Municipalism

Climate change, global finance, the neoliberal state: today’s crises require action on a big scale. And yet fighting for local democracy is – perhaps counter-intuitively – the best chance we’ve got

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Municipalism 2019: An International Exchange
De Montfort University
Municipalism reloaded?

• Is Municipalism really back?

• Municipalism in a city or as a territorialized post-capitalist proposal? as an END or as a MEAN? Parties or grassroots experiences?

• Participatory Democracy or Radical Democracy? Shall we open liberal institutions or shall we recreate social autonomy? who influences whom?

• New political experiences and social laboratories: what can we learn?

• Scaling municipalism: how, where?

• Urban/Rural? Which economies?
Today's Municipalism means diversity
Old traditions, new contexts
sharing tools: sovereignty from below, de-globalization

- **Revisiting Institutions** Public and Social: **OPEN liberal DOORS** + permanent claims for **SOCIAL AUTONOMY** + Social NETWORKING THROUGH NEW Information and communication technology (**ICT**)

- **POPULAR ECONOMY AND RE-LOCALIZATION**

- **CITIZEN'S DEMOCRACY**: PARTICIPATION, ECONOMY

- Confronting **GLOBAL ECOLOGICAL-ECONOMICAL-POLITICAL CRISIS**

- **Resistance** against AUTHORITARIAN POLITICS
Approaching Municipalism

The right for a living

- MUNICIPAL SOCIALISM
- Utopian Socialism → Politics of proximity, co-management
- Dweler’s movement in South Africa
- Free Villages → Transition towns

Radical democracy

- LIBERTARIAN MUNICIPALISM
- Sanctuary cities (USA)
- Housing mov in Spain → New local parties
- New citizen’s networks for food, Social Economy, energy, etc.

Community and Territory

- TERRITORIAL SOCIALISM
- XX African socialism and Ujamaa: self-sufficency from below
- Federalist movement of villages and cities in Spain (Movimiento cantonal) (1869-1973)
- Rojava, Zapatism, Landless mov (MST, Br)
The right for a living
Municipalism in a city: local policies and rights

MUNICIPALISM RELOADED:

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POLITICS FROM **PROXIMITY** (decentralization)

DEFENDING **RIGHTS** FROM BELOW (minimum wage)

TRANSITION TOWNS (local currency)

(social rights for housing, health and education; local public companies)

M. Beatrice Webb
founder of Fabian Society
Radical democracy
Municipalism in cities: radicalize democracy and promote (inter)cooperativism

MUNICIPALISM RELOADED:

RADICALIZE DEMOCRACY + DEMOCRATIZE THE REPUBLIC

MUNICIPALISM AS A NETWORK

DEMOCRATIZE DE (CURRENT) ECONOMY

(INTER-)COOPERATIVISM → THE WE ECONOMY, NOT MY ECONOMY (Mary Mellor)

Co-Management AS A BASIS FOR PUBLIC POLICIES

Implementing social currencies, Networking economies and platforms, cultural co-management at Barcelona, Naples, rural villages
Community and territory

Municipalism as a system: rooted in bioregions, political territories

MUNICIPALISM RELOADED:

LIBERTARIAN SOCIALISM FROM BELOW (zapatism, Kurdistan)

TRANSITION AND COMMONS IN TERRITORIES

COMMUNITARIAN DEMOCRACY (Luis Tapia about Aymaras)

EARTH DEMOCRACY (indigenous traditions in Africa, Asia)
Defining a *Transforming Municipalism*

Set of (public and social) initiatives that work for a sovereignty from below, from a *dual power*:

- **RADICALIZATION OF DEMOCRACY**: development of *social and grassroots institutions* (prevalence of action on the outside)

- **POLITICS OF PROXIMITY**: local agendas oriented towards the *democratization of local (public) institutions*, good and preferent rapport with citizens from local policies (inside action)
  
  (fighting despotic-neoliberal state + boosting eco-feminist transitions)

GOAL: Pursuing sinergies, cooperation and self-sufficiency in order citizens/communities have *equal power over the matters of (local) government* that affect them
Climate change, debtocracy, migrations, extreme right...

Which kind of scaling? How?

Do we need *expanding thousands of* C Plans or *modeling a* Plan B?

The omnipresent *Factor C*: cooperation reproduction

cf: Kropotkin, Ostrom, Razeto, etc.
C-Plans are a necessary condition... and (territorial) municipalism is a good tool

Factor C is already in action

Plan B can't alter the situation
Crossroads

C-Plans are not a sufficient condition...

