Ajuntament de Barcelona

Cities, climate and eco-social transition. Taking stock after the short summer of municipalism

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The transformational experience first embarked on by the City Councils of Change in 2015 may be interpreted from very different perspectives. It has had many achievements, and failures too, starting with the most obvious one, the majority loss of municipal power in 2019. During this process, public policies for eco-social transition and fighting against the climate emergency merit a detailed analysis. Added to the conclusions that can be drawn from the general track record of municipalism is the difficulty of making ecological policy at the level of the transformations that the urgency of our unsustainable situation requires. This texts offers a reflective survey of this process, putting the emphasis on the eco-social, and availing itself of the neo-Gramscian use of the notion of hegemony for interpreting its limits and drawing useful lessons for the coming political cycles.

Introduction: autumn reflections

It was during the prevailing climate of collective sadness and disappointment that on 27 May 2019, Kois Casadevante coined the nostalgic but highly accurate term, noted for its powerful symbolic and historical resonance, 'short summer of municipalism'. A term of office that lasted as briefly as the libertarian revolution in 1936, as recreated by Hans Magnus Enzensberger in his historical novel *The short summer of anarchy*. Out of the wave of City Councils of Change that arose in 2015, that promising open breach in neo-liberal governance which the shock waves from Spain's 15M anti-austerity movement were turning into local institutional politics and of which so much was expected, four years later only Cádiz, Valencia, Barcelona – by the skin of its teeth – and the missing taxon of Zamora remained. Another example of how ungrateful the history of that so-called Spain is for its working classes, where our political conquests have a somewhat ephemeral interval that invariably ends too soon.

These autumn reflections are therefore intended to take stock with the goal, as Kois affirmed, of 'tipping sadness more towards hope than towards impotence' (Casadevante, 2019). My intention here is to assess how the political power of the municipalist option and the way in which it has responded to the climate emergency as a problem of the times have come together in the City Councils of Change, and what can be expected for future waves of municipalism.

1. The Necker cube of eco-social policy: small big steps

A minimally exhaustive review of the achievements of the City Councils of Change in the eco-social transition and fight against the climate emergency is beyond the possibilities of this text. By

way of example, we will take a few representative projects of the process's two most iconic cities: Madrid and Barcelona.

The legacy of successful public policies of Madrid and Barcelona, as heads of the transformational municipalism process, has been notable. Some have been recognised not just internationally but by their electoral rivals too. Debt reduction, increased social spending and the public network of children's schools, in Madrid's case. Housing policy, tourist regulation and the 'Radars' project against unwanted loneliness, in Barcelona's case. Both cities have seen very substantial advances made in other fields too, such as participatory governance, feminism and public-social collaboration (Casadevante *et al.*, 2018).

Sufficiently memorable progress has been made on the eco-social-transition front as to transcend and strengthen its hold on the collective imagination. Its image is already part of that dictionary of political symbols which hegemonic narratives are woven from. A pioneer in Spain is the notable case of Madrid's *Plan A de Calidad del Aire*, with the application of a reduced-emissions zone in Central Madrid as an emblem of a cutting-edge ecologist government. Less known by the public at large, but unanimously admired by specialists, is the highly successful *Renaturalización del Manzanares* [Renaturalisation of the Manzanares river], an exemplary project in restoring the biodiversity that had been lost from the pressures of urban planning on the river bed. For Barcelona, the creation of the public energy distributor Barcelona Energía, which offers local, 100%-renewable energy, has certainly represented a courageous and ambitious measure which highlights the heart of the fair ecological transition: common control of energy. And the functional superblock pilot in Poblenou has involved an urban-planning experiment with enormous international repercussions, which has demonstrated the feasibility and interest of the ideas of the ecosystemic urban planning that Salvador Rueda has been promoting since the 1990s.

These certainly are *small big steps*. Small because, compared to the dramatic emergencies challenging us by the climate emergency and ecological crisis, they have erred, at best, in being timid, partial and very limited measures. Big because, given the initial situation and *the anthropological correlation of such unfavourable forces*, they have represented a wedge in very rocky neo-liberal consensuses. Let us now analyse this ambivalence in a little more detail.

