

Participatory democracy

Engaging, learning, succeeding together

COOPERATIVE APPROACHES

“The only path offering humanity hope for a better future is one of cooperation and partnership“. Kofi Annan

10- August 2021

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Cooperative Approaches, a quarterly journal (4 issues per year) has set itself the mission of promoting cooperative approaches in four key areas: youth and adult education, social action, organizational management, economics and citizen participation.

Publishing Director: Larry CHILDS

Editorial Committee : Biorn MAYBURY-LEWIS, James ITO-ADLER, David BULL, Karol QUINN, Dominique BENARD

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EDITORIAL

Towards Genuine Cooperative Democracy



According to the definition in the Larousse dictionary, democracy is a "political system, a form of government in which sovereignty emanates from the people". Born in ancient Greece, it did not find a stable definition until the 18th century when theories of the separation of powers (Montesquieu) and universal suffrage (United States, 1776) were formulated, which are two of its foundations. In France, democracy only exists because men and women fought for generations to attain it. Since the revolution of 1789, many other social movements have been

required to build and preserve this common good. Remember the right to vote only became accessible to women in 1947 in France! In the United States it was earlier, 1918, but people of color to this day are disenfranchised by restrictive voting laws in many US states.

At the time of Soviet system collapse in 1990, liberal democracy, the prerogative of Western countries seemed to have the wind in its sails. Thirty years later the situation has changed. In the international arena many countries are moving away from the liberal democratic model:

Vladimir Putin's Russia, Narendra Modi's India, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Turkey, but also in Europe, Viktor Orbán's Hungary or Poland led by Jarosław Kaczyński's Law and Justice Party, to name a few. Of course Donald J Trump in the United States pulled the US away during his administration with a majority of Americans willing to either follow or counter with their own oppressive and authoritarian behaviors. In its April 2021 issue, the Journal "Esprit" commented on a process of 'deconsolidation' affecting all Western democracies:

"The symptoms and multiple pathologies of democracies in the West are clearly identified: devitalization of the classic institutions of political representation (parliamentary assemblies, media, trade unions, political parties); growing mistrust of social, intellectual and political elites; disintermediation of social relations and weakening of intermediary bodies; brutal public debate on social networks as well as in the most traditional discussion forums; increasing weight of interest groups and actors from the economic and financial world in political decision-making; increasing power of executives; regression of public freedoms..."

Yet citizens are not sitting by complacent. In the United States those driven to protest range from committed left leaning activists to those who had never thought of themselves as political but whose instinct to protect democracy

"The symptoms and multiple pathologies of democracies in the West are clearly identified..."

drew them out to the streets for the first time.

In France, the results of the last departmental and regional elections, with a record 73% abstention of voters, illustrates this deep mistrust of the political system. Yet at the same time, a growing number of citizens aspire to be governed differently and to contribute in more meaningful ways to decisions. This demand has been expressed with increasing force through various movements over the past decade, some France-grown and the more prominent initiating in the US:

- Occupy in 2011
- Nuit Debout ('Up all night') in 2016
- Yellow Vests in 2018
- Me Too in 2017
- Black Lives Matter in 2020

Beyond the protests and movements are promising shifts in governance. That is the good news. During the 2020 French municipal elections, about 60 cities, including some of significant size (Grenoble, Poitiers, Annecy...) elected 'Citizens' Lists' with an intent to bring real life to representative democracy.



It is this 'List' movement in France that Cooperative Approaches has selected as a primary focus for this 10th edition. Contributing is the 2014 – 2020 elected municipal team of Saillans and several testimonies including by the Mayor of Kingersheim, Mr. Laurent Riche and Christian Proust, author of the "Guide pratique pour oser s'impliquer dans la vie locale" (A Practical Guide for Those Daring to Engage in Local Politics).

This edition also attempts to better understand responses to the suppression of democracy in the United States, which at times risks further inflammation or mimicking the very objectionable authoritarian behaviors they resist. Larry Childs provides a critique around this dynamic while the stunning photographs of Kathryn Elsesser capture the crack down on protesters in Portland so reminiscent of authoritarian regimes the US once decried as abhorrent. Meanwhile in the UK, David Bull offers a hopeful Anglophone world perspective as he covers the rise of the voluntary and NGO sectors in response to COVID.

Yes, democracy is a common good to be lived and preserved. It cannot be satisfied with an excessively formal, top-down

system. It requires a real associative and cooperative dynamism, as demonstrated by the experience of citizen collectives such as those of Saillans, Annecy and Kingersheim. The great majority of the Cooperative Approaches editorial committee have been schooled in

democracy within the world of scouting and experiential education thus learning a bit about how democracy is never acquired once and for all, but requires constantly renewed commitment and innovation. We hope in this issue you discover fresh perspective and inspiration helping to shape your own evolving understanding around this essential dimension of communal life on this planet.

Enjoy your reading,

The editorial committee

A SMALL TOWN COMMUNAL EXPERIENCE

France: Collegial and Participatory Governance in Saillans, 2014-2020

Sabine Girard, Vincent Beillard et Fernand Karagiannis de l'équipe de Saillans



Saillans en Diois. Photo Gérard

The town of Saillans is located in the heart of the Drôme Valley 40 minutes south-east of the city of Valence between the High Speed Train line and the freeway. It offers a well-protected living environment nestled between the Vercors massif and the perched syncline of the Saou forest where it straddles the river Drome

surrounded by wooded hills and vineyards.

For several decades, and more so in recent years, Saillans has been attracting a new population. Included are retirees seduced by the beautiful physical environment and calm as well as young working people fleeing the city for a more friendly and close to nature lifestyle.

Saillans is a very active rural area with many shops and well sustained tourism stimulated by the presence of the Drôme river (swimming, canoeing and kayaking), the wine industry (Clairette de Die) and many services (post office, day care center, medical center, library, stadium, etc.). The social fabric is also very rich with 55 non-profit organizations listed in 2018. Saillans also is situated in an innovation zone which brings elected officials and many actors in the Drôme valley and Diois together to consider responses to the ecological crisis and solidarity through the Biovallée® project¹. The current population is about 1,300.

THE GENESIS OF GOVERNANCE CHANGE

In 2011, the town supported installing a supermarket on the outskirts of the village. Yet a large part of the population, fearing the devitalization of the village center, mobilized against the project. A citizens' collective - "*Pays de Saillans Vivant*" (Living Saillans Country) - was created with the objective of opposing the supermarket and maintaining a watchful eye on commune policy. A key strategy was the presence of these active residents at each meeting of the municipal council and the wider community of communes. This group also often assembled during the Sunday market building bridges and links across generations. On account of their actions



Saillans City Hall

the supermarket proposal was withdrawn in 2013.

Shortly after, a small group of residents took another action presenting an alternative listing for the municipal elections as opposition to the outgoing mayor was already mounting. The key word descriptive of the alternative they were presenting was, "*Otherwise*". It was about installing an approach to commune management quite different from that of the previous governance, that is to say based on the principles of collegiality, participation, transparency, and aligned with values such as respect for the environment and solidarity.

'OTHERWISE' CAMPAIGN

From the start '*Otherwise*', as a distinctive electoral campaign approach, lacked any specific program head of list or declared candidates. Furthermore everything played out in the public square. This had never been experienced in Saillans!

¹ The Biovallée association's mission is to promote and develop a culture of environmental preservation, respect for our land and our landscapes, as well as the values of solidarity, cooperation and mutual respect. In the 1980s, the Drôme River was used as a sewer and public dumping ground. It was forbidden to swim in it. The inter-municipalities and actors of Biovallée organized themselves in 1987 to launch river protection laws such that dumps were closed, the only dam on the river destroyed, dozens of water treatment plants created, and the banks maintained. Agricultural activities were contained and, illegal quarries stopped. <https://biovallee.net/>

The meetings, open to all, allowed for the co-construction of an agenda and spontaneous declarations of candidacies. With the participation of more than 150 people on average the meetings were regarded a great success. By the beginning of 2014, 21 candidates had declared their candidacy all based on collective governance principles. They then agreed on the order of the final list and chose the head. Important note: None of their 15 official candidates listed had any experience in municipal government. In March 2014 the list declared as, *Otherwise for Saillans*, all together! won the election with nearly 57% of the vote.

2014 TO 2020 - A TRULY DIFFERENT APPROACH TO GOVERNANCE

With collective enthusiasm the new communal principles were put into action with an ambition to place residents at the heart of the initiative and to support a new governance scheme built around 4 pillars: collegiality, participation, transparency and experimentation.

Collegiality

In compliance with the legal framework, safeguards were set to protect against the excesses of traditional municipal operations. For instance to oppose the monopolization of power by a few (the mayor and his deputies) and their divesting other elected officials, it was decided all municipal councilors would be vested with the same level of authority and a pairing system set to avoid isolated decision made by a single individual. A "*leading pair*" (mayor and 1st deputy mayor) would serve to coordinate

With collective enthusiasm the new communal principles were put into action with an ambition to place residents at the heart of the initiative...

communal action and monitor communal management more closely in conjunction with the municipal agents. All the elected representatives, organized in pairs or trios, possessed shared expertise in several areas: finance, youth programming, economy and budget, civic organizations, environment, social action and transparency/communications.

