

Barber, B.R., 2013, *If Mayors Ruled the World. Dysfunctional Nations, Rising Cities*, Yale University Press, New Haven, pp. 416.

The recent book of Benjamin R. Barber, the author of the prophetic *Jihad vs. McWorld*, touches upon the role of cities in a globalised world. Taking into account that the population of urban dwellers has recently exceeded half of the overall world population (and is still growing), the book's subject is a timely issue that needs special attention and deeper reflection. Nevertheless, it is not the focus on cities what makes this publication exceptional. In relation to other works on modern urban developments and metropolitan residents (such as Saskia Sassen's *The Global City* or Richard Florida's *The Rise of the Creative Class*), its originality lies in the perspective from which cities are described and in the manner of presenting arguments. This perspective is a political one, as long as the main aim of the author is to defend his thesis that cities, represented by their mayors, should acquire more political power at the global level and eventually rule the world (downgrading nation-states and international organisations). The manner of supporting this claim is a combination of facts concerning the ongoing cooperation among cities (with special emphasis on the existing 'city networks') and controversial projections for a global parliament of mayors. Even though the book has been published by Yale University Press and embraces the structure of an academic work, the proselytism that gradually rises to the surface as the book continues undermines its scientific value.

The author begins his work by introducing the argument that the empowerment of cities in a globalised world is not just an option, but a necessity. This claim, presented in chapter 1, is supported by the observation that current nation-states are ill-equipped to resolve the problems arising on the global scale, such as global warming, terrorist activity, nuclear proliferation, the impunity of transnational corporations or uncontrolled immigration, and simultaneously prove to be losing their democratic legitimacy. This is the context in which the following chapters (2-6) describe one by one the particular features which are characteristic of cities – their public and democratic character (inherited from the Greek *polis*), economic power, openness to the

world, pragmatic approach represented by their mayors, a proclivity towards cooperation over borders and the lack of limiting sovereignty – which together make them, according to the author, more adapted to the realities of a globalised and interdependent world. Even though cities are not free from internal flaws, such as significant inequalities between their residents in the economic, social, cultural and educational dimensions or topographical inclination to segregation (discussed briefly in chapter 7), their innate diversity, creativity and innovation are believed to generate solutions to these problems. Having imposed in chapter 8 the image of a city which is able to cure itself, the author proceeds in the second section of the book to present practical considerations on how his concept of a global urban democracy can be realised.

The ending final chapters (9-11) provide examples on how digital technology and cultural cooperation may strengthen linkages between cities and what should be done to transform urban residents into ‘citizens without borders’ – making the concept of a *glocal* civil society a reality. Ideas developed by the author with respect to the latter issue, such as the use of participatory budgeting at the local level and the promotion of civic initiatives at the global level, should be of interest to political scientists, especially those who specialise in the issue of participation in political systems. Moreover, the presentation of particular cases and models in which the participatory budgeting has been implemented in cities around the world provides an interesting insight for urban politicians. Both theorists and practitioners should draw their attention to the final chapter (12) in which the construction and functioning of the recommended global parliament of mayors is explained. In order to make it a less controversial concept, the author identifies its possible problems with representation (as mayors do not represent the entire world population and even if they did, it is impossible to bring all of them together at once) and proposes some countermeasures – such as the creation of a parallel chamber for regional authorities and the rotational composition of the parliament.

Even though the author provides numerous arguments supporting his claim about the necessity of redefining the global political order and creating a parliament of mayors, granting the latter more political and fiscal autonomy, the reader is left with no answer to the

most challenging question – how can a voluntarily composed political gathering with non-binding decisions solve global problems that demand unitary actions? This issue needs to be confronted irrespectively of whether such a gathering would comprise of nation-states, regions or cities. The fact that Benjamin Barber's book pays little attention to the way in which the parliament of mayors could put pressure on non-compliant cities, suggesting merely that its causative power will be supported by the pressure of global public opinion and the 'power of example', makes it political wishful thinking. One should not neglect the fact that apart from many areas in which cities are likely to undertake common actions, such as public security, environment, transportation, housing, and culture, there are other dimensions in which they have to compete with each other because of limited resources. This competition is about attracting to the city the most skilled workers, tourists and foreign investors and it is unlikely that cities will share their best practices in achieving these goals – especially with their regional counterparts. By omitting the competitive aspect of relations between cities, Barber significantly narrows down the epistemic horizon of his book and presents himself more as an urban activist than a critical scholar.

Irrespective of its author's inclination to a selective presentation of facts, the book 'If Mayors Ruled the World. Dysfunctional Nations, Rising Cities' will provide inspiring reading for political and urban scholars, municipal practitioners, and all others who are interested in future urban and global developments. It enables the reader to learn what an alternative global political order may look like, but also get to know the profiles of those who are expected to play a decisive role within it – the mayors.

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