Paco Segura, a member of Ecologists in Action and an expert in atmospheric pollution, declared in March 2019 that Central Madrid had somewhat improved the dramatic situation of public health seen in Madrid. But it was not enough by a long way. According to Madrid-based environmentalists, Carmena's action here has been 'too slow and too spineless' (Segura, 2019), with an exasperating procedure. The tone is partly justified: even in Central Madrid, the legal limits for air pollution continued to be overshot. And Central Madrid is only one of some thirty measures contemplated under Plan A, although most remain unimplemented.

Stringent analyses of social movements are understood when achievements and challenged are checked. If we confine ourselves to the atmospheric side, and according to data from the European Environmental Agency, in 2014 alone the chilling number of premature deaths caused by air pollution in Europe came to 480,000, some 31,000 of whom were Spanish (EEA, 2017). Two figures which deserve to be written out and read again and again for being absolutely implausible and radically shocking: half a million deaths a year in the EU, some thirty thousand of which in Spain. In other words: pollution is causing a genocide every year in Europe. And a figure in Spain that is three times higher than the total number of deaths from the civil conflict in Yemen. Using this expressionist, almost demagogic language, is interesting for the purposes of checking, however, whether social perceptions on this issue are radically different. It is enough to compare the treatment of air pollution victims with that of other scourges which have managed to be construed as official social problems: gender violence, traffic accidents, crime and terrorism.

Fortunately, there is already social consensus on the absolutely intolerable crime that is death of a woman at the hands of her partner. And that no political cause justifies murder as a means to achieving an end. But the total for all these pale in significance compared to the annual number of

pollution-related deaths. While there is no intention here to play down the importance of these problems, the comparison is sociologically revealing when it comes to the prevailing collective mentalities. Those shaping the limits and possibilities of public debate, and therefore of political action. Another example of the big contradiction dividing us IN THE 21ST CENTURY: after forty years of neo-liberalism, which were forty years lost for taking on an eco-social crisis we knew almost everything about in the 1970s, what is ecologically necessary is *almost* politically impossible.

Barcelona's social movements speak in similar terms of Barcelona Energía: recognising its progress, the main criticisms point to its short-sightedness, highlighting the need to 'go beyond distribution by recovering the distribution networks, a policy of rates that incentivise saving and prioritise energy vulnerability' (Casadevante *et al.*, 2018: 214), in addition to a strong initial controversy over waste incineration, an option that was eventually abandoned. If we only have one or two decades to make a renewable energy transition under democratic control, and the pace of change is the one we have known from created tools such as Barcelona Energía, it will be impossible to meet the Paris Agreement.

As for the pilot project of the Poblenou superblock, the assessment is much the same. Outstanding results have been obtained, strengthening the initial hypothesis: a new functional urban-planning cell, with a number of vehicles in a perimeter similar to the one that existed before its implementation, but with car-free inner streets, reclaimed for community life and with a notable improvement in environmental quality. But one new superblock, added to the previous other three (one in El Born and two in Gràcia), is a far cry from the pace and scale of implementation for a city whose proposed Urban Mobility Plan is aimed at reaching 500 interventions.

It is true that the Poblenou superblock had to face a significant local resident focus of resistance to the change, conveniently extended by the media war of attrition against the Barcelona en Comú government. This certainly helped to prevent the government's minimum-targets plan for the 2015-2019 term of office, which had been developing at least four more superblocks (in Hostafrancs, Horta, Les Corts-Maternitat and Sant Antoni), from being implemented within the deadline. Having broken up this focus of resistance through citizen participation, but above all through the project's empirical success, it will speed up Barcelona's transformation under the parameters of ecosystemic urban planning. But there is doubtless room here for the pessimistic reflection that Jorge Riechmann raises over the case of Gorona del Viento, the project that supposedly grants renewable-energy sovereignty to the island of El Hierro: 'over three decades to do by halves what ought to have been quickly implemented in the 1970s... And in the end, all we have is just another pilot project' (Riechmann, 2019: 18). The most important environmentalism reveals that a spirit of gradual reform no longer fits the times as they are, which are of extreme historical emergency.

But that half-empty glass assessment can and must be weighed against the half-full glass approach: the triumph that these measures have represented on the cultural-war map. What had been an extravagant demand from radical movements four years ago is now on the official agenda of two global cities, and is already being tried out as embryonic public policies that have it, which Errejón and García Linera have called 'relative irreversibility' (Errejón and Linera, 2019).

