



HERE WE GO!

Hey everybody!

After 9 months of preparation, it's finally the departure. We left France 4 days ago for our **first destination: Florence.**



We planned to visit more than **20 cities in 9 different countries:** Italy, Belgium, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Croatia, Serbia, Hungary and Spain.

Our goal: To meet actors who are experimenting some **radical and inclusive forms of democracy with the aim of reappropriating power and resources by citizens.**

Our name: "CC-CoRDE" for "Climate Change, Commons and Radical Democracy in Europe."

The project is based on a triple observation: Ecological Emergency, Social Crisis and Democratic Denial.

ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCY

If The Paris Agreement (2015) aims to contain global warming "well below 2°C" or even to 1.5°C in 2100 compared to the industrial era, the current commitments of the States lead us at best to a warming of + 2.8°C in 2100. But in reality, the policies currently in place lead to a world at +3.2°C in 2100.

SOCIAL CRISIS

For the past 30 years, inequality has been growing on a global scale. In 2021, the wealthiest 10% of the world's population held more than 75% of the world's wealth (2nd World Inequality Lab report, 2021). Voter turnout is plummeting and the far right is gaining strength in every country in Europe.

DEMOCRATIC DENIAL

The French government's used the antidemocratic article 49.3 of the constitution to adopt a pension reform, even though it caused the largest social mobilization in 28 years in the country. One can also think of the mega-basin projects, constructed for the irrigation of conventional agricultural crops, which are a total ecological nonsense, not submit to any democratic debate.

The ecological question is systemic. Answering it requires a radical change in our practices. It is urgent to impulse a social, feminist and economic transformation of our societies. It has become vital to go beyond the productivist paradigm on which our economy is based. In this context, degrowth becomes inevitable. These transformations must be decided collectively to avoid falling into a "green dictatorship". For this reason, it seems to us essential to re-politicize the commons and to reappropriate our power to act.

To decrease economically, we must first of all "rethink" (Serge Latouche). Today, many alternatives that allow us to get out of the simplistic binary visions of "State vs. citizens", "capitalism vs. communism" already exist and show other ways of organizing ourselves by distributing power and wealth to make politics on a human scale.

Therefore, the challenge of our project is to make these initiatives visible, to understand their strengths and limits, to discover new concepts and to see the concrete results.

What democratic spaces allow the construction of a post-growth society?

Whether they are **one-off experiments** or **institutionalised processes**, initiated by citizens or by public institutions, addressing **systemic or targeted issues**, these democratic spaces are many and varied.

They are **multiple** and reflect the different ways in which **public institutions and citizen counter-powers** can be linked, depending on each context.

In order to better **understand the diversity** of these democratic spaces, their **limits**, their **real impacts** and their **potential complementarities**, we wanted to go and meet the different actors who are experimenting with them.

One democratic tool, which we thought would be interesting to study, is the **citizens' assemblies** set up by the **public institutions**. The European Network on Citizens' Climate Assemblies (KNOCA) refers more than a hundred assemblies at national and local levels. Some assemblies are currently underway, such as in Berlin and Bologna, where the Italian association [Prossima Democrazia](#) is accompanying its implementation following a mobilisation by Extinction Rebellion. A permanent convention on Climate at the level of the "Brussels-Capital" region started in 2023 and mixed deliberative commissions bringing together elected representatives and citizens have been deployed in the French-speaking parliament of Brussels since 2020.

In order to succeed in bringing **structural changes and influencing public action**, citizens are also trying to deal with **legal tools**. In Hamburg, for example, we are going to meet the citizens who initiated a municipal referendum that led to the remunicipalisation of the electricity network. In Italy, a national referendum on water in 2011 prevented its privatisation and initiated other legal advances on the **management of the commons**. Regulations and pacts for collaboration between the administration and citizens exist in several Italian cities.

The potential commons are numerous, whether they are immaterial or material resources such as land, agriculture, energy, water or even the mode of governance and "co-activities". Their **reappropriation** appears essential to **emancipate ourselves from market logics** and **regain autonomy and power to act**. The energy production cooperatives in Germany and the struggle of the workers' collective ex-GKP near Florence to transform their former car company into a cooperative allowing for an ecological reindustrialisation are examples of this.



"The commons are not just small-scale projects to improve everyday life. They are a seminal vision for reimagining our future together and reinventing our social organisation, economy, infrastructure, politics and the power of the state itself."

David Bollier, Silke Helfrich,
Free, Fair, and Alive:

The Insurgent Power of the Commons, 2019

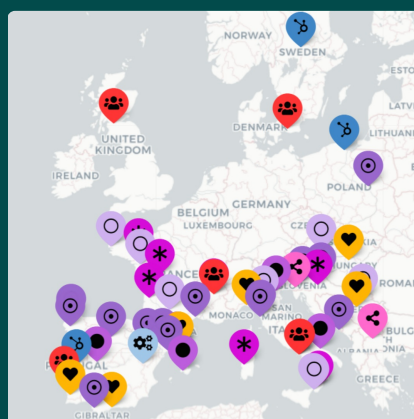
Considering the taking of power at the local level as a major strategic issue, the **municipalist movement** is another object of study of this trip. According to the European Municipalist Movement (EMN), municipalism "represents a promising way of building political power from zero by challenging the management of institutions and experimenting, with radical forms of democratisation and feminisation, the functioning of institutional politics". Since the Spanish municipal elections of 2015, the movement has been experiencing a Europe-wide dynamic leading some success in several cities such as Poitiers or Zagreb. However, the municipalist movement does not stop at the electoral calendar: *"This movement is indeed both social and political. It is based precisely on this capacity for intermediation, for linking these two worlds, for drawing from society the constituent forces of a political community capable of exerting constructive tension on the public institution, with or without representatives on the inside"* Elisabeth Dau. We are going to meet municipalist organisations in power and others that are constituting themselves as a counter-power, as in the cities of Belgrade, Berlin or Malmö.

With a strong local base, municipalist initiatives are open to the world, connected to each other in a strong logic of solidarity, sharing and internationalism.

This dimension of **scaling up** can be further explored during our visit to Brussels, where we will meet those who are working for a more radical democracy and for the reappropriation of the commons by citizens at the **European level**.

The links between local and global scales seem essential to accelerate the necessary transformation of our societies. For example, we will exchange with the organisations [REscoop](#) and [Energy Cities](#), which have campaigned for the status of "energy community" to be enshrined in European law.

We will also discuss with members of the [Citizens Take Over Europe](#) coalition, who are campaigning for a permanent European citizens' assembly.



Map of municipalist initiatives

Meetings, and what's next?

By interviewing activists, members of associations, researchers, elected representatives and members of the administration, the aim of our project is to contribute to the meditation of these initiatives, to understand their strengths and limits, to appropriate new concepts and to observe the concrete results.

You will be able to find our investigations in the form of **interviews, articles**

or notes on the [CliMates](#) website, but also on the websites and networks of our **partners** who accompanied us in our reflections as well as in the preparation of our trip: : le [Green European Journal](#), [La Fabrique Ecologique](#), le [European Municipalist Network](#), la [Fondation Danielle Mitterrand](#) ou encore [Remix the Commons](#) et [Fréquence Commune](#).

Thanks to everyone who helped us in any way,

See you soon for our next newsletter!

To follow our trip on social networks:



For any feedback or sharing of initiatives, do not hesitate to send us an email to: legras.lea@gmail.com, cleafache@yahoo.fr, hug.chirol@gmail.com

You can share the link to subscribe to our newsletter around you:

[Newsletter French version](#)

[Newsletter English version](#)



This email was sent to {{contact.EMAIL}}

[Unsubscribe](#)

Envoyé par
 **sendinblue**



REVIEW 1

FLORENCE

12-16th APRIL



Hello everyone!

On this 1st of May (May day), an important day of popular mobilisation, here are some news from our time in Florence. Today, we tell you the story of two initiatives: **Mondeggi Bene Comune** and the **GKN factory**.

The struggle of Mondeggi Bene Comune to be recognized as a common good

Anchored in the territory of the province of Florence, the Mondeggi Bene Comune has been experimenting for about ten years with new ways of producing and living together that place solidarity, self-determination and radical democracy at the centre.

How was the Mondeggi Bene Comune born?



Picture : [Mondeggi Bene Comune blog](#)

The first reflections around the recuperation of Mondeggi's land emerged in 2013 within the Italian network Terra Bene Comune, linked to the peasant movement [Genuino Clandestino](#), in a context of increasing privatisation of public goods.

Located in the town of Bagno di Ripoli, 12km southeast of Florence, Mondeggi is a 200-hectare public agricultural estate abandoned since 2008.

In 2014, the province of Florence and the municipality of Bagno di Ripoli reaffirmed their desire to privatise the land. The main argument justifying the sale was the repayment of the debt of nearly one million euros accumulated during the bankruptcy of the public agricultural company 6 years earlier.

By re-launching agricultural activities that respect the living world and by occupying the site, about fifty citizens opposed the privatisation and demanded access to the land for all.

Mondeggi Bene Comune was formed to defend the reappropriation of public agricultural land for autonomous collective and citizen use. Today it gathers about 300 people around cultural events and agricultural activities such as gardening, wine growing, olive growing, baking, brewing etc. Mondeggi participates in several local markets as well as popular canteens like the one at the Ex-GKN (the former occupied factory of Campi Bisenzio) in support of the mobilised workers.

Although the dialogue with the town hall was very conflictual, the community was able to stay on the site. However, the community was never legalised because some members rejected any collaboration with public institutions and refused to form an association as requested by the city council. However, the legitimacy gained from the population and the actors of the territory allowed them to maintain a balance of power with the city council, preserving them from eviction.

2023: a pivotal year

In a context of post-covid economic recovery, the European Union is financing national recovery and resilience plans (NRRP) based on three main priorities: ecology, competitiveness and social and territorial cohesion.

The municipality of Florence, owner of the site, could benefit from 52 million euros to carry out construction work, provided that certain ecological and social criteria are met. The project would allow the rehabilitation of the buildings as well as better water management in a region highly prone to droughts. The community faced a dilemma: reach an agreement with the city of Florence or risk being evicted.

After several months of discussions, the community of Mondeggi chose to form an association and accepted a co-construction of the project with the town hall. This decision, taken collectively, provoked the departure of a dozen residents, opposed to any form of collaboration with public institutions.

Towards the recognition of Mondeggi bene comune as a common good by the city?

During our visit, we were able to attend an assembly, the first step in a long process of restructuring the internal organisation and governance of the community. These arrangements are necessary for the drafting of a contract with the city, scheduled for the end of May.

The challenge for the community is to be truly involved in the development of the construction work, which should begin in November 2023, and to be able to maintain its activities during the three years of construction.

With this contract, the community of Mondeggi Bene Comune hopes to finally be legally recognized as a common good.

To go further (FR) :



La ferme de Mondeggi : une initiative d'agriculture périurbaine comme bien commun - AgriUrbain.

La ferme de Mondeggi : une expérience de démocratie communautaire à (...) - Métropolitiques.

En Italie, la Zad de Mondeggi cultive le bien commun.

The workers of the GKN factory: From local struggle to national mobilisation, an example of a convergence of struggles

Located on the outskirts of Florence, the GKN factory has been occupied by workers for almost two years. Initiated as a reaction to the massive and illegal dismissal of all the employees in the aftermath of the Covid crisis, this mobilisation is an example of convergence of struggles and the scaling up of a locally based initiative.



"Collettivo di Fabbrica della GKN" - © Andrea Sawyerr

The GKN factory: another victim of deindustrialization

In 1994, the British multinational GKN bought the Fiat factory, and specialised in the production of axle shafts for different car brands such as Stellantis, Fiat or Ferrari. In 2018, the GKN Automotive Group was acquired by the British investment fund Melrose, which plans to divest part of the company's assets.

When we arrived on the site, the old factory had been occupied by workers for a year and a half, while not having been paid for 7 months. The dismissal of July, 9, 2021 is not an isolated case, it occurs in a context of relocation and increasing automation of the means of production. Indeed, as everywhere in Western Europe, Italy has been experiencing a continuous deindustrialization since the 70's.

A mobilisation that brings together struggles and goes beyond the scale

of the factory



© Margherita Capprili

Without any particular economic reason, the 500 workers received an email announcing their immediate dismissal and the closure of the site on July 9, 2021. Only one hour after the announcement, the workers begin to occupy the factory and form a permanent assembly to organise themselves. They were soon joined by other local and national actors such as the Fiom-CGIL union, Fridays for Future, and student movements such as "Studenti di sinistra" ("students of the left") in Florence. A solidarity group "Insorgiamo con i lavoratori GKN" (Let's rise up with the workers of GKN) is created to support and make the struggle visible. Several other actions were then set up: strikes, conferences, concerts and demonstrations. The largest demonstration mobilised 40,000 people in the streets of Florence on September 18, 2021.

Initially, the struggle of the workers and sympathisers was aimed at denouncing the illegitimacy and anti-union character of the dismissal, which did not respect the process of information and consultation. An appeal, filed with the Labor Court of Florence, allowed the dismissal for 3 months.

However, the struggle is not limited to the factory. The workers participated in the general strike of December 16 2021 and in the introduction of an "anti-relocation" amendment voted in the 2022 finance law (an amendment that finally allows the regulation of relocations but doesn't really prevent them).

Thus, the movement around the ex-GKN allows to question more widely the local institutions and the government on the dismantling of the Italian industry and on the deleterious consequences of a deregulated economy.

A culture of self-organisation well established among the workers of the factory

In 2007, a collective of factory workers "Collettivo di Fabbrica" was created to strengthen the participation of workers in the decision-making process of the union. It opposes in particular the work on weekends, the automation of the sector and the deployment of digital tools to control worker performance.

This long-standing involvement of the workers in the life of the factory is at the basis of their very strong capacity for self-organisation and self-management since their dismissal: organisation of the canteen, of the cleaning, setting up of a permanent assembly, constitution of three teams of daily guards, communication etc.

The conversion of the car factory into a photovoltaic panel cooperative:

In 2021, the factory was bought by an investor, Francesco Borgomeo, who was supposed to propose a reconversion plan for the site. As this plan was never presented, the Collective of the GKN factory decided to propose its own "[Business plan for the continuity of employment](#)". This plan was co-written with help of academics from the region (engineers, lawyers, economists, historians, sociologists) and officially presented in March 2022.

Today, the objective for the workers is to form a cooperative to manufacture photovoltaic panels and electric batteries. The process has been patented by

the Milanese start-up Semperampere, and does not use lithium, silicon, cobalt, rare earth or other heavy metals. During our visit on April 15, the workers were meeting to discuss the industrial future of the factory.

To allow the creation of the cooperative a crowdfunding platform has been created. If you want to contribute financially to the struggle, the link is [here](#). Numerous screenings of the film "E tu come Stai?" ("And you, how are you?"), which traces the history of the mobilisation, are organised throughout Europe to collect money and support the movement.



[Crowdfunding website](#)

In the meantime, the next deadlines for the mobilisation are the following:

- The [Legacoop](#) (federation of Italian cooperatives) will study the project of the cooperative ex-GKN and decide whether it can join the federation or not.
- The [CNR](#) (Italian equivalent of the CNRS) must validate the technical feasibility of the project (carried out by the start-up Semperampere)

To go further (FR) :

La lutte des ouvriers de GKN à Florence, entre auto-organisation ouvrière et mobilisation sociale.

>>>>>> *The next steps for CC-CoRDE* >>>>>>

- Naples, where we will focus on the network of common goods (Rete di beni comuni)*
- Bari, where the commons allow the social integration of migrants*
- Rome and its numerous self-managed occupations*

See you soon!

You can find all our newsletters on [Climates website](#).

To follow our trip on social networks:



For any feedback or sharing of initiatives, do not hesitate to send us an email to: legras.lea@gmail.com, cleafache@yahoo.fr, hug.chirol@gmail.com

You can share the link to subscribe to our newsletter around you:

[Newsletter French version](#)

[Newsletter English version](#)



This email was sent to {{contact.EMAIL}}

[Se désinscrire](#)

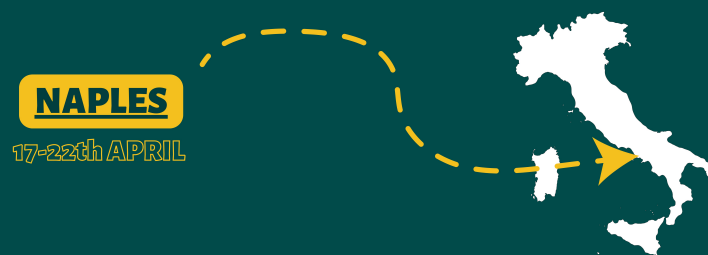
Envoyé par
 **sendinblue**



Hi everyone !

With a slightly different format for this third newsletter, we will detail the history of the Asilo and the beni comuni ("common goods") of Naples.

REVIEW 2



In Naples, we stayed at the Ex Asilo Filangieri renamed "l'Asilo", the first urban commons to have been officially recognized by the municipality. We were able to exchange with Maria Francesca De Tullio, a researcher in constitutional law who has been involved in the Asilo since 2017, as well as with Andréa De Goyzueta, an actor, theatre producer and founding member of the Asilo, who is very involved in the movement of the intermittent workers of the entertainment industry.

The occupation of Ex Asilo Filangieri began in 2012, at a time when the intermittent workers of the entertainment industry had been mobilised for several years and a national debate on the notion of common good was gaining momentum.

The movement of the intermittent workers was born a few years earlier, in a context of democratic and economic crisis. After the 2008 crisis, the Italian government adopted an austerity plan that particularly affected the cultural sector. It eliminated 40% of its public subsidies and privatised two of the national theatres. The intermittent workers of the entertainment sector, whose specific status is not recognized in Italy, decided to mobilise themselves against these precarious measures.

As part of a general movement of privatisation of public goods and services implemented in Italy since the 1990s, the Ministry of Justice launched the Rodotà Commission in 2007. Chaired by the deputy and jurist Stefano Rodotà, the commission's objective was to draft a bill to reform the management of public property. Rather than facilitating their privatisation, the Commission proposed, in the report it submitted in February 2008 [1], to include the common goods in the Civil Code as "common goods, i.e. things that express functional utility for the exercise of fundamental rights and the free development of the human person [and which] must be protected and safeguarded [...] also for the benefit of future generations" [2]. Article 1 considers natural resources such as water, forests, glaciers, protected fauna and flora, cultural, environmental and archaeological goods as common goods.

Thus, when in 2011, during the national referendum on water management [3],

27 million Italians [4] voted against its privatisation, that is 95% of the voters [5], a convergence of students, workers and lawyers emerged and made it possible to establish a real national debate on the common goods. In Rome, in June 2011, workers from all over Italy took over the prestigious Teatro Valle, a national theatre abandoned since 2008. The objective was to reappropriate this public good and make it a common good by ensuring its self-management and openness to all.

Although the work of the Rodotà Commission was not followed up by legislation, due to the fall of Romano Prodi's government [1] in January 2008 [6], the Commission's jurists joined forces with the occupants of the Teatro Valle to launch the "Constituent of the common goods" and to test their reflections in practice [7]. This collective legislative experience allowed for the elaboration of legal tools from below, thus implementing a convergence of cultural and social struggles around the question of the commons. In the specific case of the Teatro Valle, it was envisaged to create a so-called "participation" foundation to legalise the place. Since the prefect did not recognize the foundation project, it was suspended and the occupants ended up leaving the theatre, which remains closed to this day [8].

If the recognition of the Teatro Valle as a place-symbol of the common goods did not succeed, the political experiments that were carried out there, in particular the work of the "Constituent of the common goods", inspired many other experiments in Italy.



Teatro Valle Occupato, Roma
teatro.it



Interview of Andréa De Goyzueta

THE ASILO, A CITIZEN, LEGAL AND SOCIAL EXPERIMENTATION FOR THE REAPPROPRIATION OF THE COMMONS IN NAPLES

After six months of occupation of the Teatro Valle in Rome, many Neapolitans decided to leave the Teatro Valle to gather in Naples and launch the local movement "La Balena". They were joined by writers, musicians, philosophers, students: the whole cultural sphere mobilised itself. On the 2nd of March 2012, they decided to occupy for three days the Ex Asilo Filangieri, a former convent that belonged to the municipality and that was supposed to house the Forum of Cultures of 2013 whose project did not correspond to the vision that the mobilised actors had of culture: "a machine of patronage supported by the UNESCO, born in Barcelona, which in Naples has created a creek of announcements and economic waste" [9]. During the three days of occupation, festive events were organised as well as assemblies on the work of the entertainment workers, on cultural policies and on common goods, initiating a reappropriation by the inhabitants not only of the public space but also of politics. Thanks to the important mobilisation of the population, the occupation was extended for three weeks and a dialogue was established with the new mayor, Luigi De Magistris, on the future of the Asilo. This former magistrate has the distinction of having been elected in May 2011 with a citizens' list, without being attached to a traditional party. He also appointed a deputy for the common goods, Alberto Lucarelli, who participated in the Rodotà Commission [10] and allowed the introduction of the legal category of the common goods among the city's core values.

With the will to make it a place of artistic and cultural practices open to all, the community of the Asilo is working on the drafting of a declaration. The aim is that the city of Naples recognizes the place as a common good on the one hand and the self-governance of its community on the other. To do this, it was inspired by the work of the Rodotà Commission and the Constituent of the common goods, as well as the principle of horizontal subsidiarity provided for in Article 118 of the Constitution, which states that "The State, the Regions, the Metropolitan Cities, the Provinces and the Municipalities encourage the autonomous initiative of citizens [...] for the exercise of any activity of general interest".

It also re-appropriates the Usi Civici (civic uses), one of the sources of Italian law born in medieval tradition. Civic use allows communities to have access to public or private property such as woods or pastures [12]. This use is often reserved for a restricted community and cannot concern new goods, since they must have been used on a customary basis, that is repeatedly over several hundred years. Thus, collective urban civic use is innovative because it guarantees access to and use of reinvested spaces, "both to individuals and to collective subjects, of any legal nature" and is based on principles of self-management, cooperation and mutualism [13].

In April 2012, a municipal deliberation created the "Naples Laboratory for a Constituent of the common goods" whose mission was to make an inventory of the abandoned goods that belong to the municipality for the use of citizens who wished to develop collective projects of social utility. One month later, the Asilo was recognized as a common good by the municipal deliberation n°400 of the 25th of May 2012 [14] which granted its informal community of "immaterial workers" [8] the free use of the building and the assumption of responsibility for water and electricity. As the municipality and the community could not agree on the rules for the use of the space, it took three years of debate before the first declaration of urban and collective civic use was officially recognized in late 2015 [12].

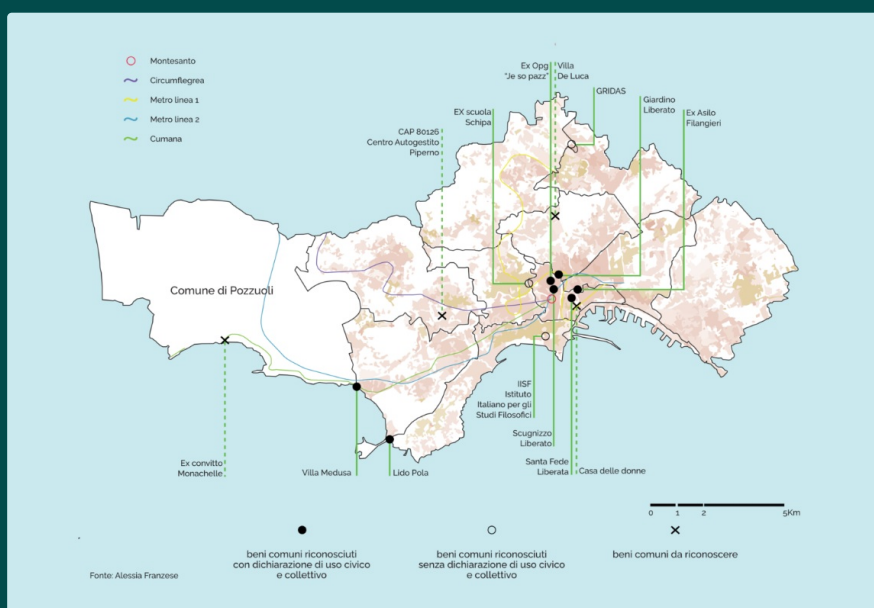
The complete declaration of urban and collective civic use is available on the Asilo website [11]. With it, the self-governance of the community, which is informal in nature, was recognized. At Asilo, all the people who wish to do so can invest in the premises, in the respect of the declaration and on validation of the assembly. This assembly meets every Monday to take decisions in a horizontal way on the basis of consensus. It can discuss the ordinary management of the activities or the political orientation. Thematic tables also meet regularly to develop proposals that will then be submitted to the vote of the assembly.





THE *BENI COMUNI* OF NAPLES

If other abandoned spaces had been reinvested since 2011 by Napolians to develop social and ecological artistic activities accessible to all, the recognition of the declaration of collective urban civic use of the Asilo has allowed it to pass a milestone. Other communities, part of the informal network of *beni comuni* ("common goods") of Naples were able to draft their own declaration and be officially recognized by the mayor. The declaration specific to the space and the uses made of it must in fact be drawn up by the community itself and can be revised, in accordance with the principles of self-governance and openness to all, shared by all the commons of Naples.

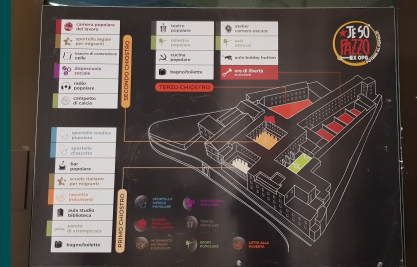


The map of the *beni comuni* of Naples

Today, thirteen "liberated spaces" constitute the network of the Beni Comuni of Naples. Ten have been recognized as common property by the City Council, but only seven have been declared for collective urban civic use.

Although the declaration of collective urban civic use is an important legal achievement for the beni comuni of Naples, the arrival of the new mayor Gaetano Manfredi and his administration in 2021 has created a new challenge (in Italy the municipal administration changes with each election). Gaetano Manfredi, who comes from the neo-liberal centre-left *Partido Democratico* (PD), is in favour of privatising public assets. The new municipality perceives the lack of a formal structure and a "profitable" economic model as immaturity, not as an assumed political choice.

To economic profitability, the *beni comuni* opposes civic profitability [15]. Based on an economy of giving and on the absence of economic barriers to guarantee the inclusion of all, this civic profitability constitutes an "indirect income" for the users of the beni comuni. For the artists of the Asilo, for example, the sharing of spaces and the pooling of production resources allows them to create at a lower cost, to establish professional links and to make themselves known. For the community of Asilo and for the inhabitants of the district, it gives free access to culture, creates social links and helps fight against crime, especially of the youngest.



At the Ex OPJ Je So' Pazzo ("I am crazy"), a former judicial psychiatric hospital, and at Scugnizzo Liberato, a former prison for minors, which are two other beni comuni that we were able to visit, the activities are centred around social issues. For example, there are popular canteens, free sports courses and medical consultations. With their theatres and sports fields, these two places can host various sports, cultural and educational events such as the "Science Day" in which we participated in Scugnizzo Liberato. Legal assistance to migrants is also central to the Ex OPJ, which accompanies people from all over Italy every week.

By responding to the needs of the Neapolitan population that are not taken care of by the institutions, the commons have gained an important political legitimacy. If the legalisation of the beni comuni communities assures them a certain stability, it is their social and political legitimacy that allows them to maintain themselves over time. The numerous international scientific publications on the Naples commons have also helped to legitimise these spaces in the eyes of the new administration, which is mainly composed of university professors.

THE COMMONS : SPACES FOR POLITICAL EXPERIMENTATIONS

The commons are spaces of political experimentation that go well beyond the place invested and its uses. They can allow the emergence of municipal and electoral initiatives, as was the case in Naples for example. In 2015, the Massa Critica platform, set up by citizens and born in Asilo, aimed to influence the public and political debate during the municipal elections. On the basis of popular assemblies organised in different neighbourhoods of Naples, citizen proposals were collected on the platform. These proposals gave rise to issues such as the management of the commons, public services and democracy that could be brought to the attention of candidates [16]. It was with the informal

group Massa Critica that the beni comuni network of Naples was initially born. This group also played a major role in the creation of a "Permanent Observatory on the Common goods" by the municipality in 2012, which aims to evaluate policies on the common goods and participatory democracy. The Massa Critica citizen platform is thus part of a plurality of political modes of action.

More recently, still at Asilo, several people, including Maria Francesca De Tullio, have been working on a proposal for European cultural policies: "Healing Culture, Reclaiming Commons, Fostering Care" [17].

Another experience that emerged within the beni comuni is that of Potere al Popolo. The reflections around the creation of this popular and anti-capitalist left party were born at the Ex OPJ Je so' Pazzo in view of the parliamentary elections of 2018.

COMMONS, COMMON GOOD AND URBAN COMMONS

According to Elinor Ostrom, an economist specialised in the governance of the commons and the first woman to win the Nobel Prize in Economics (2009), there is no clear definition of the commons that can account for their plurality. However, she identifies three major elements that constitute them: a resource, a community and the rules of access and use that it sets for itself [18]. More than a resource or a good, a common can be considered as a "common action", that is, a way of doing and deciding together. "With the commons, we are dealing with the emergence of a completely different form of social organisation: one in which people participate directly in the definition, elaboration and production of the uses that concern them directly," according to Christian Laval and Claire Brossaud.

In Italy, the term "common good" is often used to designate a common, which can be confusing. Using the term "common good" risks objectifying the common and does not allow us to account for the social process at work within it. This confusion can be explained by the work of the Rodotà Commission, which played an important role in the emergence of the commons movement in Italy [8].

The beni comuni of Naples illustrate this tension between different terms and concepts. If they are literally identified with "common goods", they nevertheless draw their foundations from their activities and not from the ownership of the good. They define themselves as spaces of emancipation for the inhabitants around common practices of "urban and human regeneration". Born from acts of civil disobedience, the occupation of public and private property being illegal, the urban commons are a means for citizens to reappropriate the city by opposing its financialization and by proposing alternatives to neoliberal logics. They are opposed to hierarchical logics and are based on the principles of self-management, cooperation, mutualism, inclusiveness, free access, conviviality and equity. The Neapolitan approach to the urban commons is thus centred on the desire to "liberate" spaces in order to return them to the citizens for civic and collective use [20].

The beni comuni embody the "right to the city" understood by Henri Lefebvre as a fundamental right to individual and collective fulfilment and access to all the necessary infrastructures to do so [21]. However, they do not intend to replace the State. The many forms of dialogue between the different communities of the beni comuni of Naples are a good example. The commons are not the expression of a rejection of public institutions as such, but rather of the neoliberal policies they apply, which tend to privatise public goods and prevent citizens from collectively enjoying these public goods. Accessibility for all and the social function of property, as provided for in article 42 of the constitution, are no longer assured.

"The commons are places of resistance, and I believe it is very important

to keep them, even if of course they do not have the same power as the city. I believe that they remain places of possibility where we can develop ways of doing and thinking differently." Maria Francesca De Tullio

SOURCES :

- [1] "Proposal for a constitutional law to build the next world based on the preservation of the commons in the face of the current crisis", Report No. 168 (2020-2021), submitted on 2 December 2020: <https://www.senat.fr/rap/I20-168/I20-1681.html>
- [2] "Rodotà Commission - for the modification of the rules of the Civil Code relating to public property (14 June 2007) - Proposals for articles", Italian Ministry of Justice website https://www.giustizia.it/giustizia/it/mg_1_12_1.page?contentId=SPS47624&previousPage=mg_14_7#
- [3] PARISIO Vera, "Le service intégré de l'eau en Italie : gestion publique ou privée ?", Droit et Ville, 2012/1 (N° 73), p. 91-101. DOI: 10.3917/dv.073.0091. URL: <https://www.cairn.info/revue-droit-et-ville-2012-1-page-91.htm>
- [4] "Italian Constitutional Court blocks water privatisation", European Water Movement: <http://europeanwater.org/fr/actualites/nouvelles-diverses/126-la-cour-constitutionnelle-italienne-bloque-la-privatisation-de-l-eau>
- [5] "Daniela Festa: In Italy, a social movement emerges around the urban commons" Catherine Vincent, published on 21 June 2018 in Le Monde: https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2018/06/21/daniela-festa-en-italie-un-mouvement-social-a-merge-autour-des-communs-urbains_5318941_3232.html
- [6] "Italy: fall of Romano Prodi's government", Encyclopaedia Universalis France: <https://www.universalis.fr/evenement/16-24-janvier-2008-chute-du-gouvernement-de-romano-prodi/>
- [7] BRANCACCIO Francesco, GIULIANI Alfonso, VERCELLONE Carlo " Le commun comme mode de production ", Editions de l'éclat, 2021, Lyber version : <http://www.lyber-eclat.net/lyber/Commun-Lyber.pdf>
- [8] Daniela Festa, "The Urban Commons. The invention of the common", Tracés. Revue de Sciences humaines [Online], #16 | 2016, online 01 January 2017, accessed 09 May 2023. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/traces/6636> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/traces.6636>
- [9] "L'Asilo", article available on the website of the beni comuni network of Naples: <https://commonsnapoli.org/en/the-spaces/lasilo/>
- [10] LUCARELLI Alberto, "Biens communs. Contribution to a legal theory", Law and Society, 2018/1 (No. 98), pp. 141-157. DOI: 10.3917/drs.098.0141. URL: <https://www.cairn.info/revue-droit-et-societe-2018-1-page-141.htm>
- [11] Constitution of the Italian Republic, Senato della Repubblica, Publication by the Office of Parliamentary Information, Archives and Publications of the Senate, Update and revision for the French language: Alessio Colarizi Graziani https://www.senato.it/documenti/repository/istituzione/costituzione_francese.pdf
- [12] VERCELLONA Antonio. The Experience of the Commons in Italy, Urban Spaces, Private Property, Fundamental Rights. 2022. Sens public. <http://sens-public.org/articles/1628/>
- [13] "Asilo's declaration of civic use", published on 2 January 2016 on the Asilo website: <http://www.exasilofilangieri.it/dichiarazione-duso-civico/#art.15>
- [14] CELATI Benedetta, "In Naples, the experimentation of new administrative models to meet the challenge of municipalism", Mouvements, 2020/1 (n° 101), p. 90-97. DOI: 10.3917/mouv.101.0090. URL: <https://www.cairn.info/revue-mouvements-2020-1-page-90.htm>
- [15] "If for the Republic it is a question of fiscal damage, for the commons it is a question of civic profitability", 25 April 2022, website of the beni comuni network of Naples: <https://commonsnapoli.org/2022/04/25/se-per-repubblica-e-danno-erariale-per-i-beni-comuni-e-redditivita-civica/>
- [16] "L'Asilo - Massa Critica - Reappropriation of buildings and commons in Naples", video made by Ways of Democracy, published on 26 February 2018 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YUc6Ns5l4Sk>.
- [17] 2021, R. Cirillo - M.F. De Tullio (eds.), Healing Culture, Reclaiming Commons, Fostering Care. A Proposal for EU Cultural Policies, Italian Institute for the Future Press, 2021: https://www.academia.edu/50123844/Healing_Culture_Reclaiming_Commons_Fostering_Care_A_Proposal_for_EU_Cultural_Policies
- [18] Ostrom Elinor, 1990, Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. DOI : 10.1017/CBO9780511807763
- [19] Claire Brossaud & Christian Laval, "Aux racines des communs. Interview with Christian Laval", Métropolitiques, 3 May 2018. URL:
- [20] "The city network", site of the beni comuni network of Naples: <https://commonsnapoli.org/nuove-istituzioni/la-rete-cittadina/>
- [21] COSTES Laurence, " Le Droit à la ville de Henri Lefebvre : quel héritage politique et scientifique ? ", Espaces et sociétés, 2010/1-2 (n° 140-141), p. 177-191. DOI : 10.3917/esp.140.0177. URL: <https://www.cairn.info/revue-espaces-et-societes-2010-1-page-177.htm>

You can find all our newsletters on CliMates website.