*municipalism in a city will not tackle the global collapse*

- Can we rely on “Non-parties Parties”?
- *The soil is not the plants, but...* The existing social cycle (i.e. Spain 15M, housing, agroecology) IS A PRE-CONDITION for any real municipalist change
- Local Government or Self-Government?
- Scaling up (majorities, organisations, policies) and side-ways (territorialize, ecological approaches, we-economy)
- *NEW-economies and RE-ruralization... or Barbarism and Eco-fascism*
Can we rely on “non-parties parties”? (Interlinked) Crossroads

- Non-parties are quite often “a new brick on the wall”, a shortcut to “BIG politics” as usual
- They claim they are not the key for social empowerment, but they end up dominating public agendas: media, events, headlines or institutional proposals where participation is not a process form below
WHO FINALLY PUTS THE RULES?

The Local Trap: need of visible changes + burocratic jails + The Overton window (be centered)

Public local government, Co-government or Self-government?

- LOCAL LAWS and PUBLIC COMPANIES involving electricity production and commercialization, water, health care, transportation, etc.
- Minimum LIVING WAGE
- Ensuring Rights from Local Policies
- URUGUAY. MUTUAL COOPERATIVISM FOR HOUSING. BETWEEN social movement AND public technical-financial support from the State, co-management
- BARCELONA. SOCIAL CURRENCY (REC). The purpose of REC is to foster local trade and strengthen community ties among the people living in these neighbourhoods.
- NAPLES. DEPT OF COMMONS. Government Resolution no. 446/2016 has as its objective “the identification of areas of civic importance ascribed to the category of the commons”
- CITIZENS INITIATIVES
- DE-GROWTH
- AGROECOLOGY
- TRANSITIONS TO COMMUNITIES
- NETWORKs against Debtocracy

Is there a higher relevance of initiatives related to “GOOD MANAGEMENT” and “COMPENSATION” in the middle of neoliberal agendas?
Crossroads

Scaling up (majorities, organisations, policies)

- Beyond communitarism: islands for empowered people or Condominiums for cultural Elites are not a solution
- Zapatism: municipal intercooperation
- Barcelona: social-solidarity economies at a bioregional level

Scaling side-ways (territorialize, we-economy and planet's economy)

- Territorialize: rural agroecology in Spain, right to the city, bioregions peri-urban o social economies networks,
- Democratize economies for caring for bodies and ecosystems / Mellor, Shiva: we-approaches and ecological approaches / ecofeminism
Scaling crossroads

First, take care of the soil: prevalence of action on the outside?

Side-ways scaling

and

From-below scaling

as a condition for

Scaling up principles:

legitimacy, experiences and real social push should come from grassroots movements and self-organization

(that is, new commons should orient ADN policies for co-management)

PRINCIPLES: a never-ending TENSION when Scaling up

“they rapidly lose the very qualities and capacities that defined them as transformational” (B. Russell, Beyond the Local Trap...)
No future

- Cities occupy 2% of surface, but they produce 60% of CO2
- Average Food Miles (western cities): 7,000 miles per product
- Footprint: Big cities claim for 100 times its urban surface
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Re-Ruralization or Barbarism

BUT:

- Lack of references in “global cities” networking, weak intercooperation
- Cities determine agenda about agroecology or relocalization economies with little presence of rural or periruban areas
- Rural areas more in touch with conservative focus, young migration, agrarian crisis, etc. → little relevance of new municipalist agenda in rural politics
- Northern cities more focused on municipalism in one village → Territorial and bioregional approaches not relevant.
Municipalism: constant laboratories

- De-Westernize and Building from Economics-Others: Degrowth with justice, Care Economy: Tozepan, Ciudad Futura, Rojava, Barcelona

- Territorialize (neither cities nor citizen's are in the air): what can be learnt from rural municipalism? Degrowth, Relocalization of Systems, Municipalization of Biorregions

- Looking for Paideia (basis and experiences for a broader cultural change): Yellow, brown and green vest movements, who will govern the villages?
First question: going local?

In a world perceived as chaotic and without safe/attractive expectations...

We need systematize learnings, experiences and promote political culture inspired by radicalization of democracy and caring economies:

1) How will we manage to support our **bodies**?

2) Where are my **social links**?

3) How are we going to take care of our **houses**: home and planet?