Decisions concerning daily management and participatory activities were taken during 'steering committee' meetings which brought together all the elected representatives twice a month. These committees replaced the traditional closed meetings of deputies and were open to the public which remains the case today with agenda and the minutes posted on the town website.

Participation

Residents were invited to participate during all stages of municipal activity from policy presentations and decision-making to on the ground implementation.

Each pair of elected officials coordinated a '*thematic commission*' based their area of expertise. These commissions were

Participation data

A total of 841 events included meetings of elected officials' and other were organized from April 2014 to March 2020 with a total of 14,980 participants. 640 events were participatory and 502 had a sign-in sheet. Participation was classified by 4 groups:

- Very frequent participation (more than 4 times a year): 50 people
- Frequent participation (more than 2 times a year): 52 people
- Occasional participation (between 1 and 2 times a year): 204
- Rare participation (1 to 2 times during the term): 364 people.

open to residents (no selection process required) and their performance reviewed at annual meetings. Commissions also prioritized projects, which were then validated by the steering committee.

To carry out these projects, 'Project Action Groups' (PAG) were created, one or two elected officials join but rely on trained citizens to lead a process of co-construction open to all. The mission of the PAGs is to study the potential of a project and/or to ensure its implementation, with the support of city hall. More than 50 PAG's were created during this 'mandate period' and led to diverse and significant actions. PAG's were also created at the request of citizens or elected officials at the steering committee meetings.

Here are a few examples of projects taken on:

- '*Things are moving in my canteen*' was a school restructuring project securing the school exit location as a meeting zone in the center of town with road markings, parking, and signage.

- '*Residents' booklet*' was an initiative targeting newcomers and included participatory workshops, information panels in the neighborhoods, and a place in the monthly agenda of municipal and volunteer organization meetings.

- Others included collective composting, night extinguishing of public lighting, Zero Phyto (plan to improve waste water sanitation and horticultural practices), group purchase of electric bicycles, a solidarity group, organic and local market, local economy week, an inventory of all actors in the local economy, development of the public garden, installation of dry toilets, and more....

The number of members in each PAG varied from 5 to 20 people. In a rural town like Saillans, which has few public employees, the involvement of the inhabitants makes it feasible to carry out a larger number of projects that the elected officials alone would have not been able to manage or bring to fruition.



PAG meeting : small group discussions are lively.

Transparency

In order to distance itself from the lack of transparency in municipal activity by the previous administration the competence, 'Transparency/Information', was entrusted to a team of 2 elected officials and 6 citizens. Every meeting was the subject of a report published on the municipal website and posted on the neighborhood panels installed at the beginning of the mandate. In addition, a municipal newsletter was published and written by elected officials and members. An important point is that it was not intended to serve as a tool for personal promotion. All archives are available on www.mairiedesaillans2014-2020.fr

Experimentation

This fourth pillar was probably not formulated clearly enough at the beginning of the mandate. It was based around a 'democracy of doing' which meant building new governance structures, taking the time to question

and to try out new options along the way which has continued to permeate municipal behaviors and actions to this day. It has led to encouraging and accompanying residents in experimenting around many different topics and then providing the associated space, training, equipment, and by valuing their respective initiatives.

The practice of communal management was effectively reinvented with

new tools and by trying out different methods supporting the emergence of public steering committees, citizen panels, voting mechanisms, greater transparency, etc. This experimentation also led to the creation of bodies and tools for reflection and evaluation, such as the 'participation observatory' and the 'monitoring and evaluation' group.

Findings and initial assessment

Participation through all these new structure evolved over the course of the mandate

From the initial participatory commissions and working groups, other forums developed such as workshops and public meetings for the revision of the Local Urban Plan (PLU). The survey "*Residents to your projects!*" was another call to action.

Though 1,100 inhabitants engaged in this process, some of the population, as revealed by the survey did not embrace this mandate and remained in the

background. The fact that the municipal team was not re-elected in 2020 confirmed a certain division in approaches to governance. Entrusting important decisions to residents chosen by lot turned out to be especially controversial and generated opposition.

Another problem impacting re-election was many projects not achieving the desired results due primarily to the budgetary limitations of a small municipality. Given the systematic policy of transparency, these difficulties could not remain unnoticed at all.

Over the course of 6 years positive results were marked by the many projects

The practice of communal management was effectively reinvented with new tools

carried out, high participation, and their increased competence in local affairs.

The municipal team had set itself the objective of motivating residents to take charge of the common good, by giving them concrete means to manage more and more of the village's affairs, while respecting others and the environment. This objective has been achieved, as



Steering group: "Let's escape the four walls: Participation can also be achieved in the open air". Photo B. Simon



In Saillans, in the "steering committees", all the elected officials decide collegially and these meetings are public. Photo Olivier Metzger pour Télérama

shown by the multiplication of initiatives such as collective composting, the recycling center, the donation space "*Protected from need*", the cleaning of the banks of the Drôme, etc. and more widely by the development of local businesses and of a more collaborative and solidarity-based form of economy as indicated by local producers' stores and 2 co-working spaces.

To achieve this objective of widespread participation, the work centered on deliberation, listening, and examining the arguments of all sides in order to arrive at acceptable compromises. The communal project did not emerge from an existing theory (e.g., communalism), but was built in an empirical and

pragmatic way, step by step, with the contribution of each person, in discussion or in practice.

The experience allowed the construction of a model constantly questioned and refined, according to the evaluation findings. The objectives announced for a second term of office by the continuity list ("*Committed together for Saillans*") reflect this: better-defined orientations, the continuation of the co-construction of projects in participative commissions, the opening of new spaces for questioning (notably to encourage individual initiatives), the holding of regular neighborhood meetings, the establishment of a "*village assembly*" responsible for gathering the opinions of

those who do not participate in group meetings.

The political line has also been affirmed: that of a territorial, ecological and solidarity-based transition, by strengthening the power of citizen action, in order to face here and now the global crises that threaten us all. It is based on a conviction that another world is possible. However this is not yet shared by a majority of residents for whom even representative democracy remains seemingly difficult to grasp.

FAILURE OR DEFEAT?

The list "*Committed together for Saillans*", which claimed to have improved governance since 2014 lost the municipal elections of March 15, 2020 by 18 votes. Many people supportive of the ideas guiding the previous six years expressed great surprise: How is it that inhabitants of Saillans did not wish to continue this way of managing the commune?

It is difficult to analyze the reasons for the inhabitants' vote but the village is eveningly divided since half of the inhabitants wished to continue the experiment. The electoral failure is therefore to be put into perspective with the "against" vote explained in a few ways. First, in Saillans, as in many communes some never vote for a program or ideas. Another is that in 2014 an passionate subset of the electorate wanted to remove the former mayor and then in 2020 there was the same effect in reverse.

There were other issues as well:

In fact, the 6-year initiative established many practices that continue to this day

- The revision of the Local Urban Plan which was perceived by some as an attack on private property such that a concern to defend personal interests allowed a coalition to form between different more or less conservative ranks of the commune.
- The participatory democracy project was over-mediated which undoubtedly also prompted rejection by certain inhabitants.
- The non-fulfillment of certain projects may also explain some votes against and those 19 blank or null.
- A new list of candidates less representative of the population with prevalence of 'neo-rurals' played on identity-related fears generating a nauseating campaign against an "invasion" of the village.

Despite these obstacles and the consequent electoral defeat many features of the municipal project of Saillans have been sustained and remain linked with larger movements to transform political cultures and practices with emphasis on participatory governance and calls for greater transparency and collective decision-making.

In fact, the 6-year initiative established many practices that continue to this day.

For example in the agenda of the newly elected officials of Saillans the terms "participation" and "collegiality" are evident. Also expressed are the intentions to create "consultative commissions" which are "permanent" and "upstream of the municipal council and decision making". Of course, there can be big gaps between the rhetoric and the practice, especially in terms of transparency but future will better reveal the longer term impacts.

In 2014 Saillans was one of the few precursors to such participatory governance in France, yet in 2020 many municipal lists define themselves as "participatory" as evidence that a desire to develop more horizontal and collegial policies has spread. According to the census carried out by the site "Fréquence commune", more than 400 citizens' lists have declared themselves to be participatory and 66 have been elected. It is far from a tidal wave, but it is undeniably the emergence of a new political will. In the nearby Drôme, in Dieulefit, a list largely inspired by Saillans now manages communal affairs. In Die, a merger list won the elections and in Crest another merger list failed by a very narrow margin.

Over the course of six years the initiative aimed above all to instill in residents a desire to get involved in the life of their village and provide the means to do so. It also encouraged collective volunteer and local business initiatives that value and emphasize elements that bind village residents rather than divide. This has definitively resulted in advancing a genuine sharing economy.

Examples are the creation of self-managed projects, cultural and volunteer activities promoting mutual aid, environmental practices and a general increased sense of solidarity. What has been attempted is a "real utopia" in that modalities of existing model alternatives have been experimented with by the residents often in the midst of crisis.

This dynamic constitutes a profound cultural change and persists well beyond the electoral components. It is indeed creeping through the walls of town hall and outward towards the wider commune and beyond. These sustaining and expanding features defines the real success of the Saillans experience during the years 2014-2020.

Find the history: <https://www.mairiedesaillans2014-2020.fr/>

MEETING WITH LAURENT RICHE, MAYOR

France: Re-enchanting Democracy in Kingersheim

By Roland DAVAL



Kingersheim

RD - Mr. Mayor, if you would please introduce yourself.