To follow our trip on social networks:



For any feedback or sharing of initiatives, do not hesitate to send us an email to: legras.lea@gmail.com, cleafache@yahoo.fr, hug.chirol@gmail.com

You can share the link to subscribe to our newsletter around you:

[Newsletter version française](#)
[Newsletter version anglaise](#)



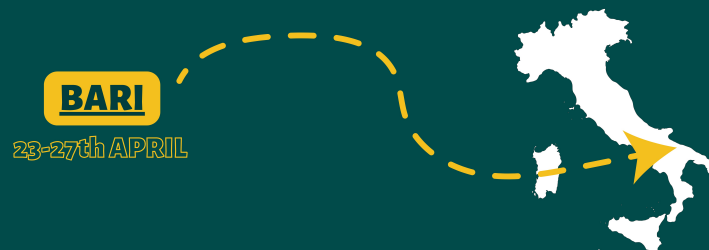
This email was sent to {{contact.EMAIL}}

[Se désinscrire](#)





REVIEW 3



BARI

23-27th APRIL

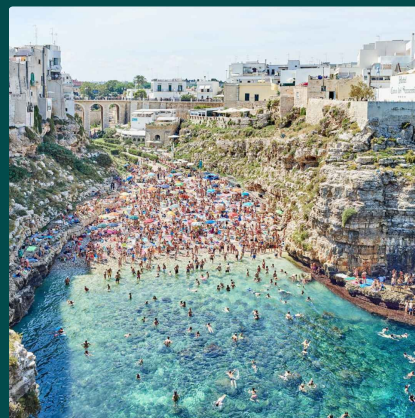
Hello everyone!

In this newsletter, we will give you news about our stop in **Bari** and more specifically about **Villa Roth**.

In Bari, on the southeast coast of Italy, we discovered a network of highly interconnected citizen initiatives. We spoke with Moro, one of the residents of Villa Roth, a place run by refugees that plays a major political and social role in the city.

THE CITY OF BARI

The city of Bari is a medium-sized metropolis, comparable to the city of Nantes in France with 320,000 inhabitants. Located on the southeast coast of Italy, the city has been facing a strong migratory flow since the beginning of the Libyan crisis in 2011. For the last 19 years, the municipality has been governed by the centre-left *Partito Democratico* (PD).



A lack of institutional response to the migratory flow



Moro is Ghanaian and was working in Libya in 2011 when the civil war broke out. After crossing the Mediterranean, he was housed in a refugee camp near Bari as of April 2011. Facing the lack of care from the Italian authorities, he began to organise demonstrations and blockades with a group of about 200 refugees to demand residence permits. After three years of wandering, one of which was spent in a camp, the collective launched its first occupation in a large abandoned building in the Bari area. The sanitary conditions were very complicated and the place was highly unhealthy. However, this initiative allowed them to attract attention and to become part of the local social landscape. Together with several local citizen movements, they created an association called "*Soledaria*" to support projects that allow the integration of refugees.

In 2014, the new mayor (PD) Antonio Decaro put at their disposal the ex Set, a large abandoned garage in the *Libertà* district, on the outskirts of Bari. Only those who had obtained a residence permit could access it. Inside, the living conditions were deplorable. Under the metal sheet of the shed, the refugees were squeezed into eight tents where it was more than 50°C in the summer.

To get out of this situation, the municipality proposed to build another temporary reception camp in prefabricated buildings, which would be financed by subsidies from the European Union. The refugee community refused this solution and demanded a more permanent care. The municipality retorted that it was unable to provide any other form of assistance, as the subsidies were from an emergency fund and had to be allocated to a temporary solution in order to be released.

In 2015, while the *ex-Set* had been occupied for more than a year, the media president of the NGO "Emergency", Cecilia Strada, visited the camp. Faced with the deplorable fate of the refugees, she testified to her "shame" in a televised speech. These words put the spotlight on the situation and pushed the mayor, Antonio Decaro, to give up two other places to the refugees: *Palazze* and *Villa Roth*.

The *Palezze* is managed by a cooperative to which the municipality has already delegated the management of a dozen other refugee reception centres. Everyday the company receives money according to the number of people it houses. Rather than redistributing this money to the refugees to provide them with support and integration opportunities, the cooperative sets up very strict rules for life on the site. For example, if the people housed leave the camp for more than 48 hours, they are denied access to their return. This example illustrates the state of dependency in which refugees are kept, depriving them of any possibility of emancipation.

VILLA ROTH: AN EXAMPLE OF EMPOWERMENT AND EMANCIPATION THROUGH SELF-MANAGEMENT



At *Villa Roth*, where we met Moro, the situation is very different from that of the *Palezze*. Located near the city centre of Bari, this old abandoned Roman villa has been inhabited by about 20 refugees for almost 8 years. Despite the deteriorated state of the building, the living conditions are much better than in the previous camps.

The self-management of the place is one of the keys to its success. The inhabitants meet in weekly assemblies to organise life in *Villa Roth*. They do not receive any public financial aid, apart from the sanitary blocks installed next to the building and cleaned everyday by the municipal services. This mode of operation gives them the autonomy and security they need to find a job and build their new life.

Today, *Villa Roth* is well known in the region, and many refugees passing through Bari can find temporary accommodation, administrative help or legal assistance. The members of the community are now recognised as privileged interlocutors by the city council, which facilitates the reception and care of new arrivals. Open to the city, the place is now very much integrated into the neighbourhood, from which they receive daily donations of food and clothing.

Close collaboration with local citizen initiatives

Villa Roth's success can also be explained by its ability to work with locally established citizen initiatives. Indeed, from the very first mobilisations in 2011, several refugees co-created the *Soledaria* association in collaboration with *Bread & Roses*, a self-managed "commune" that defines itself as a space for mutual aid ("*spazio di mutuo soccorso*").

Beyond the difficulty of access to housing, refugees are also often the victims of a vast network of exploitation sets up on a regional scale, particularly in the neighbouring town of Foggia, 130 km west of Bari. By relying on this cheap labour, farmers can benefit from higher margins on the sale of their products and/or compete unfairly. To counteract these practices, the *Soledaria* association manages to guarantee a decent and legal salary for all its employees through the sale of its "*SfruttaZero*" tomato sauce. The production is sold through *FuoriMercato*, a national network of direct sales of food products, outside the market. *Soledaria* therefore legally employs many refugees by offering them a work contract, which is necessary for the renewal of their

residence permit.

Villa Roth illustrates the paradoxical relationship that self-managed citizen initiatives can have with institutions. Although their social usefulness and autonomy is recognised by the municipality, the latter refuses to finance the renovation works of the building. In keeping with their culture of self-organisation, the residents have launched a crowdfunding campaign to start buying materials and to carry out the most urgent repairs. [To help them, it's here !](#)

**BENI COMUNI
IN CITTÀ**
Prendiamocene cura!

**RACCOLTA FONDI
PER I LAVORI DI
RIQUALIFICAZIONE
DI VILLA ROTH (BARI)**

per donare
IBAN: IT36A0501804000000000229119
Intestato a: SOLIDARIA Associazione | Causale: donazione riqualificazione Villa Roth
oppure:
www.produzionidalbasso.com

OSSERVATORIO POPOLARE BENI COMUNI IN CITTÀ

Solidaria PARCO GARGASOLE BREAD & ROSES Fiumi Mercato

To go further :

[-Sous le soleil aride des Pouilles, les migrants... - Revue Choisir \(FR\)](#)

[-Photo gallery from Italy: homeless and refugees live together in the Villa Roth - The Limited Times \(EN\)](#)

[-Migrants in Bari go beyond illegal farm work to new project - InfoMigrants \(EN\)](#)

You can find all our newsletters on the [Climates website](#).

To follow our adventures on the networks:



For any feedback or sharing of initiatives, do not hesitate to send us an email to: legras.lea@gmail.com, cleafache@yahoo.fr, hug.chirol@gmail.com

You can share the link to subscribe to our newsletter around you:

[Newsletter French version](#)

[Newsletter English version](#)



This email was sent to {{contact.EMAIL}}

[Se désinscrire](#)

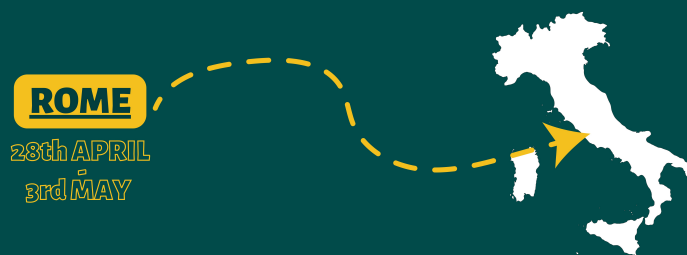




Hello everyone!

In this newsletter, we are going to give you some news about our stay in Rome and more specifically about **the relationship with the institutions** of the different Roman social centres we visited.

REVIEW 4



In Rome, we were able to visit several occupied and self-managed places. Each collective has its own history, its role in the city and its own activities. Through the experiences of Porto Fluviale, Lucha y Siesta and Metropoliz, we present three very different and complementary relationships to institutions.

The Italian context: student movements and social centers

Since the 1980s, many buildings in several Italian cities have been occupied by activists and transformed into *centri sociali* (social centers). Self-managed, they often serve as cultural centers with popular artistic programs. Now well established in the urban landscape, the *centri sociali* are an Italian specificity.

In each city, they contribute to the diffusion of militant culture, each one claiming its own ideological heritage.

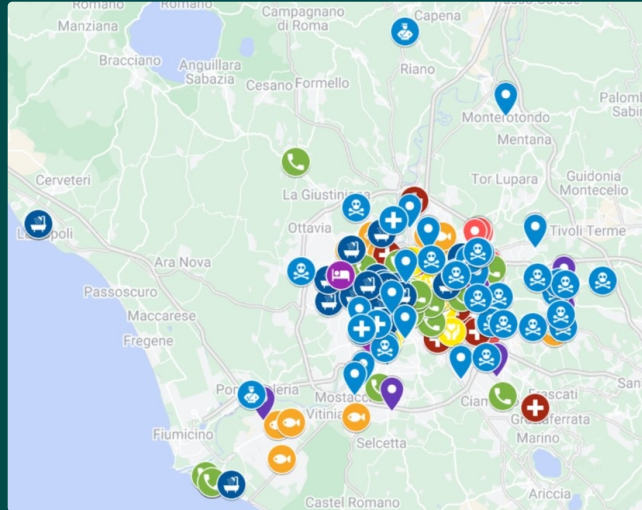
At the end of 1989, the country experienced an important student movement, born in reaction to a reform opening the possibility for universities to be financed by industrials. Initiated in Palermo, the mobilization took the name of *Collettivo La Pantera* (Panther Collective) and spread to all major Italian cities.

The Roman context: abandoned buildings and the struggle for access to housing

Several elements make the Italian capital a city that favors occupations :

- Firstly, Rome is a city of power with a strong presence of militant focus (anarchist, antifascist, feminist, environmentalist etc.). This activism is particularly marked among students, such as those of the *Roma Tre* University in the Ostiense district.
- Secondly, many buildings are abandoned. This is the result of significant real estate speculation coupled with the lack of means allocated to their renovation.
- Finally, the multiplication of migratory waves after 1960 has amplified the difficulties of access to housing in northern Italian cities.

In the continuity of the national student movement of 1990, several militant collectives for access to housing were formed in Rome. The main mode of action of these initiatives is the occupation of unused or abandoned places. The *Coordinamento Cittadino di Lotta per la Casa* (Citizen's Coordination of Struggles for the Home) was created to link and coordinate the actions of various occupations and squats in Rome. Two other collectives with the same aim were born since then, the *Blocchi Precari Metropolitani* (Metropolitan Precarious Block - BPM) in 2007 and *Action diritti in movimento* (Direct Action in movement). Today, the three movements count about 120 occupied places, inhabited by about 6000 people. However in these illegal residences, the risk of eviction is always present. Indeed, following the security decree of the Salvini government, the municipality of Rome publishes every year a list of illegal occupations to be evacuated during the year. The closer the name of an occupation is to the top of the list, the greater the probability of its evacuation.



[Map of formal and informal occupations in Rome](#)

THREE CITIZEN INITIATIVES, THREE TYPES OF RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE INSTITUTIONS



Lucha y Siesta: the feminist occupation that became a reference in the reception of women victim of violence


The story of Lucha y Siesta (Struggle and Siesta) began on the 8th of March 2008 when a group of women decided to occupy a building that had been abandoned for 15 years and was owned by Atac, a public transportation company. The idea is to create a shelter for women victim of violence, as the city of Rome has very few shelters.



[Instagram Lucha y Siesta](#)

A collective that cannot be ignored in the fight against violence against women

In order to be received in the municipal centers provided for this purpose, women victim of violence must meet certain criteria relating to the age of their



children or their administrative status. Due to the lack of accommodation capacity, the residents often cannot be accommodated for more than 6 months. The people taken care of by *Lucha y Siesta* can stay for long periods of time (up to 3 years) and are accompanied throughout their reconstruction by the activists of the collective. Unlike institutional shelters, which are often isolated from the city for security reasons, there are no cameras or opening/closing hours. The residents have their own keys and watch over each other. This principle of self-management is central to the functioning of the site and allows the women to experiment with new ways of living together without violence. Decisions are taken in assemblies and the collective is completely independent financially. The place is open to people of the district, to the neighborhood and is sometimes lent to other associations.

The evolution of the relationship with the institutions: how *Lucha y Siesta* became unavoidable

From the beginning of the occupation, the members of the collective have given an important place to the associative and political network. The residents initiated discussions with the municipality, the company that owns the building and local elected officials.

The collective, whose actions allow for the care of victims that the municipality is unable to provide, sometimes finds itself working with the police for an emergency reception. With its 14 rooms, *Lucha y Siesta* has multiplied the city's reception capacity by 1.5, making it a unique structure on this issue. Also, since 2017, activists from the collective have been intervening and accompanying women housed in other municipal shelters. They are now about twenty to receive a salary from the municipality for this action.

By responding to an urgent social need, the collective maintains a certain balance of power with the institutions. Evacuating the place would reveal above all the lack of care shown by the authorities. The municipality would also be legally obliged to find accommodation for all the families in a city where access to housing is already complicated. However, the members of the collective are not satisfied with this situation and are seeking to initiate a legalization process.

Declaration of self-government, auction and transfeminism

Lucha y Siesta is seeking administrative recognition by several institutions and at different scales. In 2017, the city council of Rome recognized the political experience of the collective and asked them to form an association, sign a collaboration contract and pay for water and electricity. Despite the agreement of the collective, the municipality never validated the creation of the association and the water and electricity charges are not paid by anyone.

In the same year, the public company Atac declared that it wanted to sell the building. This sale represented a direct threat to *Lucha y Siesta*, as evictions of illegal occupations are easier when the owner of the premises is private. One of the possible solutions for the collective was to buy the building. Nevertheless, this perspective would encourage the development of a capitalist activity, opposed to the values of the collective, to pay expenses and to pay back the purchase.

In this context, the members of the collective started to think about the concept of "common good", the "doing together" being already at the heart of their functioning. In collaboration with the Napolitan network of common goods, *Lucha y Siesta* began to draft a declaration of self-government. After the organization of round tables with all the stakeholders, a declaration was adopted governing the functioning of the place and affirming its values: feminist and transfeminist.

Following this declaration, *Lucha y Siesta* began discussions with several left-wing elected officials in the Lazio region. Governed by the center-left party, *Partito Democratico* (PD), the regional council voted to buy the premises and decided to recognize the collective and its functioning. After the purchase of the building at auction, the recognition of *Lucha y Siesta* was almost complete,

but the electoral agenda disrupted the process. Indeed, the legislative elections of October 2022 were won by the extreme right party *Fratelli d'Italia* and, six months later, in February 2023, the same party won the regional elections in Lazio.

The official recognition by the region of Lazio, now owner of the building, did not take place. However, *Lucha y Siesta* does not seem to fear eviction in the short term due to the balance of power established with the public authorities. Beyond having made itself indispensable in the eyes of the institutions, *Lucha y Siesta* offers a fertile ground for other forms of commitment. One of the members of the collective, Michela Cicculli, was elected as a city councilor on an independent list in the 2021 elections. She can thus position herself as a relay between citizen initiatives and the municipal institution.



Website : www.intersezionale.com

Porto Fluviale: a former military depot to become an ambitious architectural project financed by the European Union

Known to the general public for its multicolored facade painted by the street-artist "Blu", the occupation of Porto Fluviale is a good example of collaboration between activists, academics and municipal institutions. As with other initiatives previously encountered, such as Mondeggi in Florence or the ex-OPG in Naples, the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, which is part of the European recovery plan NextGeneration EU, is central to the process of institutionalization of the Porto Fluviale experience.



Website : www.commonfare.net
fresco of the street artist Blu

The occupation of Porto Fluviale, between self-managed housing, activism and visual arts

Located in the industrial district of Ostiense, the site of *Porto Fluviale* has been occupied since June 2003 by Italian activists for access to housing and by families coming from the waves of migration of the time, mainly Ecuadorian, Peruvian and Moroccan. The site is a former Italian army logistics depot, built in 1919 and abandoned in the early 1990s. About 150 people are housed there, representing 56 different households. The first 10 years of occupation allowed the inhabitants to consolidate their political awareness and to experiment with collective action.

It's only in the 2010s that *Porto Fluviale* began to open up to the outside world. In 2011, the film "Good Buy Roma" shone light for the first time on the intimacy of the occupants. The directors, Gaetano Crivaro and Margherita Pisano are the first to introduce art into the place. This initiative unleashed the desire for more projects among the residents and gave rise to numerous ideas for the development of the spaces.

Between 2013 and 2015, the Italian street artist, Blu, painted a huge fresco transforming the windows of the building into multiple faces and drawing "a great ship of building speculators attacked by the pirate boats of the occupation movements". The artist chose this facade because "behind the wall is a work built by the occupants who inhabit it, a monument of the present time that we all live in" according to Giorgio Talocci, professor at University College London. Referenced in many tourist guides, the work is both a symbol of the struggle for the right to housing and of the gentrification of the neighborhood. Indeed, the latter has been subject to strong real estate speculation for several years.

Several activities and workshops now exist in *Porto Fluviale*. Every day, many citizens come to take advantage of the circus room, the jewelry workshop, the bicycle repair stand, the silk-screen printing workshop, the Thai massage room or the tea room, all located on the first floor of the building.

The place is completely self-managed, the inhabitants meet in assemblies once a week. *Porto Fluviale* is part of the *Coordinamento Cittadino di Lotta per la Casa*, which allows them to be in regular contact with other squats and occupations in the capital. Although a large part of the occupants live there since the beginning of the occupation, the building can offer emergency accommodation to people who do not meet the criteria for institutional care.

European funds of the PNRR : the co-elaboration of an ambitious project involving the university, the municipality and Porto Fluviale

The first institution with which the inhabitants of *Porto Fluviale* started to establish links is the nearby University of *Roma Tre*. The first exchanges date back to the early 2010s and were mainly with the architecture department. Francesco Carreri, a former activist of the *Collettivo La Pantera* in the 1990s now a professor at the University, and Margherita Pisano, the director of the film "Good buy Roma" who later wrote her thesis on the experience of *Porto Fluviale*, are among the first academics to establish relations with the residents.

Soon, residents, professors, and students of the master's degree in urban design became involved in the reflections on the opening of the space to the outside world. Numerous workshops are organized on site and *Porto Fluviale* becomes better known by the Romans.

In 2019, under the mandate of the mayor Virginia Raggi (5 Stars party), the residents were informed of a forthcoming eviction of the place. The municipality has already proceeded in this way with two other occupations, each time proposing solutions to rehouse the occupants. To fight against eviction, the residents can rely on their relations with the University and propose an alternative solution.

Indeed, during the same period, the Italian Ministry of Infrastructure launched a call for projects called the National Innovation Program on Housing Quality (PINQuA) to which the municipalities could respond by proposing renovation

and rehabilitation projects for buildings meeting certain ecological and social criteria. This call for tenders was made possible thanks to the 2.8 billion euro envelope within the framework of the European Union's recovery plan: the PNRR (National Recovery and Resilience Plan).

Through the university's architecture department, the residents of *Porto Fluviale* could initiate discussions with Luca Montuori, the municipality's deputy for urban planning, himself a former professor at *Roma Tre* University. Together they co-constructed the *Porto Fluviale* RecHouse project that will be presented by the municipality in the framework of the call for projects.

The project aims to maintain the community of inhabitants, already inserted in the life of the district, and to give the building a public utility again. In addition to the renovation of the dwellings, the project foresees the development of the central courtyard into a public square open to the neighborhood. The ground floor is to house the following activities:

- A weekly market
- A counter for women victims of violence
- A space for playrooms and services for seniors
- A space for digital training and coding
- A sustainable mobility center (formerly a bicycle repair shop)
- Renovation of existing spaces: the jewelry workshop, the circus room, the tea room, etc.

If the project were to win the tender, a transfer of ownership should be made between the Ministry of the Armed Forces and the municipality. As proof of their good will, the inhabitants formed a cooperative to recover the place. They also produced a self-census and created an associative status for the already existing activities. These three elements have been the subject of important internal discussions as they break with the culture of illegal occupation of the building.

In April 2022, the *Porto Fluviale* RecHouse project won the tender and the Municipality of Rome was entrusted with 11 million euros for its realization. The building works are expected to start by the end of 2023 and discussions are underway to phase in the works so that residents will not have to be relocated during this period.

While the city of Rome has many illegal occupations that are subject to eviction, Porto Fluviale is a very positive experience of institutionalization and legalization with the municipality. The factors of this success are numerous and can be summarized as follows:

- A building suitable for artistic and architectural projects.
- A historical, open and very established occupation in the neighborhood.
- Close links with the university, in particular with the architecture department.
- The decisive role of certain institutional actors such as Luca Montuori (Councillor for Urban Planning of Roma Capitale) and Amedeo Ciaccheri (President of the Eighth District).
- The mobilization of the residents, who had to send several positive signals to the municipality to show their involvement in the process.
- The participation of the *Coordinamento di lotta per la Casa* and its 30 years of experience in the fight for the right to housing.

To go further :

-Porto Fluviale RecHouse (IT)

-LA 'CITTA' METICCIA' alla Biennale dello Spazio Pubblico di Roma 2011 (IT)

-Tano, Blu e il Porto Fluviale (IT)



© Valentino Bonacquisti

Metropoliz: a safe house in the heart of a renowned contemporary art museum

Metropoliz is home to over 200 people and one of the largest art galleries in the country. The community has made itself indispensable to the institutions by becoming a multicultural refuge for the largest Roma community in the city, and a recognized contemporary art museum in the capital. The experience of Metropoliz illustrates, however, the difficulty of sustaining and legalizing the occupation of private land.



Website : www.romatoday.it

An occupation-museum on private land

Metropoliz is located in a former delicatessen factory in the heart of the *Tor Sapienza* district, in *Via Prenestina* 913. Abandoned in 1978, then bought in 2003 by the company *Salini Impregilo* (now *WeBuild*), the factory was transformed into a squat of 20,000 square meters in 2009. The initial occupation was launched by a hundred people from the *Blocchi Precari Metropolitani* (BPM) movement, and *Popica*, an association that works for the education of Roma children. Among the occupants, many Roma previously lived a few kilometers away, in *Casilino 700*, a camp built in 1991 and destroyed by the municipality in 2000. Other families of Italians, Moroccans, Peruvians, Romanians, Ukrainians and precarious workers (exploited workers, students, unemployed, etc.) joined the place to transform it into housing. The *Metropoliz* has thus become a unique multicultural experience in Rome, in which the largest number of Roma cohabit with other communities. Today, the site hosts

more than 200 people, including many children, and about 60 families. Educational and sports activities are organized by the residents themselves, especially for young people.

In addition to addressing the problem of homelessness and constituting a unique multicultural experience, the Metropolis is also a space for cultural experimentation from below. In 2011, the anthropologist, filmmaker and artist Giorgio de Finis discovered the site and, with the help of the residents, made a science fiction film called "Space Metropolis" with Fabrizio Boni. Following the film, G. de Finis proposed to the residents to create a contemporary art gallery. In 2012, the *Museo dell'Altro e dell'Altrove di Metropolis* (MAAM, the Museum of the Other and the Elsewhere of Metropolis) was born. More than 400 artists from all over the world have already visited the museum and created no less than 500 works. In the corridor that used to lead the pigs to the slaughterhouse, Pablo Mesa Capella and Gonzalo Orquin, have created "*Emaamcipazione*", a mural in which the fate of the animals is reversed. If the first pigs represented hanging from the ceiling are torn apart, the last ones, still hanging, have their skin intact. This work metaphorically takes up the story of the residents who arrive almost dead in *Metropolis*, and manage to rebuild a new life, in solidarity with the other inhabitants. Thus, as its name suggests, *Metropolis* embodies a new world, a new "city" for its residents. Because of its unique character, this self-managed inhabited-museum has become a recognized cultural place in Rome, often listed in tourist guides.



Website : www.dinamopress.it
"Emaamcipazione"

Occupation of a private land: the risk of imminent eviction

The premises belong to the main Italian company of buildings and public works, WeBuild, whose turnover amounted to 6.5 billion euros in 2017. The group is known for having built, among other things, almost all of the Fiat Group's factories around the world, as well as numerous dams, highways, maritime structures, or high-speed lines. The economic power of the company thus exceeds the scale of the country.

35 years after the closure of the factory, the Italian group bought the site to transform it into a large private condominium in agreement with the municipality. But the illegal occupation by migrants changed its destiny. In a context of economic crisis and massive speculation, the inhabitants of *Metropolis* prevented the privatization of the place and transformed it into a social and cultural experiment from below. It was not until 2013 that Salini managed to officially obtain the right to change the use of the building into private housing.

Despite the illegality of the occupation, the residents were never evicted. Indeed, the Metropolis, which houses more than 200 people and the largest Roma community in the city, has quickly become indispensable. Their eviction would force the municipality to rehouse each of the families in public housing, which it has so far not been able to do. Moreover, since 2009, the *Metropolis* experience has been firmly rooted in the local landscape, working with

researchers and associations from the renowned University of *Rome Tre* and with local residents. In the same year, the *Casilino 900*, one of the biggest camps in Europe, was evicted by the municipality and took up all the attention. Finally, the success of the museum has helped to strengthen the legitimacy and reputation of *Metropoliz* in the city. In 2017, the municipal administration even recognized it as an example of social and cultural growth for the city.

Nevertheless, the risk of eviction is always there. Since 2018 the place holds the first place in the list of occupied sites at risk of eviction in Rome. Some residents have even been individually sued by the Salini family and are now under surveillance. This threat has particularly increased in recent years. The Italian group WeBuild uses its economic and political power to recover the site that initially cost him 6.85 million euros. In 2018, Pietro Salini (Salini's son) launched a lawsuit against the Ministry of the Interior and the President of the Council of Ministers. The civil court of Rome condemned the government to pay 28 million euros for not having proceeded to the evacuation of the occupants. A second trial, launched in March 2023, again condemned the Ministry to pay an additional 6.3 million euros and 6,000 per month until the eviction is completed. The government agreed to pay the first sum, but refused to pay a monthly compensation. Salini is now demanding another 50 million euros. Despite the city council's attempts to talk to Pietro Salini about buying back the site, and the city's drafting of a new housing plan, the residents now have less than 60 days to leave *Metropoliz*. To avoid eviction, *Metropoliz* is putting all its energy into organizing demonstrations, publicizing its struggle, and finding support to create a real balance of power against the economic power of the Salini family. The march of May 4th gathered 3000 people in the capital and ended with a meeting at the prefecture. The latter continues to affirm that it wants to follow the line of the Minister of the Interior, Matteo Piantedosi, to find "a solution for all the families, without traumatic expulsions." Problem: if some residents have been waiting for a long time for public housing, others do not want to leave *Metropoliz*...

To go further :

-*Squatting: reappropriating democracy from the state (avec une analyse du Metropoliz)* (EN)

-*Metropoliz: un museo abitato* (IT)

-*Metropoliz, il tribunale condanna il governo per la fabbrica occupata che Gualtieri vuole comprare*

CONCLUSION

Our visit to Rome has allowed us to study the movement of the occupations in its diversity and its complexity. Thanks to their horizontal functioning and their openness to the outside world, the experiences mentioned above seem to be very well accepted by the Roman citizens. The housing of refugee families, the access to art for all, the care of women victims of violence or the free access to spaces for manual activities are all socially and culturally necessary actions to democratically and ecologically inhabit the city.

Despite their many commonalities, the occupations of Rome are however very diffuse and heterogeneous, notably in their relationship to institutions and in their conceptualization of the notion of "common good". The story of these three different sites also illustrates the difference in treatment by the authorities, depending on whether the property of the occupied building is public or private. Indeed, while *Lucha y Siesta* and *Porto Fluviale* seem to be partially or fully recognized by the municipality, the community of *Metropoliz* is very vulnerable to an eviction procedure. Other evictions may be politically motivated, as occupations are often sites of emerging social and/or ecological protest movements.

Since December 2022, the City Council has approved Deliberation 104 and the "Regulations on the use of real estate in Rome for purposes of general interest". It is now working on a new project to register and map the 9,000 empty, occupied or concessionary public properties in Rome with the aim of regularizing them while recognizing their capacity for self-management. If this text constitutes a major advance in the policy of the Roman social centers, it was written by people who have never lived in the places concerned and without engaging in a dialogue with the occupying collectives. Nevertheless, while the mapping work is far from being completed, some initiatives have already stated that they would oppose the process. The concrete implementation of the text still seems far from becoming a reality...

You can find all our newsletters on the [Climates website](#)

To follow our adventures on the networks:



For any feedback or sharing of initiatives, do not hesitate to send us an email to: legras.lea@gmail.com, cleafache@yahoo.fr, hug.chirol@gmail.com

You can share the link to subscribe to our newsletter around you:

[Newsletter French version](#)

[Newsletter English version](#)



This email was sent to {{contact.EMAIL}}

[Se désinscrire](#)





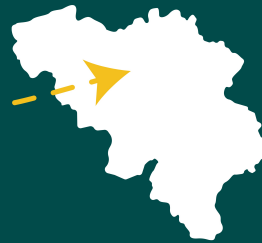
Hello everyone,
During our week in Brussels, we were able to study the issue of **introducing the commons into public institutions at different levels: municipal, regional, national and European.**

(PS: You will find an explanation of the Belgian political system at the end of this newsletter in the appendix)

REVIEW 5

BRUSSELS

10-18th MAY



Communa : a citizen initiative in Brussels

The Communa initiative

In Brussels, more than 5,000 people are homeless and many associations are struggling to find affordable space to develop their activities. At the same time, 6 million square metres of empty buildings are unoccupied. In one of these we met Max, one of the founders of Communa, a non-profit organisation that temporarily occupies buildings.

"At Communa, we're guided above all by common sense: there are empty buildings, there are people who need space. It's quite simple. We just need the standards and rules to be adapted to common sense and not the other way round"

-Max, one of the creators of Communa-

It all started in 2013, when Max and four other friends began temporarily occupying empty buildings and signing agreements with the owners. Ten years later, Communa is making around ten spaces available to hundreds of associations/projects and providing a roof over the heads of more than 400 people (homeless people, women and children in poor living conditions, refugees, etc.). These temporary sites are generally located on communal land and are set up with the agreement of the public authorities. They enable a wide range of activities to take place. Culture, sport, coworking, solidarity fridges, youth activities and social economy projects all come together in the same

buildings.

Their strategy : temporary occupation with social purpose

On the various occupied sites, they are experimenting with a new use for the premises, to prevent them from being privatised and taken over by private developers. Communa also wants its projects to foreshadow the future use of the occupied buildings, so that it is in tune with the neighbourhood's residents and serves the most vulnerable: the poorly housed and the volunteers of the social economy. Occupations are therefore places of empowerment and emancipation for their occupants and enable citizens to reclaim the city.

The social crisis being a structural problem, temporary occupation is not enough. Ambitious policies need to be put in place. Communa is seeking to use its premises as a basis for challenging the public authorities and demanding regulations that encourage the emergence of social projects and prevent profiteering.



"We do social innovation, we do things that the state doesn't dare, doesn't think of, doesn't know how to do. We test. We evaluate. If it works, we scale it up and replicate it. And at some point, if it works and it's the city we want, the State has to make it possible with interest-free loans, subsidies, regulatory exceptions, etc."

-Max, one of the creators of Communa-

At the same time, since 2021, Communa has co-founded the land acquisition cooperative Fair Ground Brussels with sixteen other partners. The aim? To buy temporary occupation sites in order to perpetuate the initiatives and take them off the market. This step opens up new possibilities, but also new questions: how can we buy at market price without having to sell at market price? By joining forces with older and more economically solid partners in the social economy, by raising citizen funds and by calling on public and private funds, the cooperative is trying to recover empty buildings and return them to the citizens for good.

Thanks to its long history and success, Communa now provides consultancy services to local authorities, associations and academic projects.

Finally, Communa's strategy has also extended to the European level over the last 2 years through the Degentrify network. This network brings together cooperatives, foundations, associations and groups that are developing sustainable, anti-speculation alternatives to make urban housing affordable for everyone in nine countries: Belgium, France, Germany, the Czech Republic, Hungary, the Netherlands, Latvia, the United Kingdom and Italy.

The entry of the commons into public institutions in Brussels and Belgium: at the level of the Brussels-Capital Region

REMINDER: You will find a fact sheet on the Belgian political system at the bottom of this newsletter.

We spoke to Magali Plovie, a Brussels MP for the Ecolo party and President of the French-speaking Brussels Parliament. She has set up a system of deliberative democracy involving parliamentarians and citizens.

