

THE GOOD TIMES

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Citizens retrieve their cities

Twenty years after the first participative proposals of Porto Alegre (Brazil), today more than 1000 cities throughout the five continents, (cities as different as Xalapa (Mexico), Cuenca (Ecuador), Windhoek (Namibia), Dakar (Senegal), Quebec (Canada) or Rubí (Catalonia), are developing more human city models, created by their own inhabitants.

By James Gordon

THERE ARE different local answers to the same global threat. All over the world, citizens are fighting against the consequences of an economic model and a globalisation that distances them from the authorities that decide on life in the cities. A model that strips urban centres of their identities, encourages urban poverty, devastates the environment and breaks social tissues. Firstly in Brazil and Latin America and then in Europe, Africa, North America and Asia, citizens are taking over the cities, building them up from below, using the peo-

ple, neighbourhoods and local communities as foundations and founders. By strengthening popular opinion and joining together social organisations, the inhabitants of these cities have succeeded in taking part in local government decisions, stimulating the reform of legal and normative frameworks from the people's perspective and developing participative management and planning proposals. For some time they have been creating a new collective city ideal.

These cities are based on values such as solidarity, freedom and autonomy, fairness, social justice, dignity and re-

spect for diversity. In these cities there is a real collaboration between inhabitants and local governments and the rights to education (public, free, scientific and secular, based on collective values), health, housing and work are guaranteed.

In these new urban centres, educational projects are pioneered to promote self-management (housing, micro-company, self-employment), environmental education and culture (retrieving community traditions). There are no outcasts, regardless of social class and origin, and the environment is respected. As regards health, preven-

tative medicine is encouraged, health alternatives are developed and special attention is paid to the most vulnerable sectors. Furthermore, new forms of employment generation and new production proposals are accepted.

However, the commitment of these cities' inhabitants is not just towards their fellow citizens and surroundings. In the same way as they will no longer allow city organisation to fall into the hands of the main authorities, they also work to create more areas of participation in all fields and to construct a world alliance based on inhabitant organisations.

News item 8 inspired by the Proposals Booklet: *Thinking the city of tomorrow: the words of their inhabitants*, coordinated by Joël Audefroy

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