

Decentralization and participatory democracy

The decentralization of the 80s led by Gaston Deferre within the government headed by Pierre Mauroy during the 1st Septennat of François Mitterrand will have nearly 40 years at the end of this quinquennium.

1 In the light of the latest events that have shaken our country it appears necessary,

even urgent to give it a new lease of life, to strengthen and extend it!

The crisis we are going through, linked to the covid epidemic19, only goes to show a little more what many of us share: our institutional system is no longer at all adapted to the needs of a modern society and the economic crisis that follows this health crisis will only accentuate this diagnosis.

A hyper-centralized State, all vertically, where no decision can be taken without the President's approval, where the Parliament has almost no real capacity for discussion, where the administration, increasingly complex and riddled with internal rivalries, has become heavy and slow, cannot have the slightest flexibility or agility to resolve the multitude of problems that involve us all. This state model has shown itself to be increasingly impotent: it is incapable of managing.

In this respect, the movement of "yellow vests" from our regions, our departments, our communes, from a France that one geographer has called "peripheral France" and which recently shook our institutions is a strong symptom of this. The citizens who gathered around traffic circles there expressed a need for more proximity, associated with more "participatory" or "local" democracy, which was reflected, among other things, in the demand for a citizen initiative referendum (RIC). We may have different opinions and analyses on this movement, but the fact remains that a real expectation of our fellow citizens was expressed there.

It is time to bring citizens as close as possible to the decisions that concern them and this at all levels. Of course the State is there to set national standards by law when they are indispensable, but not to manage very diverse situations in a uniform way.

It is time to move resolutely towards a real decentralization of power in order to make it more understandable to citizens and to better involve them in its exercise.

To do this, we must go as far as possible in all areas, not decentralize a little more, but decentralize everything, unless it is obviously impossible. The State makes the law, but it must only manage the national regalian, in the strict sense.

For example, what is opposed to the so-called National Education becoming departmental for primary and secondary education and regional for universities (the national level determining the programs and conditions of training and recruitment of teachers, and nothing more)? What is opposed to hospitals being managed according to the same principles and, more generally, to health (within the respect of a legislative and social protection framework that remains national)? Why isn't the responsibility for the employment cluster completely entrusted to the regions that are much closer to the field, as the first experiences in this direction have been positive? Let's take the example of Germany, Switzerland or the Netherlands, which is doing better than us.

Contribution "La France d'apres

¹ Law n°81 of January 2, 1983 relating to the distribution of competences between the communes, the departments, the regions and the state.
² " La France peripherique " Christophe Guilluy - Editions Flammarion 2014.

However, we will have to be careful not to reproduce a centralizing and bureaucratic model at the local level, and it is by associating more decentralization with more democracy that we will succeed. To do this, we must certainly act at the regional and departmental level, but also at the level of the municipality, of the local authority, to be as close as possible to the citizens, their needs and expectations. We have seen this recently during this health crisis and its period of containment, through the return for example to a local economy, to local agriculture (short circuits) ...

In this respect, similar advisory councils can be set up at the local authority level, in a decentralized version to the Economic, Social and Environmental Council. Participatory democracy is much simpler to organize as close as possible to the citizens directly concerned. The Swiss example shows that local referendums are frequently and effectively used on the initiative of the citizens themselves, whereas it is clear that at the national level it is no longer practicable.

A new step in decentralization should not, however, neglect the European dimension, for at least two reasons. The first is that, as few French people are aware, there are Euroregions, such as the Pyrenees-Mediterranean Euroregion, which includes Catalonia, the Balearic Islands and Occitania. These Euroregions are endowed with means and manage common projects; in an approach of more decentralization these entities must be taken into account. The second reason is that there are sometimes, not to say often, contradictions between the aspirations of our fellow citizens for more local production and certain decisions taken by the EU. An example among others: the local development of short circuits that favor our farmers in competition with the agreement between the European Union and four Latin American countries regarding the export of certain products in exchange for the import of

It will not be the simplest and we still have to think about it, but our citizens will more easily accept the idea of European sovereignty if they feel that they have a much more direct say in their own affairs.

Real decentralization goes hand in hand with real participatory democracy.

poultry and beef from Brazil or Argentina.

Jean Peyrelevade
Michel Legrand
José Garcia nd
Section Daniel Sérus - PS 17 Paris
14/05/2020