Setting up deliberative mixed commissions

Since 2020, the Brussels parliaments have had joint deliberative committees, made up of 15 members of parliament and 45 randomly selected citizens who meet to discuss specific issues. For five or more sessions, they debate and formulate concrete policy recommendations that are followed up by the same parliamentarians and the Brussels government. Five topics have already been addressed: the development of 5G in Brussels, homelessness, citizen participation in times of crisis, biodiversity in the city, and work-study programs. A sixth is currently underway on urban noise. Their [reports](#) can be found online. This approach within the Brussels French-speaking parliament is not isolated in Belgium. Another parliament has also incorporated deliberative committees into its rules.

Commissions are designed to avoid the same pitfalls as the Citizen Climate Convention organised in France in 2019. To do so, the proposals put forward by citizens and parliamentarians must result in the adoption of concrete political measures. Their main strengths are:

- Permanence and institutionalisation: By being organised several times a year, the commissions are fully integrated into the political agenda and can influence it.
- Diversity: They consist of both randomly selected citizens and parliamentarians.
- Follow-up: It is mandatory, and the participating parliamentarians are responsible for it. The work provided by citizens is always taken into account, and the government and parliament commit to ensuring the follow-up of the recommendations voted on within 6 to 9 months. Specifically, at the end of a commission, the rapporteur parliamentarians and the relevant ministers present the progress made on each recommendation. Then, citizens discuss and deliberate on this political follow-up and submit their (dis)satisfactions and the points that deserve further attention in a plenary session.

What connections exist between deliberative mixed commissions and the commons?

Deliberative commissions are an example of opening public institutions to everyone and turning governance into a 'common.'

While it is crucial for the commons to emerge at a local level driven by citizens, public institutions have a vital role to play in facilitating their development at other scales and ensuring their self-management and inclusivity.

"I thought to myself that engaging in politics without involving the concerned individuals was insufficient."

-Magali Plovie-



"I believe that we need to go beyond local projects, even if they are very important. To transform structures, citizens must enter those structures. It should take different forms and methodologies depending on whether it concerns a business, a cooperative, or the Parliament."

-Magali Plovie-

However, if the proliferation of citizen assemblies is not accompanied by rigorous methodology, it can be counterproductive and reinforce citizens' distrust towards their leaders. This is particularly true if written proposals are watered down or ignored by politicians.

Making the commissions more inclusive and democratic

The challenge of these commissions is to successfully involve non-expert audiences in political decision-making. To increase inclusivity, Magali Plovie identifies several key factors:

-Changing the Constitution to grant citizen votes the same value as those of a parliamentarian in mixed deliberative commissions.

-Implementing 'citizen sabbaticals' to free up working time without limiting meetings to weekends and evenings.

-Integrating the most marginalised populations into participation, such as homeless people, refugees, and disengaged individuals. This requires significant work in building trust, providing information, and allowing sufficient time for a public that has lost confidence in institutions and may find it difficult to speak in front of strangers.

-Opening up board meetings to citizens, particularly for public services (transportation, water management, etc.), and providing reimbursement for their participation.

An introduction of the commons into public institutions: *at the scale of the Belgian State*

Known for proposing a law to qualify the treatment of Uighurs in China as "genocide," Samuel Cogolati, a member of the ECOLO party in the Chamber of Representatives, has also completed a doctoral degree in international law focusing on the international legal protection of commons in Southern countries.

An academic and legal approach to the commons



"I was very interested in conceptualising the commons in international law because the concept is well-documented in economics and in the political world, particularly among activists and especially on the left. However in international law, it was quite astonishing to see that the concept was almost nonexistent, or if it existed, it was not defined at all as we understand it."

-Samuel Cogolati-

On the scale of political institutions, Samuel attempted to introduce the notion of "commons" by amending the chapter on "Things" in the Belgian Civil Code (which has Napoleonic origins, like the Civil Codes of France, the Netherlands, or Spain). The idea was to recognize the commons as a separate category that goes beyond the material objects that constitute "things." However, this attempt did not succeed. The ecologists were unable to gather the necessary 76

deputies to pass the legislation.

The initiative led by Samuel Cogolati illustrates the difficulty of integrating the commons into public institutions beyond the local level.

"Bluntly speaking, the commons are quite poorly represented politically. They exist politically, emerge at the local level and generate enormous amounts of academic work on them. However, purely in daily parliamentary debates, the commons are very poorly represented."

-Samuel Cogolati-

Can the European Union promote the emergence of commons?

A recap of the "Beyond Growth Conference"

From May 15th to 17th, we attended the "Beyond Growth" conference held at the European Parliament in Brussels. The event was initiated by Philippe Lambert (co-president of the Greens/European Free Alliance group), followed by twenty Members of the European Parliament from all political parties except the far-right. Initially planned for 2020, two years after the first "Post-Growth Conference," the event attracted 4,000 attendees (both online and in person).

More than twenty panels and plenaries took place to reflect on the question:

How to shape a post-growth Europe?

According to Timothée Parrique's definition : ***"Degrowth is a reduction of production and consumption to alleviate the ecological footprint, democratically planned with a spirit of social justice and well-being."***

Created and popularised by the French philosopher Serge Latouche in the early 2000s, degrowth is a concept that allows us to envision a new societal model respecting the physical limits of our planet. Grounded in scientific realities, degrowth responds to the need for new narratives and alternative paths commensurate with the urgency. To think about degrowth is to question the capitalist paradigm upon which our system is built and, above all, to reinvent our relationship with time, consumption, work, economy, happiness, nature, justice, and democracy.

The wide variety of speakers and roundtable discussions illustrate the strong dynamic of academic research on these topics. Here is a non exhaustive list of some of the subjects addressed:

-How to measure the health of a country using indicators beyond GDP? Several indicators are proposed to consider planetary boundaries and social well-being, such as Kate Raworth's [Doughnut Economics](#) or Dan O'Neill's [steady-state economy](#).

-The four-day workweek, advocated by sociologist Dominique Méda and MEP

[Pierre Larrouturnou](#). To counterbalance neoliberal policies, reducing working hours is one of the emblematic measures of a degrowth society.

-What energy system is compatible with planetary limits? The alternatives are diverse: advocating for the development of renewable energies, emphasising the crucial role of citizen energy cooperatives, and implementing policies of energy sobriety with [Julien Steinberger](#) (IPCC) and [Stefan Bourgeois](#) (Negawatt).

-What democratic governance in a post-growth society? Questions of collective decision-making and institutions were addressed, among others, by [Éloi Laurent](#) (French Observatory of Economic Conditions).

-The importance of decolonial and transfeminist approaches in building a new society, with [Anuna De Wever](#) and [Vandana Shiva](#).

The growing gap between elected officials and scientists...

Beyond Growth was the largest event ever organised on degrowth. However, this does not mean that the parliamentarians truly understood what "degrowth" actually entails. These three days of conferences revealed a significant gap between, on the one hand, scientists and activists calling for a radical change in trajectory, and on the other hand, European commissioners stuck in an orthodox vision of the economy, convinced that the solution to all our problems lies in the market, competitiveness, recycling, and innovation. These contradictory perspectives were reflected in the boos from the audience and standing ovations during more radical and scientifically credible speeches.

In the opening plenary, Roberta Metsola, the President of the European Parliament from the European People's Party (conservative right), declared: ***"We need sustainable growth."***

This statement elicited laughter from the audience, primarily composed of young people engaged in these issues. A few minutes later, Sandrine Dixson-Declève, co-president of the Club of Rome, took the floor and responded: ***"People do not want economic growth, they want economic security [...] and if a growth is necessary it is the growth of our social cohesion"***

The President of the European Commission, Ursula Von der Leyen, also spoke during the opening plenary with a subtle and ambiguous speech. Referring to the conclusions of the 1972 Meadows Report, *"The Limits to Growth"* (which was widely rejected by the political world at the time), Ms. Von der Leyen clearly acknowledged that a ***"growth model based on fossil fuels is simply outdated"***.

This statement is historic, no political figure of this magnitude had ever given so much credit to the Meadows Report (except [Sicco Mansholt](#)). However, these remarks are deceptive. In fact, the authors of the 1972 report do not call for a ***"different growth model"*** but for a ***"global balance"***. In other words, the clever speech of the President of the European Commission uses one of the founding scientific bases of degrowth thinking while diverting from its main conclusion: the necessary exit from a growth model to preserve the habitability of the planet.

The new semantic battle

Organising the conference within the European institutions is a strong and ambivalent signal. On the one hand, the event shows that degrowth ideas are gaining ground. On the other hand, by entering public institutions, the concept runs the risk of being co-opted and emptied of its meaning, as has been the case with terms like sustainability, carbon neutrality, and more recently, sobriety ([article here](#)).

The choice of words is important. The conference is called "Beyond Growth," which can be translated as "After Growth." However, most speakers consider that the urgency lies in "degrowth," that is the English translation of the word

"décroissance." The term "post-growth," on the other hand, is politically correct. It allows those who use it to project themselves towards a new model of society emancipated from growth. Nevertheless, by focusing mainly on the "after," this term does not question our current level of comfort and consumption. In fact, to transition from a resource-intensive model (the current growing model) to a balanced model (post-growth), a reduction in consumption and production is inevitable. Thus, speaking only of post-growth means turning away from the urgency, whereas the urgency lies in degrowth.

What's next ?

For the movement, the next deadline is the organisation of the International Degrowth Conference, which will take place in Zagreb from [August 29th to September 2nd](#). The idea is to continue infusing these ideas into society by multiplying conferences and concrete experiences. For the European Union, the challenge in the coming years is to achieve the "fit for 55%" targets it has set for carbon emissions reduction (-55%

"Youth is not responsible for giving you hope. Youth is not responsible for fixing the failure of your past policies."

-Anuna De Weber, Climate and Social Justice activist-



by 2030 compared to 1990). Through the implementation of the [Green Deal](#), the EU aims to become the first carbon-neutral continent by 2050. This ambition seems compromised by recent announcements from the French President, who calls for a "European regulatory pause" on environmental standards. The next European elections will be held in October 2024 and will therefore be an opportunity to obtain a parliament that meets the ecological, social, and democratic urgency.

What are the links between degrowth and the commons?

Imagining a new model of society is one thing; ensuring that citizens themselves decide to radically change their trajectory is another. The "democratic" challenge is therefore to create a bridge between these discussions at the European level and the local citizen initiatives we have been meeting. Indeed, degrowth policies must be applied at all levels (local, regional, national, European) and developed with the directly affected citizens.

As European law prevails over the national laws of member states, the European Union has the power to create a framework that facilitates the multiplication of commons and initiatives for radical democracy in all member states, through ambitious and redistributive economic policies. The multiplication of cooperatives, citizen assemblies, popular initiative referendums, self-managed commons, reduction of working time, etc., are based on political choices that the EU could decide to embrace.

"What we call 'degrowth' is the exit from our deadly addictions, it is a healing, a disenchantment."

-Aurélien Barrau, philosopher and astrophysicist-



ANNEX : A few words on the functioning of Belgian politics

Belgium is a hereditary constitutional monarchy organised as a federal state.

Belgians have a king as the head of state, whose powers are defined by the Constitution. King Philippe of Belgium, who has been the king since 2013, is the guarantor of the unity of a kingdom historically divided between Dutch-speaking and French-speaking communities. While his executive power is primarily symbolic, he still enjoys the privilege of not paying taxes... (similar to TotalEnergies, the company in France, for example... each has their own king).

The Prime Minister is the head of the federal government. In practice, it is the Prime Minister who governs the country. Since Belgian governments are always coalitions, the main role of the Prime Minister is to ensure dialogue between different parties and policy coordination. The Prime Minister chairs the Council of Ministers and the restricted Council of Ministers (the "Kern") composed of Deputy Prime Ministers. They represent the Belgian government to the king and internationally. This position has been held since 2020 by liberal Alexander De Croo of the centre-right Open Flemish Liberals and Democrats ("Open Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten").

While executive power is jointly exercised by the government and the king, federal legislative power belongs to both the government and the two chambers of Parliament: the Senate and the Chamber of Representatives.

The federal state is also composed of three linguistic communities: the Flemish community, the French-speaking community, and the German-speaking community, each with their own parliament: the Flemish Parliament, the Parliament of the French-speaking Community, and the Parliament of the German-speaking Community.

Belgium is also composed of three different regions: Flanders, Wallonia, and Brussels-Capital, each of which also has its own parliament.

The parliament of the Brussels-Capital region is composed of 89 elected representatives serving for 5 years. Among them, 72 French-speaking representatives constitute the French Community Commission of the Brussels-Capital Region (COCOF), which sits in the Brussels French-speaking Parliament. The other 17 representatives form the Flemish Community Commission (VGC).

The Belgian political system is therefore very different from the hierarchical and centralised system in France. The coalition government seeks consensus, competences are shared, and there is little hierarchy between the different levels of power.

You can find all our newsletters on the [Climates website](#).

To follow our adventures on the networks:



For any feedback or sharing of initiatives, do not hesitate to send us an email to: legras.lea@gmail.com, cleafache@yahoo.fr, hug.chirol@gmail.com

You can share the link to subscribe to our newsletter around you:

[Newsletter French version](#)

[Newsletter English version](#)



This email was sent to {{contact.EMAIL}}

[Se désinscrire](#)





Hello everyone,

From May 23 to 25, we were in **Copenhagen**, Denmark. During this short "break" in the middle of the trip, we visited Christiania, an **emblematic anarchist** and "**communs**" district internationally renowned. Between utopia and disillusionment, the dream of a few has been going on for **50 years**.

REVIEW 6

COPENHAGEN

23 - 25th MAY



The birth of Freetown Christiania: 1971-2013

Initially located on the 34 hectares of the **former Danish army barracks** at *Bådsmadsstræde, Fristaden Christiania* ("Freetown Christiania" in Danish) was founded by around 50 people in **1971**. Against a **backdrop of a housing crisis** in Denmark, **Jacob Lugvidsen**, a journalist close to the Dutch protest and libertarian group *Provo*, wrote an **article** entitled "Emigrate with the 8 bus" in an underground newspaper called *Hovedbladet*. Christiania's "Freetown" **proclaims itself** and defines its functioning as an **intentional self-managed community** in its charter, co-written by Ludvigsen and other occupants: ***"The aim of Christiania is to create a self-managed society in which each individual feels responsible for the well-being of the whole community. Our society must be economically self-sufficient, and we must never deviate from our conviction that physical and psychological misery can be avoided."***



Christiania's community self-government system

The city of Christiania was built and organized outside the Danish society around the principles of **self-management, self-sufficiency, tolerance, freedom and well-being**. The way the city functions is largely influenced by **anarchist thought**, even if few of its inhabitants today claim to be anarchists.

Christiania has its **own flag** (see below), its own **anthem** (*Det Internationale Sigejner Kompagni - I Kan Ikke Slå Os Ihjel*) and its **own rules** and **assemblies**.



The system of governance is organized around the **general assembly**, "*Fællesmøde*", the highest decision-making body and the place to talk about community issues.

Power is also exercised by the **neighborhood assemblies** ("*Områdemøder*"), the **assembly of profit-making and non-profit enterprises** ("*Virksomhedsmøde*") and the **finance assembly** ("*Økonomimøde*"), which deals with the city's economic resources (such as welfare payments from the municipality, the "Christiania rent" paid by a large proportion of residents, voluntary contributions from profit-making collectives).

In these various assemblies, decisions are never taken by vote, but by **consensus**, which means that everyone has to agree. Majority rule therefore does not apply. Anyone opposing a decision can block its implementation.

In Christiania, **private cars, weapons, bullet-proof vests, camping and hard drugs are prohibited**. Unlike the rest of Denmark, **the sale of cannabis is authorized** on the famous "Pusher Street", which creates numerous conflicts with the authorities.

Over the last fifty years, some residents **have also been elected to public institutions**, such as Tine Schmedes, elected to the Copenhagen Citizens'

Representation for the Women's List (1974-1977), and known for having been banned after breast-feeding her child during the first meeting...



Tine Schmedes

A model city of self-management?

In addition to **housing, industrial, craft, commercial, cultural, health and theatrical activities** are organized throughout the city.

Christiania has its own kindergarten, a bakery, a sauna, a **garbage/recycling unit independent of the municipal services**, bulldozers, a bicycle factory, a printing works, a **post office**, a mini-market, a **health center**, a **free radio station**, workshops for restoring old stoves and vintage cars, a "Byens Lys" ("City Lights") cinema, bars, restaurants and entertainment venues. The expansion and renovation of Christiania's **sewage system** was carried out by the residents themselves.

Despite its great autonomy, Christiania **has never managed to fully emancipate itself from dependence on the outside world.**

Christiania today: between tourism and resistance

Today, **1,000 people still live in Christiania**. However, the "Freetown" has been facing a **number of difficulties** for several years: **conflict with local authorities and the police, gentrification and touristification of the area.**

In a **general move to normalize and standardize the country**, Liberal-Conservative Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen decided to **tackle the Christiania "case"** which allows the sale of cannabis. In 2007, **the first house was demolished**, sparking a fierce protest and conflict with the police. Over the years, the Danish government has constantly sought to regularize the legally "illegal" occupation of the area. Internally, there have been numerous conflicts between the site's activists and the cannabis sellers, with **successive governments using the argument of drug sales to justify the dismantling of the site**. However, **Christiania's eviction is a delicate matter** for a state which would have to rehouse all the residents. In addition, hundreds of residents receive social assistance at a particularly low price. In the case of eviction and rehousing, the social assistance would have to be increased in order to pay more expensive rents.

Government pressure during the fifty years of occupation of the land led to the **creation of a foundation** by the Christiania community, **which bought back 7.7 hectares** of the original 34 hectares in 2012 (i.e. 20%). **Residents now pay rent to the government** and are forced to accept individual ownership, a principle they initially opposed... Residents are therefore owners, and the state considers each resident as an individual responsible for paying his or her own bills and taxes, rather than as a collective of individuals. **Since the 2013 law, the state of exception which applied to Christiania has been abolished, putting an end to the forty years of the social and political experimentation.** The district is now subject to the same laws as the rest of Denmark.



Today, thanks to its exceptional history, **Christiania is a victim of its own success**. Between **500,000 and 1 million** people visit the "prototype of the anarchist city" every year, and it's becoming more and more like an **alternative Disneyland**, far from its original ideals. Concerts and theatrical performances are organized every week. Many tourists also come to buy and consume cannabis in this legal enclave.

Finally, even if Christiania is no longer the "Freetown" of 1971, it remains a model that persists, evolves and embodies a hope that continues to set an example for the world.

To go further :

-Documentary - Christiania a free way of life - 2013 - VOSTFR

-article : Il était une fois la ville libre de Christiania au coeur de Copenhague (FR)

You can find all our newsletters on the [CliMates website](#).

To follow our adventures on the networks :



For any feedback or sharing of initiatives, do not hesitate to send us an email to: legras.lea@gmail.com, cleafache@yahoo.fr, hug.chirol@gmail.com

You can share the link to subscribe to our newsletter around you:

Newsletter French version
Newsletter [English version](#)



This email was sent to {{contact.EMAIL}}

[Se désinscrire](#)



Hello everyone,

From the 26th of May to the 1st of June, we travelled to **Malmö** in southern Sweden. These three days gave us the opportunity to take a closer look at this city, often presented as a **model of success for the ecological and social transition**.

REVIEW 7

MALMÖ

26th MAY - 1st JUNE



Malmö in Sweden: the model of the "sustainable city"?

The conversion of a former industrial port town

With over 300,000 inhabitants, Malmö is the third largest city in the country and is now considered to be **one of the greenest cities in Europe**.

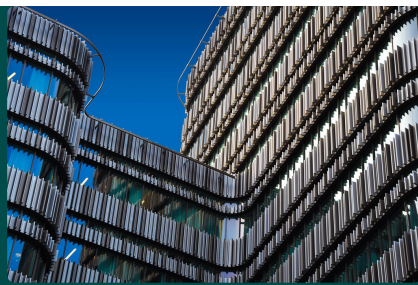
With an economy based on the salted herring trade in the 14th century, the city became a **major industrial port in the 20th century** thanks to its shipyards, its concrete factories and its textile industry. However, the **oil crisis** of the 1970s, the **recession** of the 1990s, and the failed attempt to set up the **Saab** car plant in 1989 (which closed two years later) had a severe impact on the local economy. By the early 1990s, **unemployment** had risen to **12.4%**, forcing the town to **radically change direction**.

In 1995 and 1999, the **Øresund railway bridge and tunnel** linking Malmö to Copenhagen were built. This new link boosted the economy by attracting both tourists and businesses originally based in the Danish capital.



The Øresund railway bridge and tunnel

In 1998, the city continued its redevelopment by building the **University of Malmö** (*Malmö*



University of Malmö

universitet) on a part of the former shipyard. Today, the campus is host to 24,000 students, who, together with the 40,000 students at the neighbouring University of Lund (16 km away), make this a very dynamic academic area.

Malmö is also committed to the '**sustainable city**'. Sweden is famous for its "*Koloniträdgårdar*" (family gardens), which since the 19th century have allowed city dwellers living in flats to have a small plot of land. Thanks to this system, residents could grow their own fruit and vegetables in order to reduce their food costs. The system was particularly useful during the two world wars, providing food for many families.

While these gardens still exist in Sweden and in Malmö, the city wanted to go further to continue **transforming its image of an industrial city**. In the context of an exhibition dedicated to the city of the future, the "2001 European Exhibition", the town planner Klas Tham and the municipal services transformed the polluted former docks into an **eco-district called "Bo01"**. Also known as the "City of Tomorrow", this eco-district is the first in the world to be powered entirely by renewable energy. Disused factories, warehouses and industrial areas are being replaced by 1,300 homes, workplaces, cycle paths, a rainwater collection system, green spaces (also on the roofs), a modern skyscraper (the Turning Torso), solar panels, a selective sorting system that produces natural gas from household organic waste, etc... This project is the first in a vast operation to rehabilitate the 140-hectare *Västra Hamnen* district, located in the western part of the former industrial port, and is attracting a whole new level of interest in the city, which is becoming a model 'sustainable city' in Europe.



Eco-district "Bo01"

Other eco-neighbourhoods have sprung up in Malmö, such as the *Ekostaden Augustenborg* eco-neighbourhood in the working-class district of *Augustenborg*, which has developed a major urban renewal programme called *Ekostaden* ("eco-neighbourhood") with the **participation of residents and stakeholders** from the public and private sectors.

Then, in 2015, Malmö became the first Swedish city to commit to the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with the ambition of becoming carbon-neutral by 2030 (20 years earlier than the European commitments to respect the Paris Agreement). The city has more than 400 kilometres of cycle paths and the largest biogas plant in Europe, which recycles the majority of solid waste and converts it into fuel for buses and cars.

To go further :

-Malmö: the Swedish miracle that transformed industrial city into a sustainable city (EN)

-Bo01 "cité de demain" (FR)

-Concevoir un écoquartier : l'exemple d'Augustenborg (FR)

The limits of ecological and social policies in Malmö

Despite its reputation as a "green city", Malmö is **one of the poorest cities** in Sweden and is marked by major **social inequalities**. Its location in southern Sweden makes it the gateway for immigration to Sweden (waves of migration in the 1990s and 2000s, from Yugoslavia, Sudan and Iraq, and more recently from Syria and Ukraine). Around 30% of its population is Muslim. However, in recent years, Sweden has drastically rethought its asylum policy. **The arrival in power in September 2022 of the centre-right** (Moderates, Liberals, Christian Democrats), **supported by the far-right Sweden Democrats** (*Sverigedemokraterna*, SD), a party founded by neo-Nazis in 1988, has radically transformed Sweden's image as a welcoming country. Malmö city council (*Kommunfullmäktige*) was historically run by the left-wing Social Democratic party, the Swedish Social Democratic Workers' Party (*Socialdemokratiska Arbetarepartiet*, SAP), and is now in the hands of a SAP/Liberal coalition. In the 2022 elections, the far right won **10 of the 61 seats**, prompting the municipality to implement an increasingly restrictive immigration policy.

On the climate front, Malmö remains a city in a wealthy country with a per capita carbon footprint of **9 tonnes of CO2-equivalent**, far away from the 2-tonne target required to respect the Paris Agreement...

In terms of their relationship with public institutions, the Swedish people retain a **great sense of confidence in their government**, demonstrated by the low abstention rate in the last parliamentary elections (less than 16%, in comparison with the 28% rate in the second round of the last presidential election in France, for example). This context of functional representative democracy complicates the emergence of radical currents of thought on ecological, social and democratic issues in a country where voters have a high standard of living, and where the poorest sections of the population are invisible.

During our visit to Malmö, we met several groups campaigning for a radically ecologist, social and democratic society.

To go further :

-Des inégalités croissantes en Suède...Fabrice Perrin, Dans Regards 2014/1 (N° 45), pages 109 à 116 (FR)

-Montée de l'extrême-droite en Suède : « Il est difficile de faire sans un parti qui fait 20 % » (FR)

-Législatives en Suède : comment l'extrême droite s'est rapprochée du pouvoir après une percée historique dans les urnes (FR)

Allt åt alla: various campaigns for a radical transformation of society

Introduction to Allt åt alla

Born in 2009 out of extra-parliamentary radical left-wing and anti-fascist movements, the *Allt åt alla* collective is a member of the [European Municipalist Network](#) and defines

itself as a "**social union**". Unlike a trade union, the union is not organized around the workplace, but around all aspects of daily life, without defining itself as a party. Today, the collective is present in Sweden's four largest cities: **Malmö, Göteborg, Stockholm and Uppsala.**



The campaigns run by each local group are guided by the following principles:

-**Curiosity**: taking an investigative, inquisitive approach to understanding, testing and solving concrete problems.

-**Adversarial reform**: formulating political demands to bring about fundamental social transformations.

-**Intervention**: working directly with society to implement concrete solutions to problems.

-**Mass activation**: activating people in large numbers to make them actors of change and transform society through collective action.

Born of local initiatives, the movement is now trying to **structure itself on a national scale** to gain in power and give a framework to the 200 people who compose it. A national office was officially created two years ago. It is responsible for administrative aspects and practical decisions. However, **strategic decisions remain at local group level**, in order to preserve the movement's identity.

The story of Allt åt alla Malmö

In Malmö, the story of *Allt åt alla* began in 2009, following a **wave of housing privatization** that led to a movement of illegal home occupations. *Allt åt alla* supported the protest movement, demanding the right to the city and housing for all citizens.

Then, faced with the rise of the far-right in the city and the country, the collective joined demonstrations **against the far-right SD party** (*Sverigedemokraterna*, meaning "Swedish Democrats"). The migration issue becomes a new demand for the collective. *Allt åt alla* Malmö is helping to set up and run a camp for Eastern European refugees expelled in 2015. Located in the middle of the city, this 200-people camp has highlighted the **state's shortcomings in welcoming refugees**, as well as the **growing inequalities** caused by gentrification in the city center.

The Allt åt alla Malmö campaigns

Today, Allt åt alla Malmö is composed of around sixty people who support various campaigns:

-**SVÄRM** magazine and **RADIO ÅT ALLA**, which deal with a variety of themes: the common good, ecology, democracy, feminism, etc.

-**Social center projects** in the city's



-**Participation in demonstrations**, as on

-The campaign to **prevent rent increases** of between 30% and 60% in the city.

-**Participation in the Nordic Labor Film Festival** in November 2023.

poorest neighborhoods.

-The campaign against the Swedish supermarket chain ICA, where a dozen executives are suspected of having taken advantage of their position to speculate on the company's shares in autonomous 2021.



June the 1st in Stockholm, against Sweden's entry into NATO and against the pressure exerted by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Erdogan is blocking Sweden's entry into the organization because of its policies, which he deems too "lax" towards pro-Kurdish activists, considered terrorists in Turkey. This pressure has led to a new law in the Swedish Parliament banning activities linked to extremist groups, against which the activists are opposed.

-Support for the revolution in Rojava in cooperation with the [Rojavakommittéerna](#) collective.



***Democratic Transition (Demokratisk Omställning) :
radically change the system by driving a bottom-up
democratization movement***

Introduction and vision

Democratic Transition (*Demokratisk Omställning*) is a Swedish organization based in several Swedish cities, including Malmö. Its aim is to **drive radical change in society by multiplying the tools and initiatives of participatory democracy at local level, enabling citizens to reclaim political power.** To achieve this, societies today face five challenges:

-**Respecting planetary limits and putting an end to the predatory exploitation of natural resources.** As the ecological and social crises are linked, this ecological revolution can only take place if resources and power are democratically redistributed for all to enjoy.

-**Transforming public policy-making processes by giving greater importance to direct and participatory democracy.** In a democratic society, the citizens directly affected by decisions must be involved in the discussions.

-**Decentralizing our decision-making systems**, so that decisions are taken as close as possible to the people affected. The model of confederalism* could be an interesting alternative.

-**Establishing an egalitarian, feminist, anti-racist and anti-fascist society striving for equality and freedom for all.** The concept of intersectionality highlights the interactions between the dynamics of discrimination and oppression that are created and maintained between them: race/ethnicity, sex/gender, class, age, sexuality, religion.

-**The emergence of a locally-based, solidarity-based economy** to break out of the productivist, inegalitarian paradigm on which our economy is based, ensuring greater autonomy and resilience for territories.



*CONFEDERALISM:

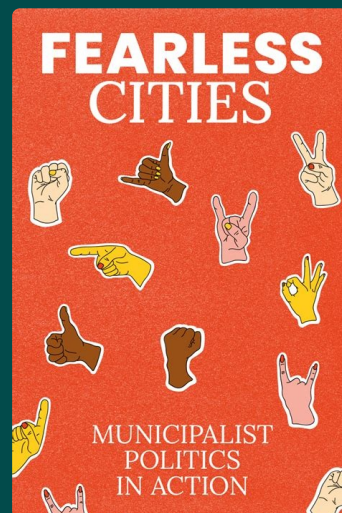
Inspired by Murray Bookchin's "[libertarian municipalism](#)", confederations are networks of local communities whose power lies with their citizens. At the confederation level, policy is formulated at the local level, while administration and coordination are carried out by elected, mandated and revocable delegates in council assemblies. Confederal bodies may also exist at regional, national and European level to make decisions on subjects requiring a change of scale: transport infrastructure, health/retirement systems, education, justice, etc. The political system set up in Rojava (Syrian Kurdistan) in 2014 was inspired by this model in particular.

Practical activities in Malmö

Although the local Democratic Transition group in Malmö is fairly recent, its six active members are setting up various projects to drive transformation from below.

Last year, they helped **translate the book *FEARLESS CITIES* (2018) into Swedish**. Written in the continuity of the "Fearless cities" gathering, this book is authored by over 140 people from 19 different countries.

Designed as a toolbox, it lists best practices for setting up a municipalist platform, drafting a participatory manifesto, obtaining funding and winning local elections. This translation gave rise this year to the creation of "**study circles**" open to all in Malmö to read and discuss the book. Next autumn, the idea is to organize a **tour of Sweden** to discuss the translated book in local towns.



The aim of these workshops is to help **spread the culture of municipalism and radical democracy** among the people of Malmö and Sweden.

This year, they also want to put their knowledge into practice by **writing political proposals** for the next municipal elections in 2026.

You can subscribe to their [newsletter](#) to stay informed of all the latest news from Democratic Transition, or read their articles on their [blog](#).

You can find all our newsletters on the [CliMates website](#).

To follow our adventures on the networks :



If you would like to share any feedback or initiatives, please send us an e-

You can share the newsletter subscription link with others:

[Newsletter French version](#)

[Newsletter English version](#)



This email was sent to {{contact.EMAIL}}

[Se désinscrire](#)





Hello everyone,

Our stay in the German capital from **June the 1st to the 5th** was rich in meetings and interviews. The city is full of civic initiatives enabling citizens to reclaim political power. We decided to spend the five days to work on two distinct themes: **local referendums** as a civic lever and energy cooperatives. This newsletter is dedicated to the first theme.

REVIEW 8

BERLIN
1st - 5th JUNE



The German political system

Very different from the French centralized system, the German political system is **federal**: it is made up of autonomous regions (the *Länder*), with each having its own government. Whether national or regional, governments are formed by coalitions after each election.



Olaf Scholz, German Chancellor

At national level, for example, Chancellor Olaf Scholz's government is based on a **coalition of three parties**: the SPD (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, the Social Democratic Party) from which he emerged, the FDP (*Freie Demokratische Partei*, the Liberal Democratic Party) and the Greens (*Bündnis 90/Die Grünen*).

At regional level, the 16 *Landers* are **autonomous in many areas**, including education, police, culture and regional planning. Along with two other cities (Hamburg and Bremen), Berlin has the particularity of being a city-state, which means it has the status and powers of a Land.

The local citizens' referendum

In line with this logic of decentralized power, the Germans have a powerful democratic tool at their hands: the possibility of **initiating a citizens'**

referendum at local or regional level. As each *Landër* has its own constitution, the procedures for organizing such referendums **vary** whether you are in Hamburg, Munich or Dortmund. Here are the **main steps** in a local referendum process in the city-state of Berlin:

1) **The request for a referendum is submitted** to the Berlin Senate's Department of the Interior and Sport, with a budget estimation for the proposed reform.

2) **20, 0000 signatures** must be collected, in paper form only (1st phase).

3) **The Senate verifies the conformity** of the signatures and the compatibility of the reform with local legislation. If these elements are validated, the Senate and then the House of Representatives have 4 months to decide. If the parliamentarians refuse to apply the proposed reform directly, the 2nd phase begins.

4) Citizens then have 4 months to collect **170,000 signatures**, representing 7% of local voters (2nd phase). If the referendum involves changing the constitution, the number of signatures required is **490,000**, equivalent to 20% of the electorate.

5) If the number of signatures is reached, the administration must **organize the referendum within 4 months**. This is the third and final phase.

6) To be successful, **the "Yes" vote must be supported by 608,000 citizens**, representing 25% of the electorate. If a modification of the constitution is necessary, 66%, or **1.2 million people**, are required.

Who can participate? All citizens eligible to vote for the Berlin parliament, i.e. anyone over 18 who has lived in Berlin for at least three months and has German citizenship. **Irregular migrants and the homeless are therefore not eligible to vote...**

What is the value of this vote? Surprisingly, this vote has **no legal force**, and is not equivalent to a decree or a law. However, a favorable vote obtained during a citizen referendum carries **strong moral weight, implicitly obliging** the local government to implement the requested measure.

What is the text to be voted on? There are two possibilities for the initiators of the initiative: either they **draft a law** so that the reform can be adopted directly after the vote, or they list their demands in the form of **"bullet points"**. The former is more constraining for the government in power, but requires a great deal of legal work before the text can be considered legal and applicable. In the second case, once the vote has been won, the municipality is expected to draft a bill incorporating the proposals voted. However, there are cases where, despite a favorable vote, no decision has been adopted...

