

Introduction

What would happen if the international institutions opened spaces and mechanisms where cities could play an effective role in decision-making processes? What would happen if we could implement methods for sharing best practices to solve major local problems that have a global impact? What are the structures, resources and projects behind the “shelter cities”? In an era where the global can only exist with a connected local, cities are mobilising and proving to be the space where democratic renewal is happening.

Europe is witnessing the evolution of innovative cities where the relation between active citizenship, social movements and local administration is leading to a new way of doing politics. Cities are showing that alternatives exist and can be implemented; cities are putting the commons in the centre of their policies, where activists are taking control of the administration and increasing political pressure on national governments and European institutions.

This chapter depicts those parts of Europe, which are developing new relationships and methods between citizens and the institutions. Experiences, dynamics and programmes that are searching for creative paths and methods to face the struggles that directly connect the local with the global, that directly affect the welfare of the citizens. A new political agenda for the cities, projects for welcoming migrants, tools for engaging citizens in public participatory life or inclusion of the commons in the policy making process – these are some of the key challenges that this chapter presents.

City-makers, commoners, urban social movements, mayors, councillors, and activists that are helping to create, promote and develop new urban experiences come together in this chapter. “Cities could be places of radical innovation in politics, spaces of actual reinvention of democracy”,

argues Giuseppe Caccia, scholar in History of Political thought, in his essay opening the chapter. Similarly, Gesine Schwan, Professor of Political Science, proposes to start from the cities, or more precisely those cities in Europe that are welcoming refugees as places for building bottom-up alternatives and presents a revised common European refugee policy. Following this, five interviews with the mayors of Messina and Naples and city councillors from Barcelona, Madrid and A Coruña, portray practical cases and experiences on municipalism, the commons, policies for refugees and citizen participation in the institutions at the local level. In contrast, the activist collective 'Don't let Belgrade d(r)own', is not holding institutional power. They offer ideas and practices of urban resistance and mobilisation against the corrupt city officials. The chapter closes with Renata Avila, human rights lawyer and digital advocate, making the case against pan-optic surveillance in urban planning and why basic human rights in the digital era need to be defended also at the city level.