Let us continue studying the case of Central Madrid, which is an especially interesting ecological urban-policy experiment for two issues at least: because it has been inherited by a government team with a different political orientation, intent on dismantling it, with little success at present, and because it has the advantage of facing the ecological crisis from this narrative proximity offering the notion of health. Perhaps the difficulties that the Almeida government has come across for dismantling the Central Madrid legacy can be explained by the second of these issues. While climate change refers us to the narrative of something that always seems to happen elsewhere, tropospheric ozone peaks are stinging our eyes and throats. While the exhaustion of basic resources only scares us when expressed in an indicator as deceptive as prices, the black fog in the Madrid sky is an image that the whole world recognises as a nightmare postcard. Central Madrid's popular success hides key clues to construing majority environmentalist proposals.

This success is especially significant for the symbolic role of cars in the anthropological model of the Great Acceleration created after the Second World War. The anthropologist Marvin Harris used to say there was no need to go to India to see a sacred cow. All we had to do was look at a car from outside our home window. In many aspects, our relationship with cars appears more like totem worshipping than the rational use of a potentially useful item. As with other prevailing collective forms of behaviour in capitalism, our addiction to cars has a little to do with free decision and a lot to do with structural blackmail. Direct blackmail because the structural deficiencies in public transport and intense daily mobility required by today's labour market is a perverse combination. Even in Madrid's metropolitan area, which has the densest network of public-transport infrastructures in the country, cars are the only option for many when it comes to balancing work hours and minimum time for family life (especially, perhaps, in Madrid's urban model, whose two decades of government headed by Esperanza Aguirre has offered an imitation of North American *suburbia*). Indirect blackmail given that the car industry has not spent billions of euros in advertising over decades without its psychological conditioning having made its mark. So, for an important part of the population, freedom continues to look very much like driving a car through a solitary road in a landscape of untamed beauty. And with this desire, as with any other, the slate cannot be wiped clean. Desires are also changing, but over a low flame and never by the imperative of a municipal decree.

Between the devil of pollution and the deep blue sea of such blackmail, which the political opposition invariably exaggerates, the resulting squeeze summarises the dangerous challenge of urban sustainability: for example, how to reclaim the city for the people, away from cars, reducing pollution and emissions, and not dying politically in the attempt. To inhabit this narrow space with some transformational yield, the City Councils of Change have had to obtain a doctorate in the art of contradiction.

Eco-social public policies are condemned to be like a Necker cube, that famous optical illusion whose perceived depth remains ambiguous until the observer decides how they wish to see it. Approached from planetary boundaries, they almost all fail. But when approached from political boundaries imposed by a very settled neo-liberal hegemony, the successes are notable. Let us remember here that neo-liberalism is an ideology no longer solely composed of myths and emotions made up of metaphors but also a *discurso encarnado* in infrastructures as inflexible as the closed architecture of the new Urban Development Action Plans (PAUs) or the territory's arrangement. The political value of the breaches opened by projects such as Central Madrid and Barcelona Energía in the prevailing conventional wisdom has to be assessed from the recognition of this double limitation: ecology and policy.

2. A short-circuit in municipalism as a hegemonic process
Both Madrid and Barcelona have experienced frustration, or at least parking in administrative limbo, of some of their star measures in eco-social transition. The most striking case in Barcelona is its municipalisation of water: a tough legal battle at the Supreme Court was finally won by Agbar, the company that has been managing Barcelona's water through a century-long concession granted during the Francoist dictatorship. But at least the continuity of the government of change in Barcelona can still get this measure to work, even if the margin for manoeuvre has been substantially narrowed.

In Madrid, however, the coalition government led by the PP and Ciudadanos has not only put an end to that city's municipalist experience but also put special emphasis on a scorched-earth policy on the Ahora Madrid government's work. Bringing the Central Madrid project to an end was the electoral *casus belli* of the right. Photos of Almeida and Villacís celebrating the de-pedestrialisation of Calle de Galileo are a semiotically perfect declaration of intentions.