* Is there room and political will for an ecofeminist transformative agenda from below?
The local trap (revisited)

Go not too radical:
- the Overton window: be politically centered
- the bureaucratic jail and the marketisation of electoral processes

Go for results
- need of visibilize interventions
- daily impact and support long-term participatory, cooperativism and critical dynamics
- improve transparency and radicalization of democracy

Go for real transformations
- Social justice
- Environmental justice
- Gender justice
- Global justice: climate change victims, migration, inequalities
- Intersectional approaches

...AND
How to deal with NL State? What about defending and ensuring social rights? Are we going to open local doors of public politics?
Citizen's laboratories
The necessary condition for municipalism

Local gov at BARCELONE
Feminist city: a city for everyone and a long-term cycle of mobilization

ROSARIO
Projects and movements: Campaign HACER in communities (Let's make it happen in our neighborhoods)
Rural laboratories:
Back to the municipalist basis?

ORENDAIN, Basque Country

- Energy: self-sufficiency
- Internet: a public company
- Support new housing promoting local expenditure
- Assambleary budgets

NADAL, Logroño, Spain

- “A caring community”
- Cooperativism for food, services, leisure...
- Recovery of common land
- Supporting networks for international solidarity
The people’s economy of Tozepan

Mexico

- Scaling up: 300,000 families, food cooperative
- Scaling side ways: cooperativism in housing, health, education; 80% sold in the region
- Radical Democracy: traditional and assamblearian ruling
The people’s economy of Rojava

*Kurdistan*

“Economic autonomy is a democratic form of economy. The bases are an ecologically-viable industry and a communal economy. The limits posed to industry, progress, technology, production and property – these are the limits within which an ecological and democratic society will prosper”

Öcalan, A.

*Democratic life with woman as the basis of equality and freedom is the essence of life itself*, Association of the women of Kurdistan, 2015, pg. 37-38
The people’s economy of Rojava

AGRICULTURE

Profit distribution in the co-op:

The agricultural institution receives around 25% share

The commune’s share is 25% (Health, education...)

Members of the co-op receive 50% share (the actual share is 65% but 15% is given to the commune).

SOME INDUSTRIAL COOPERATIVES

Small and Medium-Sized Industrial Co-operatives are conducted by Coop and Commune:

- Public market co-operative: 240 members
- Electrical cables co-operatives.
- Generators co-operative

1. Mineral water bottles co-operative: 992 members
2. Oils co-operative: 1250 members
3. Fuel stations co-operative: 100 members
4. Real estate construction co-operative: 124 members
TRANSVERSALIZE, IN TRANSITION

Barcelona Activa project:

- citizen empowerment
- reshaping the balance between neighbourhoods
- including SSEconomy

TERRITORIALIZE

- A surrounding belt of Cities working at the Network for Social-Solidarity Economy

A STRONG (PREVIOUS) SOCIAL NETWORKING:

- Barcelona Sostenible
- Pam a Pam
- Reruralitzem
- Eix Muntanya
- XES
- Xarxeta...

- INCREASING 80 Coops per year!

A ECONOMY FROM AND FOR BELOW?

B-MINCOME is a pilot project that fights against poverty and inequality in disadvantaged areas of Barcelona. The economic collaboration received by B-MINCOME, where 25% of these contributions will be transformed this May into REC (Real Economy Currency). REC is a cryptocurrency based on Blockchain
Degrowth conflicts and municipalism: who is going to pay the bill?

A century for (colorfull) vests

Yellow
CLASS Struggle
RURAL
and extreme right
(with libertarian notes)
*Gilet Jaunes, France*

Green
ECOLOGIST
*Fridays for Future, Western*

Brown
Not in My Back Yard (NIMBY)
Demonstration against dismantling nuclear power station
*Say Yes to Life (Alive Station), Spain*
Scaling UP and SIDE-WAYS from a Ecofeminist Basis? Territories and confederation

“Confederation' should be conceived as layers of democracy, from the neighborhood to the worldwide. The defining principle of a confederal system is not community autonomy, but interdependence”

‘Dark municipalism' - the dangers of local politics
The Symbiosis Research Collective, 2018

“Bookchin estaba opuesto a toda jerarquía, pero Ocalan le da una importancia singular a la opresión de las mujeres”

Janet Biehl, 2018

“The radical democracy that we want to promote re-establishes the creative force of political innovation as a fundamental human attribute. It bases social life on the production and reproduction of an inexhaustible diversity, and not on a manipulated consensus”

Foro Mundial de las Alternativas, The Bamako Appeal, 2006
Transforming Municipalisms to come?

“The assumption that what currently exists must necessarily exist is the acid that corrodes all visionary thinking.”

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