LR - I have been Mayor of KINGERSHEIM since the last municipal elections in 2020. I was previously deputy to Jo SPIEGEL, the then Mayor of KINGERSHEIM, for three consecutive terms from 2001 to 2020. In 2001, at the request of Jo SPIEGEL, and taking into account my experience of management control in business, I was responsible for the budget / finances.

During two mandates I also took charge of cultural affairs, and then during my third mandate the ecological transition to help accelerate the territorial approach carried by Jo SPIEGEL.

My current duties as Mayor have led me to limit my professional activity.

RD - In order to know the framework of the project we are going to discuss, please introduce us to the town of

Kingersheim in Alsace with its main characteristics.

LR - KINGERSHEIM is a medium-sized residential town located in the first ring of the city of MULHOUSE. It is a town of 13,500 inhabitants and its population doubled between 1960 and 1980. When Jo SPIEGEL stood for election in 1989, he wanted to control this urban development so that the town would not become a commuter town, which required the implementation of a policy of public facilities and actions creating links between the inhabitants.

RD - You have been Mayor of Kingersheim since March 2020, but you have been part of the municipal team that has been involved in this process of mobilizing citizens in municipal life since its beginning. Since when, why and how was this project born? What values guide this approach?

LR - As Jo SPIEGEL pointed out, if we had worked on the dynamism of the city, there was still a step to be taken, that of the participation of the inhabitants in local life. In the mid-1990s, Jo SPIEGEL wanted to meet the inhabitants, using a questionnaire "Let's talk about our city together" with an encouraging return rate of 43%, and by asking them directly to share their expectations. This was a very important



Laurent Riche, Mayor of Kingersheim

symbolic step. The process was then intensified to give the citizens as much power of proposal as possible. As Jo SPIEGEL says, "Transparency is essential because it is the first lever of trust". In 2004, the municipality joined the "Pacte civique"² (Civic Pact) and launched the "Etats Généraux Permanents de la Démocratie" (Permanent Forum of Democracy³) (EGPD) which permeate local democratic life. It is a state of mind: to commit oneself to experience the common good and the general interest, to participate in the construction of a fraternal city, to vow to build a sophisticated democracy with the following general objectives:

- To improve democratic practices.
- Rebuild a spirit of solidarity and responsibility.
- To reinforce the better living together.

² The "Pacte civique" (Civic Pact) is a collective whose members commit themselves "to put their personal, social and political lives at the service of a more just and fraternal society": <https://pactecivique.fr/notre-collectif/>

³ In Kingersheim, the "Etats Généraux Permanents de la Démocratie" (Permanent Forum of Democracy) includes, among others: the participative councils, the House of Citizenship dedicated to democratic practices and the Citizenship Day: <https://www.ville-kingersheim.fr/Democratie/Les-Etats-Generaux-Permanents-de-la-Democratie-EGPD>

- To take into account the expertise of the inhabitants.

RD - *In a recent article in the "Nouvel Observateur", you indicate that in Kingersheim, you do not say "participatory democracy", an expression that is "overused", because by its very nature "democracy should be participatory in itself". You prefer to say that elected officials and inhabitants practice "democracy-construction". Could you therefore specify your conception of this citizen approach?*

LR - We speak about "participative democracy" because we have never made the inhabitants participate. We don't know how to do it and we must change our "programming" by not staying in a top-down system. Creating participation means listening to people, animating the debate so that decisions, compromises and co-constructions can be reached. The Greek word "Demos", one of the ways of designating the people, was participation. The theme of "Participatory Democracy" can also be "a cream pie" for all the elected officials who take it up, limiting themselves to informative, top-down neighborhood meetings. It is essential to accept co-construction. In KINGERSHEIM we talk about "democracy - construction".

Public debate is not easy to organise and training is needed. It is also necessary to invest and the municipality has a staff member dedicated to this work..

It is necessary to get involved to give a framework to the consultation and the working method is important for the respect of the inhabitants. Jo SPIEGEL talks

about the "democratic perimeter" to be fixed with the inhabitants: what is the subject of the debate, how we debate, how we decide.

It is necessary to know how to take time because one cannot debate under pressure and the time apparently lost is time saved for the future. Moreover, when you decide alone, you may be confronted with petitions from citizens, which means that you have to backtrack and waste time.

As an example of work carried out by setting the democratic perimeter, we can cite the work done in a neighbourhood with a community of North African origin. To avoid being afraid of an "Islam of the cellars", some algecos (buildings) had been made available to a religious association to create a place of worship, which stayed like this for about fifteen years. Young people took over the running of this association and invited the elected representatives, pointing out the ageing of the premises and the lack of space. This invitation was accepted by Jo SPIEGEL, but with an expression of willingness to open up the reflection to other inhabitants in this participative sequence. This was in the autumn of 2016, just after the attacks on Charly Hebdo and St Etienne du Rouvray. However, Jo SPIEGEL decided to continue and to assume the commitments made by defining the perimeter: there will in any case be a new place of worship because it already exists and it is necessary to work together including in an intercultural approach. The processes were very rich. Although some people expressed their concerns, they all appreciated working together and getting to know each other. This is what Jo SPIEGEL calls the "pathway".

RD - *To implement such an approach and to lead it, how did the commune organize itself? In particular, what collective intelligence tools have you put in place? What are the limits of this participation of the inhabitants in the life of their municipality, because, as elected officials, you have your own responsibilities to exercise, particularly in terms of financial management.*

LR - With the setting up of the Permanent Forum of Democracy (EGPD), over the period 2004 - 2008, a new rise in democratic participation was observed.

After the 2008 elections and during the 2008-2014 term of office, citizens were mobilized to participate in projects, including the preparation of the Local Urban Plan: a Participatory Council that lasted 6 years!

Citizens are drawn at random from the electoral lists and are accompanied from the outset by trainers and participate in discovery visits. This is how the Participatory Councils were created each time a project is set up on the initiative of the city or the inhabitants. Each Participatory Council is composed of a college of residents, a college of experts (associations, institutions, resource persons) and a college of elected officials.

We could also cite, as an example, the exchange on the implementation of electronic voting, a practice that took place just next door in Mulhouse, a consultation in the form of a citizens' jury.

In his book mentioned above, Mr. Jo SPIEGEL indicates that "In ten years, forty



Jo SPIEGEL, pioneer of local participatory democracy

participatory councils have met with seven hundred participants. They have enabled the city council to make the best possible decisions, the citizens to be recognized as full players, and the experts, in particular the employees of the municipality, to be valued when they provide their insight, if necessary".

After the re-election of Jo SPIEGEL in 2014, a new step was taken with the organization of "Meetings in the neighbourhoods". Citizens, mobilized during the previous mandate, formed a core group of activists who were invited to get involved in this participatory approach. Training courses for elected representatives and volunteers were organised: training on participation, debate engineering.

These meetings were implemented in ten districts with the following facilitation approach:

The Communal Democracy Council, an informal body, has also been set up to enable residents (who are more regularly involved) to support elected officials in the engineering of participation

1st sequence of 45 minutes in workshops and with the use of post-it notes to express grievances and expectations: need to put down what is on one's mind. These elements are then reorganised and a "ledger" is set up

2nd sequence of 45 minutes to express the kindness that is received and given even if it was more difficult. A summary on better living together, on the way people could commit themselves, do solidarity and live together is also written.

Following this, two Participatory Councils were immediately organised, resulting from requests for involvement from residents: nature in the city and public lighting. These participatory sequences were proposed by the elected representatives, but they can also be set up at the request of the inhabitants.

The Communal Democracy Council, an informal body, has also been set up to enable residents (who are more regularly involved) to support elected officials in the engineering of participation. It functions as

a "control tower" of all the democratic sequences established in the commune.

In order to guarantee this citizen mobilisation process, a permanent methodology is put in place:

1. Organization at the House of Citizenship of a public debate with information in the press. Experts and technicians on the subject are brought in for information and training. For example, for the work on school rhythms, Prof. Hubert MONTAGNER, the democratic perimeter of the debate having been set on the rhythms of the child.
2. Solicitation of those who want to get involved, making sure that the inhabitants of the city remain in the majority.
3. Organization of a Participatory Council by setting a goal and a deadline.
4. Setting up, if necessary, a steering committee for long-term work.
5. If necessary, we can also add a "citizen jury".
6. This is a simple methodology that complements very effectively the work of the municipality, which fully assumes its role and responsibilities. As Jo SPIEGEL says, "There is no decision without renunciation, just as there is no debate without rules, nor projects without constraints: budgetary, regulatory, legal."

RD - To illustrate this approach in a concrete way, what are the project(s) around which the citizens of Kingersheim are currently mobilized.

What does this look like and what is their level of involvement?

LR - A new stage has started since 2020. Indeed, before the elections, a proposal of municipal program is presented by the candidate list during a participative forum which gathered 130 people at the "Maison de la Citoyenneté" (House of Citizenship). Five workshops were organized to enrich this program, which in the end will present about sixty projects and actions that are commitments of elected officials, with a participatory approach to discuss their implementation.

It is the will to mobilise citizens even if they have difficulty doing so, which requires both being proactive and putting in place a great deal of engineering. There are no taboos and the inhabitants can always ask the elected representatives questions.

KINGERSHEIM is a town in the making which has managed to avoid being a commuter town and where the question of transportation links is particularly important.