Significantly, for the specific case of Central Madrid, the dismantling could not be carried out and the promise has so far failed to be kept. The reason was intense citizen opposition, whose biggest victory were two court rulings that overturned the moratorium in fines, decreed by Almeida's City Council, which had effectively been abolishing Central Madrid's low-emissions zone. The

infringement proceedings opened since 2010 by the European Commission against Madrid for its systematic failure to comply with the legal limits set for NO2 pollution and which threatens to become a million-euro fine offers little margin of manoeuvre for the reversal. By contrast, the MARES project has been dismantled. MARES was a big social economy incubator created by Madrid City Council, with European funds, to promote a change of production model, which set its employment sights on the ecological transition (renewable energies, agro-ecology, mobility, circular economy and so on) and the feminist care economy.

The capacity of these two projects' differential resistance offers clues on the level of hegemonic power of the various core ideas of the environmentalist discourse. And let us remember that the hegemony, in the Gramscian sense of the term applied here, does not consist so much in promoting for example the partisan alienation of a favourable judiciary (appointing similar judges) as in establishing interpretative perspectives on social issues which, being ideologically partisan, have such a capacity for bringing together different demands that may end up as something of general interest. So damage to public health is starting to become an intolerable externality within the prevailing conventional wisdom which is the raw material of the political game. Enough to be able to establish an ambitious jurisprudence attempting to prevent it. But promoting an economy where internal democracy, gender equality and sustainable production are distinguishable features meriting reward is still not enough. That is why Central Madrid is resisting and MARES was easily closed down.

The reference to the Gramscian notion of hegemony proves essential given that the deficiencies in the Councils of Change's eco-social transition cannot ignore the sort of short circuit suffered by municipalism during the hegemonic process it was starting. The 2019 elections demonstrated that the municipalist proposal failed to win a political majority for its city model and style of governance. In other words, they were unable to maintain the tension typical of a hegemonic political project. Which explains the brevity of its consideration by the government, with Barcelona the exception, whereas Madrid's experience proved especially hard in political terms. On 26 May 2019, Barcelona en Comú lost five percentage points of the vote and a councillor, but even weaker politically, and by exploiting an anomaly in the dynamics of political blocks which can only be explained in the specific context of Catalonia, it managed to bring continuity to its project. The Más Madrid platform, after losing one percentage point, ended up with one less councillor, and despite being the City Council where the forces of change kept the highest level of votes after Cádiz (30 %), lost the mayor's office.

A common pattern emerges from the small selection of measures analysed, which can furthermore be extrapolated to most municipalist public policies relating to the right against the climate emergency. There has been a genuine proliferation of strategies, agreements, motions and participatory processes over the last four years, and in many places apart from Madrid and Barcelona, in such issues as urban agro-ecology, energy sovereignty, community composting, cyclist mobility and renovation. In general, we can conclude that municipalism achieved significant advances in many eco-social-transition tasks, so long as we accept one small qualification: their transformations have failed in remaining trapped inside a certain symbolic status. As essentially cultural victories with little verifiable impact in statistical terms beyond a few over-represented experiments in the very image of the city model that was meant to be planned.

As we have argued, that result is logical given the context of the correlation of anthropological forces it was starting from. And in a certain sense, it matches the political hegemony's prototype circuit. Álvaro García Linera established that the transformation hegemonic process can be summarised in a system of stages he calls Gramsci-Lenin-Gramsci (García Linera, 2017). First, by disputing the unifying symbols, the discourse is at its most linguistic, softest level, with victories that are intellectual, cultural and moral. Then there is a naked clash of forces resolved by the monopoly of power. And once the effective control of the State's structures has been consolidated, a Gramscian stage comes back into play, in cultural-domain building, but from the mass-intervention tools offered by legislation, state budgets and public policies. This is, by intervening in the most objectual and harshest levels of the discourse. This system presents blurred boundaries

in pluralistic democratic societies (the Lenin stage never boils down to electoral dates, but goes on at least during a good part of a government's first term of office), but broadly continues to be a valid path.

If we use this system as an interpretative tool, we will be able to conclude that municipalism failed to complete the hegemonic process. It suffered a short circuit between the Gramsci stage that burst into the scene from 2014-2015 and the Lenin stage during the term of office, which prevented it from consolidating itself as a sound alternative governance. That is why its achievements, especially in the eco-social realm where its support base was smaller, continue to present this style of superficial re-writing of the city's semiotic code condemning some transformational social movements. And that for ambitious transformational expectations, it can be confused more with political marketing than with transformational political action.

