

Foreword

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A few months ago, when we started preparing this issue 27 of the journal *Barcelona Societat* which you now have in your hands, we were using a working title that referred to the “climate change”-“cities” relationship between these two concepts. It was at that point that one of the journal’s contributors very cleverly suggested making a change to the title. The idea, she said, was not just to highlight the fact a climate “change” was taking place but also to point out that this change was now a real “emergency”. And she was absolutely right. This change is a real emergency, both in terms of the giddy speed in which climate, biodiversity, resource depletion and other changes are taking place as well as the scale of these changes, and the extent of their current and future consequences on large swathes of the population all over the planet. It was clear that the problem or matter we were dealing with, and which we had to identify, related not just to the change taking place but to a genuine emergency.

Likewise, we thought it appropriate to point out from this issue’s title that this emergency is not limited to a particular or single dimension but must be seen as a diverse, heterogeneous, complex and plural phenomenon. Therefore, we should not talk about a climate emergency but rather about “climate emergencies”. Using the plural helped us identify the problem in its true dimension, that is, a diverse one: the emergencies take different dimensions with different consequences when we talking about the diversity of flora and fauna, the effects on people’s health, the changes to atmospheric patterns, water quality, the reduction in biodiversity, air pollution and so on.

Besides their consequences on plant and animal life and on the planet’s natural resources in general, the climate emergencies also have very specific effects in terms of their impact on the population, on people. Again, it is worth pointing out that the climate emergencies have very varied consequences on people, on their health and well-being, the quality of their housing, their cognitive performance or their financial situation, to name but a few dimensions of the problem. In this issue of *Barcelona Societat*, we felt it was important to focus on the general effects relating to social justice, in particular those aspects or dimensions relating to issues of gender, social exclusion and poverty in the context of the city.

Accordingly, it begins with an opinion piece that focuses the debate on a new approach when addressing the economic aspects or dimensions of ecology. Ecology and politics cannot be separated from each other, so what the classics traditionally labelled as “political economy” must now be reformulated as “political ecology”. We thus move from a more general and conceptual reflection to more empirical and applied research. This is why the next article uses ten indicators to explore the socio-ecological functioning of the metropolitan area. Precipitation and temperature, land uses, the state of vegetation, the effects of fires, the state of biodiversity and the rivers, and energy consumption are some of the indicators that are key to understanding environmental health and the situation in this area, as well as, therefore, our ability to intervene.

On the basis of this diagnosis, we also wanted to look at the role of cities, particularly Barcelona, as major consumers of resources (such as food, water or energy) that produce large amounts of waste and are therefore responsible for a significant part of the climate emergencies. In that sense, cities become large urban concentrations which, by definition, are environmentally unsustainable unless bold and comprehensive policies are adopted that are geared towards ruralisation, in terms of economic activity and also how they operate socially.

If we maintain there are many climate emergencies and that they have many effects, we have to highlight one of their main consequences on one of the key aspects of social justice, namely, energy insecurity. Likewise, we must also take into account the depth of this insecurity and the form it takes. Doing this exercise makes us realise that the current business and energy consumption model is not only unsustainable from an ecological point of view but also that its consequences are very different, depending on which social group we are talking about. These days, energy insecurity mainly affects women in Barcelona, so any proposals for overcoming it must inevitably be based on an eco-feminist perspective.

The climate emergency has traditionally been tackled by central governments or supranational bodies. It has therefore been framed in national or global policies, multilateral agreements, and so on. But cities also play a key role in addressing these climate emergencies and that has been the subject of much less discussion. Consequently, in this issue of the journal, we also reflect on their social impact in the urban context, including institutional architecture and urban public policies, and also provide some key elements for discussing how to conceptualise vulnerability, resilience, mitigation and adapting the urban fabric to the current and future consequences of climate change. We think about how cities suffering effects of their own are, at the same time, key players and leading players in the fight against the climate emergencies.

If we talk about the social justice-related aspects of the climate crisis, we must take energy policy into account as one of the great drivers of social equity or inequity. We therefore propose that we reflect on how to work towards guaranteeing the right to energy and what role can be played by different authorities, such as local government, and different sectors, such as the social and cooperative sectors. Highlighting the role of these players necessarily involves re-conceptualising the place and role of public administration. So we invite you to consider the fight against inequalities as a task that relates not just to social policies but also to energy policy. What is the relationship – if there is one – between energy policy and social policy?

This reflection leads us to review the role played by what are known as the “councils of change” in the latest stage of the political cycle, which started in 2015. Madrid, Barcelona, Cádiz and La Coruña city councils, to name but a few, have achieved many of the climate and transitional public policy goals they set themselves. In spite of this, they too must be the subject of a critical analysis regarding the scope of this government action that puts the emphasis on the limitations, obstacles or limits at municipal level encountered by these city councils. We therefore ask ourselves, from the Gramscian perspective, what the limits of municipal policy are as regards the fight against the climate emergency so that we can draw some useful lessons that can be applied in future political cycles.

Barcelona Societat always includes a space dedicated to analysing specific experiences which require detailed reflection due to their unique nature. In that regard, we wanted to focus on “Health in the streets” project which assesses the environmental and health effects of the superblock programme in three city neighbourhoods: Poblenou, Sant Antoni and Horta. The assessment was carried out using both quantitative and qualitative methods to calculate this impact, which has generally been seen as very positive. In addition, we have also dedicated a space to reflecting on urban mobility, relating it to the dynamics and use of transport by women and their relationship with health and sustainability. On average, women use public transport more than men, so it is in their mobility patterns that new proposals for making urban mobility more sustainable and reducing its impact on health must be explored. Thirdly, we wanted to analyse the policy on energy advice points, which were set up a few years ago and provide an important service to city households and

consumers. Finally, we present and analyse “Blue, Green & Grey: Adapting Schools to Climate Change”, a project co-financed by the European Commission’s Urban Innovative Actions programme that proposes actions in eleven schools with measures relating to nature, water and architecture. The aim of the project is to improve the children’s quality of life, as well as for their immediate surroundings and local residents, by promoting open uses for the school playgrounds.

As the variety of articles in this issue of *Barcelona Societat* shows, there are many climate emergencies, and they are complex and far-reaching. At the same time, so are their effects and consequences which, as a general rule, tend to be deeper and more severe for women as a whole and, in general, for the most vulnerable populations. The reflections and proposals for the future aimed at mitigating and redressing the climate crisis must therefore start from the reality of these groups. We hope that reading this issue of the journal will make a valuable contribution to that.