The House of Citizenship in Kingersheim

Two long-term projects are currently mobilizing a number of residents:

- A project that dates back to the previous mandate and concerns the place of the bicycle in the city.
- Another project concerns the place of nature in the city. Initially, it was a "Green Lung" project with the development of a park, then the reflection was extended with regular monitoring.

RD - In Kingersheim, since the beginning of this municipal project, you have placed the child at the heart of the project. Why this choice and what are the actions implemented?

With Jo SPIEGEL, we wanted to work with and for the youth and families in terms of education and we have therefore implemented a policy for children because today's child is tomorrow's citizen.

During our first mandate, we built a new school - the Children's Village - and a cultural facility - the "Centre de Rencontre, d'Échanges et d'Animation" (CREA)⁴.

The CREA, managed by an association, has signed a Contract of Objectives and Means (CPOM) with the city to implement leisure activities and a cultural program.

It is already 30 years ago this year that we initiated the MOMIX festival, a live show for a young audience, which

⁴ Center of Meeting, Exchanges and Facilitation.

is a reference in France in the field of festivals for young audiences. We should have celebrated this anniversary but the health crisis has not allowed it for the moment.

RD - In order to support the projects of the inhabitants, the municipality has set up a Citizen's Initiative Fund (FIC), can you tell us about it?



Training at the "House of Citizenship"

LR - Within the framework of the Permanent General States of Democracy, the city of KINGERSHEIM has indeed set up in 2006 a support fund for the inhabitants' projects.

If these projects intersect with public policies, financial support, which remains modest, can be provided. Support is mainly given to neighbourhood projects that support "living together", which is also reflected in the equipment that can be made available, for example, support for "neighbourhood aperitifs".

RD - To conclude this interview, if you had three or four pieces of advice to give to a municipal team that would like to invest in such a citizen approach, what would you tell them?

LR - Not everything can be done in a collegial and participatory manner and everyone must assume their responsibilities.

In the current mandate of the elected officials of KINGERSHEIM, the following priorities have been set

- Education and citizenship which are inseparable ;
- Solidarity;
- the ecological transition.

Participatory democracy does not appear as a priority because it is lived; it is at the heart of our governance, and it is a state of mind.

In KINGERSHEIM we had a lot of visits from elected officials before the 2020 municipal elections and many of them lost by putting participatory democracy too much in the forefront of their programme as an end in itself, which is, in my opinion, a mistake. Voters need a direction, a vision for their city, their territory,... as much as they need to want to participate and build.

DECIPHERING

What is Participatory Democracy?

By Christian Proust and Dominique Bénard

Christian Proust comes from a background in popular education. After having worked for a dozen years in "Centres sociaux,"⁵ he became the secretary of a town hall in a rural commune, then moved to the Departmental Council, where he held the position of Deputy Director General of Departmental Services. He knows well, from the inside, the local political and administrative institutions. In a recent book, he offers some important points on how to get into politics and thus promote the establishment of participatory lists in local elections.

DB - In 2018, Christian Proust, you wrote a "Practical guide for daring to get involved in local politics", which led you to undertake a "citizen's tour of France". How did you become involved in this adventure?

CP - My personal, militant and professional experience made me discover that, for decades, the political field in France has been organized into hostile groups that compete with agility to demolish their opponents while they end up wielding power with great similarity.

Faced with this spectacle, citizens are filled with confusion and wonder why elected officials do not act to join forces and build the country's future together by



seeking real solutions to concrete problems.

People have the growing feeling that politicians are more active in defending the future of their party (and incidentally their personal futures) than that of the citizens of their territory, and that, despite the shuffling of office holders, nothing changes. Politics is less and less a battle of ideas, and more and more a game of musical chairs, which explains the

⁵ The "Centres sociaux" (Social Centers) are local organizations that offer social, educational, cultural and family activities to meet the needs of the area, to animate democratic debate, to accompany mobilizations and projects of residents, and to build better living conditions: <https://www.centres-sociaux.fr/>

growing disaffection with political parties.

I had the intuition that the democratic frustration was as serious as global warming and that "it was going to blow up". The episode of the "Yellow Vests" would confirm it. I felt that things could not last... I became convinced that the culture of getting people involved in politics had to be changed and that only the base could make this change.

It is only by changing the ways of doing things in daily, political and local life that we will eventually be able to develop the habit of cooperating, sharing power, involving people, being transparent and keeping commitments. So, I wrote a "Practical Guide to Dare to Get Involved in Local Politics" with the goal of encouraging and advising new actors on how to engage differently in politics at the local level.

DB - The "yellow vests"⁶ have shown that democracy is suffering in our country. We take part in an election every 5 years, and then we are not consulted anymore. In the meantime, we have the impression that politics has no power to solve the problems we face. Is this something you have felt on the ground?

CP - Yes, all these groups that I met made the same diagnosis: democracy is in danger; politics can no longer continue this way; and the political practices

I had the intuition that the democratic frustration was as serious as global warming and that "it was going to blow up".

exercised over the past few decades are no longer bearable. A few examples of the untenable are the control of politics by cultural and professional elites, cleavages and power wars between the different parties and political groups or even within the parties; the accumulation of mandates, the pyramid-like highly vertical even autocratic power practices that we find in the communes in particular... and the communities of communes let's not even talk about them! All of this! People are fed up with it!

This especially disappointing since we have a supposed representative democracy which does not represent anything anymore. When we look closely at the data – we are not impressed by the 51% results of the second round of an election. We realize that our elected representatives, and in particular the deputies, have been chosen by less than 20% of the people of voting age in their constituency.

First of all, there are the abstentions, the invalid or blank votes, but also the "invisibles of democracy", i.e. those who

⁶ The "Yellow Vests" movement - named after the high-visibility yellow vests that protestors wore – has been an unstructured and sporadic protest movement that appeared in France in October 2018. This spontaneous social movement originated in the dissemination - mainly on social media - of calls to demonstrate against the increase in the price of gas resulting from the hike in the domestic consumption tax on energy products.



do not even register on the electoral lists. We never talk about them, but roughly speaking they must be between 4 and 6 million people. This is considerable, because it is about 10 to 11% of the French electorate.

This means that today an elected official of the Republic is extremely unrepresentative since 80, even 90% of the people did not vote for them. At the presidential level, for example, Emmanuel Macron received no more than 25% of the people's vote. He will therefore necessarily provoke discontent. From one election to the next, the outcome of the elections changes because the elected representative never manages to regroup and stabilize a real representative majority.

In January 2018, I was in Coutières, a very small rural commune, to launch my book. After the conference, I moderated a debate and asked everyone the question, "You are President of the Republic, tomorrow morning, what is the decision you make to breathe fresh air into our democracy?"

This aroused such interest among those attending that I heard myself say, "I found this meeting really interesting – perhaps

I'll need to go on a citizen's tour of France!" Then, I was lucky enough to be invited to a France Inter program where I talked about my citizen's Tour de France project and it was like a trail of gunpowder!... I received lots of invitations and wound up moderating 54 conferences on the issue of citizen participation... Almost every time, I was invited by "citizen collectives" some of which were already engaged in running for the next municipal elections, like in Chambéry, for example.

DB - In the last departmental and regional elections, we saw an abstention rate of over 70% of the electorate. Does this mean that citizens are not interested in politics?

CP - Obviously, when we reach this rate of abstention, it is an extremely heavy indicator and yet despite all that, the people I met like politics. Though most had never been involved in politics, they are still interested. They reject political parties, but they are interested in politics and democracy. No matter how old they are, they want to try something. They don't know how to do it, and that's why my book worked. The practical issues it deals with have aroused great interest because people don't dare to get involved as they believe they lack the required competence. They make a diagnosis that politics is catastrophic, and are fearful of getting involved in these kinds of fights. They have been led to believe that politics requires ultra-fine skills and that it is reserved for an elite. My objective with my first book was to break this mindset and to show that it was not

mandatory to have attended ENA⁷ to get involved in politics.

DB - The President of the Republic launched the Great National Debate and then the Citizens' Convention on Climate Change with the goal of encouraging active participation by citizens. From what you have seen in the field, what are the challenges of participatory democracy? In what way does it place political engagement in a new light?

CP - The attempts at participatory democracy launched by the President of the Republic have not really been conclusive, probably because the issues at stake were not clearly understood.

The first issue is that of values. The question of values is crucial for citizen collectives. When one is not linked to a political party, on what basis can one regroup? We must open up, but to whom and why? You have to start by having a clear idea of what can bring people together. The citizen collectives I met almost all started by asking themselves what values unite their members and what governance they want in place if they are elected. Then they set these values in a charter, manifesto or constitution.

Their foundations are mainly rooted in values that take into account the ethics of candidates and then elected officials and the governance of the community. A significant example is given by the

Today an elected official of the Republic is extremely unrepresentative since 80, even 90% of the people did not vote for them...

Manifesto of Values of the Toulouse Citizen Archipelago collective (see box). Like many other similar texts, it insists on democratic governance, social justice, ecological transition and ethics.

DB - How did the citizens' collectives organize themselves to get known and elect candidates in the municipalities?

The question of visibility was a major issue. When you are totally unknown, when you don't exist through a party, you have to be imaginative to be recognized. In this respect, the citizens' collectives have shown astonishing creativity.