A satisfactory explanation of the hegemonic short circuit of municipalism is yet to be given, and it will be crucial for having an assessment of the political cycle that first began with the 15M anti-austerity movement. Three complementary hypotheses are briefly explained which, among many other things, could be interesting to explore by adding a specifically eco-social approach:

• Like a cascade effect, municipalism suffered from the loss of hegemonic power of the political space of change in the national arena. The old adage that municipal elections are never local elections has continued having its effect on electoral behaviour in the Spanish State. And in that regard, it is hard to explain the initial drive of municipalism, but also its decline, without the carry-over effect of the Podemos phenomenon, whose fall has been practically as fast and worthy of study as its meteoric rise. That story is yet to be researched, let alone written. We will need to understand the resilience of Spain's Regime of 1978, regarding which a fatal constitutional crisis was presumed, perhaps hastily. But more interesting, from a perspective committed to social transformation, is understanding what happened within the political space of change so we can learn from the experience. We cannot add much here, only an important consideration that has tended to be ignored in the most immediate analyses. Besides interpersonal conflicts, malfunctions that have been shown to be inherent in certain types of organisation, disputes over the control of the machinery between political families, quarrels over tactical support and clashes between incompatible strategies and their various costs of opportunity, Podemos was subjected to a harrowing theoretical dispute: whether or not its foundational hypothesis was valid. That is, the populist hypothesis, which assumed, among other 'parent killings' that the political topology of the 20th century, the left-right divide, had become obsolete after 2008. Like a single-use weapon, the populist hypothesis was abandoned after the general elections of December 2015, with Podemos gradually sliding towards a conventional post-communist political niche, comparable to what existed in Spain and Europe before the 15M anti-austerity movement.

• In its government tasks, municipalism underestimated that central element which, according to Clausewitz, distinguishes real war from war in theory: friction. Governing a city, managing a public administration, also implies 'movement in a resistant element' (Clausewitz, 2017: 120). Which was made especially hard given the inexperience over the political spaces where the municipalist commitment had been created. Co-governing with partners hardly predisposed to collaboration and much more skilled in the institutional game and its tricks, absence of legal and technical expertise, little experience in negotiating, ignorance of the 'profound institution', lack of harmony with the civil service networks running the real and informal functioning of the administrative machine, the saboteur and highly belligerent attitude of certain interest groups, etc. As a general rule, municipalism had to go through harsh climatisation to a relatively new and largely hostile political ecosystem, under enormous pressure from the opposition (exaggerated insofar as the oligarchies understood that City Councils were the prologue to an assault on national power), and limited by some self-imposed mortgages resulting from a certain ingenuous anti-political romanticism, very close to the emotive atmosphere of the 15M anti-austerity movement. The case best illustrating the latter was the decision, taken by many municipalist groups in government, to reduce the quota of advisers and positions of trust that

legally corresponded to them as a gesture of rejection of the *habitus* typical of old-school politics.

• Besides external friction, municipalism had to support an intense inner friction, caused by the high participatory expectations of its political origins. The structural gap within this framework between supporters and leaders, which is universal and inherent in every institutional policy, acquires an intensity that can end up deeply destabilising. Whereas supporters, especially those politically socialised in social movements, usually maintain maximalist, impatient stances and are more predisposed towards feeling wronged from gestures with a strong symbolic impact on their identity system, a municipal government can only function by applying a certain pragmatism, capacity of assignment and a certain strategic patience. This gap is inevitably widened owing to the fact that government and grassroot political supporters are subject to very different times, responsibilities and rewards. As for range of specific goals, authorities are antediluvian monsters and grass-roots movements flexible players. But the time for everyday work, especially when linked to institutional management, is devilishly fast, whereas the response times of the grassroots supporters are necessarily slow. This makes it hard to delegate tasks among supporters that the leaders tend to perceive as ineffective. As the responsibility for failing in one or other area is radically distinct, the leadership tends to distrust grassroot supporters and monopolise tasks according to the perceived weight of their responsibility. This is understood by grassroot supporters as a closure that undermines the democratic quality of a political space. Add to that the fact that there can never stop being a very important division between leadership and grassroot supporters in the realm of reward (some are professionals spurred on by a salary, others are volunteers driven by ethics) the vicious circle of delegation-disaffection almost always tends to grow. Finding a third way that productively manages the tension between the technocratic bunkerisation that bypasses participation, and the dysfunctional radicalism imposed by oversized activist minorities, is a need of the municipalist political culture that is very far from being resolved. And which in eco-social public policies can end up especially inflammable, given the enormous distance between the ecologically urgent and the politically feasible.