Does it really work? The efficiency of the process **depends on a range of factors**. We met a number of citizens' groups who have campaigned for referendums on different issues, with varying degrees of success. **Here are a few examples.**

Klimaneutrales Berlin ab 2030 (Climate-neutral Berlin in 2030) - 03/26/2023

Initiated by the **Berlin NGO Klimaneustart** ("New Climate Start"), the *Klimaneutrales Berlin* referendum was held just 3 months ago and failed. **Although the "yes" vote won out** over the "no" with 50.9% of the vote, **the campaigners failed to mobilize enough people**. Only 442,000 "yes" votes were counted, far short of the 608,000 needed... The ambition of the referendum was to **oblige the local government to achieve carbon neutrality for the city by 2030 instead of 2045** as initially planned, in order to align the city's climate policies with the 1.5°C target set by the Paris Agreement. The bill that was drafted by the NGO proposed, among other things, to prioritize the reduction of CO₂ emissions, over compensation, or the

introduction of penalties in the event of non-respect of the targets set.

This attempt illustrates one of the most decisive elements in the success of local referendums: **the choice of date for the final vote**. This decision is made by the municipality in Berlin, which can choose to coordinate (or not) the referendum with a conventional election (local, national, European). The choice of voting date has a direct influence on the referendum turnout. It is much more difficult to achieve the necessary 25% quorum when the vote is organized independently of the electoral calendar. In theory, this decision should be taken on technical or logistical grounds, taking into account the fact that pooling votes optimizes the cost of organization. In the case of the *Klimaneutrales* Berlin referendum, the city council chose to hold it on March 26, just a few weeks after the Berlin municipal elections on February 12. **This short period between two elections is probably one of the reasons why voter turnout was so low on the day**. Despite this, the campaign brought **climate issues to the forefront of local politics and media**. The *Klimaneustart* association is already thinking about **replicating the experience** in other towns to achieve further victories.



Meeting with a member of *Klimaneustart*, 06/04/23

***Deutsche Wohnen & Co. enteignen* ("Expropriate Deutsche Wohnen & Co") - 09/26/2021**

On September 26th 2021, at the same time as the federal elections, a referendum on the **housing right** was held in Berlin. The initiative, called **Deutsche Wohnen & Co. enteignen** ("**Expropriate Deutsche Wohnen & Co.**") **was a success, with 1,035,000 votes in favor, or 57.6% of participants**. In contrast to the previous example, the quorum, fixed at 608,000 votes, was more than reached. *Deutsche Wohnen & Co* (DW&Co) is a real estate company specializing in the management of social housing. In Berlin, the company owns over 113,000 homes, making it the market leader. By naming their initiative "*DW&Co. enteignen!*" (Expropriate DW&Co), Berlin's housing rights activists have chosen a clear campaign narrative: **the people of Berlin against the big real estate companies**. They accuse the major real estate groups (DW&Co, but also Vonovia and Heimstaden) of **speculating on property prices and driving up rents**. To organize this referendum, the citizens are invoking **Article 15 of the German constitution**, which allows for the "**socialization of the means of production**" under certain conditions. The referendum does not propose a bill, but **highlights 4 points**:

-Bring back into the public sphere ownership of the city's 226,000 housing units. All companies owning more than 30,000 homes would be affected.

-Compensate the targeted companies financially by remunerating them "below market value" for the repossessed homes.

-Create a public company to manage and administer the repossessed housing.

-Establish a democratic governance system bringing together citizens, elected representatives and tenants to administer the public company in question.

Once the referendum has been won, the application of the measures voted on is even more **vague and complex**. In theory, the municipality is supposed to draft a bill incorporating the proposals put to the vote. In this particular case, **the legality of such measures is still being debated**, particularly on the question of compensation for landlords. At the time of the referendum, the municipal coalition was made up of the Green Party, the radical left-wing *Die Linke* and the Social Democrats of the SPD. **Following the vote, this coalition set up a commission to draft a bill**. Bringing together legal experts, elected representatives and activists, this working group is set to deliver its conclusions very shortly. However, the ruling coalition has changed in the meantime (see below), and **the new right-wing mayor of the Christian Democratic Union** (*Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands*, CDU) **does not seem very receptive to the idea of implementing the results of this referendum...** As the vote was not taken on a bill, the referendum is relatively less constraining for the current government. However, all is not lost. The right to housing has become **a central issue** since the mobilization. The initiators of "*DW&Co. enetignen!*" are now **working on the organization of a second, more binding referendum**, proposing a draft law drawn up in consultation with Berlin's citizens on the basis of the commission's conclusions. It now remains to be determined if they will once again be able to mobilize a sufficient number of citizens on the same issue...



Meeting with a member of *Deutsche Wohnen & Co*, 06/03/23

Volksentscheid-fahrrad ("Bicycle referendum") - 06/28/2018

Over the past 4 years, more than **20 major German cities have launched a referendum on cyclo-mobility**. This dynamic, named **radentscheid** ("wheel decision") **was initiated in Berlin in 2018** when various actors in the cycling community mobilized to organize the first *volksentscheid-fahrrad* (bicycle referendum). The project brought together citizens from the German Bicycle Users' Federation (ADFC), Greenpeace and other Berlin NGOs to form the Livable Cities network, which later became Changing Cities. On May 18, 2016, **after drafting their mobility bill**, the collective began collecting the 20,000 signatures needed to pass the first phase of the referendum process. In just three weeks, the mobilized citizens collected over **100,000 signatures**. This huge success helped **publicize the initiative and make cyclo-mobility a central issue** in the campaign for the municipal elections in September of the same year.

Once formed, the new ruling coalition (alliance of radical left, greens and social democrats) came out in favor of the vote and **pledged to implement the results: the second phase of signature gathering and the holding of a referendum were no longer necessary**. On June 28, 2018, **the new Mobility Law** was passed by Berlin's House of Representatives. It includes most of Changing Cities' proposals, such as:

- The construction of 350 kilometers of bike lanes
- Safeguarding 75 dangerous intersections
- 2-meter-wide bike lanes on every major thoroughfare in the capital
- Providing 200,000 bicycle parking spaces

The success of the *volksentscheid-fahrrad* can be explained by a number of factors:

- Firstly, **the strong dynamism of the "bicycle culture"**, visible in all major European cities, and particularly in Germany.
- Secondly, the **electoral context** seems to have played a decisive role. **The presence of the Green Party** in the new coalition made it easier to implement the law.
- Last but not least, **the enormous enthusiasm generated during the initial signature-gathering phase** helped to establish a balance of power with the public institution.

This example illustrates **how bottom-up initiatives can emerge, be structured and achieve very concerted results, thanks to this democratic tool**. Berlin's experience now serves as a **model for other bicycle collectives** in Darmstadt, Hamburg and Stuttgart.



Meeting with *Changing Cities*, 06/02/23

How do citizen initiatives interact with local elected representatives?

While the city is teeming with diverse citizen initiatives, while citizens seem to be calling for more social justice and ecological measures, and while the city has been governed for 22 years by left-wing parties, how can we explain the return of the right-wing to power in the new municipal coalition?

2023: the right-wing takes power in Berlin

Logistical problems having been noted in the September 21st 2021 ballot, **a new vote took place on February 12th 2023** to elect the regional parliament, with **the CDU (Christian Democrats) leading** (28.3%), followed by the SPD (18.39%) and the Greens (18.39%, 50 votes less than the SPD). Unlike in the previous term, the outgoing mayor and **leader of the SPD list, Franziska Giffey, has decided to turn with her party to the conservatives to form a coalition** and govern the city-state of 3.8 million inhabitants until the next elections in 2026. It should be noted, however, that this second election was marked by a **high abstention rate** of 38%, up 12% on the previous vote.

The arrival of Kai Wegner (CDU) in power is thus **bad news** for a large part of civil society and for Berliners campaigning for social and climate justice. However, the defeat provides **an opportunity to highlight the lack of interaction between elected representatives and citizens**.

The *BerlinZusammen* ("Berlin together") network: how to connect initiatives

During the two months of negotiations between the February 12th election and the official appointment of the new mayor (who therefore depends on the new coalition), **several citizens involved in various local associations tried to influence the SPD's decision to avoid an alliance with the CDU**. Indeed, to validate the coalition agreement, SPD members had to **vote internally**. The

BerlinZusammen (Berlin Together) initiative was therefore launched to mobilize public opinion in a very short space of time (6 weeks) and ensure that the internal vote would oppose the coalition. On March 18, 2023, more than **2,000 people turned out** to demonstrate their disagreement, under the banner of a wide variety of citizen collectives. In the photo below, for example, you can see an activist from *Klimaneusart* (in red), an activist from *Deustch Whonene & Co. enteignen* (in purple) and an activist from *Berlin autofrei* (in blue), a fledgling initiative aimed at banning combustion-powered cars from certain areas of the city.



slogan: stop the retrograde coalition!

Unfortunately, **the mobilization was not enough**. 54% of SPD members voted in favor of the coalition, giving the keys to the mayoralty to Kai Wegner, the local CDU leader.

However, *BerlinZusammen* **continues to take action, structuring itself as a "citizens' coalition"**. The idea is to establish a **common timetable that will enable collectives and associations to support each other in each action**. By taking a long-term view of their actions, the citizens of *BerlinZusammen* are seeking to **counter the usual political and activist short-termism, in order to better respond to the ecological, social and democratic emergency**. They draw their inspiration from the municipalist movement, in particular the *Barcelona en Comú* (Barcelona in Common) platform, which has administered the city of Barcelona for the past 8 years. *BerlinZusammen* members are currently **increasing their contacts with elected representatives and associations** in Berlin, with a view to **creating synergies** on concrete actions and in the run-up to the next regional elections in 2026.

"We also want to become a platform that fights for the power of Berliners, with or without voting rights, to transform our Berlin into a social, ecological and fair city. There are so many ideas to make Berlin better - let's join forces to implement these ideas!" Lisa, member of the *BerlinZusammen* collective.

To go further :

*On the referendum tool:

-*Senate administration for home and sport, referendums (GER)*

*About *Klimaneustart*

-*Berlin.de (official Berlin website), the referendum for climate neutrality by 2030 has failed (GER)*

-*Synopse Novelle Klimaneustart (GER)*

*About *Deustch Whonene*

[-A Blueprint for a Left That Wins, The Berlin referendum to expropriate big landlords shows how to organize majorities \(EN\)](#)
[-Berliners vote to expropriate large landlords in non-binding referendum \(EN\)](#)
[-Berliners vote 'yes' on property expropriation \(EN\)](#)
[-About us : wenteignen.de \(GER\)](#)
[-Volksentscheid, Deutsche Wohnen & Co. enteignen" 2021 \(GER\)](#)

*About Volksentscheid

[-10 goals - because Berlin is spinning! \(GER\)](#)
[-Berlin Mobility Act \(MobG\) - with justification \(GER\)](#)

*On Berlin's municipal elections

[-Berlin goes to the right for the first time in 22 years \(FR\)](#)
[-Olaf Scholz's SPD loses Berlin parliamentary elections \(FR\)](#)

You can find all our newsletters on the [CliMates website](#).

To follow our adventures on the networks :



If you would like to share any feedback or initiatives, please send us an e-mail to: legras.lea@gmail.com, cleafache@yahoo.fr, hug.chirol@gmail.com

You can share the newsletter subscription link with others:

[Newsletter French version](#)
[Newsletter English version](#)



This email was sent to {{contact.EMAIL}}

[Se désinscrire](#)





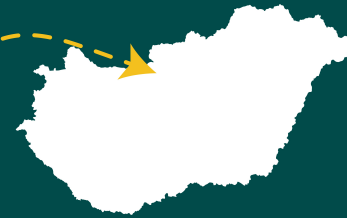
Hello everyone,

In Budapest, where we stayed for a week, it was the **political context** that struck us. **Illiberal democracy, autocracy or even dictatorship**, the terms are numerous to describe the **lack of plurality of opinions, the absence of freedom of expression and the oppression of minorities**. In this newsletter, after a historical recap, we will see how it is possible, in such a difficult context, **to transform the politics in place** for more social justice, ecology and democracy, **inside or outside public institutions**.

REVIEW 9

BUDAPEST

6-13th JUNE



1967 - 1989: From Austro-Hungarian Empire to Eastern European Communist regime

One of the first questions we asked our interviewees was this: **Is Hungary an Eastern or Central European country?**



Map of Hungary and neighbouring countries

Let's take a brief look back: from 1867 to 1918, Hungary was part of the **Austro-Hungarian Empire**. Ruled by the Habsburgs, the empire was considered a **major force in Central Europe**. Much later, after having been successively a republic and then a monarchy (a regency) allied with the Nazis,

the **Hungarian People's Republic** was proclaimed in 1949. It was a **totalitarian Communist regime**. The country is a member of the **Warsaw Pact** (Treaty of Cooperation between Eastern European countries and the USSR, 1955) and **can be defined as an Eastern European country**. In 1956, a **revolutionary wave** spread across the country, with citizens protesting against the regime and the excessive influence of the USSR on public policy. The revolt was bloodily repressed, but left a deep and lasting mark on Hungarian society. In fact, from the 1960s - despite little change in official discourse - Hungary experienced a **gradual liberalization of the social and economic sectors**. This policy, which was more lax than in neighboring countries, was **an exception** within the Eastern bloc, to the point that it was nicknamed "**goulash socialism**" from the name of the traditional Hungarian soup. This "goulash socialism" refers to the "**culture of diversion**", i.e. the gap between political speech (always strict in form) and the everyday reality of citizens. From an economic point of view, Hungary acted as **a bridge between West and East** from 1960 to 1989. It was the gateway to the East for many Western companies, and Hungarians benefited from goods unavailable in the other Communist dictatorships of the time. In 1989-1990, with the dislocation of Eastern Europe, Hungary began a **democratic transition "from above"**. A multi-party system was introduced **without any popular movement demanding it** (as had been the case with *Solidarność* in Poland, for example). The newly established republic has no popular foundation on which to base its legitimacy.

The legacy of "goulash socialism", i.e. the "culture of diversion" combined with the republic's lack of popular legitimacy, are **two important elements for understanding the current Hungarian political situation**. But these keys are **far from sufficient**. Hungarians' **strong disinterest in politics is a relatively recent phenomenon**.



1956 Revolution: In Budapest, anti-communists and nationalists place a Hungarian national flag on a demolished statue of Josef Stalin.

1990 - 2010: From the emerging liberal republic to the election of an autocrat

In the context of active liberalization in all ex-Communist countries, Hungary **joined NATO** (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 1949) in 1999 and the **European Union** in 2004. Politically, the twenty years from 1990 to 2010 were marked by a **balanced political game between the traditional left-wing and right-wing parties**. From 1998 to 2002, **Viktor Orbán's first term** as

Prime Minister was characterized by debates on European integration (of which he was in favor), before he was forced to **cede his post** at the 2002 parliamentary elections to the **Hungarian Socialist Party** (*Magyar Szocialista Párt*).



Hungarian Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán
license: CC-BY 2.0

The **economic crisis of 2008** particularly affected a Hungary economically dependent on Western nations. The liberal government of the time developed a **policy of austerity** that reinforced social inequalities and generated a **feeling of anger and distrust among citizens towards the left**. Two years later, the disappointment was confirmed in the parliamentary elections, when **Viktor Orbán's party, Fidesz, took over two-thirds of the seats** in the *Országgyűlés* (National Assembly).

2010 - 2023: The slow slope to dictatorship

In 2010, having regained the post of Prime minister, Viktor Orbán has enough power (2/3 of parliament) to **amend the constitution**. Then, he gradually and skilfully sets Hungary on the path to **autocracy** (a political regime in which a single individual holds power). In the course of amending the constitution, Orbán **attacks media freedom, criminalizes homelessness, changes the number of MPs and the boundaries of their constituencies, takes a radical position against immigration, plays up the country's Christian roots** (even though he is himself agnostic) and, most recently, **restricts the rights of homosexuals and transsexuals**.

Orbán considers his policies to be **illiberal**. Illiberalism can be defined as **the rejection of the principles of liberalism in the political sense**. In other words, a democracy in which universal suffrage is still present, but where **plurality of opinion is not respected, and where the independence of the judiciary and the media is abused**. This notion is complex, as it is accompanied by **an ultra-liberal economic policy**: strong privatization in areas such as healthcare, Europe's highest VAT rate (27%), flat tax (equal taxation regardless of income level), etc. Viktor Orbán enjoys solid popularity among Hungarian citizens, particularly in **rural areas**. This reputation is due in particular to the success of the economic policies implemented in the early 2010s, helped by **massive financial subsidies from the European Union**. Although criticized by most member countries for its failure to respect individual freedoms, Hungary continues to play **a major strategic role within the European Union**, particularly in terms of **ecological transition and reindustrialization**. Indeed, the country has positioned itself as a key player in the **production of batteries and electric vehicles**, necessary for the decarbonization of the transport sector and central to respect the objective voted by European parliamentarians of banning combustion engine vehicles in the EU by 2035. By once again making itself economically dependent on foreign dictatorships, **the European Union seems to be repeating the same mistakes as before**, with the difference that the countries in question are now on European territory (Hungary or Serbia) and not on another continent (Russia, Gulf States).

To discredit the opposition and strengthen its power, the government **directs the European subsidies it receives to pro-Fidesz municipalities**.

This policy of economic favoritism brings the few opposition politicians to their knees, and drives some local public institutions into debt. **The city of Budapest**, led by Gergely Karácsony of the ecologist party *Párbeszéd - Zöldek* (Dialogue for Hungary - the Greens), is on the verge of bankruptcy.

Strongly inspired by **Margaret Thatcher** in the UK, Viktor Orbán's **neoliberal and conservative populism** is methodically constructed and **a major source of inspiration for European right-wing parties**. *Fidesz* was a member of the EPP, the right-wing party in the European Parliament, until 2021. On different scales, Viktor Orbán also appears to **influence some French political figures** such as Marine Le Pen, Les Républicains and Emmanuel Macron.

Political commitment in Hungary: changing things from the inside?

*By strengthening his powers, Viktor Orbán is **forcing his opponents to reinvent themselves**.*

There are several strategies available to activists:

*-**Take power at local or national level** and try to act from within public institutions... which contributes to Orbán's game by giving the impression that political plurality exists.*

*-**Acting in parallel with institutions**, always on a local scale, in the continuity of the Hungarian "culture of diversion".*

With the examples that follow, we will see the possibilities and limits of these two approaches, whether political, administrative or simply human...

The Szikra movement and radical left-wing MP András Jámbor

The left-wing environmental movement *Szikra* has chosen its name in recognition of the hostility of the current political system. In Hungarian, *Szikra* means "**spark**", and the spark in question is **András Jámbor, the only member of parliament from a radical left-wing group to sit in the Hungarian National Assembly**. Formed in the wake of struggles for **social rights and access to housing** in Budapest, the movement relies on a tight-knit community of activists to **link up and give a voice to local initiatives** and struggles that already exist in the country. The challenge is **to break the government's omnipresent hegemonic narrative** by bringing a new narrative and concrete measures into the public debate, particularly on issues of access to housing.

In the run-up to the 2022 parliamentary elections, all parties opposed to Viktor Orbán came together under a common banner, *Egységben Magyarorszáért* (United for Hungary), stretching from the radical left to the liberal conservative right. The electoral system is such that half of the deputies are designated by proportional representation (cumulative results on a national scale) and the other half by obtaining a majority in one constituency. The opposition parties organized primaries for the constituencies in order to designate the coalition's single candidate. **András Jámbor**, founder of the independent media *Mérce* (which means gauge) and member of the *Szikra* movement, **ran and won the primary organized in the constituency combining Budapest's popular 8th and 9th districts**. After standing as a candidate for the opposition coalition in the official ballot in 2022, **he won the election and became the only deputy to assume a radical left-wing position in the National Assembly**.

In concrete terms, this **"one foot out, one foot in" strategy** with public institutions should enable András Jámbor to act as a **megaphone for alternative policies**. For example, when speaking in Parliament, **he promotes participatory democracy initiatives, campaigns for a better distribution of wealth and calls for the introduction of subsidies for the renovation of energy-draining buildings**. Outside the institution, *Szikra* multiplies links with local trade unions and international movements.

They maintain relations with **citizens' movements** operating in similar political contexts, as in Poland.

"If we continue to refuse politics, we will never change anything."

Áron Rossman-Kiss member of the *Szikra* movement

The **real impact of the movement is difficult to quantify**. The political obstacles are numerous and often insurmountable. Having a deputy sitting in the National Assembly is the most they can do in such a blocked political context. However, with its 200-300 members, the *Szikra* Movement has no intention of stopping there, and **hopes to increase its influence over the coming years**.



Meeting with Áron Rossman-Kiss, 06/07/23

Ecology and local power: meeting with Gábor Erőss, vice-mayor of Budapest's 8th district

Gábor Erőss, author in 2021 of an open [letter to President E. Macron](#), is **vice-mayor of Budapest's 8th district, in charge of climate change, culture, ethnic minorities and education**. After completing a thesis at the EHES (École des hautes études en sciences sociales) in Paris, he became a researcher at the **Institute of Sociology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences** before taking office. His party, *Párbeszéd-Zöldek* (Dialogue for Hungary - the Greens), allied with the other left-wing parties, **won the 2019 municipal elections in the capital and has a majority in most of the capital's 22 districts**.

In office for three and a half years, Gábor Erőss and his teams are **under pressure from the state over municipalities run by the opposition**. By controlling the legislative body, **Viktor Orbán prevents local elected representatives from engaging in ambitious local policies**. Here is a non-exhaustive list of this strategy:

-Withdrawal of powers: *Fidesz* is removing powers from municipalities. Elementary school used to be run by municipalities. Following a constitutional amendment, the Hungarian constitution now stipulates that they must be administered by the state. The same is true for the **midwifery network or certain town-planning competencies**.

-The battle for land ownership: by buying up land, buildings or using the national parliament, Viktor Orbán is "nationalizing" many plots of land and buildings originally owned by municipalities.

-Financial pressure: by restricting national subsidies and directing European subsidies to his supporters, or targeting them with special taxes, the ruling party is keeping opposition municipalities, particularly those on the left, on their toes. To such an extent that the city of Budapest has to go into debt to pay for its operating expenses, such as the public transport network. Opposition municipalities are also discredited by the Orbán-dependent national media, which blame their supposed "incompetence" without explaining the financial manipulations.

Despite the obstacles, the 8th arrondissement mayor's office **has launched a number of initiatives, including a participatory budget.** The removal of parking spaces to make the neighborhood streets more user-friendly is just one example of the projects selected by citizens. The town council is also working on **equal opportunity programs** in (nursery) schools, to increase social diversity and fight against the segregation of gypsies from an early age. On issues of biodiversity and adapting to climate change, Gábor Erőss is campaigning for an **urban forest project** that is unlikely to succeed, as the land has been reclaimed by the state to build soccer fields (with synthetic turf...).

Like many Hungarian intellectuals, Gábor Erőss studied abroad and **remains deeply imbued with European culture.** In particular, he draws inspiration from cities like Paris for his cyclo-mobility policy or to tackle energy poverty. **When asked how the European Union can support opposition municipalities in the face of Orbán's state, he replies:**

"It's ambiguous, before There was this dominant nationalist discourse which was to say that we, the opposition, are 'traitors to the fatherland' because we ask the European institutions to condition European subsidies on democratic criteria or whatever. Today, the debate is over, and the fact of addressing European institutions has become legitimate and easier to defend."

He believes that **Europe is not federal enough**, and that **democratic criteria should take precedence over all else.** At present, European funds negotiated as part of the **European Recovery and Resilience Facility** in the wake of the covid crisis **are "blocked" in Brussels for Hungary.** It has to be said that, paradoxically, Europe has played a key role in setting up the "Orbán system", which has long used these subsidies to (when not diverted) finance projects located in *Fidesz*-friendly cities. **A report** by MEP Judith Sargentini rightly calls on the Council of Europe to examine the clear risk of Hungary seriously violating the values on which the European Union was founded (2018).



Meeting with Gábor Erőss, 06/07/23

***Taking concrete action outside the institutions:
commons and the culture of diversion in Eastern
Europe***

What if Eastern European countries were in fact the best positioned for the necessary paradigm shift required by the ecological transition?

From their communist heritage, these countries, including Hungary, retain a **certain habit of solidarity, empathy and care outside public or private institutions.** This culture of the "commons" is central and alive in a country where public institutions are subject to an authoritarian regime. **In a degrowth world, the values of simplicity, conviviality and mutual aid**

promoted by the culture of the "common" are the foundations on which society functions, where **consumption is reasoned, production is supervised and human relationships are enriched.**

Although constantly threatened by the liberalization of the economy that increased in the 1990s, **many of Budapest's commons still exist.** The large number of abandoned buildings has enabled the emergence of alternative spaces over the past 30 years. **Very much alive in the 1990s and 2000s,** a dense network of alternatives (bars, citizen initiatives, cooperatives, etc.) was structured and reached its **apogee in 2016-2017.** Far from having disappeared, Budapest's counter-culture has nevertheless **been weakened by the covid crisis, generational change and the city's touristification process.**

Cargonomia: Between organic farming, cargo bikes and degrowth

In this context, the ***Cargonomia*** project was officially launched in 2015 (the project had already begun to take shape in 2010). A group of 5 friends, steeped in this alternative lifestyle, decided to **leave the dominant model behind and experiment with something new.** Using their **respective knowledge and networks,** they created an initiative **combining bicycle culture, agroecology, degrowth, politics and research.**

In concrete terms, Cargonomia is defined as **the convergence of several existing initiatives:**

- Cyclonomia***: a bicycle self-repair workshop
- Zsámbok Biokert***: an organic farm
- Kantaa***: a self-organized courier service

a) Cyclonomia : cargo bikes as a common matrix



From 2010 onwards, the members of the bike workshop started training in welding and began building, among other things, cargo bikes **to transport heavy goods in urban areas.** In addition to **demonstrating a different way of moving in the city and proposing an alternative logistics system free of polluting thermal vehicles,** the cargo bikes make *Cargonomia* **a meeting point** for different projects and a place for **socializing.** This low-tech mode of transport helps to **shape new exchanges,** based on balanced economic and social relations, and to design a slower and more desirable future. Far from being reduced to a "bike store", *Cyclonomia* is first and foremost a **"social center",** a place where citizens can buy or borrow a cargo bike for a move, for example, or simply repair their own bike autonomously. *Cyclonomia* also offers **a cyclo-logistics service, delivering baskets of local organic fruit and vegetables** from the *Zsámboki Biokert* farm to the city, thus **ensuring continuity between urban and rural areas.** The self-organized courier service is provided by the small company "*Kantaa*", also part of the *Cargonomia* universe.

Whereas a car weighs over 1 tonne to carry a 70kg person, a bicycle weighs only enough for one person to carry 10 times its load. The *Cargonomia* bike is therefore a **way of getting away from the absurd car dependency, reconnecting with a sense of proportion and transporting essential goods and services**. Although the *Cargonomia* initiative is difficult to copy outside Budapest, it can be a **source of inspiration**. One of the project's Franco-Hungarian founders, Adrien, left Budapest to return to France and set up his own "*Veloma*" bicycle workshop in France, inspired by *Cargonomia*'s values

b) Zsámboki Biokert (Zsambok organic garden): between organic farm and ecological and social experimentation

Located in the village of *Zsámbok*, about 50 kilometers from Budapest, the 3.5-hectare *Zsámboki Biokert* farm was established in 2010. Based on an **organic and biodynamic farming model**, the farm produces fruit and vegetables that are **sold at the market (40%) and in baskets in cooperation with Cargonomia in the city (60%)**. Delivery is based on a **pre-order system** inspired by **Community-supported agriculture (CSA)**. Every week, the *Zsámboki Biokert* farm distributes a hundred baskets. With **five employees**, the farm creates a **dynamic within the village of Zsámbok**, and offers **higher wages** than those usually earned by Hungarian farmers. Thus, *Zsámboki Biokert* is a **social and convivial space, reconciling social and ecological issues and proposing an alternative economic model**, emancipated from the logic of profit. The link with *Cargonomia* ensures the **farm's stability and connection to the city**.



CC-CoRDE at *Zsámboki Biokert* farm, with *Cargonomia* interns, 06/08/23

c) From concrete local action to spreading degrowth ideas

Cargonomia members take part in **numerous events** to promote their cargo bikes and the degrowth values they embody. Their partners include the **Gólya cooperative**, which runs an alternative bar and is active in building distribution and renovation, and the **Valyo association**, which campaigns to ensure that the banks of the Danube are seen as a commons accessible to all. Like many of the initiatives we met during our trip (*L'Asilo* in Naples or *Christiania* in Copenhagen, for example), the members of *Cargonomia* face the **challenge of generational shock**, the new Hungarian generation being less steeped in the culture of the commons (and conversely, more steeped in Western individualism) than their elders (some of whom have emigrated to other European countries). Aware of this need to pass on knowledge, the team welcomes **many visitors from different backgrounds**:

- Schoolchildren**, who come to take part in activities on the farm, for example.
- International students on exchange or internship**: many of them are graduates of France's prestigious engineering schools, and share their daily lives by alternately working on the farm and researching topics related to degrowth.
- Journalists, researchers and curious groups** passing through Budapest (like us).



Meeting with *Valyo*, 06/10/23

By providing a **common narrative** for the initiatives they are partnering, *Cargonomia* **bridges the gap between practice and theory**. Strategically, they **assume their status as a simple, concrete utopia and a front for spreading the ideas of degrowth**, without falling into the trap of the quest for profit and the race for subsidies.

"You have to be careful with utopias. The risk is in taking too many people with us, and if it collapses, it's a disaster. We're trying small experiments... If Cargonomia falls apart, there aren't millions of people behind it, so we're taking it one step at a time."

Vincent Liegey, co-founder of *Cargonomia*

Several of our co-founders are actively involved in **disseminating degrowth ideas**. Among them, Vincent Liegey is very active in the French debate and media, as well as in international degrowth networks. Logan Strenchock, another co-founder, lectures on organic farming at Budapest's Central European University (CEU). Or Orsolya Lazányi ("Orsi"), whose doctoral thesis, completed at Budapest's Corvinus University in 2022, is entitled "AN ECOLOGICAL ECONOMICS INQUIRY INTO THE SOCIAL AND SOLIDARITY ECONOMY" (EN), with *Cargonomia* as the study object.

This constant juggling between ideas and action makes *Cargonomia* **a showcase for degrowth in action**. When asked what strategy to adopt to avoid the coming ecological crash, Vincent Liegey replies that the crash is inevitable. The real challenge is to make people understand what is happening, to reinforce local production and solidarity, and to **prepare people's minds in a "pedagogy of catastrophe"**. Contrary to catastrophism, this pedagogy argues that **we need to make society sufficiently familiar with a political idea** so that, in the wake of a deep crisis, **our society takes the path of degrowth rather than the path of an increasingly totalitarian neoliberalism**. This strategy seems particularly relevant in view of the effects of the covid crisis, which, despite the ephemeral debates on "the world after", has only produced a strengthening of control over citizens and of corporate power. Last but not least, *Cargonomia* places the notion of **conviviality**, so dear to the thinker Ivan Illitch, at the heart of its daily life, which probably guarantees it a certain sustainability.

To go further:

About Hungarian politics:

-article: [Announcing the "illiberal state", fondation Heinrich-Böll \(EN\)](#)

-article: [How Orbán Exploited a Pandemic, Green European Journal \(EN\)](#)

About Cargonomia:

-article: [*At the school of degrowth: in a Hungarian farm, young Frenchmen push back the merchandization of the world, L'Obs \(FR\)*](#)
-article: [*Cargonomia: the economic alternative from Hungary, Cafe Babel \(FR\)*](#)
-video: [*Survey #8 - Meet Cargonomia and Veloma, Low-tech Lab \(FR\)*](#)

-About Zsámboki Biokert : two videos [*Zsámboki Biokert - Part One \(EN\)*](#) / [*Zsámboki Biokert Part 2 - Cargonomia \(EN\)*](#)

You can find all our newsletters on the [CliMates website](#).

To follow our adventures on the networks :



If you would like to share any feedback or initiatives, please send us an e-mail to: legras.lea@gmail.com, cleafache@yahoo.fr, hug.chirol@gmail.com

You can share the newsletter subscription link with others:

[Newsletter French version](#)

[Newsletter English version](#)



This email was sent to {{contact.EMAIL}}

[Se désinscrire](#)



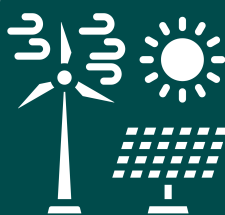


Hello everyone,

In addition to being at the heart of our daily lives, **energy occupies a central place in the political organization of Western countries**. For geo-strategic reasons, energy policies are often decided on a national or even European scale, which raises problems of local acceptability and implementation. Over the last few months in Europe, we have been exploring **the notion of "Energy Democracy"**, and seeing how **citizens can take power over this fundamental issue in three European cities: Hamburg, Berlin and Brussels**.

SPECIAL REVIEW

ENERGY DEMOCRACY



In a context of transition: "energy democracy" as a solution to overcome the limits of centralized and liberalized energy governance

Most **Western democracies have started their energy transition**, even though it is encountering two major problems.

On the one hand, the deployment of Renewable Energies (RE) across the country is generating **a great deal of opposition and widening the urban-rural gap**.

On the other hand, the need for "sobriety" (i.e. drastically reducing our consumption) requires **a radical shift in economic paradigm** (towards degrowth), which still seems far from a consensus among decision-makers.

But what are the reasons for this blockage?

From a technical point of view, the **disconnect between consumer and producer is particularly high for energies such as gas and oil**. European citizens are ultra-dependent on abundant, cheap, imported energy (Middle Eastern oil, for example), without realizing the negative effects of this on a daily basis. Their consumption habits, though recent, are deeply rooted. As far as electricity is concerned, the sector that best illustrates this discrepancy is civil nuclear power. The construction of a few nuclear power plants to supply an entire country helps to make invisible the fact that all energy production methods have an impact on the environment. The radical change in habits brought about by the introduction of new renewable energy sources represents a major cultural challenge. The growing opposition to renewable energies in the West is proof of this: people in Western countries have become so accustomed to the benefits of abundant energy that they can no longer accept its negative impacts.

From a political point of view, if we look back a few decades, another cause of these blockages can be tackled: **the hyper-centralization of decision-making on energy issues**. As energy is a major power issue, its governance has always been at national or even European level, historically for conventional energies (coal, gas or nuclear) and more recently for renewable energies (onshore or offshore wind power, solar power, etc.). Centralized governance could be seen as an advantage at a time of ecological planning, but it calls into question the democratic dimension of decisions and widens the gap between decision-makers and citizens, diminishing the latter's autonomy (and freedom?).

Finally, from a more **economic point of view**, we can consider that the current blockages are partly **inherited from the liberalization of the energy sector introduced by the European Union in the late 1990s**. Opening up the sector to competition makes planning more difficult and reduces the power of governments, considerably slowing down the urgently needed energy transition. In the onshore wind energy sector, for example, citizens living close to a wind farm feel the impact on the environment on a daily basis, generally without receiving any benefit from it, since this benefit is captured by the company behind the project, which probably has its headquarters in a major European city.

This is where the concept of "energy democracy" comes in. The idea is to overcome the obstacles mentioned above by reinventing a decentralized system of energy governance, in which citizens play a central role. The involvement of citizens seems essential to address the issues of social justice and acceptability in the implementation of the energy transition.