In Chambéry, for example, the collective organized real-fake city councils in the open air, at the foot of the towers, or in front of the city hall, on issues like the municipal budget. This attracted the attention of passers-by, as well as journalists! Other collectives have organized door-to-door tours to ask residents about their needs.

⁷ The "École Nationale d'Administration" (National School of Administration - ENA), created in 1945, is a major French training school responsible for the selection and training of senior civil servants destined for the French government.

They succeeded in building their philosophy on three pillars: power sharing, participation of the residents in the management of the city and transparency.

But where they have been most original, it seems to me, is in the constitution of the lists and the choice of the heads of the list. You know, traditionally in France, the head of the list is designated, in rural areas, by a person who decides to gather a few friends around him or her and say, "Don't worry, you'll be on the list, but you'll only have a small role or no role at all. "One meeting a month and I won't bother you!", is how I would characterize it.

In the city, party logic prevails but is also problematic. The party starts by choosing the head of the list which then goes through a multitude of intrigues... Next we look for the other candidates and finally we try to write, two or three, a program, or we copy a model proposed by the party.

The citizens' collectives have chosen a diametrically opposite approach! It is a citizens' assembly, set up, well before the election, which chooses the candidates using innovative methods. For example, in Toulouse, the "Archipel citizens" collective created an assembly comprised of 3 groups: one third volunteers, one third personalities most

cited by the people, and one third people drawn by lot. The drawing of lots results in a very interesting pattern because it allows new people to emerge, who will then be very committed because they are extremely grateful to the organization for having allowed them to participate this social and political progress.

To choose the candidates, some collectives used the logic of "majority judgment". The logic of normal voting is "I vote for this one, I don't vote for that one..." You are forced to limit your choice to one person, and yet you can have plenty of opinions about all the other candidates... On the contrary, majority judgment voting is a values-based vote. We propose to the voters to evaluate the candidates by attributing mentions (for example: "very good", "good", "fairly good", "fair", "insufficient", "to be rejected"). Several candidates can be attributed the same mention. The notion of a median is used to determine the winner. It is a voting system that requires only one round. In the end, the people who are chosen are really chosen by a majority of the people. And this gives great strength to the list of candidates so designated.

The top of the list is chosen last. Another method is used for this purpose which is called, the method of election without candidate. The assembly or list of candidates is assembled and each person is asked to put their name on a post-it note (it is not anonymous) and to write the name of another person they propose as the head of the list. The post-it notes are collected, and then the

facilitator asks each person to explain the choices they have made. In the first round, there are about ten names that come out and then, with the arguments we have with each other, the brains put to work – we advance to a second round where things change.

This is how Cécile, the head of the list of the Saint-Médard-en-Jalles collective was chosen, to her great surprise! She found herself designated head of the list without having imagined for a second that this could be possible! Completely panicked at the end of the meeting, she had asked for three days of reflection. She came back three days later saying "I accept!" Now the first deputy of a commune of 31,000 inhabitants, this teacher is so invested that she plays an exemplary role in her commune.

DB - The question of citizen governance is undoubtedly central to the field of participatory democracy. What did you notice on this subject?

CP - It is indeed a common element between all the collectives. Like the municipality of Saillans, they succeeded in building their philosophy on three pillars: power sharing, participation of the residents in the management of the city and transparency. And this is found everywhere! There are no exceptions. In concrete terms, what does this mean? Let's take for example the idea of Saillans to create pairs of elected representatives in charge of each municipal commission. What does this mean in a municipal council? It simply means: "Let's try to fight against the isolation of the elected representative, against the little

In this cooperative contract, everyone's commitments in terms of ecological transition and citizen governance are explicit.

arrangements between friends, and then let's really try to share the power between all the municipal councilors, including members the opposition if it wishes to engage.

This idea, which is often repeated, corresponds to the desire to implement the most horizontal power sharing possible and to fight against the place given to the mayor that is commonly seen in France, as the man or woman who knows everything and does everything. All the institutions are organized around the mayor, in the direction of the mayor, and completely forget that there is a municipal council alongside. We are in a country that is still strongly centralized, marked by a culture of Napoleonic power. The citizens' collectives that won the elections must therefore fight against the extremely heavy and strong tendency of other elected officials, of municipal staff, and of external institutions (department, prefect) to entrust full power to the mayor.

In fact, when a list launches members generally think it has little chance of winning or, on the contrary, it thinks that it has a good chance of winning it will not have to get along with others to win.



This is what happens most of the time because of the traditional vesting of power to the mayor and people having only 24 or 48 hours between the two rounds to build an agreement with others, their competitors and sometimes their opponents, for building something together.

It had also been common practice for a list to be taken over by the one in the lead position. What dominated therefore was not an idea of association, but instead of habitual absorption. And was it due primarily to what set of conditions? Well, due to time. It's impossible to practice a path of listening and understanding in just 24 hours.

Well, more recently something noteworthy is happening in our democracy. The Covid pandemic has presented an extraordinary opportunity since there was a postponement of the second round allowing weeks of discussion. In that time competing teams came together around a common project. This is how in Saint-Médard-en-Jalles, in Chambéry, and in Annecy – an alliance between two lists built around a real cooperative agreement. It allowed for

In order to get people to participate, they needed specific skills to facilitate people's voices

the emergence of a new majority that would take power.

In this cooperative contract, everyone's commitments in terms of ecological transition and citizen governance are explicit. The work that was done between the two rounds by these citizen collectives presented an example of a new way of conceptualizing politics.

DB - Have citizen collectives invented new democratic practices that could provide models for revitalizing political life?

CP - In my tour of France, I did indeed try to decipher a certain number of new political practices that citizen collectives put into place before and after the election. I therefore analyzed the functioning of five cities won by citizens' collectives, cities that are situated at very different levels: important regional capital cities like Chambéry, Annecy, Poitiers and smaller communes like Saint-Médard-en-Jalles, on the outskirts of Bordeaux, or La Crèche, a rural commune in my department.

What interests me in all this is, first of all, the human aspect. In my book, I gave the floor to some thirty people who testified to what they invented, in order to keep

THE VALUES MANIFESTO OF THE CITIZEN COLLECTIVE OF TOULOUSE

Democracy by the inhabitants

Power should no longer be in the hands of a few but, on the contrary, should be found at all levels and in all structures of the municipal community and its inhabitants. Candidates and elected officials must serve and defend the ideas and projects of the people of Toulouse, the common good and the general interest with exemplarity and transparency. Residents, the first actors of the city, must be involved in the emergence of ideas and projects, in the construction of solutions, in decision-making, thanks to inclusive and cooperative methods.

Social justice and solidarity

The municipality, within its perimeter of responsibility, has the duty to provide the means of access to the material, social and cultural resources necessary to ensure a dignified life, the protection of the weakest and physical and material security for all inhabitants.

Ecological transition

The impact of human activities today directly threatens the balance of our planet and jeopardizes the world we will leave to our children. The municipality must transform Toulouse in order to provide answers to the current environmental and climatic emergencies, to imagine the city and the life of its inhabitants beyond the term of office, and to allow future generations to implement their own aspirations. The municipality and its citizens must act responsibly, preserve natural resources and biodiversity, reduce the impact of their activities and develop new economic models.

Living together

The city is as much a territory as it is a community of residents who live in it. As such, the quality of relations between these residents is essential to facilitate and secure the daily life of all and to make cooperative democracy live. The municipality's mission is to promote and develop the values of civic-mindedness, benevolence, tolerance, respect for others and for oneself, individual and collective responsibilities and to create opportunities for the people of Toulouse to "work together".



track of their experience because it was really too important. I am convinced that we are onto forming a major trend or breakthrough. It is a pivotal moment of our democracy. On page 188 of Volume 2 of my book, you can find a table that summarizes all the new practices that have been put in place by the five communes, at different levels:

First of all, there is a concerted effort to make citizen participation live and dynamic. Thus, in the five municipalities, elected officials are in charge of participation. For example, in Poitiers, the first deputy is in charge of local democracy, democratic innovation and citizen engagement... This makes sense! In Saint-Médard-en-Jalles, the 3rd deputy is in charge of participation, but they have 12 elected officials responsible for the involvement of the residents, district by district. Everywhere, the same logic can be found.

Then, these municipalities discovered that in order to get people to participate, they needed specific skills to facilitate people's voices. To put in place methods of collective intelligence that energize the debates and make consultation processes productive. They therefore

recruited specially trained staff with these skills.

The power-sharing desired by the citizen collectives is the sharing in decisions. To this end, the new city councils have set up a structure that I call the "citizens' assembly". It can be a group of 50 people, or even 150 people, as in Poitiers, which has been constituted on a voluntary basis, by drawing lots, by co-option, to bring together people who have a certain number of skills or represent a certain number of institutions. In short, the citizens' assembly is a pillar or a lever for public action and decision-making in the organization of the communities in question. In Annecy, it is called a Citizens' Council, in Saint-Médard also, in Chambéry it is the Etats Généraux de la démocratie.

To further broaden participation and consultation, all municipalities have set up working groups with residents in very different forms: working groups, project committees, youth council in La Crèche; participatory workshops, citizens' juries, action-project committees in Poitiers; territorial councils, local council of associative life, youth council, senior citizens' council, advisory councils on

inequalities, city project committee, participation observatory, etc. In Saint-Médard-en-Jalles, a municipality that shows amazing creativity there are citizen neighborhood councils, participatory commissions, youth forum, cultural conferences... and in Chambéry and Annecy similar structures exist.