3. Conclusions: the limits of municipalism
Two ideas frame the assessment of the short summer of municipalism in eco-social transition and the fight against climate change: i) the results have been ambivalent and ii) although the eco-social transition implies some specific difficulties, its performance cannot be detached from reflection on the general limits of the municipalist commitment.

It is clear that a qualitative leap was made in the eco-social agenda between 2015 and 2019, which shifted from the margins to the centre of the political debate. The avant-garde action of the City Councils of Change contributed to that in key issues, such as air quality, sustainable mobility and citizen control of energy. There is no doubt that the 2015-2019 period has seen an explosion of global climate conscience and, starting with the Paris Agreements and reaching a 2019 that was a landmark in the history of environmentalism, with the Greta phenomenon bursting on the scene, the mass civil-disobedience Extinction Rebellion actions and the big worldwide strike for climate, represented a favourable tailwind. But for all those advances, no city in the world today is a sustainable entity, especially if we make a comprehensive analysis of its material energy metabolism: the European *Green Smart City* would not be possible without China's conversion into a Dickensian hell. The 'geopolitical illusion' factor, which hides the processes of outsourcing in the extraction of minerals and CO_2 emissions, cannot be ignored if we wish to have a complete perspective of what the ecological transition implies.

Sustainability, as defined and applied in the strong sense that requires confronting the climate emergency and ecological crisis, and, what is more, modulated through social justice and feminism, is a political goal that is launching a change to everything that is profoundly revolutionary in every aspect of our social life. Taking it on compels us to disrupt not just well-organised economic interests, which are always capable of defending themselves, such as those of the energy oligopoly or fossil-fuel lobby. To become sustainable cities and societies, we have to

change the basic rules of the economic game that has prevailed over the last 200 years. Strongly affect the current distribution of power and wealth. Deploy immense technological substitutions that have a strong political component in themselves. Intervene in very deep and unmanageable strata for short-term policy of our metabolic reproduction in its three dimensions: the techno-material, the social and the symbolic. We are referring to such tasks as dismantling the *infrastructure hardware* that is inherited by our regional arrangements, opening up alternatives to the structural dynamics that are holding our economies ransom to permanent expansion and deconstructing the most profound mythologies of our anthropological framework, as the 'technolatry' or the myth of progress.

Environmentalism points out with reason that in a finite planet a sustainable society will have to give rise a post-growth paradigm, to a stationary state economy. By historical comparison, the socialist enterprise, which aimed to transform practically everything and whose study is a must-stop for considering a post-capitalism worthy of the 21st century, never attempted anything as revolutionary as to stop growing, and cannot teach us anything in that respect. As we move on blindly, without inspiring models, in building an exciting utopian policy formulated from a certain idea of material austerity in contrast to the idea of abundance that has dominated almost all the proposals of social reform during the industrial age. An especially complex work when neo-liberalism has a libidinal economy, a social configuration of desires, based on an eco-cidal waste of resources, in a good part of the world's population (in emerging countries in the form of a framework of expectations). Riechmann gave a perfect definition of the neo-liberal social contract: a *low cost* world, with cheap flights, meat and mobile phones, within reach of the masses, having a gigantic ecological impact spreading towards others or the future, in exchange for precarious lives and economic insecurity.

It is easy to conclude, therefore, that negotiating the steep divide between the ecological emergency of the 21st century and coordination of transformational political hegemonies is an *especially* big task for our cities. And this is occurring because, in one of these necessary types of excitement required by policies, the municipalist commitment overestimated its capacity for historical impact. The short summer of municipalism knew little in the most activist environments because too much was certainly being required of it.