Strongly influenced by **the municipalist, cooperativist and "commons" movements**, the players involved in energy democracy are numerous and complementary. During our tour of Europe, we met some of them:

-Some are campaigning for the **remunicipalization** (return to the public sphere) of energy distribution networks, as in Hamburg with the *"Unser Hamburg unser Netz"* (Our Hamburg, Our Network) project.

-Others are joining forces **in the form of cooperatives** to launch citizen energy projects, as in Berlin with *"BürgerEnergie Berlin"* (Citizen Energy Berlin).


-Last but not least, a number of players are **working in Brussels to influence**


Citizens: central but forgotten players in energy policies


A brief look at the organization of the electricity market in Europe


In almost all European Union member states, the energy sector, and in particular electricity and gas, was managed 100% by public institutions. Since 1996, the European Union has transformed the sector into a single, integrated internal market, with the aim of reducing costs and improving security of supply.

So, to understand to which link in the chain the notion of "energy democracy" can be applied, it's essential to recall **how the electricity sector is currently divided up in Europe:**

 **Production:** This can take the form of hydroelectric dams, nuclear, gas or coal-fired power plants, or renewable energy parks. **This activity is open to competition.**

 **Transport:** This involves transporting electricity over long distances. These high-voltage lines are to electricity what highways are to the road network. This sector is considered a natural monopoly, and **in most countries is administered by a public company.**

 **Distribution:** to bring electricity to every home, towns are equipped with a distribution network connected to the transmission lines. It's the equivalent of departmental roads for the road network. As with transmission, **distribution networks are natural monopolies owned by public institutions.**

 **Supply:** The final link in the chain is the purchase/sale between the consumer and the supplier. The latter may be a producer themselves, or may purchase electricity from a third-party producer. **This activity is open to competition.**

Lever n°1 Taking energy out of the market: remunicipalization, a return to local power

One of the levers for regaining power at local level is to **remunicipalize energy management**. This means **bringing back into the local public sphere, i.e. into the municipal fold, activities that were managed at national level or that had been opened up to private players**. This leverage applies particularly to **production and distribution**, and enables elected representatives to make informed decisions in the light of all factors (economic, social and, above all, ecological), in contrast to private companies, which are essentially profit-driven. In Germany, for example, distribution networks belong to the regions (*Landër*) and are operated by private players under 10-20-year concessions.

After a competitive bidding process, a private company is then appointed to manage the network: strategic decisions on network development (which may have an impact on the feasibility of RE projects in the city) fall to it, as well as the profits generated by this activity.

The example of Hamburg and the "Unser Hamburg unser Netz" (Our Hamburg, our network) initiative

In Hamburg, the company *Vattenfall* (owned by the Swedish state), which was responsible for operating the electricity distribution infrastructure (owned by the city-state of Hamburg) until 2013, **has been challenged by a citizens' initiative for a local referendum: "Unser Hamburg unser Netz"**. This particular democratic tool enables German citizens to request a popular referendum on the subject of their choice, provided they gather a sufficient number of signatures. **Thus, on September 22, 2013, over 25% of the city's citizens voted in favor of remunicipalizing the city's gas, electricity and heating distribution networks** ([we wrote an article on these initiatives](#)). This result, although opposed to the will of the ruling municipality (headed by Olaf Scholz, the current German Chancellor), has a high symbolic value and indirectly enables citizens to regain power over the city's energy policies. Today, all three networks are operated by public companies that are 100% owned by the local authorities.

In line with the ideal of "energy democracy", the arguments in favor of remunicipalization are numerous: **greater democratic control, greater transparency, support for the development of renewable energies, fairer pricing policies, security of supply, or even channelling and local reuse of the profits generated...**

Delegating the management of an infrastructure to a public player obviously represents a step forward in the democratization of energy management. One of the limits of this approach is the lack of citizen involvement on a day-to-day basis. To counter this, there are **initiatives for shared governance of the public company in charge of managing the network**. For example, the board of directors could be made up of one-third citizens, one-third associations or local businesses (civil society) and the remainder local elected representatives, so that decisions taken collectively are representative of the general interest. Another limitation of this approach is that **it only concerns the distribution sector. To overcome these two limitations, let's take a look at cooperatives and citizen energy initiatives.**



Meeting with Wielke from "Unser Hamburg unser Netz" in Hamburg, 05/23/23

Lever n°2 Produce your own energy: when citizens invest themselves in the energy transition

Citizen energy, energy community, energy cooperative... There are many words to illustrate the idea of "energy democracy". To avoid confusion, here's a quick vocabulary reminder:

A **cooperative** is a collectively-owned enterprise where power is exercised **democratically**. Shareholders are citizens, each having one vote on the Board of Directors (regardless of the number of shares they own). Applied to energy, a cooperative is often a group of citizens who invest in and operate a renewable energy project.

A **citizen energy** is a renewable energy production project that **opens up the majority of its capital to collective financing and its management to local stakeholders, in the interests of the territory and its inhabitants**. The majority of cases follow the format of cooperatives, but there are also renewable energy projects whose shareholding is shared between private companies and citizens, with more or less horizontal governance.

The concept of **energy community** is very similar to "citizen energy". However, there is a definition for each of these terms. In French, "communauté d'énergie" refers to the **sharing of energy between users of a network** (or collective self-consumption). It is a way of organizing collective energy activities through a system that is **both open and democratic**.

The latter definition (energy community) is therefore very similar, if not identical, to that of citizen energy. **The existence of these two terms can be explained by the change in language:** "energy community" translates into French as "énergie citoyenne", **the notion of community being negatively connoted in the language of Molière.** In the end, citizen energy initiatives seem to be the best way of overcoming the obstacles mentioned above.

There are **six main arguments** in favor of developing these initiatives:

Acceptability: by having the opportunity to be involved and perceive the benefits (direct or indirect), people living near an RE project are much more likely to be in favor of it. Lack of transparency, democracy and benefit-sharing are among the arguments most often used by opponents of this type of project.

Democracy: with decision-making power at their disposal, citizens reclaim a form of power, learn about the challenges of the energy transition and discover political action.

Circularity: instead of being captured by delocalized private interests (the company behind the project is rarely based in the region), the profits generated are either paid back to the cooperative's citizen shareholders, or reinvested in local projects with a social and/or environmental impact (decided by the shareholders). The trajectory of profits is not insignificant, and some of the private companies active in renewable energies also finance fossil fuel projects... An energy cooperative project therefore guarantees a "sustainable" use of the profits made.

Conviviality: a project co-developed by residents of the same area can help forge links and overcome certain ideological or human divisions. This is where the notion of "community" makes sense.

Sobriety: involving citizens in a collective renewable energy project can have an impact on individual behavior. It is much easier to reduce one's electricity consumption when one is confronted on a daily basis with the impact this has.

Moving away from market logic: In a system where the selling price of the electricity produced is fixed over the long term, the ups and downs of the market (price rises in winter, war in Ukraine, for example) have no impact on consumers' bills or producers' profits. Emancipated from the instability of market logic, this economic model enables us to gain autonomy, making it a concrete expression of degrowth.

In addition to this possibility of collective self-consumption, **two directives were adopted by the European Parliament in 2020 to define and encourage energy community projects: the Renewable Energy Communities (RECs)** defined in the Renewable Energy Directive, and **the Citizen Energy Communities (CECs)** defined in the Electricity Market Directive. These two definitions are very similar. For example, both require energy communities to **have limited profitability and a positive environmental, social or local economic impact.** More precisely, **Renewable Energy Communities (RECs) can be seen as a subset** of Citizen Energy Communities (CECs), with the former having a few additional criteria:

-RECs must be made up exclusively of citizens, local authorities or small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), while large corporations may be members of CECs.

-The **REC must be governed by the same principles of democratic governance as a cooperative**, and **be autonomous** not only from other market players, but also from its own members.

-**REC's members must be based in the vicinity** of the RE project. However, the perimeter is not specified.

-**A CEC's range of activities is broader than that of a REC**. A CEC can, for example, offer distribution and energy services, whereas a REC can only produce renewable energy.

Once ratified, these directives **were translated into the legislation of each EU member country**. As is often the case, this process was carried out with varying degrees of fidelity to the European text, depending on the country. **The purpose of these definitions is to set up public subsidy mechanisms for citizen energy projects**. However, the project and the legislative amendment are **still too recent to assess their concrete effects**.

Even though they represent a major solution for the energy transition, citizen energy projects **remain largely a minority in the energy mix of European countries**. In **France**, 315 projects have been approved by *Energie Partagée*, representing an annual production of 1,225 GWh, or **0.3% of national electricity consumption**. In Germany, a leading country on these issues, there are over 900 energy cooperatives producing 8 TWh of electricity a year, or 1.6% of the country's annual electricity consumption.

The example of BürgerEnergie Berlin: energy democracy in action

Founded in 2011 to **strengthen democratic control over Berlin's energy management**, *BürgerEnergie Berlin* is **the city's largest cooperative and now has 1500 members** (share owners), the majority of whom are citizens **based in the region**. Initially, the cooperative was set up to take action on distribution, by bidding to operate Berlin's electricity network, whose concession was due to expire in 2012. The operating contract was not awarded (the grid is managed by the municipally-owned public company *Stromnetz Berlin*), so *BürgerEnergie Berlin* **is now working on the production side, with solar power projects scattered across the city**. In addition to **raising awareness among citizens**, the cooperative lobbies local and national elected representatives for greater "energy democracy".

In reality, a cooperative of this scale is hardly profitable, and relies on the work of volunteers. On the dozen projects in operation, the cooperative manages to generate a margin of **2%, enough to pay its five salaried employees**. Like the "commons", cooperatives represent a third way between the state and the market in resource management. While they operate in a similar way to the horizontal, self-managed organization of the "commons", **the main difference lies in the financial contribution required to join a cooperative**. In the case of *BürgerEnergie Berlin*, a share costs €100. To become a member and have a vote at the general meeting, five shares are required. **However, a citizen with 150 shares will have as much power as one with only five**.

Citizen energy, in the form of cooperatives, communities or collaborations between traditional companies and local residents, **is therefore the main lever for creating a**


virtuous "energy democracy" in which citizens are free and autonomous, from production to consumption. To facilitate new projects and multiply initiatives, many actors are mobilizing at all levels: local, national and European. Here are some of the organizations we met along the way.


The European Union:
a key level to promote laws in favor of "energy democracy"

In the previous section, we mentioned the introduction in 2020 of two European directives defining the status of "energy community" and providing financial support for citizen energy projects. **These legislative advances don't just appear out of the blue:** they are, of course, **initiated by either the European Commission or MEPs and adopted by the European Parliament.** As part of our project, we were able to exchange views with **EnergyCities** and **REScoop**, two organizations that played a key role in the formulation and adoption of these measures.



***EnergyCities** is a European network that brings together more than 1,000 European cities in over 30 countries to collaborate and pool actions in favor of energy transition in cities. The remunicipalization of energy governance is central to their advocacy. Mainly active in Brussels, they currently focus their activities on three pillars:*

 As part of the **current negotiations on the allocation of the European budget for 2027-2034**, the organization is **campaigning for the budget to finance only "Places Based Implemented Strategy", i.e. projects that have been designed "from the bottom up" in a way that is coherent with the challenges facing the territory concerned.** The idea is to include all stakeholders in the design of the project, i.e. elected representatives, the administration, civil society, academics and local economic players.

 Ensure that **the notion of "sobriety" (not just individual but systemic) is integrated at all levels of projects funded by the European Commission.**

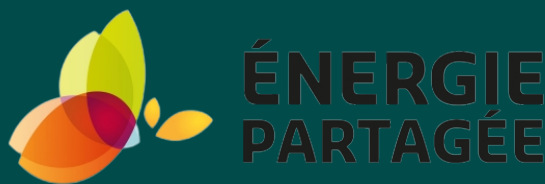
 **Increase the number of direct-democratic initiatives, such as citizen conventions.**



REScoop - *European federation of citizen energy cooperatives*. Formed just over 10 years ago, REScoop is a major player **in the field of energy cooperatives**. By lobbying the EU, REScoop is pushing European legislation to **encourage energy cooperatives as much as possible**. They are also active in **structuring the network and strengthening cooperation**.

National federations:
linking locally-based initiatives with European advocacy

Advocacy for greater "energy democracy" in Brussels would be less effective without the support of national federations. In France and Germany, we were able to talk to organizations that act as intermediaries between the problems encountered by projects in the field and the international organizations that represent them. The great diversity of projects and types of initiative (cooperative, citizen energy, community, etc.) also translates into a certain diversity of organizations. For example, we met with **Énergie Partagée**, which deals with citizen energy issues in France, **DGRV**, which represents all German cooperatives (including energy cooperatives), and **VKU**, which represents local public enterprises. Here are a few details on the respective roles of these organizations:



Énergie Partagée is a French association whose aim is **to facilitate the creation of citizen energy projects**. Created some ten years ago, they provide initiatives with access to the tools and best practices they need to develop. They **coordinate the national citizen energy network** and can even **provide financial support** for certain projects.



DGRV - *Deutscher Genossenschafts- und Raiffeisenverband e.V. (German cooperatives and Raiffeisen association)* - is the **lobby for German cooperatives**. Present in Brussels and in every region of the country, they seek to **defend the interests of cooperatives, whether they are energy cooperatives** (most of them) or **active in other fields** (agri-food, banking, etc.). As an influential group financed by cooperatives, they refuse to use the term "citizen energy", even though most citizen energy projects take the form of cooperatives.



VERBAND KOMMUNALER
UNTERNEHMEN e.V.

VKU - *Verband kommunaler Unternehmen e.V. (association of municipal companies).* Like DGRV for cooperatives, VKU is **the federation of German municipal companies**. These are companies whose **activity is a delegation of public service and which are owned by the municipality** (as in the example of Hamburg, where a municipal company now operates the electricity distribution network). Based in Berlin, the VKU federation is also present in Brussels and in all the German *Landër*. **With 200 employees, they issue opinions on public policy to defend the interests of municipal companies** (taxation, support mechanisms, etc.).

Thanks to a multitude of local initiatives and players, **the ideal of an "Energy Democracy" is spreading in many European countries**. Strengthening the role of democracy at all levels of the energy chain **seems essential and urgent if European citizens want to overcome the obstacles to the energy transition without creating a "green dictatorship"**. Despite the dynamism of the movement, **there is still a long way to go, and a more ambitious commitment on the part of European states is needed to make Europe an example of "energy democracy"**.

To go further:

-article: [ENERGY COMMUNITIES: DEFINING THE FUTURE EUROPEAN DRIVERS OF CITIZEN ENERGY TRANSITION](#), [Enerblog \(FR\)](#)

-article: [Beyond self-consumption: the concept of energy communities](#), [Smart Grids \(FR\)](#)

-article: [What is an energy community](#), [LIFE LETsGO4Climate \(FR\)](#)

-article: [Citizen Energy: A practical guide to regaining power](#), [REScoop \(FR\)](#)

You can find all our newsletters on the [CliMates website](#).

To follow our adventures on the networks:



If you would like to share any feedback or initiatives, please send us an e-mail to:

You can share the newsletter subscription link with others:

[Newsletter French version](#)

[Newsletter English version](#)



This email was sent to {{contact.EMAIL}}

[Se désinscrire](#)





Hello to everyone,

For the 13th city we have crossed, we are back within the borders of the European Union, in Croatia, in Zagreb. This last stop in a Central European country was an opportunity **to meet a citizen's movement that holds power**. Here we look at how a group of citizens mobilized for the right to the city came to form a municipal list and then a national party, now elected in two Croatian cities, including the capital Zagreb.

REVIEW 11

ZAGREB

18 - 21 JUNE



Croatia's recent history, influenced by its integration into the European Union



A member of Josip Broz-Tito's Communist Yugoslavia since 1945, Croatia declared itself an **independent nation in 1991**, as Yugoslavia and other Eastern European Communist dictatorships were crumbling. The liberalization of the economy and the establishment of a representative democracy in the country were accompanied by **integration into NATO in 2009**, **entry into the European Union in 2013** and, more recently, the adoption of the **Euro (€)** as its currency on January 1st, 2023. The growing number of connections with the major Western powers has transformed Croatia, which has developed an **important tourism economy** accounting for almost 20% of its Gross

Domestic Product (GDP), the rest being dominated by the service sector. Zagreb, but especially the Mediterranean coast to the south-west, is therefore very popular with European tourists looking for a party destination. The country's recent history also includes **the magnitude 5.3 earthquake of March 22, 2020**, which damaged many homes in the Zagreb region, requiring an investment of some ten billion euros for repairs.

Regarding its political system, Croatia is a **parliamentary republic**, with a single chamber: the *Hrvatski sabor* (Croatian Parliament). The President of the Republic is elected by direct universal suffrage for a 5-year term, renewable only once (as in France). He has little power compared with the Prime Minister, whom he is responsible for nominating (based on the results of the parliamentary elections) and who must lead the *vlada* (government). Since 2016, the country has been governed by **Prime Minister Andrej Plenković**, a former MEP and member of the right-wing conservative and nationalist HDZ party: *Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica* (Croatian Democratic Union).



Croatian Prime Minister, Andrej Plenković
Premier Ministre Andrej Plenković,

A mobilization against the privatization of the city that strengthens ties between citizens

As we mentioned in the Budapest newsletter, the countries that emerged from the communist bloc in Eastern Europe share a **certain "culture of the commons"**, which is gradually being eroded by the liberalization of their economies. Like its Slovenian, Serbian and Hungarian neighbors, Croatia is following this dynamic. At the end of the 2000s, a number of **citizen groups began to protest against the privatization of public space and the destruction of nature**. From 2006 to 2010, the capital's residents protested against the construction of an access road for a **private garage** in the pedestrian street of *Varšavske ulice* in the heart of Zagreb, by demonstrating and occupying the site. Even if the project is completed, these years of mobilization will have a **lasting impact on the city's public policies and the organization of activist networks**. In a context of international mobilizations against neoliberal policies, following the economic crisis of 2008 (Occupy Wall Street in the United States, *Indignados* in Spain), Croatia saw **major demonstrations in 2012 against the austerity policies of the current government led by social democrat Zoran Milanović (center-left)**.

Zagreb je NAŠ! and the conquest of power



Created in 2017, the ***Zagreb je NAŠ!* (Zagreb is ours)** brings together activists for the right to the city, ecologists and feminists, some of whom have been involved in struggles against the destruction of public spaces. Influenced by the Barcelona en Comú (Barcelona in Common) municipalist movement, the collective **structured itself into neighborhood groups and local committees to decentralize power** and run in the **2017 municipal elections**. The **coalition**, which includes four other left-wing and environmentalist parties, **won 7.4% of the vote and 4 seats on the city council**, including one for *Zagreb je NAŠ!* **Tomislav Tomašević**, former president of the NGO *Zelene Akcije* (Green Action), **became the movement's first elected representative**.



Tomislav Tomašević

Two years later, the **national party *Možemo!* (We Can!)** was founded, mainly by personalities from *Zagreb je NAŠ!* **with a view to the 2019 European elections**. The score achieved was not enough to win seats in the European Parliament, but helped popularize the new party. In its electoral strategy and ideas, *Možemo!* draws much of its inspiration from Spain's *Podemos!* (We Can!) movement. Thanks in particular to the organization of the summer university of the **Institute of Political Ecology (IPE)** in Zagreb, *Možemo!* is in close contact with other **Balkan movements** such as *Ne davimo Beograd*, which we met in Serbia, and *United Reform Action* in Montenegro. In **2020, parliamentary elections** are held in Croatia, and the party builds on its grassroots base to achieve a promising score: it **wins 7% of the vote and 7 seats in the National Assembly**, making its mark on the Croatian political landscape. **This campaign was decisive for the one to follow: the municipal elections of 2021.**

In the meantime, the party has grown to over **300 members directly involved in Zagreb**, and has branches in many provincial towns, relying as much as possible on citizens already mobilized in local struggles. Including its conurbation, Zagreb has a population of **1.1 million**, or over a quarter of the Croatian population. Thus, the city has a major political weight in Croatia. The municipality is divided into 19 districts, which in themselves are divided into constituencies. There are therefore **three levels of representation for a total of around 500 local elected representatives**. In 2021, the municipal campaign was disrupted by the **sudden death of the outgoing mayor, Milan Bandić** (who was then expected to lose in the polls). Bandić, who had been in

power for 21 years on behalf of the right-wing conservative HDZ party, had been implicated in a number of **corruption scandals** and had even been imprisoned and released on bail in 2014. **On May 30, 2021, Tomislav Tomašević and the *Možemo!* party came to power for the first time in their history, winning a majority in 18 of the capital's 19 districts, i.e. a total of 62.25% of the vote.**

This **striking success can be explained by a number of factors:**

-The **favorable political context:** On the one hand, the sudden death of the outgoing mayor took his party by surprise, especially as power was exercised in a very vertical manner. Secondly, the traditional left-wing party, *Socijaldemokratska Partija Hrvatske* (SDP, Social Democratic Party of Croatia), was in the midst of disintegration, also due to corruption.

-A **"bottom-up" conquest of municipal power** by experienced left-wing and environmental activists, identified in the continuity of the struggles for the right to the city over the last ten years.

-The **drafting of a collaborative program**, carried out by some 10,000 contributors and coordinated by 200 experts, i.e. citizens specializing in a particular field.

-The **dynamism of research and civil society**, notably embodied by Zagreb's Institute of Political Ecology (IPE), from which the newly elected mayor and vice-mayor come. The IPE documents topics such as the commons, municipalism, degrowth and climate justice, and has actively contributed to building the ideological framework of the *Zagreb Je Nas!* movement.



Meeting with Vedran Horvat from IPE, 06/20/23

Municipalism and degrowth put to the test of power: a review of two years in office

One of the questions posed by citizens' initiatives of this kind is: **should we abandon our militant posture when called upon to govern, and risk losing our radicalism?** This question had already arisen in the early stages of the municipal campaign, when the local *Zagreb Je Nas!* movement agreed to run under the colors of the national *Možemo!* party. For their first two years in office, Tomašević and his teams have **decided to disassociate themselves from the IPE** from which they come, in order to make people forget their militant past, gain credibility and **apply a less radical policy** than the one they claimed in the past. Their strategy, based on the idea of having **"one foot in politics and one foot out"**, is to **prioritize day-to-day municipal services** (waste, education, public transport) **before transforming the institution in greater depth**. Two years after their election, the municipal team is **highly criticized** by citizens, traditional parties and, to a lesser extent, by its own supporters. However, all is not lost: in a recently published survey, **citizens gave the municipality over 50% positive feedback.**

It has to be said that, as soon as it took office, the new team had to deal with the **disastrous state of the city's finances** and do everything in its power to avoid bankruptcy. One of the first measures taken by Tomašević was **to put an end to the birth policy implemented** by the previous mayor. Indeed, in the face of the country's major demographic crisis, the municipality had launched a program of financial assistance for large families. These families could receive

600€ per month, so that one of the two parents could look after the children at home. As well as being sexist (in the vast majority of cases, the woman stays at home), this measure weighed heavily on the municipal budget and risked cutting children off from socialization with other children. Despite being a priority in the eyes of the new mayor's office, the unravelling of this measure is taking a long time; in addition to the legislative headache, the municipality **does not have sufficient nursery or kindergarten capacity.**

Another difficult measure is the introduction of **a new waste collection system inspired by Brussels.** The system consists of **buying council-certified garbage bags** from tobacco shops (at a slightly higher price than their production cost, to pay for the service). The idea is to make the bags dedicated to recycling (paper, plastic, etc...) less expensive than the "all-purpose" bags, to encourage Zagreb residents to separate their waste. The other benefit of this reform is the **disappearance of garbage bins** from citizens' view, as the bags are placed directly in the street in accordance with the times when the garbage collectors pass by. This measure, intended to **improve the city's aesthetics, contribute to social justice** (the biggest waste producers are the ones who pay the most) and encourage waste recycling, **was implemented with difficulty.** This was due to **problems of communication and citizen awareness**, a certain **reluctance to change** on the part of citizens, as well as the **corruption and inertia of municipal services** inherited from the management of the former mayor.

In a tug-of-war similar to Viktor Orbán's confrontation with the mayor of Budapest in Hungary, **the Croatian Prime Minister has frozen the state aid needed to repair the damage caused by the 2020 earthquake.** This strategy is **forcing Tomislav Tomašević to be moderate in his criticism towards the national government**, and this attitude is being criticized by some of his supporters. Many of them **regret the mayor's lack of radicalism**, particularly within the Institute of Political Ecology (IPE), which is full of ideas for developing radical democracy and the commons in the city. The International Degrowth Conference, to be held in Zagreb from August 29 to September 2, will be organized by the IPE, and **represents an opportunity for the municipal team.** It can choose to **show its support for the radical movement, and reconnect with its militant roots and past positions.**

To go further :

On the 2010 mobilizations

-article: [Croats stage first protest against austerity drive, Reuters \(EN\)](#)

-article: [Anti-Government Protests in Croatia: Changing Politics, The Bulletin \(EN\)](#)

On Zagreb Je Nas! and Možemo! party

-article: [In Croatia, an environmental activist elected mayor of Zagreb, La Croix \(FR\)](#)

-article: [One Year On, Is Zagreb Ours?, Left East \(EN\)](#)

You can find all our newsletters on the CliMates website.

To follow our adventures on the networks :



If you would like to share any feedback or initiatives, please send us an e-mail to: legras.lea@gmail.com, cleafache@yahoo.fr, hug.chirol@gmail.com

You can share the newsletter subscription link with others:

[Newsletter French version](#)

[Newsletter English version](#)



This email was sent to {{contact.EMAIL}}

[Se désinscrire](#)





Hi everyone,

We spent a few days in Belgrade, the capital of Serbia, the only non-EU country we will visit. There we met Jelena Vasiljević, elected representative of the municipalist movement Ne Davimo Beograd ("Don't let Belgrade drown"), as well as a member of Ekoloski Ustanak ("Ecological Uprisings") and Predrag Momcilovic, director of the Institute of Political Ecology. Between the war in Ukraine, the rekindled conflict in Kosovo, recent shootings and demonstrations against violence and the government, the political debate in Serbia is currently not the most open to ecological issues.

Nevertheless, by tracing the evolution of the struggles against the lithium mine in the Jadar valley and that of the municipalist movement Ne Davimo Beograd, both of which gave rise to political parties, the inseparable nature of ecological struggles and democratic issues became very clear.

REVIEW 10

BELGRADE

14-17th JUNE



From citizen ecological struggles to public institutions in an illiberal democracy at the gates of the European Union

Historical and political context

Democracy in a country with a history of ethnic conflicts and authoritarianism

Ecological and social struggles in Serbia face very specific difficulties, as they take place in an authoritarian regime with strong nationalist tensions, and are first and foremost struggles for democracy. Authoritarianism and ethnic conflict play an important role in Serbia's history. After the dismantling of the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the end of the First World War, several Slavic peoples banded together to form the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, a Serb-dominated monarchy which in 1929 became Yugoslavia, the "country of the South Slavs" in Serbo-Croatian. This new country was the scene of ethnic massacres perpetrated by the pro-Nazi Croatian separatist Ustashiz movement during the Second World War, among others.

At liberation in 1945, Marshal Josip Broz-Tito, who had led the Communist resistance, created the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to reunite the peoples and recognized the six separate republics of Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia, Montenegro, Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. [1]



The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia - from 1945 to 1990

Tensions flared up again after Tito's death in 1980, and were exacerbated by the arrival in power of Slobodan Milošević, founder of the Socialist Party of Serbia, who centralized power in Belgrade and claimed a strong nationalist stance. He was nicknamed the "Butcher of the Balkans" when, in 1995, following the wave of independence declared successively by Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, he ordered the Serbian army to invade Sarajevo in Bosnia-Herzegovina, where it massacred eight thousand Muslims. Eventually, with NATO support, the Croats crushed the Serbs. [2]

Another ethnic conflict broke out in 1997 in Kosovo, a province of Serbia inhabited by a 90% majority of Muslim Albanians and a minority of 120,000 Orthodox Serbs.



AFP Infography

The Kosovo Liberation Army's demand for independence was repressed in a bloodbath in Belgrade. In 1998, NATO bombed Yugoslavia for 78 days to prevent further ethnic cleansing, but this move was not without consequences, and still fuels strong resentment of NATO and even Europe among the Serbian population. In June 1999, hostilities with Kosovo ceased. The territory was placed under interim UN administration and saw the deployment of the Kosovo Force (KFOR), a NATO peacekeeping mission that is still present today. [3]



"Operation Allied Forces - NATO bombing Yugoslavia" Amos Chapple -

The year 2000 saw the end of Slobodan Milošević's authoritarian regime and Serbia's accession to the UN. Vojislav Koštunica, candidate of the Serbian Democratic Opposition coalition, won the presidential election against Milošević. Milošević only agreed to relinquish power following several revolts led by the Otpor movement, known as the "Bulldozer Revolution". This name refers to the protests of October 5, 2000, when the Radio Television of Serbia building, a symbol of Milošević's power, was stormed by a bulldozer driver.



"Scene outside the Serbian parliament during the "bulldozer revolution" that led Milošević's resignation" Djordje Kojadinovic/AFP - Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, 03/24//2019



"The Milosevic Trial - Prosecution file", first head of state accused of war crimes by an international tribunal, United Nations - International Criminal tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague

Milošević was subsequently indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. He died in 2006 in his cell before the end of his trial. [4]

And today? The maintenance of an authoritarian regime

Milošević's former Minister of Information, Aleksandar Vučić, a fervent nationalist and neoliberal, has now presided over Serbia since 2014.

He no longer has an absolute majority since the 2022 parliamentary elections, but retains a relative majority for his so-called "progressive" party, the Srpska napredna stranka (SNS) ("Serbian Progressive Party"), which enables him to control the institutions.

The main opposition to the government is to be found in Belgrade. Home to over a million inhabitants, the capital is known as Europe's most polluted city. [5] It concentrates the political and economic power of this highly centralized country.



"Serbia :outgoing head of state Aleksandar Vučić wins presidential election by a wide margin", article by euronews, AFP and AP, uploaded 04/04/2022

To reinforce dictatorial power, Aleksandar Vučić and his government control the media, threaten, bribe and commit numerous crimes. The New York Times article of May 3, 2023 "The President, the Soccer Hooligans and an Underworld House of Horrors" depicts the morbid reality of this criminal government's exercise of power, too little highlighted in Western Europe and internationally. According to Jelena Vasiljević, an opposition councillor from the Ne Davimo Beograd movement, whom we met in Belgrade: ***"We're not talking about a deficient democracy, a hybrid regime, or even an illiberal democracy like in Hungary, but something much more serious, where the state is heavily implicated in several crimes."***

Since the beginning of May (2023), a protest movement has been growing in Serbia. Popular anger was ignited when, on May 3 and 4, two shootings perpetrated by two young people, aged 13 and 21, left 18 dead and 20 wounded in a Belgrade school and in a village near Mladenovac [6]. Since then, tens of thousands of Serbs have gathered in Belgrade every week. These shootings are symptomatic of a culture of violence encouraged by the government of President Aleksandar Vučić, who is openly challenged during the demonstrations. While the debate remains focused on the question of violence, preventing any real discussion of democratic and ecological issues, it does testify to a questioning of the authoritarian power in place that Serbia has not seen since the fall of Milošević in October 2000

Serbia, on the doorstep of the European Union

If Serbia is still not part of the EU, unlike Slovenia and Croatia, which joined in 2004 and 2013 respectively, it is mainly because of the conflict surrounding Kosovo's independence. Tensions increased last May (2023) when Kosovo Serbs opposed the appointment of ethnic Albanian mayors in northern Kosovo, where the Serb minority is concentrated [7].



"Roland-Garros: understand Djokovic's polemical message on Kosovo: "Kosovo is the heart of Serbia, Stop violence" ", Laura Laplaud with AFP / Photo credit : JEAN CATUFFE / DPPI VIA AFP 14h55, 05/30/2023

For the first time in twenty years, fewer Serbs are in favor of EU membership (35%) than are opposed (44%) [8]. Resentment from the 1998 war is still with us, and the promise of the EU is fading. In response to the war in Ukraine, numerous demonstrations were organized by the far right in support of Vladimir Putin. However, these protests do not reflect the general feeling of Serbian citizens, which is more resentful of NATO than supportive of the Russian invasion [9]. The "balancing act" of Aleksandar Vučić [10], who signed the UN resolution condemning Russia but refused to impose sanctions against Moscow before the 2022 presidential election, illustrates just how divisive the issue of EU membership is. Moreover, Serbia, which is over 89% dependent on Russian gas [11], has extended its supply agreements by three years to May 2022, guaranteeing it access at low prices [12].

Energy is at the heart of the relationship between the EU and Serbia. Like Hungary (see previous newsletter on Budapest), Serbia is an essential economic partner for the development of electric cars in Europe. Indeed, Serbia estimates that its lithium requirements will increase 18-fold by 2030, in order to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 and thus meet the commitments of the Paris Agreement [13]. These electric cars will not benefit Serbians, and the boron and lithium extraction that goes with them will have major environmental and social impacts. While there are significant untapped deposits on its territory, the EU prefers to relocate the negative externalities

[14] of an industry it considers indispensable to its transition to renewable energies. As Serbia is not part of the EU, its environmental regulations do not apply.

While the use of private cars and mobility in the broad sense are not called into question, this "transition to renewable energies" is nothing more than a transition to green growth, which continues to destroy the environment and accentuate inequalities [15].

Lithium mine in the Jadar Valley:
The sacrifice of a region for the European Union's
green growth (2021-2022)

In 2004, the Anglo-Australian multinational Rio Tinto, one of the world's three largest mining and metallurgical companies, discovered a deposit of "jadarite", a mineral composed partly of lithium and boron, in the Jadar Valley in western Serbia. These two metals are essential to the energy transition as envisaged by the European Union, in a perspective of green growth that does not call into question our production and consumption. Lithium, also known as "white gold", is a necessary component in the manufacture of electronic and electrical equipment, while boron is used, for example, in the construction of wind turbines and solar panels.



Jadar, Serbie – Cr dit : Rio Tinto

Notorious for scandals in Papua New Guinea, Madagascar and Australia, mining giant Rio Tinto is now looking to invest over two billion dollars in the construction of a mine in the Jadar river valley near the town of Loznica, 150 km west of Belgrade. The region is estimated to contain almost 10% of the world's lithium reserves. With the extraction of 2.3 million tonnes of lithium carbonate over forty years, the multinational is aiming to supply one million electric cars a year. In 2017, a memorandum of understanding was signed between the government and Rio Tinto. In 2020, the final project plan is approved by the government without the impact studies having been delivered, and the purchase of the land by the multinational begins.