Then, the municipalities –in which elected officials from a citizens' collective lead – have set up a right of interpellation. What does this mean, concretely? Well, for example, in Poitiers, it is possible, starting from a petition signed by 5,000 inhabitants, to question the municipal council and even to initiate a local initiative referendum on a specific question.

All the municipalities have also taken care of training citizens. They have set up facilities and actions to ensure this training. Thus, "Maisons de la vie citoyenne et associative" or "Maisons des associations et de la citoyenneté" (citizen and associative life training sessions) have been created to organize seminars, thematic workshops, Etats généraux, training programs on collective intelligence, citizen participation, governance, climate issues and ecological transition.

Finally, other democratic tools and practices have been invented such as "citizen participation charters", "governance pacts", "ethical codes", "participatory budgets", "participatory digital platforms". In fact, we are witnessing an abundance of creativity and invention.

DB - Finally, based on your experience, how do you now view the relationship between representative and participatory democracy?

CP - Some collectives are following a logic called "municipalism": this term refers to historical French and Spanish movements for which all decisions had to be taken by the whole population. The election of representatives capable of making decisions was rejected. But in the field, I have met people who want to find a new balance between participatory and representative democracy, a better harmony between the elected representative and the citizens. Their horizon is not limited to their local community. They really want to imagine a democratic renewal. I think that this desire has a future. If the movement that is taking hold can only last what may happen will be really dramatic. Between 2014 and 2020, we have gone from a few dozen to hundreds of citizen collectives walking along the same path... I hope there will be thousands in 2026. Representative democracy, as it functions today, has no future. We are really at a turning point. Either we are going towards something extreme and dysfunctional, or we are going towards a democratic renewal which will be based, whether we like it or not, on different patterns of power sharing and on significant participation of the population because the citizens demand it.

ACTIVE LEARNING ON CITIZENSHIP

The Montech Youth Municipal Council (France)



First meeting of the newly elected Municipal Youth Council of Monthec.

By Dante Monferrer

The capacity for commitment to citizenship action by young people though expressed different from their elders, theirs is no less evident. The dynamics in the Municipal Youth Councils of Montech are the focus of this article.

FIRST A BIT OF HISTORY

What is a youth municipal council (YMC)? At the beginning in the 1960s/1970s, various experiments aimed at involving young people in governance at the local level were carried out in France under a variety of names: children's municipal council, communal youth council, youth forum or municipal youth council. The

aim of the municipal authorities was to establish a municipal body dedicated to the next generation.

The first of these "modern" councils was created in Schiltigheim (Bas-Rhin) in 1979 and others followed. According to the ANACEJ⁸, which has assembled more than 500 local authorities that have set up YMCs, there are currently 2,000 throughout France.

PRINCIPLES AND VALUES

"As citizens of Europe and the world participation by children and young people in local and regional public life is essential because it is a source of socialization, exchange, peace and solidarity." (ANACEJ)

The establishment of the YMC therefore responds to educational goals in popular education which is characterized by the following:

- Respect for the individual, secularism and solidarity
- Dialogue between children, youth and elected officials.
- Education and exercise of citizenship and democratic engagement by young people.
- Public policies adapted and co-constructed with stakeholder
- Pursuit of educational process and outcomes

The YMCs are intended to provide an introduction to real political life. The aim is

The YMCs are intended to provide an introduction to real political life.

to promote a culture of commitment and to enable everyone to become an actor and author of local life through tangible participation and the assumption of responsibility.

The YMCs also have a role as an interface between young people and the community. This is why they have the vocation to collect ideas and initiatives coming from all the youth of their communities. They have the additional task of translating these ideas and initiatives into projects for the benefit of all. These projects are then presented to the municipal authorities so that they can be included in the city's program.

AN ADAPTABLE OPERATION

The operating methods of the YMCs vary according to the city, the age group and the method of appointment. Some variables include elections at the town hall or in the schools, appointment within representative associations, voluntary work, etc. The members of the YMC are generally elected for a period of two years and generally obliged to attend school in the town or city.

The council is often chaired or assisted by a municipal councilor, supported with municipal resources and meets in plenary

⁸ Association Nationale des Conseils d'enfants et de jeunes" (National Association of Children and Youth Councils): <https://www.anacej.fr>

session three or four times a year. These meetings are generally public and attended by the mayor, and focus on the work done in commissions or working groups which meet once or twice a month. The YMCs have an advisory role and their deliberations do not have regulatory force unless approved by the municipal council.

THE INTENDED IMPACT OF THE YMC'S

The YMCs advance ideas which, once debated and having gained support of municipal and sometimes regional officials can be implemented as concrete projects. Effectively they offer young people an opportunity to conceive of projects and participate in their implementation. In addition to addressing direct social needs, the process also increases citizen participation and serves as training for citizenship and democratic engagement.

YMC IN ACTION: THE CASE OF MONTECH

To learn more we examine the youth council in Montech, a small town in the Tarn-et-Garonne region. Originally built as a fortified military base in the 12th century by the Counts of Toulouse to help defend the northern territories within their domain, its principal economic activities were agriculture and crafts.

Today, with a population of 6,600, 43% of the inhabitants commute daily to the two large neighboring cities of Montauban and Toulouse for work. Urbanization is accelerating with the arrival, in particular, of young couples which helps explain the population doubling in the past 30 years.

The process also increases citizen participation and serves as training for citizenship and democratic engagement

These demographic shifts require attention to public services and sustainable infrastructure development so as to ensure the new inhabitants feel well served and are retained. Yet there are continued mobility issues, with a poor public transport to the cities and few local jobs.

Meanwhile problems of isolation and poverty are evident among elderly since some changes result in displacement of their familiar public spaces, consequent diminished opportunities for socializing, and economic challenges as well. The changing social configuration and the diversification of the population has also been causing divisions between locals and newcomers even if sometimes difficult to perceive.

At the same time, there is an awakening of the citizenry toward solidarity and a willingness of individuals to shape their environment. The territory offers many assets to help energize local life and citizen involvement.

Included is the physical location, being in the countryside and near the cities, the natural and historical heritage, the quality of many facilities and the living environment all make Montech a town

where life is or can be very good. The town has about 100 vital civic organization providing many social, sports, cultural, artistic and leisure activities.

The youth are also a strong asset of the city with more than 2200 students in the two elementary schools, the college and the high school.



Voting operation in a school for the election of the Municipal Youth Council of Montech

Creation and development

Fanny Dostes, elected official in charge of the Municipal Youth Council, has played an important role in its creation and development. She joined Jacques Moignard, the current mayor first elected in the 2011. After the success of their list and convinced of the interest in giving a voice to young people, Fanny proposed to set up a YMC. The mayor, who is sensitive to these issues and has a background as a socio-cultural educator, approved this proposal.

Since 2011, a little less than one hundred people have been members of the YMC. Currently, it is composed of twenty-four members aged 8-17, including twenty girls and four boys, who were elected in 2019 for two years by the students of the commune.

The young people, divide into three commissions (living environment, culture, sport) and work under the supervision of three elected members of the municipal council fulfilling various assignments within their individual competencies. The

YMC has a double-page spread in the municipal bulletin to disseminate information on its activities.

Since 2011, many projects, led by the YMC and submitted to the approval of the municipal council, have been implemented. These include:

- Creation of a botanical trail, which offers educational support to school children on the flora of the 1200 hectares of the adjoining state forest and represents an attraction for tourists.
- Raising awareness on waste management, social networks, collection and recycling.
- Animation of the local cultural life such as the summer sessions of the open-air cinema "Ciné Toile" or the photo exhibition on Montech
- Operation "Let us live sports" with the sports clubs which, on one day, invite young people to come discover various sports

- Intergenerational exchanges with the residents of the EHPAD.
- Poster to raise awareness of COVID and the wearing masks throughout the global pandemic.



Counting of votes in the presence of Fanny Dostes

Meeting with the young elected officials

On this sunny Saturday in mid-June, about ten of them are crowded around the big table of the municipal council. After months of low activity due to the health crisis they are visibly delighted to be around Fanny Dostes, Xavier Rousseaux and Joëlle Belliot, elected members of the city council in charge of their engagement.

Arnaud Fournié, president of the festival committee, came to ask them about activities that could be set up for young people. Attention is given to certain initiatives which remained unfinished during the health crisis and they also consider new ones. Finally, they propose extending by one year the current mandate truncated by the events of this last year.

I take advantage of the invitation to launch a discussion on the motivations of the young people to participate in the YMC, on the benefits that they may gain and on the way their actions are recognized or not.

The motivations of young people

The motivations expressed by the young people as to the reasons for their involvement are diverse.

For some, their application was driven by curiosity, inherent to their age and displayed without being self-conscious, as well as simply wanting to join their friends.

For others, the motivations are more profound: the desire to be useful, the desire to get to know and contribute to the life of the city, the interest in working in teams with other young people and adults.

And then, a younger girl declares, with a candid sheepish smile betrayed at the corner of her lips, "I was forced to!"

Improving information dissemination especially, at the secondary schools level is needed as well as within civic organizations that receive young people. These remain important strategies for making the YMC better known.

