Now, the discussions surrounding the acceptance of refugees have started to expose some of the problems of this model. While the number of refugees that each state should receive has been decided at the European level, a number of states have postponed this intake.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, some of their cities have not only

<sup>1</sup> In September 2015, in one of the peaks of the refugee crisis and faced with lack of governance and reluctance by Member States to open their borders to refugees, the European Commission adopted a refugees' relocation policy, intended to relocate 120,000 refugees among the Member States.

shown themselves willing to take refugees in, but have also held demonstrations to demand this. This is a clear example of conflict between the three levels of sovereignty. It can be expected that such conflicts will increase as cities continue to grow in importance and states continue down the opposite path.

A small number of progressive cities, challenging the established order in radical ways but acting more or less separately, will find it difficult to achieve great things. However, a global network of rebel cities<sup>2</sup> acting in a coordinated way, sharing their experience and knowledge, errors and lessons, will be able to completely reformulate the way in which globalisation takes place. A republican globalism based on cities organised in a network can therefore be our next step. And there are various examples of attempts to form these networks, with varying levels of success, such as: ‘Solidarity cities’, ‘Eurocities’, the ‘Global Parliament of Mayors’, or the ‘Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy’.

But specifically, what can be done to promote municipalism and to strengthen republican freedom within cities? A first step is to look at what has been done already, namely regarding remunicipalisation initiatives. Secondly, one can look at city governments such as the ones in



<sup>2</sup> Using David Harvey's expression, who in his 2013 book lays out the potential role of cities as places of social justice and ecological resistance.



Paris and Stockholm which have assumed a leadership role in pressing issues such as climate change. It has to be noted that the construction of a republic of cities will not only include larger cities, as proven by the municipalist examples of A Coruña and Bristol with their complementary currency system. These latter cities exemplify the republican motivation of the citizens and the civic virtues that animate them: the search for more justice, participation in the life of the community, and a strong sense of perseverance. These practical examples are truly inspirational and serve as baseline for other municipalist movements and for the definition of a 21st century brand of municipalism.

## **BARCELONA: THE DAWN OF A NEW ORDER**

The definition of a new global order should not happen through the creation of a hypothetical global government but through greater shared sovereignty. States should share their sovereignty with supra-national institutions (such as the European Union), but also with sub-national institutions, namely cities. The European Union can, as a matter of fact, be a good environment in which to experiment with municipalist republicanism in the 21st century, by supporting existing projects in various countries and promoting a true Europe of the regions and cities, in which subsidiarity does not boil down to intergovernmentalism, but to the sharing of skills, responsibilities, and

funds with cities and regions. Direct contact between European institutions and cities must therefore be increased and improved, not making it dependent on the states in which these cities are located. Republican cities would therefore have various platforms on which to make themselves heard, and be able to have a more influential role in public policy and in shaping alternative development models. This true subsidiarity – clearly distinct from the current model – would help to promote the republican notion of non-domination at the European level.

Global municipalism has therefore a fundamental role to play in the critical moment we are living in, through the promotion and support of governance for the common good. Responsibility to the entire human community, based on the criterion of global justice, is a necessity for those municipalist movements which, having emerged initially as opposition forces, now have to start implementing their proposals.

## **TODAY A EUROPEAN REPUBLIC, TOMORROW A GLOBAL REPUBLIC**

Throughout history, the constitution of citizenship has been defined as top-down. That is, the definition of a specific political area was followed by the attribution of a series of rights and responsibilities associated with belonging to that area. But the European Union can radically challenge this model, going



to the heart of belonging to a nation state: citizenship. Allowing access to the privileges of European citizenship for those who are not citizens of any of the EU countries but reside in their cities, would represent a true change of paradigm.

We can imagine a European Republic<sup>3</sup> formed by various republics at the municipal or regional level. Small, medium, and large republics agreeing on deliberation as a way of doing politics and creating the necessary platforms for citizen representation. Places with alternative currencies at the regional level, as exists in Bristol now, that promote sharing and the decommodification of goods. Republics that follow the example of Barcelona and where the citizens, also through their representatives, are members of energy production and distribution cooperatives, living in cities designed for this end: living. Cities and regions where everyone has the right to not be dominated, giving everyone a set of minimum conditions (e.g. access to shelter, to education, to health, to transport, and a basic income) that allow them to freely exercise their activities as citizens. Republics that look inwards, concerned about the quality of life for those living there, but also look outwards, cosmopolitan and open to those who arrive, conscious that there exist multiple visions of the common good.

The message from the main municipalist projects is opposed to a dark and defeatist vision based on fear. With a message of hope, justice, perseverance, and courage – essential republican civic virtues – these movements have managed to awaken in citizens a sense of urgency to act and to grasp their future with their own hands. Not by chance, the first municipalist meeting in Barcelona was called ‘Fearless Cities’. But fear of what, exactly? Of course, to no longer fear being open to all those who seek shelter there, be they residents or refugees. To be courageous in confronting states when they fail in the definition of progressive policies, in fighting inequality, in investing in education, and in promoting a sustainable development model. To not fear involving citizens in their civic virtues, giving them the platform necessary to make themselves heard. To not fear being ambitious in envisaging the future. And what objective could be more ambitious than the definition of a new global order?



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<sup>3</sup> To use Ulrike Guérot's expression, although not directly referring to it.