"Jadar project, an overview from then to now" Mar  sa Drine

The consequences of this project, with its huge financial implications, would be dramatic for the region [16]. 293 km² of fertile land, 22 villages and 19,000 people are at risk [17]. Extracting and processing the ore requires astronomical quantities of water and electricity, and will have consequences in terms of pollution. The project also involves the use of tens of tonnes of explosives per month and 300,000 tonnes of sulphuric acid per year. The discharge of 25,000m³ of wastewater into the Jadar every day and the storage of almost 57 million tonnes of waste produced by the mine over a 40-year period pose a serious risk of long-term soil contamination in this flood-prone area [18].



Atlas des Conflits pour la Justice Environnementale

The only obstacle to this mega-mining project, due to start in 2022, is the large-scale mobilization of the population, which has brought together both rural and urban dwellers. A petition was launched by Marš sa Drine (MSD), a network of organizations and independent experts, including the "Ne damo Jadar" ("We don't give away Jadar") movement. The number of signatures has now reached almost 5% of the Serbian population. Numerous civil disobedience actions and nationwide mobilizations have also been organized, notably by the Ekoloski Ustanak ("Ecological Uprising") movement, which was born a few years earlier during the mobilization against mini hydroelectric power plants in the Stara Planina, a mountain range that is one of Serbia's largest nature reserves.

To silence protest and speed up the project's launch, the government used a variety of repressive tools. After declaring the Jadar project to be in the national interest, it passed two laws to encourage the establishment of foreign polluting industries. The first provides for an emergency procedure enabling expropriation within five days if it is in the national interest. The second allows the government to put the Jadar mine project to a referendum, with a turnout of less than 50%, and to renew the vote if the result is not to its liking [19]. At the end of November 2021, a weekend of mobilization gathering thousands of people was marked by numerous incidents of police violence, as well as an attack by hooded men from a private militia. This outpouring of violence and profound attack on democracy led to a new wave of near-daily mobilizations in December 2021, which spread to around fifty cities.



"Serbia: massive mobilization against a lithium mine for electric cars", Augustin Langlade, 12/08/21, La Relève et la Peste

While the Rio Tinto mine is not the first mining project to be carried out by the government, its corruption scandals and clientelism have become intolerable for the Serbian population. The scale of the mobilizations can therefore be explained by the combination of ecological and democratic issues.

Faced with this, President Vučić had promised in January 2022 to abandon the project, withdraw the law on expropriation and pass another on impact studies. But after his re-election in April of the same year, he relaunched his cooperation with Rio Tinto, which had meanwhile drawn closer to companies and universities, signing research contracts with the Novi Sad Faculty of Agriculture and agreements with the Slovak battery production company Inobat, among others.

In May 2022, the Association of Ecological Organizations of Serbia (SEOS) and the Kreni-promeni ("move-exchange") movement launched a popular initiative and submitted a petition to Parliament calling for a ban on lithium mining in Serbia [20]. This initiative is supported in Parliament by the new Moramo ("We must") opposition, which was able to emerge in particular thanks to the mobilizations against Rio Tinto.

These resumed in November 2022, after the new government took office, but appear to be running out of steam. The war in Ukraine, threatening energy security and peace in Serbia, reoriented public debate, as Jelena Vasiljević explained: ***"But the invasion of Ukraine changed everything, literally overnight. It was a shock, people were scared and no one was talking about Rio Tinto anymore. We were still in the middle of the campaign and Vučić changed his rhetoric to talk about peace, stability and energy security. Before that, Rio Tinto was the main concern of opposition voters."***

For Jelena, there is no doubt that the project will go ahead, given the pressure exerted by the European Union, the United States and Germany: ***"If we follow the EU's statements on Rio Tinto, there is no doubt that they will impose this agreement because it is one of the biggest mines in Europe and they will not abandon the project. They won't be able to produce all those electric cars without lithium and, ironically, it's for clean energy."***

Ne Davimo Beograd: a municipal movement born of the defense of an urban common



"Biographies of Ne Davimo Beograd candidates on the electoral lists" 2022 elections with the green-left coalition Moramo ».
02/11/2022

At the end of September 2015, the Serbian government launched a major project on Belgrade's Waterfront. It involves the construction of an office zone, luxury apartments, the largest shopping mall and the tallest tower in Eastern Europe in place of the Savamala district, on the banks of the Sava River [21]. The main train and bus stations serving the city center would also be relocated. In 2014, various players in the academic, artistic and architectural spheres had already mobilized against this project, developed in the greatest opacity by the state company "Beograd Na Vodi D.O.O" and Eagle Hills, the new private developer from the United Arab Emirates. In addition to the environmental and social impacts of the project, it was the government's interference in the city's policies and the opacity with which the agreements were reached that reinforced the mobilizations. The government has passed laws to speed up construction and override Belgrade's urban development plan, declaring the Belgrade Waterfront to be of national interest.



"Troubled waters - Participation, transparency and real estate on Belgrade's Waterfront"-
Democracy International, 06/27/2018

Associations and organizations that have been defending public spaces in the city and urban commons against privatization since the 2000s also joined the resistance, organizing several demonstrations under the slogan "Ne Davimo Beograd" ("Don't let Belgrade drown"), which gave the movement its name (NDB).



Waterfront construction site, /06/17/23

When construction accelerated after the illegal demolition of several buildings on Hercegovačka Street (Savamala) by thirty masked men on bulldozers on the night of April 24, 2016, the protests took on a whole new dimension. One of the men guarding the buildings died as a result of his injuries. To this day, the investigation is still ongoing... Only the policeman in charge of the area was prosecuted for failing to transfer the calls, thus preventing the intervention of the police. He later publicly acknowledged that he had "done a favor", explains Jelena Vasiljević. This episode is reminiscent of the one that took place in November 2021 during a mobilization against Rio Tinto's mine project: failure to comply with regulations, preferential treatments, corruption and other criminal practices. Like other environmental and social struggles in Serbia, the one against the Belgrade Waterfront was built in a particularly complex and hostile context. This did not prevent the initial protest from developing into a social movement, and then into a political agent at municipal level.

From ecological and citizens struggles to the public institutions

In 2018, the year of the municipal elections, an NDB list was formed to carry forward a municipalist project in Belgrade, put an end to corruption and build environmental and social policies, following in the footsteps of Zagreb je Naš ("Zagreb is ours" [22] (see Zagreb newsletter). Many NDB activists are in fact very close to the Croatians of the municipalist movement born in 2008 out of the struggle for a different urban common, and now in power in Zagreb since 2020 within the Možemo ("We can") coalition.

While the NDB list failed to exceed the 5% vote threshold (reduced to 3% in 2020) that would have enabled it to win seats in the municipal parliament, participation in the 2018 elections marked a turning point for the movement. Two years later, eight of them, who had never really aspired to enter politics, finally entered the city council.

"Many of us became politicians without having wanted to at first. That's the story of many of the politicians who are now part of Ne Davimo Beograd, people who five years ago said they weren't. Many of us still have another job on the side. In fact, many of us still have other jobs on the side." Jelena Vasiljević.

Although the opposition, including the right-wing, came close to winning half the seats in the last municipal elections, the government party remains in the majority and applies a policy of obstruction. Any opposition amendment or proposal is automatically rejected, and no debate seems possible in the city council. The violence of the exchanges reflects the government's policy. For Jelena Vasiljević, although sitting in the Assembly under these conditions is very hard and the impact on public policy remains very limited, being present is a necessity. In a state where the media are controlled by the government, municipal and national parliaments are crucial political spaces for making corruption visible and for telling a different story. Decentralization and the development of regional economies were also high on the agenda of the municipalist NDB movement [23]. Indeed, unlike Zagreb, where power is less centralized, in Serbia, power is much more concentrated at national level. That's why members of the movement also ran in the 2022 parliamentary

elections as part of the Moramo ("We must") green-left coalition. Today, 13 members of this coalition, including 5 from NDB, sit in the National Assembly, a body of 250 deputies elected by proportional representation. Opposition to the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) is in a much smaller minority than in Belgrade, where the coalition won 11% of the vote, enabling it to enter the Assembly with 13 of the 110 seats.

These small victories and involvement in institutional politics have raised the profile of the movement. They enabled it to forge links with other environmental, social and partisan organizations. When we met Jelena Vasiljević on June 17, she was in the midst of a signature-gathering campaign to create the new Zeleno levi front ("green-left front") party, which was finally formalized on July 14, 2023 [24].



"So it started as a protest movement, before becoming a kind of social movement, then finally an electoral player. And now we're becoming an official national party and we're going to change our name because Ne Davimo Beograd is a very local reference. We are uniting with several local initiatives in Serbia to form the 'green-left front' party." Jelena Vasiljević.

Internal organization: between professionalization and inclusion

Despite the extremely hostile political context, the members of the NDB movement are committed to doing politics differently, at least internally. They reject any form of leadership, despite pressure from the media, which always try to personify political movements. They try to allow any citizen who wants to get involved to do so, especially minorities such as women and single mothers, as well as LGBTQIA+ people.

The question of time and professionalization is central to the evolution of the movement, but is also a source of considerable tension.

Today, around ten people work full-time for the movement, not counting the elected members of the national parliament, who receive a real salary, unlike the elected municipal representatives.

For Jelena Vasiljević ***"It's a process of activists becoming politicians that accompanies that of a movement becoming a political party."***

If a certain professionalization seems necessary to compete with well-established parties of professional politicians in the current political system, the challenge for NDB is not to reproduce patterns of concentration of power and exclusion of those who have neither the time nor the means to mobilize.

In the lists presented by NDB, the principle of alternation between men and women is applied. There is no leader, but several small decision-making groups

within the twenty different councils that structure the movement. And lately, a co-presidency divided between three or five people is envisaged to represent the "green-left front" party, just created.

Citizens' ecological struggles become political parties

In the 2022 national and municipal parliamentary elections, NDB joined forces with other environmental and left-wing movements from local struggles to form the Moramo coalition and gain political clout. This coalition includes NDB, Ekološki Ustanak ("Ecological Uprising") and Zajedno za Srbiju (ZZS) ("Together for Serbia"), and is the first union of the left and ecologists to have representatives in the national and Belgrade parliaments. Ekološki Ustanak is a movement born in 2018 out of the struggle against the construction of some 50 mini hydroelectric power stations in the Stara Planina, a mountain range that constitutes one of Serbia's largest nature reserves, and which is also heavily involved in the fight against the Rio Tinto mine. After the 2022 legislative elections, the organization merged with Zajedno Za Srbiju (ZZS), which already included twenty-eight environmental civic groups supporting the "Green Accord for Serbia" in June 2021 [25]. Ekološkik Ustanak and Zajedno za Srbiju now officially form a new party, Zajedno ("Together"), just as NDB has allied with other local struggles to create the "green-left front" party.

Pioneers of municipalism in Serbia and the first to include the issue of urban commons in their political program, NDB, originally firmly rooted in Belgrade, has sought to incorporate its radical approach to ecology and democracy into a more global project that also extends to rural areas. Various struggles, such as the one against Rio Tinto's mine project in the Jadar valley, have created and strengthened connections with organizations mobilized in the countryside in defense of the commons and the environment, as well as against nationalism. Indeed, all the rural municipalities are run by the SNS, the nationalist government party that controls the population even more in these landlocked regions, using threats and blackmail as well as media propaganda.

Fighting for the commons and ecology in Serbia cannot be dissociated from the struggle against the dictatorial nationalist regime.



Interview of Jelena Vasiljević, 06/17/2023

For Jelena Vasiljević, reclaiming institutions is crucial. Fighting outside for ecological and democratic ideals is not an option, and that's why many movements are now forming political parties: ***"For us, it's a counterproductive strategy to think of our actions outside the institutions because we need to reclaim them, the question is not to do politics differently outside the institutions [...] the only alternative politics is to fight for the institutions."***

SOURCES

- [1] *"Stories of Conflict: Ex-Yougoslavie, Un mariage explosif"*, ARTE report, 2020
- [2] *"VI e siècle à 2008, Tumultueuse Serbie"*, article by André Larané, published on [heredote.net](https://www.heredote.net) Le Média de l'Histoire, 08/12/2019
- [3] *"Le dessous des cartes - L'essentiel, Serbie-Kosovo : la tension monte"*, ARTE video de décryptage, 31/05/2023
- [4] *"Le procès Milošević - le dossier de l'Accusation"*, United Nations website, International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia
- [5] *"Belgrade most polluted European city with over 1 million people"*, published on [Balkan Green Energy News](https://www.balkan-green-energy-news.com) on September 8, 2021
- [6] *"Serbia, two killings, two countries"* | ARTE Report, 20/06/2023
- [7] *"Serbian and Kosovar leaders refuse to meet in Brussels"*, Euronews and AFP article published on 23/06/2023
- [8] *"Serbie : la population bouderait une adhésion à l'UE selon un sondage"*, article by Euronews and AFP, updated on 21/04/22
- [9] *"Anti-western sentiment in Serbia is not rooted in support for Putin"*, article published on 06/11/2022 in [The Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com)
- [10] BIEBER Florian, *"La Serbie, équilibriste entre Russie et Occident"*, *Politique étrangère*, 2022/4 (Hiver), p. 41-49. DOI : 10.3917/pe.224.0041. URL: <https://www.cairn.info/revue-politique-etrangere-2022-4-page-41.htm>
- [11] *"Which European countries are most dependent on Russian gas?"*, article by Tristan Gaudiaut published on 04/02/2022 in [Statista](https://www.statista.com)
- [12] *"La Serbie prolonge avec satisfaction sa dépendance au gaz russe"*, article by [latribune.fr](https://www.latribune.fr) (with AFP and Reuters), published on 05/29/2022
- [13] *"Red river, green tide"*, article by Milica Čubrilo Filipović published in *Lëtzebuurger Land* on 10/12/2021
- [14] *"Convoitise européenne sur le lithium serbe"*, article by Saša Dragojlo & Ivica Mladenović, published in *Le Monde diplomatique* in September 2022.
- [15] Video *"Effondrement: notre civilisation au bord du gouffre? Aurore Stéphant"* published on 26/02/2023 on the [Thinkerview](https://www.thinkerview.com) youtube channel.
- [16] *"Le grand reportage de la Terre au carré : Lithium en Serbie, les contradictions de la transition énergétique"*, report by France Inter, 07/01/2022.
- [17] *"Project Jadar: an overview from then to now"*, article published on 09/03/2023 on [Marš sa Drine](https://www.marš-sa-drine.com)
- [18] *"Serbie : mobilisation massive contre une mine de lithium pour véhicules électriques"*, article by Augustin Langlade, published by *La Relève et la Peste* on 08/12/2021
- [19] *"Polluters, the people are stronger!" en Serbie, la révolte explose"*, article by Louis Sellier, published on 02/12/2021 by [Reporterre](https://www.reporterre.org)
- [20] *"Lithium en Serbie : Rio Tinto repasse à l'attaque"*, article by Milica Čubrilo Filipović, published in *Courrier des Balkans* on 28/11/2022
- [21] *"Belgrade Waterfront Project, Serbia"*, description of the project, written by Jovanka Spiric, published on the [Atlas of Conflicts for Environmental Justice](https://www.atlasofconflicts.com) website and updated on 20/06/2016
- [22] *"Progressive environmentalist Tomislav Tomašević wins Zagreb mayor's office"*, article by Valentine Porche published on [Mediapart](https://www.mediapart.com) on 31/05/2021
- [23] *Ne Davimo Beograd* program, available on the movement's website
- [24] *"Serbia gets new Green-Left party"*, article by Beta published on 07/14/2023 on [n1info.rs](https://www.n1info.rs)
- [25] *"Green deal for Serbia"*, june 2021

You can find all our newsletters on the [Climates website](https://www.climates.com).

To follow our adventures on the networks :

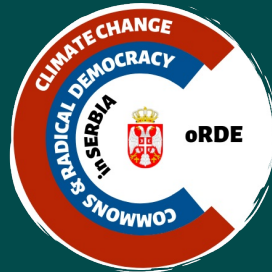


If you would like to share any feedback or initiatives, please send us an e-mail to: legras.lea@gmail.com, cleafache@yahoo.fr, hug.chirol@gmail.com

You can share the newsletter subscription link with others:

[Newsletter French version](#)

[Newsletter English version](#)



This email was sent to {{contact.EMAIL}}

[Unsubscrib](#)





Hi everyone!

After 4 years of struggle, the first citizens' assembly on climate emergency began last April in Bologna. The issue of adapting to climate change is particularly present in this city recently hit by major flooding. We spoke to Pasquale, a member of Extinction Rebellion Bologna, Mauro Bigi, who works for the Fondazione per l'Innovazione Urbana ("Foundation for Urban Innovation") and Rodolfo Lewanski, Professor of Political and Social Sciences at Bologna's Alma Mater Studiorum University and member of the national association Prossima Democrazia ("Next Democracy"), all of whom are working to ensure that time is taken for real democratic debate in the face of the emergency.

REVIEW¹²

BOLOGNA

26-30th JUNE



Bologna: From mobilization to the implementation of long-term institutional tools for participatory democracy

Setting up a citizens' climate assembly in Bologna: mobilization and political window of opportunity

4 years of struggle for a first citizens' assembly in Bologna on the climate emergency

In 2019, with the mobilization of tens of thousands of citizens during the climate strikes and the birth of *Fridays For Future* in Bologna, the issue of climate change is brought to the center of public debate. Students, high school pupils and members of *Extinction Rebellion (XR) Bologna*, the first local group in the national movement, are joining forces in large-scale demonstrations to demand that the municipality declare a "state of climatic, environmental and ecological emergency".



Margherita Caprilli

Photo by Margherita Caprilli for La Repubblica

The city of Bologna had already put in place a number of measures several years ago, such as the environmental balance, a tool that has been active since 2003, enabling it to assess its environmental impact, accounting, among other things, for its greenhouse gas emissions. It has adopted several local action plans, such as the one on adaptation to climate change in 2015, which has still not been implemented. [1].

On September 30, 2019, Bologna joins almost 500 other cities worldwide that have declared a state of climate emergency. The city council finally adopts several radical proposals put forward by *Extinction Rebellion*, drafted with the help of researchers from the CNR (equivalent of the french CNRS). In particular, the town council is committed to achieving carbon neutrality by 2030, which goes beyond European regulations. With the adoption of this motion, it recognized the importance of the concept of climate justice, the need to organize citizens' assemblies to draw up fair environmental policies, committed itself to greater transparency and even questioned the growth paradigm [2].

A year later, the pandemic has not helped, and the municipality has failed to meet its commitments. *Extinction Rebellion* organized a 7-day hunger strike in the *Piazza del Nettuno* to demand that a citizens' assembly on climate change be held within the year.

"In this moment of emergency we have to make the decisions together and not to wait for the government to make them for us" Pasquale from XR Bologna

It was finally after a second 70-day hunger strike in early 2021 that specific negotiations on setting up a citizens' assembly on climate could begin. The *Fondazione de l'Innovazione Urbana* was commissioned by the municipality to organize debates between elected representatives, experts and over 50 companies and organizations, including *Prossima Democrazia*. At the end of May 2021, on the proposal of this group, the municipality agreed to change its statutes (the equivalent of a municipal constitution) to incorporate citizens' assemblies as a tool for democratic participation. This measure thus goes beyond the holding of a single climate citizens' assembly, and represents a long-term change that concerns democracy more broadly. It is now possible to hold a maximum of one citizens' assembly per year in Bologna on a variety of topics. This annual assembly can be convened in one of four ways: by the city administration, by the city council, by a majority of the six municipal district councils, or by individual citizens. In the latter case, the proposal must gather 5,000 signatures, i.e. 1.25% of the population.

It will be another year before the citizens' assembly bylaws, which define the operational stages of the process, are adopted by the city council in July 2022. In the end, it was last April (2023), almost four years after the first

mobilizations, that the project was launched.

Bologna: a city committed to fighting climate change?

The setting up of this first citizens' assembly on climate came about in a particular political context. Bologna had already been involved in climate and ecological issues for several years. One of the interesting experiments carried out by the city was the creation of the *Fondazione per l'Innovazione Urbana*, which coordinated the discussions prior to setting up the citizens' assembly and is now part of the coordinating office of the citizens' assembly on climate. In 2018, the Foundation, which is owned by the University of Bologna Alma Mater Studiorum and the municipality, took over from the Urban Center, which was based on a public-private partnership. With its forty employees and freelancers, the Foundation provides an essential link between the municipality and the university. The latter occupies a very important place in the city, which has 100,000 students and 400,000 inhabitants. According to Mauro Biggi, who works there and whom we met, this new structure has been able to propose a number of pilot projects in the environmental field, promoting the acceptability of ambitious projects that would have been rejected had they been proposed directly on a large scale: ***"I think it's a good way to influence policies, in topics that the municipality is not ready to implement or doesn't have the competence for".***

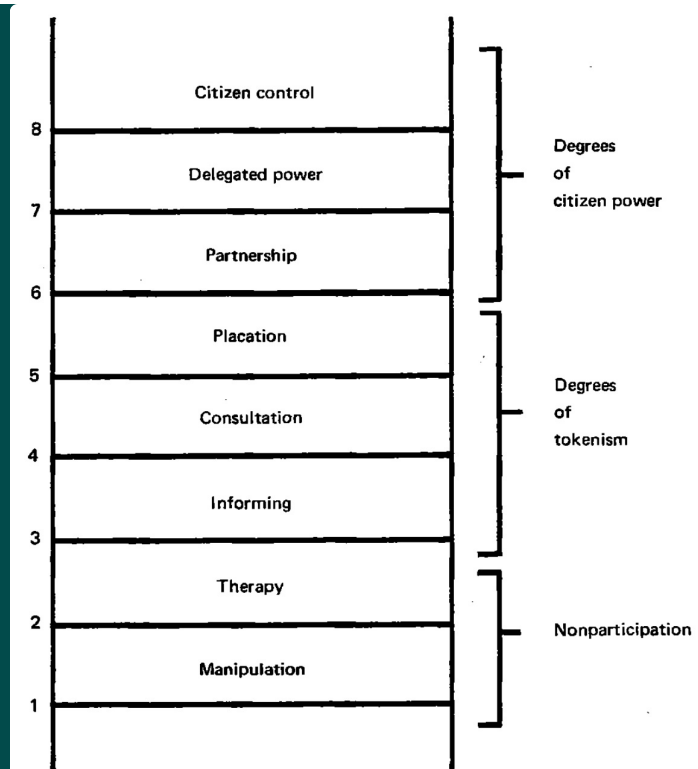
On mobility issues, for example, it was only after experimenting with pedestrian weekends and noting their benefits that the municipality decided to switch to a "30 zone" on July 1, 2023 [3], limiting traffic speeds to 30 km/h throughout the city.

In terms of citizen participation, the municipality has also set up several schemes, with the help of the *Fondazione per l'Innovazione Urbana*. Since 2018, each district has had an annual participatory budget of €500,000 to carry out projects co-constructed with citizens. Bologna was also among the first cities to offer *Pattii di collaborazione* ("Collaboration Pacts") [4], which enable the management of public goods or spaces to be shared between the municipal administration and citizens.

For Pasquale, a member of *Extinction Rebellion* from Bologna whom we met, all these schemes are too top-down and we now need to go further: ***"We need deliberative democracy to get people informed and decide together otherwise, when the decision is taken top-down, people don't accept it. That's what is happening with the demonstrations against the limitation of speed to 30 km/h, even though it's a good law."***

Deliberative democracy" refers to decision-making processes based on discussions with citizens that precede policy-making [5]. These discussions must be carefully organized and facilitated, so as to ensure the free expression of all views, and to allow for the exposure and criticism of different arguments. Citizens' assemblies are a case in point. Participatory democracy, on the other hand, refers more broadly to the various ways in which "ordinary citizens" [6] are involved in policymaking, by collecting their opinions through surveys or city-wide participatory budgets, or by creating a space for them to contribute to the implementation of projects, without necessarily involving a decision-making process through debate.

In *"A ladder of citizen participation"* [7], American sociologist Sherry R. Arnstein defines participatory democracy as ***"a categorical term for citizen power. It is the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future. (...) it is the means by which they can induce significant social reform which enables them to share in the benefits of the affluent society... participation without redistribution of power is an empty and frustrating process for the powerless."***



The original 1969 illustration of Sherry Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation as it appeared in the Journal of the American Planning Association. The Ladder features eight "rungs" that describe three general forms of citizen power in democratic decision-making : Non-participation (no power), Degrees of Tokenism (counterfelt power), and Degrees of Citizen Power (actual power).

A window of opportunity to set up a citizens' climate assembly

Successive mobilizations on the ecological emergency and on the citizens' climate assembly have made it possible to bring these issues to the attention of political decision-makers. However, these advances have been achieved in a specifically favorable context. Indeed, at the time of the negotiations for the adoption of Extinction Rebellion's radical proposals and the new statutes relating to the citizens' assemblies, the *Coalizione Civica per Bologna* ("Civic Coalition for Bologna"), then a member of the municipal opposition with two municipal councillors, played a key role. The *Partido Democratico* (PD) ("Democratic Party"), the liberal centrist party in power since 2009, didn't really understand the value of these participatory democracy tools, believing that representative democracy was sufficient.



The *Coalizione Civica per Bologna* is a municipal platform initially created in 2015 with the aim of presenting a list for the 2016 municipal elections. It brings together activists from social movements, associations and left-wing parties.

It is based on a number of principles, including horizontality, anti-racism, anti-sexism, anti-fascism and the inclusion of all. Its internal organization is based on two assemblies governed by two co-presidencies, each made up of a man and a woman. It aims to defend the right to the city and housing, common

goods and spaces, social justice and ecology.

In the September 2021 elections, *Coalizione Civica* wins three seats on the city council and joins forces with the PD, which has just lost its absolute majority. The *Coalizione Civica* thus left the opposition and Emily Clancy, already a councillor in the previous term and a key supporter of the mobilizations to declare a climate emergency and call for a citizens' assembly, became deputy to the new mayor, Matteo Lepore.

Coalizione Civica members continued to support the Citizens' Climate Assembly project and accelerated its implementation. However, as early as December 2021, the coalition came out in favor of the PD's project to widen the A14 *Passante di Mezzo* (the central freeway), which it had firmly opposed during the previous term [8]. The plan is to add four lanes to the existing eight by 2027 [9]. It's difficult for organizations mobilized in response to the ecological emergency to welcome the creation of the Climate Assembly in such a context. For some, the assembly appears to be the compensation granted by the PD to the *Coalizione Civica* in exchange for the vote to widen the *Passante di Mezzo* freeway.

NET
ZERO
CITIES

EU MISSION PLATFORM
CLIMATE NEUTRAL AND SMART CITIES

*« 100 villes intelligentes et à impact
climatique neutre d'ici 2030 », Eurocities*

In April 2022 [18], Bologna was also selected by the European Union (EU), along with 99 other European cities and 12 outside Europe, to be part of the "100 smart cities with neutral climate impact by 2030" mission under the Horizon 2020 program.

One of the first steps for the selected cities is to draw up a "climate contract" with their citizens. The citizens' climate assembly that Bologna's environmental organizations have been calling for for several years could therefore enable the city to draw up this climate contract [10].

In this way, the contradictions displayed by the municipality cast doubt on its real ambition for change and investment in ecological policies. The Citizens' Climate Assembly risks being reduced to a mere symbolic communication tool.

How will Bologna's Citizens' Climate Assembly work?

To achieve the goal of carbon neutrality by 2030, the city council has defined three main themes to be addressed by the citizens' assembly [11]:

- "How can we promote an energy transition for the city, starting with the sectors that have the greatest impact in terms of climate emissions, while guaranteeing the principle of equity and climate justice and combating the phenomena of poverty and marginalization?"

- "How can institutions and citizens confront and contain the city's main climate risks (heat islands, extreme weather events, floods, droughts, etc.)?"

- "What are the obstacles found in rules, services and regulations under municipal jurisdiction to achieving these objectives and possible improvements and innovations?"

The assembly is made up of one hundred citizens drawn at random using stratified random sampling. This method ensures a certain representativeness of the population, thanks to selection criteria such as age, residential area and gender. Eighty of them are aged over sixteen and live in the city, while the other twenty are "users" who do not live there, including ten students at the University of Bologna and ten public transport users.

The process is divided into three phases over four months, with eight half-days of meetings at weekends. For each session, participants receive €72.96 and can benefit from a babysitting service, ensuring a certain degree of inclusion.



"Citizens' assemblies: an incisive response to the climate and democratic crisis", article written by Valeria and published on January 11, 2021 on Chiara.eco

The first meeting took place in April 2023, kicking off the "training" phase, during which some fifteen experts present the various findings on climate change and biodiversity erosion, as well as adaptation options, to the citizens. A number of working groups will also be set up to examine specific topics before a plenary session. The second phase consists of a dialogue between the citizens of the assembly and the various players involved in the transition. Finally, in September and October 2023, the last phase of deliberation will result in environmental policy recommendations.

Despite initial requests from a number of organizations, the amendment to the town's articles of association does not include an obligation to implement the proposals put forward by the assembly as they stand. Instead, the bylaws stipulate that the Town Council must study the proposals and vote on them within four months of their publication. If they vote against the application of a measure, they must provide an explanatory document, and if they vote in favor, an implementation plan is expected. This commitment to monitoring the process is often lacking in citizens' assemblies across Europe, and relies solely on political will, which may choose to ignore the deliberative democratic work of citizens, increasing their distrust of public institutions [12].

Convergence of struggles and citizen debate over the long term



"Bologna bypass, video of the procession: demonstrators on the ring road" by Calamosca/LaPresse /corrieredibologna.tv - CorriereTv of 22 October 2022

On October 22, 2022, a major mobilization against the widening of the *Passante di Mezzo freeway: "la Convergenza"* ("the convergence") [9] brought together environmental and social justice activists such as *Bologna for Climate Justice*, *Fridays For Future*, *Sollevamenti della terra*, *Legambiente*, *social centers*, *AMOBologna* and representatives. The former employees of the ex-GKN car plant want to transform it into a renewable energy production cooperative (see [Florence newsletter](#)). Bologna had not seen such a mobilization for 20 years. Nearly 30,000 people marched to block the freeway. This high point in the convergence of struggles strengthened the links between these organizations, which are struggling to work together in the long term.

Although the fight to secure the organization of the Citizens' Climate Assembly was initially led by *Extinction Rebellion*, more recently it has brought together several of these organizations. In fact, a few weeks before the assembly was due to start, the municipality created a new model of participation with the city's economic players to draw up "climate contracts" as part of the EU's "100 smart, climate-neutral cities by 2030" mission. In the process planned by City Hall, these contracts were due to be signed in October 2023, i.e. before the publication of the recommendations of the Citizens' Climate Assembly. Several organizations therefore organized demonstrations in front of the town hall in February 2022 to contest this process, which short-circuits the democratic work of the citizens' assembly. They succeeded in securing the postponement of these "climate contracts" with the city's economic partners until March 2024, thus ensuring that the municipality would truly take into account the recommendations of the citizens' assembly.

These environmental and social organizations represent a real counterweight to ensure that the Citizens' Climate Assembly is not rendered meaningless.

But this new space for public debate, which the municipality has agreed to create, also enables the various associations and collectives to go further and confront their elected representatives with their contradictions. Indeed, in the second phase of the process, various stakeholders, including several of the organizations mentioned above, will be able to express themselves to the citizens of the assembly. Several of them will take advantage of this opportunity to raise the issues of deforestation, pollution and artificialization, notably with the Passante project, even though the assembly's rules stipulate that it cannot debate projects already underway. For Pasquale, a member of Extinction Rebellion, the challenge is twofold: to broaden the scope of the assembly by bringing about a more global reflection on the systemic transformations that the city of Bologna must undertake, and to bring together different movements beyond one-off opposition actions: ***"The citizens' assembly is a way to gather those different movements."***

Thanks to a change in the city of Bologna's statutes, which now recognize citizens' assemblies as a permanent tool of participatory democracy, more will be able to be organized. This could establish a new long-term relationship between environmental and social movements and the municipality, and could help restructure and strengthen links between organizations working for social justice, democracy and ecology.

"XR started with CC but we think we have a problem with representative democracy so we need those citizens assemblies to work on those complex problems/subjects, for example housing and migration", Pasquale

The Bologna citizens' assembly experiment is not an isolated case in Italy. A number of citizens' assemblies have been organized over the past three years by the *Rinascimento Green* ("Green Renaissance") association, either on a regional scale in Calabria, Emilia-Romagna and Lazio, or at the instigation of public institutions, as was the case in Tuscany in the town of Viareggio in 2020, for example. In December 2022, the city of Milan launched the first sessions of its new permanent citizens' assembly on climate. The assembly will meet every three months until 2030, i.e. for the duration of the "Air and Climate Plan" framework under which it was set up [13].

SOURCES & FURTHER INFORMATION

- [1] *"La déclaration d'urgence climatique"*, article published on 31/10/2020 on the Chiara website.
- [2] *"Bologna, the city declares a "state of climate emergency". And it does so by accepting the manifesto of Extinction Rebellion activists"*, article by Elisabetta Ambrosi, published on 02/10/2019 on [Il Fatto Quotidiano.it](http://IlFattoQuotidiano.it)
- [3] *"What's the point of a city with a 30 km/h limit?"* article by Stefano Dalla Casa, published on 07/13/2023 on the Chiara website.
- [4] *"Bologna à l'épreuve des communs"*, article written by Pierre Boutoux, member of the SavoirCom1 organization, and published on the "Enacting the Commons" project website in 2019.
- [5] *"What's the difference between participation and deliberation?"* article by Llona Lodewijckx published on 24/04/2020 on the citizenlab website.
- [6] SINTOMER Yves, *"6. Démocratie participative, démocratie délibérative : l'histoire contrastée de deux catégories émergentes"*, in: Marie-Hélène Bacqué ed, *La démocratie participative. Histoire et généalogie*. Paris, La Découverte, "Recherches", 2011, p. 113-134. DOI : 10.3917/dec.bacqu.2011.01.0113. URL : <https://www.cairn.info/la-democratie-participative--9782707157201-page-113.htm>
- [7] S. (1969.) *A ladder of citizen participation*. Journal of the American Planning Association, 35(4), 216-224 : <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01944366908977225>
- [8] *"Bologna bypass: for us it's always been a no. Listen to the territories"*, press release published on 10/04/2018 by the Coalizione Civica per Bologna
- [9] *"Il Passante, malgré tout : "Le business doit continuer""*, article by Marco Palma published on the website of the Bologna for Climate justice movement on 23/06/2023
- [10] *"Bologna Neutral City in 2030: the first step is the Climate City Contract"*, article published on the Chiara website on 12/10/2022
- [11] *"Citizen meeting for the climate"*, article available on the Bologna municipal website
- [12] *"How can Climate Assemblies be integrated into the policy process?"* Briefing 2 KNOCA ("Knowledge Network on Climate Assemblies"), Frederik Langkjær, Project Manager, The Danish Board of Technology Foundation, November 2021
- [13] *Presentation of the Milan Permanent Citizens' Assembly on Climate on the Poliedra Politecnico di milano website:* <https://www.poliedra.polimi.it/en/project/permanent-citizens-assembly-climate/>

"The Future of Democracy - Politics Without Politicians, The political scientist Hélène Landemore asks, If government is for the people, why can't the people do the governing?" article published in the Newyorker on 19/02/2020 and written by Nathan Heller

"A green dictatorship is not a solution, with Dominique Bourg", Paloma Moritz for blast. Paloma Moritz for blast, le souffle de l'info published on 27/10/2022

"OECD 2020 Synthesis - Innovative citizen participation and new democratic institutions, the deliberative wave" by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

You can find all our newsletters on the [Climates website](https://www.climates.org/).