The benefits for young people

There is a certain unanimity about the beneficial nature of individual contributions and the knowledge gained: All declare to have gained confidence. Also rewarding is the feeling that adults listen to them and take their opinions into account, allowing them to take risks, even to make mistakes, is very rewarding. The trust given generates self-confidence in return.

A greater sense of responsibility is also emphasized. This is the case when one is in charge of a project, from the initial idea to its implementation. It also occurs when one has to make choices, defend one's ideas, manage resources, and report to classmates and adults.

The diversity of ages (from seven to eighteen), which could appear as a handicap in terms of cohesion and areas of interest, is on the contrary appreciated. These and other differences (culture, origin) are perceived as assets. The fact of working with adults (elected officials, municipal agents), of learning to communicate with them, also contributes to developing a sense of openness to others.

Fanny Dostes, reflects on the changes that she has noticed in many of those who have passed through the structure over the last ten years. One for instance, closed and introverted, gradually revealed himself. Another who was unable to express himself in public has gained self-confidence, and for others this has had a positive effect on their academic success.

The desire to be useful, the desire to get to know and contribute to the life of the city...

Being involved in democratic life from a very young age through a civic course allows one to acquire many social and human skills. Exposure to reality and complexity helps to break out of binary and simplistic schemes and to acquire more maturity.

Being actively involved in projects of general interest is a vector of education in citizenship and prepares one to become a committed, enlightened and active actor, more capable of debating and arguing.

Recognizing the role of youth

Is the experience of young elected officials sufficiently recognized and valued?

Some of them emphasize the recognition of their commitment, for example by writing a letter attesting to the experience they have acquired and adding it to their school record. For older students, the experience of the YMC will have an impact on their choice of university and, later on, professional orientation.

Being in the YMC undeniably gives a sense of pride, not only to the participants but also to the people around them, as many parents closely follow what their children do. Many adults in the commune know and recognize the YMC and its actions, giving the young



Mayor Jacques Moignard and councilwoman Fanny Dostes install the new YMC

seriously. Some adults, unconsciously or not, give little value to the word and abilities of young people. Others tend to lead young people too much towards assuming the role they imagined for them thus reproducing stereotyped patterns, codes and habits.

One could imagine that the YMC be consulted on general issues that fall

people the feeling of being taken seriously.

Things are much less clear with other young people. The elected members of the YMC think that many of their peers do not really understand the meaning of their commitment. Why? Some imagine these causes: Lack of information; Rise of individualism; Too much reserve of the young elected members who say that they do not talk too much about the subject with their peers.

Various avenues could be explored to improve this perception, in particular with more targeted information and greater visibility, especially in middle and high schools. Suggestions include: Events organized in the school setting, inclusion of the YMC experience in civic and social life initiation courses, dedicated pages in social networks, etc.

YOUTH COUNCIL AND YOUTH POLICY CHALLENGES

In some cases, it is difficult to get the YMC's proposals recognized. It raises the question as to whether they are taken

within the scope of the "big" city council, and that directly concern young people.

For example, wouldn't the current debate on intra- and inter-communal mobility, which primarily concerns young people who are often "stuck" in Montech and entirely dependent on adults for their transportation, be an opportunity to conduct such an experiment?

Many examples show that if institutions accept listening to young people and putting in place the conditions for their expression, renewed and dynamic commitment would develop.

CONCLUSION

The YMC must be one component, among others, of a local policy for youth, and an overall strategy for the city supported by the elected officials.

The YMC must be in close relation with all the youth and with the other mechanisms promoting commitment set up by the community and its institutional and civic partners.

The YMC must be one component, among others, of a local policy for youth...

Today the YMC has twenty-four members, which is very few relative to the existing population of 1364 young people from zero to fourteen years old, and 883 from fifteen to twenty-nine years old counted in the commune.

The YMC could aspire to play a relational and intermediary role with more assertive mobilization, dissemination and valuing the word of all young people, in their diversity.

For example, it was suggested that the CMI::

1. Organize local debates using digital tools to reach a larger number of young people;
2. Involve young people more widely in defining and implementation of action projects.
3. Make an effort to leave the comfort of "entre soi" positioning the YMC as a voice and facilitator of engagement and commitment for all youth voices. This could be a new and stimulating horizon and challenge that the current group seems to be able to take on.
4. Drafting an assessment and outlining perspectives concerning the life of the municipal youth council of Montech is needed but would require more in-depth work to advance. The goals would be to obtain a more detailed

analysis of the meaning, the objectives, the results, the effects and the functioning of the YMC.

In this spirit, there is also the idea of celebrating the ten years of the YMC/ Such a celebration would recognize the actions of all the people who have contributed to the growth of the council. This would be a good opportunity to go even further by assessing the path we have taken and to draw new paths so that the system engages even more people and is closer to more fully addressing the realities of young people today.

ANALYSIS

UK: Bridging the Opinion Divide

By David Bull

David Bull sits on the boards of trustees for a number of charities in the United Kingdom and is an elected member of the council of governors of a National Health Service provider in north west England. He is a life-long volunteer with the Scout Movement. He is also a member of the British Labour Party and of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), a faith that advocates simplicity, truth, equality and peace.



For many years now, a feature of public and political affairs in the United Kingdom and elsewhere has been the extent of what Nyta Mann (a BBC News political correspondent) calls political layering.

A BINARY DIVIDE

Put simply, there has been something of a binary divide, at its most basic between parliamentary and extra-parliamentary activists.

Those in the mainstream political parties seem to take the view that extra-parliamentary activism is ineffective and

even self-indulgent. Those in the second camp will say that they are committed to movement building and dismiss change occurring via parliamentary democracy, which they see as a class-based or establishment sham.

It should also be borne in mind that extra-parliamentary is open to funding and influence as a result – whether admitted or not - from those with a hidden agenda. In the UK, the newspaper industry is still a powerful influence on opinion, despite the reduction of the reach of printed media when faced by the digital alternative. All campaigners now use

social media as a major – possibly the most important – way to influence opinion (not always truthfully).

In this article, I will draw on my own experience as a member of a national political party and, at the same time, as a participant in single-issue campaigns.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

In the UK's history, there has always been an element of political layering – activity both within and outside so-called party politics. In the nineteenth century, the anti-slavery movement was prominent and successful to a great extent, as were a number of religious movements. Looking back over the period since World War Two, many people will recall issues that caught the imagination of individuals who then sought to influence events and public policy by direct action. The movement in opposition to the war in Vietnam and the formation and activities of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) will come to mind.

An indication of the extent to which extra-parliamentary activism has grown can be recognised in two campaigns:

- In September 2002, the Countryside Alliance organised a march in central London to promote the interests of rural Britain. It was said to be one of the largest marches of its type in history, with the BBC reporting around 400,000 in attendance. The Countryside Alliance claimed the march as an unprecedented success. A central focus of the march was to show opposition to a ban on hunting with hounds in England and Wales

All campaigners now use social media as a major – possibly the most important – way to influence opinion

but a wide range of other grievances around farming from rural communities were also being linked with the demonstration. Over 300,000 people were in attendance. Richard Burge, at the time Chief Executive of the Countryside Alliance, said of the march 'This is a march for the people and by the people and not simply rural people'. The British National Party (BNP), a small, hard-right political party, had called for its members to join the march and support the countryside. However, the Countryside Alliance rejected this endorsement by the BNP

- The Stop the War Coalition organised a mass protest in February 2003 in London against the imminent invasion of Iraq. The campaign claimed the event to have been the largest ever such event in the UK with estimates of attendance ranging between 750,000



and 2,000,000 people. Following the beginning of the war, the Coalition organised another national demonstration in March. While the turnout for this march did not match the demonstration in February, Stop the War claimed up to 500,000, whilst fellow organisers CND claimed between 200,000–300,000 – it was noted that this was the largest anti-war demonstration held in the UK during wartime and had been organised with only a week's notice

Despite the number of participants, their point of view did not win the day!

EXTRA-PARLIAMENTARY ACTIVISM TODAY

Turning to the present day, extra-parliamentary action is prominent and increasing:

- In 2016, the campaign relating to the referendum on the UK's membership of the European Union was notable for the many groups that campaigned on either side of the debate without reference to the official political parties. It has to be said that the campaigns of both sides were accused of publishing fake news and making tendentious contributions to the debate. Such concerns are more easily raised in the less-regulated world of single-issue campaigning
- Climate change is a key area for debate of course and some mainstream groups as the Green Party and also to some extent parties in government have participated and tried to lead the national response.

Extra-parliamentary action is prominent and increasing...



Activists have taken their inspiration from such prominent people as Greta Thunberg. And the approach varies between such organisations as Friends of the Earth to the prominent direct action of Extinction Rebellion. In the view of some, this action is often unlawful - although prosecutions are frequently unsuccessful

- The housing needs of society are a focus for groups such as Shelter and the publication Big Issue, sold in support of rough sleepers which is a prominent advocate of action in support of the homeless
- Animal rights groups have always operated largely out of the political party system: in the UK there is a wide spectrum of approaches, from the abolitionist faction that believes that humans should stop using animals altogether to the reformists who believe that humans should stop abusing animals
- International development is a concern of a large number of

organisations, who often combine advocacy with delivery of aid programmes. Some of these were originally founded in the UK and have extended worldwide over the years: Oxfam and War on Want, for example



- In mental health, the work of the National Health Service (one of the largest organisations of its type in Europe) is balanced by challenge and advocacy from such independent groups as Mind, and Rethink Mental Illness
- The question of inclusivity in society is addressed by many voluntary organisations. Often these groups are small and local but a key player in the debate on LGBT+ rights has been Stonewall, which has operated as a pressure group since 1989 and is the largest LGBT rights organisation in Europe. A result of the advocacy of such groups has been a societal change in attitudes to sexual and gender issues



opposed to delivery of services by government?

