

CO-GOVERNANCE: MUTUAL RESPONSIBILITY IN CITIES TODAY

International conference

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PACT FOR A NEW GOVERNANCE

Today, it is cities which increasingly bear the brunt of the impact of Globalisation in its political, economic, technological and social manifestations.

The resultant fear of the change which this has generated has led to depressed societies, narrow mindedness, escalating conflict and polarising inequality, seriously undermining social cohesion.

By 'cities', we mean places of co-existence coupled with a sense of belonging, whether that be a mega city or a small town. In today's world, cities are home to more than half the world's population, a proportion destined to grow. It is therefore inevitable that these cities experience all humanity's challenges, whether social inequality, ethnic conflict, environmental threat or the silencing of democracy.

Urban governance is a complex task and the decisions taken today affect the next generation's future. Thus, today's cities have a strategic political and cultural importance in that they have always represented places of aspiration in relation to human co-existence and creativity, becoming hubs for experimentation to transform fear, social breakdown and conflict into opportunities that generate answers to these problems in local and global contexts.

This 'new era' requires a new commitment involving conscience, thought and action on a personal and collective level.

Participation is key and recognising this, a different vision of democratic processes can emerge at a local level, with this participation founded on the community feeling part of a shared history and being part of one human family.

We are convinced that cities can become workshops whereby daily interaction between people enable them to pursue peace and justice; where virtual circles can be initiated by anyone and can spread, building constructive habits of citizenship. In the context of cultural diversity, cities can enable genuine encounters with others leading to a greater capacity for acceptance and equality.

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Democracy can acquire a new quality through cooperation between politicians, technical experts, competent officials, citizens' and stakeholders' knowledge. If this approach is consolidated in effective practices, in all their variety, it foreseeably can become a system at a global level.

The signatories of this Pact, who come from cities in various continents and who have varying commitments and roles, have decided to become front-line workers, together with key players from other fields.

To enable this cooperation, the first choice is the adoption of the tool and philosophy of 'the network', a social structure defined by the clusters that support it and the quality of the human relationships which connect it.

In this context, networks are the most effective structures for inclusion initiatives and actions and thus for responding with a broader vision to complex real problems. Dialogue between different people can rebuild the fabric of the city because it increases social capital, improves public choices and makes them more effective.

Networks produce outcomes greater than the sum of their parts as they influence and achieve the happiness of many by respecting the variety of contributions, thus strengthening overall identity.

By gathering and multiplying skills and talents, networks create the future, in a time when everything is compressed into the present.

These networks are not insular or closed off, but seek out connection with other networks thus mitigating an elitist, closed political system as well as its inherent social imbalances.

In addition, they avoid becoming unproductive, solipsistic organisations because they choose to approach and engage with those on the margins of democracy by way of their economic, social or cultural poverty.

To restore full political ownership to cities, a logic of networks needs to be implemented on at least **three** levels:

- **Networks of Citizens:** people who live in the city, who, while having different roles and tasks are inspired by the same sense of responsibility
- **Network of Facilitators/Stakeholders:** people working in particular sectors, forming groups in professional and economic spheres e.g. voluntary sectors, faith communities, academia and universities; communications and media etc.
- **Networks of Cities:** because the unity of the human family doesn't come from a 'top down' decision but by a 'bottom up', intelligent, active and patient building of a network of networks.

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This leads to the key question which challenges political action, primarily on the level of the method; how to decide? And how can decisions be translated into practice? This is a question asked of anyone who activates a network for political action.

Some priorities emerged from the conference.

Citizens who choose to operate in **Networks** choose to:

- Oppose corruption (this, a systemic problem promulgated by individual behaviours) – by acting responsibly, with integrity on a personal, work and family level.
- To seek opportunities for ongoing training to learn about contexts, strengthen motivation and acquire new skills
- Be transparent - demanding clear information, appreciating the multiplicity of languages and new technology to tackle problems; transparency in decision-making processes; clarity of political agendas.
- Demand and promote a loyal relationship with institutions while these must preserve the participation of citizens by making elements of real power available to them.

Actors (Facilitators)/Stakeholders who choose to participate in **Networks**, the following priorities emerged:

- A commitment to giving voice to the city's wounds, offering a map of its potential with full disclosure.
- Helping to focus on the profound spirit of the city's history (genius loci) promoting it through their own skills.
- Constant communication/dialogue with institutions, harmonization of particular interests for the common good eschewing favours and embedding citizen participation in new statutes, community agreements and consultations.
- Together with officials of these institutions adopt fundamental principles of transparency, integrity, task sharing, inclusion, accountability and evaluation.
- Expertly address, city wide, the urgent social and urban planning needs and those of the environment and find solutions which can be applied on a large scale.

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Cities which choose to participate in **Networks** wish to:

- Share energies and choose to 'think and act globally' through various means including town-twinning, and by so doing contribute to building a more cohesive human family worldwide.
- Aim to make citizenship work, by creating platforms that are accessible and easy to use for everyone.
- Cooperate – by laying aside our own prejudices and interests which undermine trust, which is the indispensable foundation for the building of networks, conscious that any difficulties encountered can become opportunities for bolder, broader strategies and creative collaboration.
- Share programmes and resources (human and material) in addition to problems experienced with the aim of helping each other gain new perspectives as well as finding new ways to collaborate.
- Be recognised as significant stakeholders within international and transnational organisations and institutions in order to be able to integrate government representation with the voices of its people.

In light of these network commitments the city government expands into a multi-dimensional co-governance process, acquiring democratic quality, decision-making capacity, effective outcomes and prospects for the future.

For the path ahead, for the signatories of this pact – three powerful guidelines emerge:

- That the meaning of **Politics** be interpreted as a democratic, deliberative, participatory and un-confrontational experience, which calls everyone to commitment.
- To nurture **participatory** processes at every level, where dialogue, fundamental to all human interaction finds forms, languages and tools which facilitate action.
- To strive for an **inclusive** culture based on values of universal sister/brotherhood – on the one hand rich in the diversity of its people and on the other woven together by those shared values, which make the journey towards the unity of the human family possible.

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