To follow our adventures on the networks :



If you would like to share any feedback or initiatives, please send us an e-mail to: legras.lea@gmail.com, cleafache@yahoo.fr, hug.chirol@gmail.com

You can share the newsletter subscription link with others:

[Newsletter French version](#)

[Newsletter English version](#)



This email was sent to {{contact.EMAIL}}

[Se désinscrire](#)





Hello everyone!

The CC-CoRDE adventure is coming to an end, and we have arrived in the last country of the trip: **Spain!**

Our first stop was in **Barcelona, in Catalonia.**

Mayor Ada Colau, of the **radical left-wing and environmentalist *Barcelona en Comú* party**, which has been in power since 2015, **lost the May 28, 2023 municipal elections in this emblematic city of the municipalist movement**. Originally embodying great hope for political renewal, BeC is an example of a **social and citizen movement that has succeeded in conquering public institutions**. Despite an ambitious program, Ada Colau's municipality **was confronted with the difficulties of exercising power** and the **rise of right-wing and far-right parties**.

REVIEW¹³

BARCELONA

12-21th JULY



2015: The Spanish municipalist wave

The Barcelona en Comú citizen platform

The arrival in power of a citizens' movement like BeC is part of a wider context of Spanish democratic transition. This democratization process, which began with the death of dictator Francisco Franco in 1975, put an end to the "Franco era", marked by its severity and violence towards its population: loss of freedoms, executions of political opponents, censorship, torture, etc. It ended with the arrival in power of Felipe González's Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) in 1982. During this democratic transition, multi-party elections were held in 1977, and a new Constitution, advocating "advanced democracy", pluralism, tolerance, equality and fundamental rights and freedoms, was

adopted by referendum in 1978.

Since then, the center-left, social-democratic PSOE party and the center-right, conservative, Francoist People's Party (PP) have alternated at the head of the Spanish government. Both implemented policies of economic liberalization, privatization, free competition and pro-European policies (Spain became a member of the European Economic Community in 1986). Corruption scandals abounded, and the 2008 crisis, which hit Spain hard, led to an explosion in unemployment (24.4% in March 2012) and the implementation of austerity policies (cuts in public sector wages, extension of the legal retirement age from 65 to 67, etc.), resulting in massive social movements. One of the best known is the *Indignados* (Indignant Citizens Movement) movement. Also known as "15-M" in reference to May 15, 2011, the date on which the non-violent movement was launched in Madrid's *Puerta del Sol* square by the citizens' organization *¡Democracia Real Ya!* ("Real Democracy Now"). The movement brings together hundreds of thousands of demonstrators in some 50 Spanish cities (including Barcelona) to put an end to the PP and PSOE two-party system, to the "dictatorship of the markets" and its ecological and social consequences, and to demand more democratic policies that genuinely meet the needs of citizens. The demonstrations are taking place in the context of the municipal elections scheduled for May 22, 2011, and the movement, which is chanting the slogan "They don't represent us" ("*¡Que no nos representan!*"), is encouraging people not to vote for either the PP or the PSOE. Inspired by the Arab Spring and made up mainly of young people aged between 20 and 35 who could speak English and use digital tools, the 15-M movement spread and organized itself on social networks and the Internet. For several weeks, encampments and general assemblies were organized, leading to the drafting of political proposals, notably at the Madrid "*acampadaSol*" encampment. The movement is a source of much hope, and shows that alternatives to traditional politics do exist, making it possible to govern by, for and with the people. The movement spread beyond Spain's borders to more than 80 countries worldwide (France, Italy, Germany, Greece, Portugal, United Kingdom, etc.). Other international appeals were then launched, inspired by the *Indignados*, such as the Occupy movement.



The Spanish Indignant Citizen Movement again at Puerta del Sol, Euronews, 2011



*The Fawkes mask, symbol of the Indignant Citizens Movement all over the world
(MARIO LAPORTA / AFP)*

As mobilizing outside public institutions is not enough to bring about more structural change according to some, a number of citizens have decided to enter the municipal election race. This is particularly the case in Barcelona.

On June 15, 2014, the manifesto of the *Guanyem Barcelona* (Let's Win Barcelona) platform was published on the internet, bringing together some thirty citizens from various social movements, including 15-M, neighborhood associations, and personalities from the academic and cultural worlds.



Ada Colau, mayor of Barcelona, with deputy mayors Gerardo Pisarello and Laia Ortiz / EFE

The movement proposes a new political discourse and calls for the occupation of political institutions by ordinary people, with no prior institutional experience, to transform the way politics is done. The movement's aims are to combat social exclusion and inequality, the privatization of the commons, uncontrolled mass tourism, air pollution and better waste management and reduction. It also wants to regenerate democracy, by fighting corruption, advocating total transparency in the work of elected representatives and ensuring genuine citizen participation. Unlike social-democratic parties, the platform does not wish to conduct politics on behalf of the people: it is the people themselves who must be actors in political decision-making. And these principles have been in place right from the political program construction phase. As early as August, a month before the manifesto's planned date, 30,000 signatures of support were collected. At the same time, local meetings were organized throughout the city. These were complemented by technical and political committees, and by an extensive online consultation process to build a program linked to everyday issues and imagined by and for citizens.

On February 10, 2015, after drawing up a [code of ethics](#) with citizens to define the lines of conduct to be respected by future elected representatives, the platform presented itself publicly under the name Barcelona en Comu (the name Guanyem Barcelona having already been registered a few days earlier). It defines itself less as a party than as a confluence of various left-wing and environmentalist parties, bringing together Iniciativa per Catalunya-Verds

(ICV), EUiA, Equo, Procés Constituent and the Podemos party created after the Indignados movement for the 2014 European elections. On February 28, housing rights activist Ada Colau presented her candidacy for the primaries as head of list for the municipal elections, with Gerardo Pisarello (Procés Constituent) as number two, Laia Ortiz (ICV) as number three and Jaume Asens (Podemos) as number four. The candidacy was completed on March 12 with a primary open to all citizens to choose the city's district councillors.

After months of intense campaigning (which can be followed in the documentary "[Ada for Mayor](#)"), and numerous attempts to discredit them by the traditional parties, the BeC list came out on top in the municipal elections of May 24, 2015, with 25.21% of the vote and winning 11 seats (out of 41). The Barcelona-born Ada Colau was elected mayor on the following June 13, becoming Barcelona's first female mayor, an activist, openly bisexual and from a working-class background. To form a majority on the city council, BeC allied itself with the center-left pro-independence party the Republican Left of Catalonia (*Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya*, ERC), the Socialists' Party of Catalonia (*Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya*, PSC), and received the support of the radical left-wing pro-independence the Popular Unity Candidacy (*Candidatura d'Unitat Popular*, CUP).



"Ada For Mayor" documentary poster (2016)

The launch of the Fearless Cities movement

Across Spain, the 2015 municipal elections saw a major revival in local government, with elected representatives seeking a new approach to politics. Barcelona, Madrid, Valencia, Zaragoza, Pamplona, A Coruña, Cádiz, Ferrol and Santiago de Compostela, led by citizen platforms, were nicknamed "Rebel Cities" and launched a real movement to transform politics at local level by inventing "shared" institutions and establishing public-citizen cooperation.

In 2017, the first Fearless Cities conference was held in Barcelona, marking the starting point for the construction of a European (European Municipalist Network) and international municipalist network, with multiple goals:

Feminizing politics: giving women (and minorities more widely) a greater role in decision-making processes, allowing oneself to express doubts and contradictions in politics, putting care at the heart of politics or, in the words of Ada Colau: ***"You can be in politics without being a strong, arrogant male, who's ultra-confident, who knows the answer to everything"***. A [MOOC](#) from the European Municipality Network has been created to provide training on these issues.

To deploy more radical democratic tools to enable real citizen participation in decision-making (citizens' lists, citizens' assemblies, etc.).

To fight against **the rise of the extreme right**.

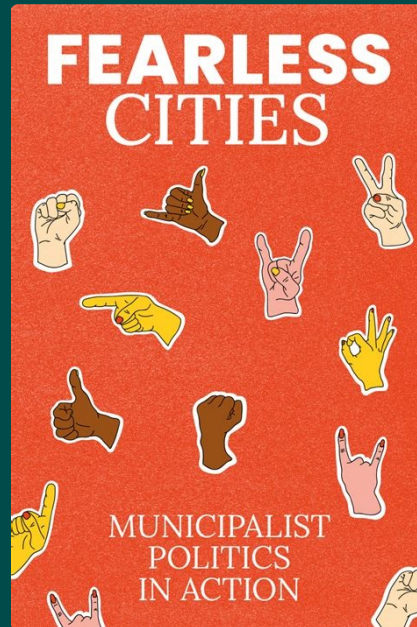
To propose **an economy that respects living organisms and planetary limits** ([donut economy](#), etc.).

"In a world in which fear and inequalities are being twisted into hate, "Fearless" towns and cities are standing up to defend human rights, democracy and the common good. This global municipalist movement met for the first time at the Fearless Cities Summit in Barcelona in June 2017, at the invitation of Barcelona En Comú, with the goal of radicalizing democracy, feminizing politics and standing up to the far right. Since then, these neighbourhood movements, mayors and local councils have been collaborating to build global networks of solidarity and hope from the bottom up."

Fearless Cities website

This first international summit brought together over 700 people representing hundreds of municipal organizations from all over the world.

A guide entitled *[Fearless Cities](#)* (2018) was also written as a follow-up to this first gathering. Written by over 140 people from 19 different countries, this guide is a toolbox, listing best practices for setting up a municipalist platform, writing a participatory manifesto, securing funding, and winning local elections. The book has now been translated into six languages (with the Swedish version arriving cf the [Malmö newsletter](#)).



Fearless Cities

Since then, other summits have been held in Europe and internationally: Warsaw (2018), New York (2018), Brussels (2018), Valparaíso (2018), Naples (2019), Belgrade (2019), Barcelona (2021), Rosário (2022).

The election of BeC in Barcelona thus goes far beyond the locality ...

Today: is municipalism losing ground in Barcelona?

After eight years in power, we can list some of the measures implemented by BeC thanks to a budget of 2,300 million euros/year.

Wages: The salaries of BeC's elected representatives have been reduced compared with those of previous municipalities. The money saved was paid into a fund dedicated to the city's social projects over the eight years of the mandate.

⚡ **Energy:** One of the most important policies of the BeC mandates is the creation in 2018 of the municipal renewable energy operator, *Barcelona Energía*, for the Barcelona metropolitan area. *Barcelona Energía* is managed by TERSA, a public environmental services company, and provides electricity to Barcelona City Council buildings and facilities, as well as to the city's citizens and businesses.

Mobility: Barcelona is the European city with the highest car density. This makes regulating the use of cars a key factor in reducing air pollution

in the city. BeC has set up an ambitious "Superblock" (*Superilla*) program, notably in the Sant Antoni district. Each large block of buildings is made up of six smaller blocks in which cars are prohibited. Car traffic is therefore diverted along an axis running around these six blocks, where car use remains authorized. While this urban transformation has reduced car traffic and air pollution, and increased the number of green spaces, it has also led to a rise in housing prices in the district... Indeed, this program, which is the stuff of international dreams, is becoming the new urban trend, attracting the most affluent populations...

This urban planning project is part of a wider mobility policy. For example, BeC has decided to deploy low-emission zones, multiply the number of bicycle lanes in the city, and implemented a policy of "street pacification", notably around schools, to increase the number of pedestrian spaces and force cars to drive slowly.

Water: The municipality of BeC has set up campaigns in schools to call for reduced water consumption in a context of widespread drought.

More original, they have created Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS). These systems are alternatives to conventional drainage, replicating the natural flow of water in the city to increase resilience to extreme rainfall events in urban centers: using runoff where it falls, providing attractive habitat for flora and fauna, and encouraging natural groundwater recharge.

The city also uses no potable water for street cleaning.

Citizen participation: The municipality has set up a digital citizen participation platform, Decidim.Barcelona, enabling citizens to make political proposals to the mayor's office, to participate in participatory budgets, or to collect signatures for a citizen initiative.

From July to December 2021, the municipality also organized the BCN Youth Forum (Fòrum Jove BCN), an assembly made up of 99 randomly selected young people between the ages of 16 and 29, with the aim of writing recommendations to the city council to answer the question: As a young person living in Barcelona, what would you need to realize your life project? During twelve sessions, the assembly focused on three topics: mental health, education and emancipation. The forum was conceived after the covid crisis, which led to an increase in social and economic difficulties for young people. 27 recommendations were finally formulated. The town council has undertaken to study them and to give reasons if any of them are not implemented. The recommendations can be followed up directly on the decidim platform.

At the end of 2022, a second deliberative process was set up by the city council: the Citizens' Climate Assembly. One hundred people between the ages of 16 and 75 were selected by random draw to answer the question: What can we do better to tackle the climate emergency in Barcelona? Once again, three topics were prioritized by the participants: energy, mobility, consumption and waste. Ten sessions were organized between September and December 2022. At the last session, 34 proposals were presented and voted on. A follow-up committee made up of elected representatives, participants and stakeholders involved in the fight against climate change has been set up to monitor progress in implementing the recommendations.

Thanks to these numerous projects, Barcelona was elected European Capital of Democracy 2023/2024.

□ **Mass tourism:** Since the 1992 Olympic Games, Barcelona has become an attractive destination. In 2019, the city welcomed over 15 million tourists. Mass tourism, a source of enrichment for the city, is also the source of much pollution and land pressure. As early as 2015, the municipality therefore set up a Special Plan for Tourist Accommodation (PEUAT) to successfully reconcile housing for tourists with guaranteeing the fundamental right to housing for local residents.

☀ **Hot:** To deal with increasingly regular and extreme heatwaves, BeC has multiplied the number of indoor and outdoor "Climate refuges", now

numbering 200.

♻️ Waste: When it comes to waste management, the city is responsible for collection, while the metropolis handles treatment through a public company. Nevertheless, a large proportion of Barcelona's population does not properly sort their waste...

BeC is experimenting (with difficulty...) door-to-door waste collection in a working-class neighborhood. Unlike in other neighborhoods, waste does not have to be sorted and then thrown into garbage cans located a few meters from the dwellings, but directly into containers located as close as possible to the buildings.

This policy is accompanied by city-wide awareness-raising campaigns and the development of repair facilities.

Before the 2023 elections, BeC was planning to set up composting sites in the city, as well as a municipal plastic waste management company to replace its current private partner Ecoembes.

However, the implementation of these various social and ecological policies in Barcelona did not enable BeC to hold on to the leadership of the mayor's office for a third term in the May 28, 2023 elections.

However, the implementation of these various social and ecological policies in Barcelona did not enable BeC to hold on to the leadership of the mayor's office for a third term in the May 28, 2023 elections.

Nevertheless, this loss of popularity for left-wing parties is not specific to Barcelona. Indeed, in recent elections, all Spanish cities have seen a rise of the right and a breakthrough of the far right. Taking all Spanish municipalities into account, the Popular Party (PP) managed to win over 6.9 million votes (31.5%), compared with 6.3 million for the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE). The far-right Vox party was another big winner in the municipal elections, doubling its four-year score with 1.5 million votes (7.19%).

In Barcelona, while in the 2019 elections the BeC list came second with 20.7% of the vote (a loss of 4.5% on 2015) and 10 seats (compared with 11 in 2015), Ada Colau managed to win re-election thanks to a coalition with the Catalan Socialist Party (PSC), which won 8 seats. But in the 2023 elections, the BeC list came third with 19.77% of the vote and lost another seat (total: 9 seats out of 41). BeC then decided to enter into an agreement with the PSC, which had won 10 seats, to counter the rise of former Barcelona mayor Xavier Trias's center-right pro-independence party, Junts ("Together for Catalonia"), which came in first place with 11 councillors (6 more than in 2019!), and the entry of two elected members of the far-right Vox party into the city council. With 9 elected members for BeC against 10 for the PSC, Jaume Collboni (PSC) was finally elected mayor of Barcelona, succeeding Ada Colau...

BeC's defeat can be explained by a number of factors, and must be nuanced: it does not necessarily reflect dissatisfaction on the part of citizens.

Winning elections doesn't mean winning power...

In fact, the movement lost just 1% of the vote compared to 2019. This defeat can be explained more by the rise of the right (+6 seats) and the far right (+2 seats), and by the candidacy of numerous lists that fragmented the municipal council (9 lists). Moreover, during its two previous mandates, BeC has never governed with an absolute majority, and has always had to ally itself with other, less radical parties in an attempt to implement policies that were often less ambitious than desired, leading to much criticism in the movement ...

In addition, the Catalan crisis has weakened BeC. Barcelona is located in one of Spain's seventeen autonomous communities, Catalonia, which has a population of 7.5 million, its own language, its own police force and its own government based in Barcelona. Catalonia is a very dynamic region and important to the Spanish economy, accounting for 20% of national GDP (2016). According to the

Independents, the region gives more to the state than it receives, and has its own culture and history. Two symbolic consultations on Catalan independence have already been held, in 2014 and 2017, without any legal value and yet heavily repressed... Faced with this eminently divisive issue in the city and throughout the country, BeC has chosen to defend the holding of a referendum, without taking a position on whether Catalonia should be independent or not. This "no" position was not unanimously accepted and weakened Ada Colau's party.

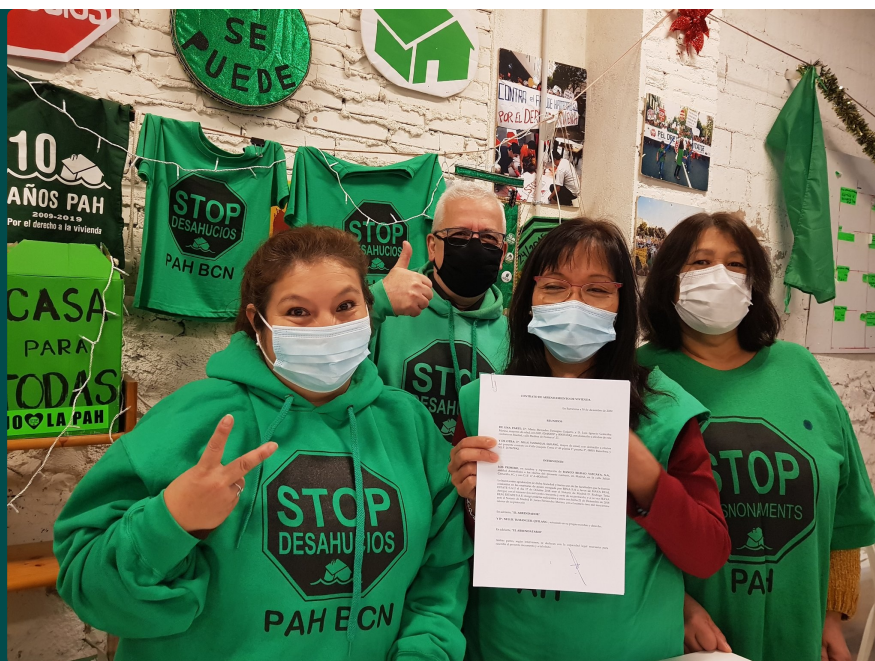
Finally, transforming public institutions and implementing ecological and social policies is a long-term process, and not simply a local matter. In Spain, municipalities have few powers. Furthermore, the results of the policies implemented are often not directly visible to citizens, who thus have the feeling that nothing has really changed... As soon as she took office as mayor in 2015, Ada Colau did not hide the importance of the role of municipalities in responding to the emergency, but also their limited ability to act: ***"We can prove there is another way to govern, more inclusive, working together with the people, more than just asking them to vote every four years. We're very aware that the real change must be global, that one city alone cannot solve all the problems we're facing"*** (Ada Colau a few weeks after the 2015 municipal elections, in an interview for Democracy Now!).

But all is not lost. This new position in opposition could allow BeC to change strategy. Free of the frontal criticism and pressure from all sides that come with the exercise of power, and with more time at their disposal, it could be an opportunity for BeC to reconnect with the social movements they distanced themselves from when they came to power, and to rethink a medium- and long-term strategy with them.

However, at the national level, the political climate is still uncertain. Following the rise of the right in the municipal elections, Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez called for early general elections, which took place on July 23. No absolute majority emerged, resulting in a political deadlock. If no agreement is reached between the traditional right-wing (PP) and social-left (PSOE) parties to govern, new elections will have to be held. On the other hand, a new left-wing coalition was formed around the Sumar platform, winning 31 of the 350 seats. We will tell you more in our next newsletter on Madrid.

BeC's defeat: what are the consequences for citizen initiatives in Barcelona?

The Platform of Mortgage Victims: PAH (Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca)



Founded in 2009 in Barcelona, [PAH](#) is an association campaigning for the right to housing guaranteed by Article 47 of the [Spanish Constitution \(1978\)](#), co-founded by Ada Colau and now present throughout Spain. The association is nonetheless apartisan, and is not affiliated to BeC. In Barcelona, it is a horizontal movement, with two weekly assemblies: on Mondays, to help people facing eviction in the presence of a lawyer and witnesses, and on Tuesdays, to take strategic decisions. Hundreds of people volunteer at the Barcelona PAH, organizing themselves into different circles. Three people are also working on a research project with the Observatori de los derechos económicos, sociales y culturales DESC (Observatory of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights) platform, in relation with the municipality, which enables them to be paid.

PAH emerged after the collapse of Lehman Brothers in September 2008, which caused a major real estate crisis in Spain. The 2008 crisis led to an explosion in the country's unemployment rate (20% in 2010), and many Spanish people were no longer able to repay the mortgages they had taken out under the government's incentive policy. Following the crisis, banks repossessed properties that had often been mortgaged to repay their loans. Hundreds of thousands of families were evicted from their homes and apartments. Since then, PAH has launched several campaigns:

- Stop evictions: The platform leads non-violent civil disobedience actions to prevent evictions by gathering in front of the homes concerned. This campaign has prevented thousands of evictions.
- National mobilizations, including the one on September 25, 2011, in 41 cities across Spain.
- Popular legislative initiatives (ILP) to demand the right to housing for all, not just for people coming to the PAH.

In 2014, a year after the failure of the Spanish Popular Legislative Initiative (ILP) before the Congress of Deputies, the social movements Aliança contra la pobresa energètica ("Alliance against energy poverty") and Observatori DESC, led by PAH, wished to introduce at Catalan level the measures that had been rejected by the Popular Party at national level. This ILP, entitled "urgent measures to respond to the housing emergency and energy insecurity", aims to :

- give a "second chance" to over-indebted people. It enables them to use datation in payment to pay off their mortgages.
- prevent evictions by granting social rents (capped according to household income) to vulnerable people whose homes belong to financial institutions and large landlords, and by obliging authorities to rehouse them in the event of eviction.
- fight energy insecurity by imposing a precautionary principle on water, gas and electricity suppliers to guarantee the right to basic drinking water, gas and electricity services for people at risk of eviction and energy insecurity.

-increase the stock of social housing by forcibly renting out empty homes owned (and reclaimed) by financial institutions.

The IPL managed to collect 143,000 signatures in four months, three times as many as necessary, and the bill was submitted to the Parliament of Catalonia on May 28, 2015, which adopted it unanimously on July 23, 2015 (law 24/2015).

However, in April 2016, the Spanish government, led by the PP, decided to appeal against the law to the Constitutional Court, requesting a provisional suspension of the text. Numerous demonstrations are organized in Catalonia. The President of the Catalan Parliament, Carles Puigdemont, Ada Colau and various municipalities and social movements join forces to defend the law and oppose the Spanish government's appeal.

A new draft law on "measures to protect the right to housing" is proposed to bypass the suspension by replacing the contested articles. However, the citizens behind the ILP, including PAH, criticized the bill for being less ambitious than the original. Nevertheless, the bill was adopted by the Executive Council on October 4, 2016, and then by the Parliament of Catalonia unanimously on December 22, 2016.

According to Ricardo from PAH, with whom we spoke, this law is considered one of the most protective in the world by the United Nations (UN). However, if this law was relevant in the 2010s, the situation is different today. Mortgages no longer represent the reality of the real estate market, and this law does not cover tenants and squatters who are no longer able to pay their rent or find accommodation. Moreover, although the law has been passed, it now needs to be applied, which seems difficult in municipalities that are largely run by the PP since the last elections....

BeC loses mayor: what changes for PAH?

When we ask Ricardo from PAH what the major changes were in terms of the right to housing when BeC was at the head of the mayor's office, he replies that there were very few... In reality, housing is not a competence of the municipality but of the region.

Nonetheless, BeC's arrival in power has made for more fluid exchanges and discussions with a government that is more open on these issues than its predecessor. In particular, Ada Colau's government has enabled the city to acquire the largest stock of social housing in Spain, and to offer a mediation service between landlords and tenants to help resolve conflicts. However, evictions have not ceased under Ada Colau's mandate, and relations between the municipality and PAH remain conflictual. While it is true that municipalities are not responsible for housing, they can nevertheless combat a series of abusive practices through town planning regulations, local by-laws and agreements with private companies.

For Ricardo, the regulations put in place were not followed by rigorous monitoring, leaving companies that failed to comply with the conditions unpunished. In his opinion, Ada Colau's government did not put in place the housing policies it had hoped for, although it remained more committed to these issues than the previous local government... Now, with the Junts party at the head of Barcelona, Ricardo believes that the new government will put little energy into the issue of the right to housing... Even though a new housing law was recently passed at national level (April 2023), it also remains insufficient in his view, and will not radically transform local policies... PAH is therefore ready to keep up the pressure.



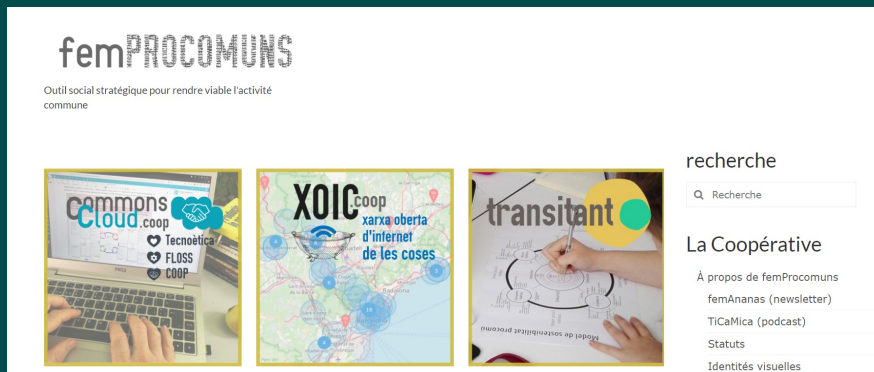
Meeting with Ricardo, member of PAH, Barcelona, 07/13/23

To go further:

[-Documentary on PAH \(EN\)](#)

[-Article written, by Ricardo Dubcek , member of PAH in Barcelona](#)

femPROCOMUNS: a cooperative of commons



Home page of femPROCOMUNS website

Founded in 2017 in Catalonia, *femPROCOMUNS* (literally "we make commons" in Catalan) is a non-profit cooperative that creates and supports projects whose economic model is based on the commons. The cooperative is made up of five "worker members" (who work for the cooperative and are paid), "user members" (who use the cooperative's services in exchange of a small sum of money) and "collaborator members" (who often work on a specific project). Each group has its own decision-making powers.

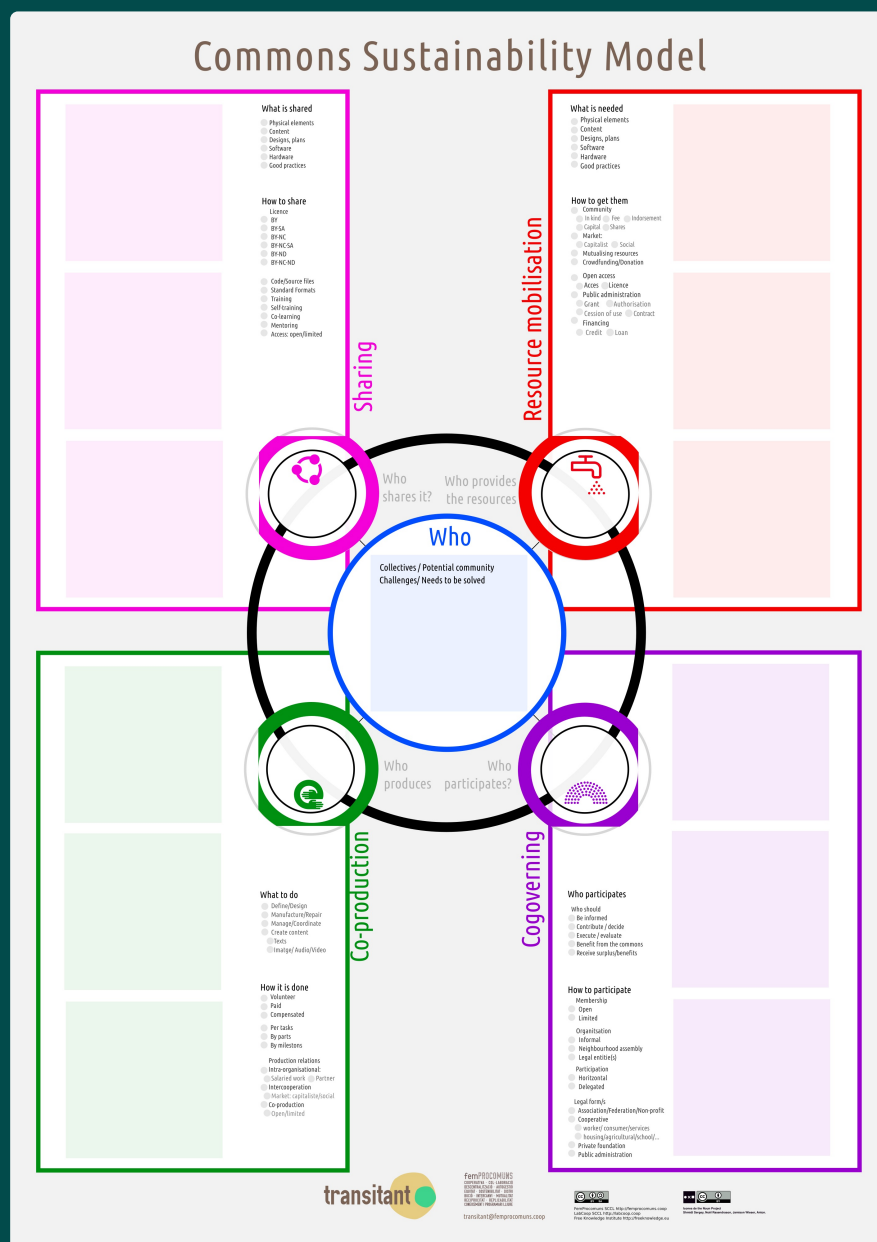
The cooperative offers participatory mapping and diagnostics, consulting and training for associations and public and private institutions, and open-source technological tools as alternatives to GAFAM. It is organized into 4 "cooperative activity groups" (*Grups d'Activitat Cooperativitzada, GAC*), each of which is economically sustainable and independent:

🏠 **CommonsCloud:** launched in 2018, the group aims to enable cooperative members and partners to work and communicate on alternative digital tools and free software to that of GAFAM.

Teixidora: the project was launched in 2016 and joined *femPROCOMUNS* in 2018. It offers collaborative and varied documentation on many topics (feminism, covid crisis, political participation, etc.) especially on its online platform. It also facilitates work between organizers, volunteers and speakers at events. In 2017, the project received the Democratic Quality Award from Barcelona City Council.

Open and Community Network of the Internet of Things (XOIC): this GAC proposes a free, community-owned network as an alternative "internet" community. The project was initially launched by the Freeknowledge Catalunya association and The Things Network in Catalonia, with the aim of covering the whole of Barcelona and the surrounding area using the LoRaWAN protocol, a long-range, low-energy network. The project was supported by Barcelona City Council, which enabled 40 workshops and two hackathons to be held in the city.

Transitant ("In transition"): This cooperative activity group is involved in animation, awareness-raising, training, support and reflection on the issue of the commons, cooperatives and alternative economies. In particular, group members provide support to various projects, enabling them to reflect on the viability of their structure and their economic model. To this end, the group uses teaching tools such as a card game on the economy of the commons, or the Commons sustainability model to analyze existing projects or build new ones.



Commons sustainability model

FemPROCOMUNS is also involved in other projects, in association with the municipality of BeC. In 2019, together with LabCoop, they were tasked to coordinate the process of co-creating the *Coòpolis* incubation community and the physical space that was to open its doors in Can Batlló in October of the same year. Several working circles were set up to collectively imagine the contours of the future incubator: identifying best practices, running workshops, a co-working space to get the incubator's first projects off the ground, etc. This Cooperative University of Barcelona is a scheme to encourage and promote an ecosystem of activities based on the Social Solidarity Economy in the city of Barcelona, and is supported by the city council. In five years, the incubator has welcomed over a hundred projects that *femPROCOMUNS* has been able to support.

BeC loses mayor: what changes for *femPROCOMUNS*?

We asked this question to David, one of *femPROCOMUNS* "worker" members. On the one hand, the cooperative network has been well established in Catalonia, and more generally throughout Spain, since the early 20th century. Changes in town councils have therefore little impact on this network. Nevertheless, other changes are possible.

In particular, *femPROCOMUNS* was part of a working group set up by the town council to work on improving the digitalization of the economy in a sustainable way by 2030. David doesn't think these groups will be closed down by the new government, but they may be neglected and slowly die out... This type of municipally-driven project is therefore showing its limits: if no permanent community is built to follow and sustain the project, it remains highly dependent on the municipality.

In terms of financing, the cooperative is striving to become increasingly autonomous. Part (50%) comes from public funding, including municipal funding, and the remainder from the cooperative's own projects. Achieving financial independence is therefore a major challenge for *femPROCOMUNS*, enabling it to free itself (at least in part) from electoral logics.

Finally, the cooperative owns premises in the *Canòdrom*. Under Ada Colau, this former cynodrome has been transformed into a citizens' laboratory for digital and democratic innovations. Any association working on these subjects can apply for free premises, for a period of two years, in exchange for the regular organization of free activities open to all. It remains to be seen what will become of this space with the change of municipality, and whether *femPROCOMUNS* will again be able to have its own premises.



Meeting with David from femPROCOMUNS, Barcelona, 07/17/23

Energy Democracy

During our visit to Barcelona, we took another look at the question of energy democracy.

The Poblenou energy community pilot project

We met up with César Ochoa, who is working on the Poblenou Energy Community (*Comunitat energètica del Poblenou*) pilot project, which is funded by the town council and works this time in the field of energy production, in close collaboration with municipal operator *Barcelona Energia*.