The reality of government will often mean that compromises are necessary – often because of cost but also because public opinion may not be ready for some changes. Independent groups can think freely and widely. Much progress that is now accepted started off as a controversial proposal (for example, abolition of slavery in the 19th century).

Independent advocacy aims to have a significant impact. This is sometimes difficult when an organisation is a charity, where registration as such brings with it obligations for even-handedness in exchange for status in the eyes of the public and some tax benefits. This means that some groups forgo the opportunity to take charitable status to be sure of their independence. Of the examples given already, here are some comments on impact:

- During the Brexit referendum campaign, there were many instances of background influence and fake news. In a democracy, free speech is essential but a sceptical approach in the general public is essential! An apparently free press which is

THE IMPACT OF EXTRA-PARLIAMENTARY ACTION

The examples given are just a snapshot; there are many others that could be given. The key question is what is the impact of extra-parliamentary action, as



controlled by vested interests will never produce a fully informed public

- As a result of the work of many non-governmental organisations, climate emergency



declarations have been made by the UK and devolved nations parliaments and by many local and municipal councils

- On the other side of the equation, housing policy by central government in the UK has not followed the lines advocated by such groups as Shelter
- Public views on treatment of animals has developed due to the advocacy especially of single-interest groups, the vegan approach to food has markedly increased and government policy has followed the changes in opinion
- On international development, recently the government in the UK decided to reduce the allocation for international development from 0.7% of the total budget to 0.5% despite the protestations of many interested parties



- Mental health provision in the UK has for many years been the poor relation in health care: fewer resources were made available compared to the funding for physical health. This approach is gradually being remedied. Pressure groups representing the needs of users of the services have been prominent in the debate
- National opinion on gender and sexual identity have changed fundamentally in what seems like a short period of time. Examples are same sex marriages, and a more understanding attitude to sexual identity – largely due to extra-parliamentary advocacy

Government has power to deliver using national resources over management



responsibility arising from its mandate from a voting electorate. Maintaining alignment with the electorate requires it to constantly test public reactions on many diverse policy recommendations.

At times though political parties, rather than exercising their leadership just through such testing, are influenced by the activities of single issue, non-mainstream groups. These groups have the luxury to choose their preferred media and operating environments in some instances using deceptive and inaccurate information.

A problem is that when these tactics successfully influence government policy, a race to the bottom ensues

A free society and healthy participatory democracy are defined by multiple pathways

diminishing government legitimacy and the very health of democracy.

Though easier said than done, in my view we need space for both approaches despite the hazards associated with single issue groups influences. Surely a free society and healthy participatory democracy are defined by multiple pathways for airing free unfettered debate and speaking truth to government power.

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ANALYSIS

US: An Under-recognized Assault from the Left

By Larry Childs

Larry Childs, an expert in cooperative adult education and an international consultant, lives in Williamsburg, Massachusetts, USA. He is the editor of the English-language edition of Cooperative Approaches.



January 2021 assault on the US Capital – An example of the extreme right pushing progressives further towards their own reactive, intractable positions. Photo AP Archives

Participatory democracy is on shaky footing in the US. On this point there is widespread agreement and concern across the political spectrum, yet explanations on why or how vary depending on points of view.

SIMILARITIES ACROSS THE DIVIDE

To many progressives it has been eroded by obstructive, lying, authoritarian leaning politicians. On top of this are persistent attempts to restrict voter access. Consider the 400+ voter



Ideas of course are essential but problematic when inflexibly etched in stone. Photo L. Childs

measures currently working through the courts all directly targeting communities of color.

On the other hand many conservatives feel out of control immigration and election fraud are sources of erosion. Though not based in fact rather thinly veiled racism, xenophobia, anti-feminist, anti-gay sentiment their feelings of outrage and righteousness parallel in intensity those on the left.

Another similarity across the divide is certitude about being right, others being wrong and believing everyone should unify around their values ... or find another country!

Curiosity about why one might think and behave differently is almost absent. Such intolerance is the fallout of binary 'this or that' thinking so prevalent across the political spectrum...ironically including among progressives who define themselves with an open mind and ability to consider multiple perspectives.

Amidst these narrowly defined, polarized positions drifts a foggy alchemy obscuring the countries' defining ideal of participatory democracy. It can be hard to see through.

OUTRAGE CULTURE

These opposing movements are both catalyzed by a sense of outrage and 'outrage culture' so intense that a small but very influential minority on each end of that spectrum stoke fears in attempts to convince their more moderate middles that the only path towards a livable future is inflexibility and asserting power. They call for an all hands in activism - one that shunts multiple perspectives, open search for truth and democratic practices. Sometime this occurs with physical weapons and others with re-education camp-like indoctrination. Desperate times, some argue, justify a revolutionary mindset that is increasingly authoritarian and undemocratic.

Thought by the new left is so strident and prescriptive that at times it behaves as an undemocratic counterpoint to Trump sympathizers brandishing weapons in the January assault of the US capital. Yet researchers and reporter who accurately assign authoritarian label to Trump and the Republican Party too often fail to critique the left for its authoritarian tactics.

Another similarity across the divide is certitude about being right, others being wrong and believing everyone should unify around their values...



Political discourse frozen and elevated to an extreme by the far right under Trump. Yet the progressives, traditionally self-defined by consideration of multiple perspectives, fell into a similar fixed mind-set. Photo L. Childs

VILIFYING THOSE WITHIN THE SAME PARTIES

Another concerning symptom still rampant is vilifying those within the same parties and movements. As with religious extremism some of the most intense persecution is often reserved for one's own kind when perceived to not 'towing the line'. For instance to extreme activists on the left if one's personal progressive agenda is not sufficiently focused on a prescribed 'issue du jour' one may be condemned as traitor - or if luckier, a mere off-track slacker.

FASCIST-LIKE RULES

There are Fascist-like rules such as prohibitions against white people ever uttering the 'N' word (no matter the context) or rigid prioritization like affordable housing as more important than observing environmental regulations.

More serious than the identity obsessed rule are the social consequences for violations. To start, questioning rules or issue prioritization is taboo. Doing so is a

I have witnessed severe distortion of facts, public shaming and career busting vilification.

recipe for confrontations by anger or disgust.

Next, if deemed guilty mis-speak the vitriol becomes more intense. If one is of a certain identity configuration one can be further criticized for flouting 'white privilege' or exhibiting inadequate self-shame. In extreme cases I have witnessed severe distortion of facts, public shaming and career busting vilification. This social pathology is not dissimilar from Islamist terrorists reserving special hatred and punishment for moderate Muslims.

THE ENDS JUSTIFY THE MEANS

In this current political space the ends justify the means. The left rationalizes since the right, and republican party specifically is prone to obstructive, hateful rule breaking and lies, the left must put aside its' principles for a short while and crank up their own propaganda. Otherwise they would not be playing by the same rules and risk certain defeat. It is a hard choice and perhaps the right one, but still devastating to democracy which many Americans recognize as more fragile than once thought.

Ironically environmentalism and climate change have been sidelined by racial justice Black Lives Matter such that affordable housing has created strange

***How easily the left can
be provoked to
outrage causing them
to abandon a rational
moral high ground
once firmly held...***



An American flag torn by harsh winter weather – a symbol of eroding American democracy. Photo L. Childs

bedfellows with developers eager for short term returns on investment. In the city where I used to live social justice squeezes out environmental sustainability such that those whose expertise, passion and focus is climate change or even environmental justice are readily labeled and shamed as 'privileged'.

Gone are considering others' points of view, forgiveness, and love ... all caste

aside for an aspirational future when they may return. Ironically self-flagellation seems the only Christian theology encouraged by the left.

Meanwhile mischievous and manipulative spokespeople on the right understand how easily the left can be provoked to outrage causing them to abandon a rational moral high ground once firmly held.

A serious problem with progressives taking on a mind-set of what I consider abandoned values is that we have historically embraced critical thinking and inclusivity more strongly and consistently than those on the right. By appearing to reject the essential values that define us, one could argue the far right has progressives just where it wants them. Vulnerable to being accurately called out for weakness and hypocrisy. As a result there is a huge political risk - that moderate 'swing-voters' will, in coming elections be repelled by the lefts moral collapse such that the right need not even lure or form a compelling platform. Sadly I would bet on those middle 'swing voters' siding with the liars and cheats over the hypocrites anyway...

PHOTO GALLERY

US: Protests in Portland

By Kathryn Elless

In the summer/fall of 2020 the Trump administration called on state officials to deploy the National Guard to quell protests in many cities including Black Lives Matter protests in Portland Oregon. Such actions were widely criticized as federal over-reach, intentionally inflammatory and in this case resulted in excessive use of force. Teargas and rubber bullets wounded dozens marking a pattern of governments repressing democratic expression in the US and globally. Kathryn Elless was there and shares images from her coverage for the AP and AFP with Cooperative Approaches.