Municipalities control a minimum part of public wealth in the Spanish State, below 15%. They have little authority in the matters of law and tax and their effective exercise of such authority is often dependent on financial transfers and agreements with higher authorities under unclear criteria, giving rise to every type of political arbitrariness unless, in turn, the upper echelon is politically controlled. The public network on which the Governments of Change worked is also a public network abused by the vicious cycle of neo-liberalism: dismantled from a decade of cuts, reduced from two decades of privatisation processes, therefore inflexible and castrated, which feeds back the perverse need of embracing neo-liberal recipes as a lifeboat in the middle of a shipwreck. The clearest example is the connection between municipal funding and the sale of land: an institutional design which, as confirmed by Naredo (2010), is one of the cursed driving forces feeding the speculative quick-rich economy, political corruption and the urban-planning melanoma destroying our regions. Because of their electoral weakness, the Governments of Change have been working as well either as a minority or in coalition governments, which has caused many situations of fragmented power, intensifying the dysfunctional fragmentation that public authorities are already prone to. And not only that but the short summer of municipalism has been confined through the draconian and partisan intervention of the Ministry of Finance and the austerity policies championing the Budgetary Stability Act.

In this 'resistant element', if we take up the Clausewitz image once more, and with such weak weapons, leading processes of profoundly revolutionary change, as is the ecological tradition, can only be justified from certain *magical democratic thought*: closeness to the people and possibilities of high citizen participation will make good all the deficiencies. This is a widespread enthusiasm, never explicit but strongly present in some transformational spaces and which is no mean matter as it shapes certain political provisions that are determinant. Namely: consider that the immense

social force that plebeian and working-class outbreaks can end up putting into play during the great revolutionary times is not quickly dispelled. And which can therefore act as a sort of fusion reactor which puts the inexhaustible energy of the stars at the service of transformational policies. By analogy with the comic, Asterix, one of the unconscious myths of the municipalist commitment was the belief that making democracy more profound was a kind of magic potion that gave superpowers to the Gaulish village besieged by Roman troops.

This brief review of its limits is not intended to deny the transformational potential of municipalism. Cities with progressive Governments working in a global network with common agendas have proved themselves to be players with an interesting political capacity. According to Jessop's analysis (2017), nobody can think now of political power in the old-school terms created under the Treaty of Westphalia, as if it were 'something' concentrated in the government of an air-tight spatial enclosure bounded by frontiers. Political power is a highly complex, multi-level social relationship which allows disputes and is partially exercised by hoards of very diverse players and social agencies. Alliances between big cities, especially those with an international reputation, have been playing a leading role in the civilisation change that is being contested today on the matter of ecological transition, but also feminist public policies, advances in the redistribution of wealth and the creation of new common assets.

But the State in the classic sense is not beating a retreat. It would be an enormous political mistake to think that. And its role is proving to be especially irreplaceable in what García Linera called the *Lenin stage*: the move from an essentially symbolic cultural-hegemony construction, based on narratives, to an actual cultural, systematic, reproductive and unconscious hegemony, based on the material weight of the law, infrastructures and administrative and economic routines, in short, the hegemony that allows directing in your favour the drag effect of a good part of social inertia. The task ahead at least is analogous to the neo-liberal revolution, with transformations of a scope and speed similar both in their socio-economic and in their anthropological aspects. Does anyone believe the neo-liberal revolution could have been promoted only through the London and New York mayor's offices without the governments of Thatcher and Reagan?

In sum, the experience of the short summer of municipalism strengthens the following idea: the transformational governments of our cities can substantially improve the lives of their citizens in whatever is within their reach. For example, breathing in air that poses no public health problems. That is valuable in itself. But facing social transformations of greater scope, such as solving the climate emergency, municipalism operates more as one of the best popular tools in the initial Gramscian stage of the hegemonic process. That is, the stage of the cultural dispute over the meanings shared by social majorities. But this will be short if the political project inspiring it does not succeed in climbing the steps up the higher echelons of institutional power. In the future roles that municipalism will be playing within the eco-social transition, it will be important for us to bear in mind this partial, profoundly performative role of the city as a builder of political discourses and feelings that go further. And to learn together how to act as a result better than we have done in the past.

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