This community was born of a citizens' initiative, in particular the work of the Poblenou Neighbors and Residents Association and the Family Association, which proposed the project to the BeC government in 2020. Since then, Ada Colau's city council, together with the Energy Agency, the "Institut Quatre Cantons" high school and the two neighbors' associations, have launched the energy community pilot project in one of Barcelona's Sant Martí district neighborhoods, Poblenou. Initial work on the pilot project began in 2021 with the installation of 58 kWp solar panels on the roof of the Quatre Cantons Institute. The photovoltaic panels are expected to produce 73,750 kWh/year of electricity, equivalent to the consumption of 32 standard homes. These first panels will supply energy to the Institute, a number of municipal buildings (the Can Felipa Civic Center - Social Rights Offices and the Le Levant fire station), a second high school (the Maria Espinalt Institute) and some twenty homes located less than 500m from the Institute. Citizen participation is voluntary, and costs are covered by the municipal authorities in the framework of this pilot project, which aims to multiply the number of production areas to help the community grow. The energy produced by the community will then be marketed by the municipal energy operator *Barcelona Energia*. Although the photovoltaic panels are currently producing energy, this will not be fed into the grid until September-October.

It remains to be seen if the new government will have an ambitious energy policy and continue the work begun by BeC...

A move towards remunicipalization of the distribution network?

Spain's energy network, like many other European countries (cf. Energy Democracy Newsletter), is in the hands of a few very powerful companies: Endesa, Naturgy (formerly Gas Natural Fenosa), Hidrocarburos, Iberdrola and Viesgo. This energy oligopoly also greatly influences the (lack of) ambition of the country's energy transition policies. In addition to this lobbying action, these companies refuse to comply with the legislation of Spain's autonomous communities, such as Law 24/2015 on energy precariousness in Catalonia (mentioned above), which requires companies to apply a precautionary principle. Before cutting off access to basic services, the company must assess, with the help of municipal social services, the economic situation of the beneficiary who is no longer able to pay.

To dismantle this energy oligopoly, citizens' movements are springing up. They are attempting to form a counter-power and impose a reduction in energy production and consumption, in dependence on fossil fuels and a real democratization of the energy sector.

In 2009, a group of former students and professors at the University of Girona drew inspiration from European initiatives (Ecopower in Belgium, Enercoop in France, Greenpeace Energy in Germany) to create Som Energia ("we are energy"), a Spanish cooperative for the production and consumption of renewable energies, with a particularly strong presence in Catalonia. The cooperative produces 100% renewable electricity from various projects (photovoltaic panels, biogas plants, mini hydroelectric power stations, wind turbines, biomass), financed by the cooperators themselves, through voluntary participation in the share capital (=total amount of all types of contributions given by the cooperator and partners to the cooperative at the time of its creation or the setting up of a project, in exchange for social rights) or by

participating shares for people who are neither cooperators nor partners and cannot vote at general assemblies. Today, *Som Energia* produces 22.99GWh/year, equivalent to the consumption of 9,800 households. In addition to producing energy, the cooperative is also active in the marketing of green electricity, and since 2011 has been the first renewable energy operator based in Catalonia to develop profitable projects. The cooperative is also active in the field of fuel poverty, applying the precautionary principle set out in Catalan law 24/2015 across the whole of Spain, in direct dialogue with municipal social services to prevent basic services from being cut off for people unable to pay their electricity bill, and in collaboration with professionals in the energy sector through its local groups.



Logo of Som Energia

However, this return to citizen control of production and marketing networks has failed to create a real counter-power. The few companies continue to dictate their laws, thanks in particular to their almost total control (98%) of distribution. This network is highly strategic, since it provides the link between generation and the electricity meter, and grants (de)connection to the grid. In Spain, it is in the hands of the private Spanish company Endesa. With a view towards decentralization and reconnection of production and consumption sites, citizens' reappropriation of the distribution network has a central role to play.

In response, an energy sovereignty network, *Xarxa per la sobirania energètica* (Xse), was formed in 2013 with the publication of its [manifesto](#), and brings together associations, citizens' collectives and cooperatives (including *Som Energia*) from all over Catalonia, campaigning for remunicipalization of the electricity distribution network and a democratic, ecofeminist transformation of the energy sector.



Logo of Xse

During our visit to Barcelona, we met Guifré, a student in [the master's program in Political Ecology, Degrowth and Environmental Justice](#) at the Autonomous University of Barcelona (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona), who told us about the energy sovereignty network of which he is a member. He explained that remunicipalizing the distribution network is very difficult for a municipality, due to the Spanish legislative framework, which locks in any possibility of recovering this sector once it has been lost. In Spain, only a handful of towns and villages, such as Cadiz (Andalusia), Centelles y Almenar (Catalonia) or Crevillent and Alginet (Valencia), have control over electricity distribution. Despite this, Xse is trying to take action by organizing events, carrying out studies and writing policy proposals for municipalities in [2015](#), [2019](#) and [2023](#), to promote municipal energy sovereignty.

Regarding BeC's mandate, Guifré confides that the municipality has focused primarily on production and commercialization, through *Barcelona Energia* (and the Poblenou community), with no particular emphasis on distribution.

In addition to campaigning for the return of distribution to the public domain, Xse promotes greater citizen participation. Indeed, without a real social debate to collectively transform the energy sector, the installation of photovoltaic panels or wind turbines will continue to be a source of conflict. Without disregarding the climate and social emergency, it seems essential, then, to take the time to debate and give a political meaning carried collectively to renewable energy installations. In 2018, Xse gave particular attention to the democratization of *Barcelona Energia's* governance to enable broader citizen participation.

What future for social and ecological citizen movements?

When they entered public institutions, BeC activists were unable to implement radically transformative policies because of the challenges inherent in the exercise of power. However, citizen mobilization is necessary to support and/or drive these policies. Today, a less institutional and less party-connected network is being rebuilt: the Climate Justice Network (*Xarxa per la Justícia Climàtica*). This new political artifact, of which Guifré is a member through Xse, uses an intersectional approach to bring struggles together in response to the ecological and social emergency, and to counter the rise of the far right. Guifré confides in us that "the current rise of fascism" could perhaps enable the various citizen movements to unite to better confront it.

To go further:

-article: Le gouvernement du changement ? L'approche de Barcelona en Comú de la gouvernance métropolitaine, Mariona Tomàs

-article: La gauche en net recul aux élections municipales et régionales sur la montée de la droite en Espagne, Le Monde

-film: Ada for Mayor (2016)

-article: BARCELONE EN COMÚ. LAURA ROTH. MARCELO EXPÓSITO, sur le site de CommonsPolis

-article: Huit leçons de Barcelona en Comú sur la façon de reprendre le contrôle, Open Democracy

-article about energy democracy: Building a powerful regional network for energy sovereignty, Transformative cities

-article about the fight against electricity oligopoly: Dossier Villes contre multinationales Débrancher l'oligopole, Ritimo

You can find all our newsletters on the CliMates website.

To follow our adventures on the networks :



If you would like to share any feedback or initiatives, please send us an e-mail to: legras.lea@gmail.com, cleafache@yahoo.fr, hug.chirol@gmail.com

You can share the newsletter subscription link with others:

[Newsletter French version](#)

[Newsletter English version](#)



This email was sent to {{contact.EMAIL}}

[Se désinscrire](#)





For our final leg of the CC-CoRDE project, we stopped off in the Spanish capital: Madrid.

A "Rebel City" in 2015 among other Spanish cities (like Barcelona, Zaragoza, Valencia, etc.), the victory of the **citizen platform Ahora Madrid, led by the lawyer Manuela Carmena** in the municipal elections of the same year, surprised everyone. However, as we saw with Barcelona en Comú in Barcelona, **getting into public institutions to bring about changes that really respond to citizens' demands is not an easy task, especially in a city where there are major inequalities between north and south and which has been run by the conservative right-wing Popular Party for over twenty years...**

REVIEW 14



2015 : The hope embodied by the Ahora Madrid coalition at the head of the Spanish capital

The unexpected victory of Ahora Madrid in the municipal elections of 2015

As detailed in the [newsletter on Barcelona](#), in the wake of the Indignant movement, a number of citizens' platforms emerged in an attempt to seize power at local level in the 2015 elections.

As early as 2014, in Madrid, discussion forums under the name Municipalia were organised to reflect on the creation of a "citizens' candidate" to be put forward in the municipal elections the following year. A few months later, the movement took the name Ganemos Madrid (Let's win Madrid), inspired by the Barcelona platform Guanyem Barcelona (Let's win Barcelona), and joined forces with the Madrid branch of the radical left-wing Podemos party to form Ahora Madrid (Now Madrid) in March 2015, a "popular union citizens' candidacy".



Members of the Ganemos Madrid citizens' platform speak at a former tobacco factory in the Spanish capital on 6 June 2015
© DANI POZO AFP

The Podemos (We Can) party, originally founded in 2014 and based on the Indignant movement, is led by Pablo Iglesia Turrión, Professor of Political Science at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid (who in 2020 will become the Second Vice-President of the Spanish Government and Minister for Social Rights and Agenda 2030) and aims to overcome the left-right divide in the European elections of May 2014. The party succeeded in obtaining 5 MEPs (including Iglesias) in the European Parliament, causing a general surprise in the face of the collapse of the two-party traditional Popular Party (PP)/Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE), which respectively obtained 16 seats (compared to 24 in 2009) and 14 seats (compared to 23). In the 2015 municipal elections, the party decided not to present its own list and to support local citizens' lists such as Ganemos Madrid in the Spanish capital. Other parties joined Ahora Madrid to form a coalition (Candidatos independientes, Equo, Convocatoria por Madrid, PUM+J, Piratas Madrid, CLI-AS, members and former members of the United Left of the Community of Madrid (IU-CM), Juventud Sin Futuro, Partido X) supported by the Communist Party of Madrid, Convocatoria por Madrid (Appeal for Madrid) or Por un Mundo Más Justo (For a Fairer World).



Pablo Iglesia Turrión, leader of Podemos

In March 2015, primaries were held, enabling more than 15,000 people to vote online to choose the candidates who would run in the municipal elections under the name Ahora Madrid. Manuela Carmena, a lawyer known for her involvement with the Communist Party of Spain during Franco's dictatorship, won 63% of the vote to head the list. The development of the programme was open to all citizens, and the priority measures to be implemented in the first

100 days following Ahora Madrid's arrival at the head of the city council were also voted on during the primaries.

To everyone's surprise, on 24 May 2015, the day of the municipal elections, Ahora Madrid succeeded in obtaining 20 out of 57 elected members, making it the second political force after the PP (21 elected members), which had been in power for more than twenty years! Among the 20 councillors, 8 are members of Podemos, 5 are dissidents from the United Left of the Community of Madrid (IU-CM), 3 are from Ganemos, 3 are independents and 1 is a member of Equo. Carmena was elected mayor of Madrid thanks to an alliance with the PSOE, which won 9 seats. She took the head of the first left-wing government to run the capital since 1989!



Manuela Carmena, mayor of Madrid 2015-2019

Policies implemented during the 4 years in office

With a budget of 5,000 million a year (twice as much as Barcelona), Ahora Madrid has implemented a number of projects over its four years in office.

Citizen participation: In September 2015, Manuela Carmena launched the "Decide Madrid" platform, enabling citizens to make policy proposals, to discuss them, to take part in citizen consultations or to support or vote for projects with participatory budgets. Despite a budget of €60 million, some felt that the platform did not give citizens enough opportunity to participate in shaping policies or budgets on important issues. No real deliberative democracy was institutionalised.

Debt reduction: Ahora Madrid struggled with high levels of debt left by outgoing mayors. It should be noted that in Spain, from 2011 onwards, the European Union imposed a number of austerity policies applied by the national government to pay off debts. The reform of article 135 of the Constitution, for example, limits indebtedness and prioritises payment of the public debt. The adoption of the 2012 law on the "rationalisation of local government" allows the Spanish government to limit the autonomy and powers of towns and cities in order to control their debt. Reducing debt is therefore a central issue for a municipality if it wishes to be authorised to implement new projects.

Wage: Reduction of 55% in the mayor's wage and 41% in that of local councillors. This measure does not apply to PP and PSOE councillors, who are free to decide whether or not to apply it.

Ecology:

.A ban on thermal cars in the centre of Madrid, superblocks, 472-hectare low-emission zones, pacification of the streets and cycle lanes.

All these measures, inspired by Barcelona en Comú (cf [Barcelona newsletter](#)), have been poorly received in Madrid. These various policies have been replaced by less ambitious and binding legislation following Manuela Carmena's departure in 2019...

.Work to renaturalise the Manzanares river from 2016 to 2020 following a

proposal from the Ecologistas en Acción (Ecology in Action) environmental movement to the Ahora Madrid city council, with a budget of 1.2 million euros.



River Manzanares

Animal welfare: Annual subsidies of €61,200 to Madrid's Marcial Lalande Bullfighting School (which has just 38 students) are being withdrawn from 2016.

A year later, the city council (with the votes of the PSOE and Ciudadanos) passed an ordinance banning circuses with wild animals from both public and private land in the capital.

The fight against Francoism: Unlike previous right-wing municipalities, Ahora Manuela Carmena decided to apply the 2007 law on historical memory, which obliges the renaming of streets, squares, monuments and establishments exalting the figures of Francoism.

Operación Chamartín: Madrid Nuevo Norte (Madrid New North), formerly known as Operación Chamartín, is one of Europe's largest urban redevelopment projects, estimated to cost over €8 billion.

Located in the north of the Spanish capital, the programme aims to build a "new type" business district in Madrid, ending the divide between the north-west and north-east of the city, boosting the economy and competing with major European capitals such as London and Paris. The project began in 1991, when the Spanish government (including the Ministry of Public Works), Madrid City Council and the Madrid Regional Government jointly devised a programme to renovate Chamartin station and the adjacent neighbourhoods. The project has been managed and promoted by the private company Distrito Castellana Norte since 1994, whose shareholders are the Spanish multinational banking group BBVA (72.5%) and the Spanish construction and renewable energy company San José Constructora (27.5%). After a twenty-five year administrative battle that brought the project to a standstill, the urban redevelopment programme was rethought following Manuela Carmena's victory in 2015 and approved in 2019 by the city council and in 2020 by the regional government.

The work is due to be completed by 2045 and will involve the remodelling of 3.3 million m², of which 1.6 million m² will be used for offices and shops and 1 million m² for residential buildings, and will generate around 241,700 new jobs.

Manuela Carmena's relaunch of this enormous project, under pressure from lobbies, has given rise to a great deal of disagreement within Ahora Madrid and a lack of understanding on the part of some citizens. While the Distrito Castellana Norte website describes the private company as selling "a socially, economically and ecologically sustainable city model", based on "the fruit of public-private collaboration and citizen participation", some citizens and elected representatives feel that this is not the case. However, for some citizens and elected representatives, the Madrid Nuevo Norte project will only serve to reinforce the already sharp inequalities between the north and south of the city, simply in the name of economic growth that will largely benefit the private sector and very little the local population. This project is therefore a

world away from the values of social justice, ecology, the commons and democracy that were initially at the heart of Ahora Madrid's political project... Many people are therefore confused...



Madrid Nuevo Norte project

Manuela Carmena's downfall in the 2019 and 2023 elections?

Creation of Más Madrid: a definitive internal split within Podemos

Despite the controversies surrounding Madrid Nuevo Norte, at the end of 2018 Manuela Carmena announced her intention to stand in the 2019 municipal elections with a different platform from Ahora Madrid: Más Madrid. Íñigo Errejón, Podemos' number two between 2014 and 2017, parliamentary spokesman for the same party from 2016 to 2018, and provisional Podemos head of list for the 2019 regional elections in the Community of Madrid, decided in January 2019 to break with Podemos to run in the following elections on 26 May in the Community of Madrid under the name Más Madrid. [Note that in Spain, municipal and regional elections are usually held on the same day, with some exceptions like Barcelona in Catalogna]. This split within Podemos is the result of two competing political projects put forward by two of the party's co-founders, Iglesias and Errejón, notably at the 2017 Vistalegre II congress (the name of Podemos' citizens' assembly). Iglesias, with Podemos para todas (We can for all), advocates a greater commitment to social struggles and civil society, in firm opposition to the traditional PP, PSOE and Ciudadanos-Partido de la Ciudadanía (Citizens-Citizenship Party) parties.

Back in 2016, after firing Sergio Pascual, the party's organisational secretary and a close associate of Errejón, Pablo Iglesias began looking for new political allies and reached an agreement with Alberto Garzón's radical left-wing party Izquierda Unida (United Left) to create the Unidos Podemos alliance and surpass the PSOE's score in the 2016 general election. Errejón's strategy within Podemos recuperar la ilusión (We can recover the illusion) is quite different. In his view, Podemos must no longer be a party of opposition and resistance, but must gain credibility in order to win the trust of voters disappointed with the PSOE.

In the end, more than 50% of the 155,275 people who took part in the consultation voted for the Podemos para todas candidacy led by Pablo Iglesias (compared with between 33% and 35% for Íñigo Errejón's Recuperar la ilusión, and 10% for the anti-capitalist project). With 37 seats out of the 62 to be filled, members of the Pablo Iglesias team occupy 60% of the new citizens' council. The 23 elected members of Íñigo Errejón's team accounted for 37%, with the anti-capitalists taking 3% and only 2 seats. Iglesias was also re-elected as General Secretary with 89% of the vote, beating his only rival, Juan Moreno Yagüe, a little-known member of the Andalusian Parliament. From the outset, Iglesias wanted to maintain the vertical structure adopted at Vistalegre I,

contrary to what Errejón had advocated...

Finally, the signing of the pact between Errejón and Manuela Carmena in 2019 to emerge from Iglesias' shadow finally marked a definitive break within Podemos and was perceived as a real betrayal. Iglesias decided to present an alternative Podemos list to Errejón's Más Madrid list for the regional elections in the Madrid region (however, Podemos did not present an alternative Podemos list to Carmena's Más Madrid list for the municipal elections).

Results of the 2019 municipal and regional elections

On 26 May 2019, Más Madrid won the most votes (30.94%) and 19 councillors at municipal level (one seat less than Ahora Madrid in 2015). However, the 8 PSOE councillors did not form an absolute majority on the city council. With 30 elected members, the right-wing bloc made up of the PP, Vox and Ciudadano reached an agreement to govern the city. José Luis Martínez-Almeida, head of the PP list, was finally made the new mayor of Madrid by the city council, succeeding Manuela Carmena.

At regional level, Errejón's Más Madrid won 14.65% of the vote and 20 seats. The list led by Podemos Unidas Podemos Izquierda Unida Madrid en Pie (United We Can, United Left, Standing Madrid), meanwhile, obtained just 5% of the vote. As at municipal level, the left-wing bloc (PSOE, Podemos, Más Madrid) failed to form an absolute majority. The PP and Ciudadanos formed a coalition government with the non-participating support of Vox. Isabel Díaz Ayuso, head of the PP list, became president of the Madrid community.

Results of the 2023 municipal and regional elections

On Sunday 28 May 2023, Spain held its municipal elections, which were characterised by the rise of the right and the breakthrough of the far right throughout Spain. The Spanish capital was not left behind. Mayor José Luis Martínez-Almeida's PP won 29 seats, 14 more than in 2019. The Vox party gained 1 seat and 5 elected members. The Más Madrid platform, led by Rita Maestre, a councillor and spokeswoman for the mayor's office under Carmena, lost 7 seats and obtained its lowest score since 2015, with 12 elected members. José Luis Martínez-Almeida remains at the head of the city.

At regional level, the PP managed to win 70 out of 135 seats, i.e. 40 more than in 2019, enabling Isabel Díaz Ayuso to remain as President of the Community of Madrid (note that early regional elections had been held in 2021 and had enabled the PP to win 35 more seats than in 2019).

Originally a source of hope and political renewal at local and regional level, Más Madrid is losing support as the elections progress. Mario, a member of Ahora Madrid whom we met when we were in the Spanish capital, told us about the difficulty for a citizens' platform to run Madrid. In this city of 3.3 million inhabitants, which is traditionally conservative and suffers from major inequalities between north and south, it is difficult to implement far-reaching changes in the face of citizens who are opposed to any change and civil servants who are often close to the PP and remain in power despite the election results. What's more, unlike Barcelona en Comú, the Madrid platform has only been at the head of the city for four years, and has made debt reduction one of its main priorities to be able to propose other transformative projects. In Mario's view, long-term planning is essential if projects want to be sustainable: "The most important thing is not to play politics, but to change what people think". So winning elections is not synonymous with winning power, especially in a country where the regions have a central role to play. Unlike Barcelona in Catalonia, the citizens' platform in Madrid has always had to negotiate with a region run by the right...

National elections in Spain: Más Madrid in Sumar

However, Más Madrid does not want to stop there. During the general elections on 10 November 2019, Íñigo Errejón decided to transform Más Madrid into a national party, and created Más País (More Country). The national platform joined forces with the environmentalists of Equo, the nationalist left-wing Valencian Compromís and the Aragonese Chunta Aragonesista in several constituencies. The Citizens' Platform succeeded in obtaining three deputies out of 350 and joined the Plural Parliamentary Group, created the same year.

For the 2023 general elections, despite the defeat of Más Madrid in the local and regional elections, Más País joined the Sumar coalition of fifteen left-wing and ecological parties (including Barcelona en Comú, Podemos, IU, etc). Más País succeeded in getting 2 of the 31 MPs elected within Sumar (out of 350). However, at national level, the political climate is uncertain (cf [Barcelona newsletter](#)). If no agreement is reached between the traditional right-wing (PP) and left-wing (PSOE) parties to govern, new elections will have to be held. The creation of the Sumar platform is nevertheless a source of hope and unification for the left. If it manages to hold together between now and the European elections in June 2024, it will be interesting to see what strategies the various parties in the coalition manage to adopt to remain united despite their different visions, and which parliamentary group(s) they will move towards (the Greens/European Free Alliance or the Left Group).



Íñigo Errejón at the presentation of the Más País candidacy in September 2019 © Daniel Duch

Although public institutions and the ecological, social and democratic emergency do not have the same timeframe, they should not be opposed. The role of citizens' movements is to highlight the urgency of the situation and provide a political direction that must then be perpetuated by public institutions. During our visit to Madrid, we met a number of activist groups working on issues of ecology, deliberative democracy and the commons.

Today: transforming politics through grassroots citizen movements

The Spanish environmental movement

In Spain, ecological policies have always tended to be pushed into second place by economic and social issues. However, a number of Spanish groups have been pointing out for decades that the climate crisis is systemic, and that the end of the world and the end of the month (to use the slogan of the yellow jackets) cannot be opposed.

As early as the 1950s, the first petitions were launched to protect the Doñana reserve from the eucalyptus plantations that were threatening it. They gave rise to the first environmental group, the Spanish Ornithological Society (SEO, 1954), supported by leading figures from the world of finance and politics. However, it was not until the 1960s that the environmental movement really took off in Spain, in response to the impact of economic growth on the climate and biodiversity. Two currents took different paths: conservationism, which focused on the preservation of nature (nature parks, etc.), and political environmentalism (later known as political ecology), which combined the protection of ecosystems and pointed the finger at the responsibility of the government's economic and industrial policies.

-Félix Rodríguez de la Fuente, a key figure in Spanish conservatism, naturalist and radio and television broadcaster, left the SEO in 1968 and founded the Association for the Defence of Nature (ADENA) (35,000 members), which remained close to the political elite. In 1971, the Institute for the Conservation of Nature (Instituto para la Conservación de la Naturaleza, ICONA) was created, attached to the Ministry of Agriculture.



Félix Rodríguez de la Fuente

-Political ecology really took root in Spain, when environmental issues met social ones. From the mid-1960s onwards, neighbourhood movements denounced the poor living conditions and air and water pollution in working-class suburbs. These demands were reinforced by the scientific findings of the Club of Rome, which published The Limits to Growth in 1972, showing that infinite growth in a finite world was physically impossible. That same year, the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, also known as the Stockholm Conference, was organised. Against this backdrop, one of the pioneering political ecology organisations in Spain, the Spanish Association for Environmental Management (Asociación Española para la Ordenación del Medio Ambiente, AEORMA), was set up in 1970 with the aims of raising public awareness of the need for spatial planning, studying the main environmental problems, seeking solutions by collaborating with competent bodies, creating a university centre specialising in landscape studies and providing documentation. In particular, AEORMA advocates "an immediate halt to the construction of nuclear power stations until such time as technology resolves the serious problems involved in their implementation".

In June 1977, around thirty ecologist groups got together to form the Federation of the Ecologist Movement, which played an important structuring role for the Spanish ecology movement, despite its dissolution in 1978. In the context of the industrial conversion of Spain in the 1980s, the interests of the ecological movement, which opposed polluting industries, came into conflict with the demands of the workers' movement, which defended jobs. Moreover, the presence in the political landscape of the Spanish environmentalist party Federación de Los Verdes (The Green Federation) since 1984, and the commitment of its activists, did not lead to any transformative change. Various local and regional citizens' groups decided to join forces and in 1998 created Ecologistas en Acción (Ecologists in Action). The collective brings together activists from different political backgrounds, but who have in common the desire to link ecological and social struggles:

"Ecologistas en Acción is a plural social organisation that integrates different ways of living environmentalism, and where it is understood that the destiny of human societies is inseparable from natural ecosystems."

However, ecological and social policies remain largely inadequate in a country that is one of the biggest polluters in the European Union. During our visit to Madrid, we met two of the three co-founders of Contra el diluvio (Against the Flood), Xan Lopez and Hector Tejero (also an opposition politician in the Madrid region). Faced with the lack of action and public debate on climate and ecological issues, they decided to organise conferences and demonstrations from 2017 onwards. After the covid crisis, which weakened the movement but also raised a few awarenesses, Xan tells us that climate change has now become a major political issue (at least in the left-wing parties and the trade unions), and one that the general public is familiar with. Today, the new challenge for Contra el diluvio is to win political victories. To achieve this, the environmental movement needs to become more effective and structured, and link up with other struggles, such as the feminist movement, which is very present in Spain. Nevertheless, the environmental movement is weakened today by the confrontation of two visions: the "collapsologists", for whom the collapse of industrial civilisation is inevitable and must lead to the emergence of resilient and convivial local communities; and the "technosolutionists", convinced that technical progress can solve all of today's problems (despite numerous warnings from scientists about the dangers of this belief!!!). As in many European countries, the ecology movement in Spain also suffers from heavy police repression, which weakens it and forces it to adapt constantly...

To go further:

-The origins of the environmental movement in Spain (ESP)

- In Spain, environmental activists block golf holes to denounce the "waste" of water

Citizens' assemblies and initiatives such as Marea deliberativa (Deliberative Tide)

A number of movements are taking an increasing interest in participatory and deliberative democracy in Spain, in particular pushing for the organisation of citizens' assemblies, a mechanism that is still little known by the general public and elected representatives. This is particularly true of Marea deliberativa (Deliberative Tide).



Citizens' Climate Assembly in Spain

What about deliberative participation in Spain?

In 2021, the Spanish government organised its first citizens' assembly on the climate. It took place almost entirely online and received very little media coverage. It followed on from the [declaration on the climate and environmental emergency in Spain](#) approved by the Council of Ministers on 20 January 2020 and its implementation in the [Climate Change and Energy Transition Act](#) of 20 May 2021. 100 citizens, selected randomly according to various criteria to ensure a certain representativeness, were brought together for six five-hour working sessions between December 2021 and June 2022. Their task was to propose climate change mitigation and adaptation measures based on the principles of social justice and solidarity. [172 recommendations](#) emerged from the debates, focusing on five main areas: consumption, food and land use, communities, health and well-being, work and ecosystems. While some of the recommendations are very precise, others are very vague and left to the free interpretation of the government.

These include, for example, a ban on internal flights where alternatives by train exist (recommendation no. 66) or the acceleration of the creation of energy communities in municipalities (recommendation no. 6), but also the deployment of resources to train new professionals in the future circular economic model (recommendation no. 26) or the protection of existing buildings and workplace infrastructures against the effects of climate change (recommendation no. 96). However, two years after the end of the deliberations, these recommendations [have still not been taken up by the public authorities](#).

At a local level, citizens' assemblies are also on the increase. A number of climate assemblies have been launched in various Spanish cities, including [Gipuzkoa](#) and [Mallorca](#) in 2023. [La Palma](#) in the Canary Islands and the city of Valencia have also recently committed to setting up citizens' assemblies on climate and energy. However, while this system is becoming increasingly democratic, not all citizens' assemblies are of the same quality. Numerous parameters may differ, ranging from the selection of citizens to the follow-up to recommendations and the quality of the conditions for debate. The legitimacy of these assemblies and their impact in terms of public policy and media coverage may be reduced. Their ad hoc nature can also [make them tools of communication in the service of a well-crafted political agenda](#), with no real aim of transforming democratic practices and putting the "ordinary citizen" back at the centre.

What is the state of deliberative democracy in Madrid?

Some ten years ago, the Indignant movement called for Democracia real ya! (A real democracy now!). Faced with the crisis of representative democracy and ultra-personalised traditional parties, citizens occupied the Puerta del Sol square in Madrid and experimented with different processes in self-managed assemblies.



Puerta del Sol in Madrid during the Indignant movement

These experiences inspired the Spanish municipalist movement of 2015, which in turn inspired other European cities. To reinvent democracy and put citizens back at the heart of political decision-making, the various municipalist movements relied on digital citizen platforms that are now used by hundreds of cities around the world. In the case of the Ahora Madrid movement, for

example, the [Decide Madrid](#) platform enabled all residents over the age of 16 to express their views by proposing and voting. If a proposal received more than 1% of the votes cast, it was put to a referendum, [the outcome of which the government undertook to respect](#). Other participatory bodies were set up at neighbourhood level, as well as the Observatorio de la ciudad (City Observatory). This permanent citizens' assembly was made up of 49 citizens chosen randomly each year and met 8 times a year to evaluate municipal policies. This system was only put in place a few months before the right-wing was returned to power in Madrid in 2019, [dismantling the various systems](#) put in place by Manuela Carmena's team and the deputy for citizen participation. This post had in fact been created by the municipalist movement once it came to power.

What is Marea Deliberativa's role today?

Recently, in the run-up to the July 23 elections, [Marea Deliberativa](#) and 17 other associations launched the [Democracy for Climate campaign](#) to put forward their demands, which can be found in their manifesto [Extending democracy to tackle the climate emergency](#). In particular, they are calling for an [Ecological Pact](#) to make citizens' assemblies permanent, to ensure that they no longer simply depend on the political will of the parties. As the right-wing PP party did not win an absolute majority in the early general election on 23 July, as had been predicted, the Democracy for Climate organisations plan to focus on the national level. They hope to obtain an Ecological Pact that can have a structural impact on public institutions in the long term. These various organisations, which are all campaigning for permanent and binding participatory democracy bodies, are taking inspiration from Belgian models such as the permanent citizens' assembly for the climate set up by the [Brussels-Capital region](#), or the [mixed commissions](#) bringing together MPs and citizens.

They are also inspired by other European organisations such as [Democracy Next](#), the [Sortition Foundation](#) and the Swiss citizens' movement [Agissons](#) (Act).

To go further:

-[A real democracy: the Spanish example \(FR\)](#)

Commons: the collective garden “Esta es una plaza” (This is a place)

In Madrid's Lavapiés district, in Doctor Fouquet street, local residents have reclaimed a space that had been abandoned for 30 years and transformed it into a garden hosting a range of cultural and artistic activities. In 2008, a group of local residents got together to think about transforming the space, which had previously housed a goldsmith's and silversmith's factory and a pottery workshop. After several months of negotiations with the city council, a number of demonstrations on the Plaza de Puerta Cerrada and the obligation to form an association, the citizens were granted an initial 5-year concession in December 2009. The concession has since been renewed several times and will expire in two years' time. [Esta es una plaza](#) is the name given to this collective garden, which is [self-managed and open to all](#). Anyone can propose activities and occupy the space, as long as they take care of it and respect the community's free, anti-racist, anti-sexist and anti-fascist values. Anyone who so wishes can have a key to the garden, as is already the case for 90 members. Various areas have been developed, including a vegetable garden, a compost and methaniser plant, an uncultivated area, an open-air cinema, a shared library and DIY workshop, children's playgrounds and several temporary murals, including one by the artist Blu (a name we had already crossed during our visit to a number of Italian occupations (cf [Rome newsletter](#))).



The collective and self-managed garden "Esta es una plaza"

In a matter of years, this former wasteland has become an island of coolness in the heart of the capital, a place to meet and meet others.

The rules governing the use of this communal area are decided at the monthly horizontal assembly. At the same time, a number of other assemblies relating to the various projects are self-organised: groups of parents, pet walkers, vegetable gardeners, fruit and vegetable basket distributors, teachers from local schools, etc.

Madrid is home to a range of self-managed and communal urban spaces such as this one. These collective gardens, or other public or private buildings occupied and reappropriated by citizens, usually have a socio-cultural purpose similar to the Italian social centres. But over the last ten years, many of them have been evacuated.

You can find all our newsletters on the [Climates website](#).

Follow our adventures on the web:



If you would like to share any feedback or initiatives, please send an e-mail to: legras.lea@gmail.com, cleafache@yahoo.fr, hug.chirol@gmail.com

You can share the newsletter registration link with others:

[Newsletter French version](#)

[Newsletter English version](#)





Hello everyone!

After 4 months traveling around Europe, crossing 9 countries and 16 cities, the adventure is coming to an end for us!



Over these 4 months, we were able **to talk to hundreds of activists, citizens, researchers and elected representatives**, and discover democratic tools that enable citizens to reclaim political power and launch ecological and social transformations commensurate with the urgency of the situation: **citizens' assemblies, municipalism, commons, cooperatives and local referendums**.

We have shared our discoveries with you through these (often very long) newsletters, trying as best as possible to link them to the country's political context and local realities.

We have come back from these four months in Europe **more convinced than ever of the existence of alternatives to our current system**, and of the best remedies to fight against fatalism (the famous "everything's screwed up") and ecoanxiety. These alternatives rest on three fundamental pillars - **democracy, degrowth and care** - which must guide all our policies.



All our newsletters can be found on [our website](#).

Six articles will be published in the [Green European Journal](#) in September 2023-2024, based on several of our newsletters.

During our trip, we also gave an interview to the NOWU media, which can be found on [their website](#).

A 2023-2024 edition

Ready to go?



As our "activist research" work is far from exhaustive, **we are launching a 2.0 edition of CC-CoRDE for the year 2023-24**, open to anyone wishing to discover other countries, other tools, or deepen the work we have already begun.

We have lots of contacts to share, from people we have already met and those we haven't! Don't hesitate to ask us if you are interested!

AND ABOVE ALL, if you are interested in joining the adventure, you can reply to this e-mail or contact us on the [Climates networks](#):



See you soon

And thanks for following the adventure ;)

Cléa, Léa & Hugo for CC-CoRDE



This email was sent to {{contact.EMAIL}}

[Se désinscrire](#)

