

Thematic contribution

The territories of work-study programs

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Introduction

Two dramatic phenomena forcefully challenge us: the terrorist attack in Conflans Saint Honorine which cost me the life of a teacher, an odious act against freedom of expression, against the foundations of education in our Republic, and the resurgence of the epidemic, its spread which lasts and subjects populations and territories to unprecedented restrictions of social ties. We had thus forgotten that lasting peace had built a daily life around the future of each individual, neglecting the benefits of collective action, and some even let themselves go and blithely criticize the functioning of the Republic: taxes, public service, public spending, social protection, the status of civil servants...

Once again, we must salute those who, in the exercise of their profession, find themselves immersed in the heart of republican values (health, safety, education, culture, cleanliness, production, etc.).

In this difficult period, the situation is clear: it is the local authorities and their representatives who provide the first aid and protection, followed by the central government. Let's consider that we are all the State. The organization of the Republic is territorial at the administrative level (decentralized and deconcentrated) but almost "federal" at the level of national responsibilities. What the pandemic and also terrorism (even if it must be managed at the highest level) confirm and amplify is the necessary fundamental shift of the republican cursor as stated in the preamble and article 72 of the Constitution.

Local authorities at the forefront: which republican cursor?

The Republic

The State is all of us! This idea, which was born during the French Revolution, has still not seen its culmination in real decentralization, because the central State and its administration are constantly slowing down this evolution so as not to give it too much scope. The latest legislative acts of this organization still bear generous notions: "Rights and liberties of communes, departments and regions" in March 1982, then "freedoms and local responsibilities" in August 2004, "Modernization of public action" in January 2014 and finally "New organization of the Republic" in August 2015... not forgetting the merger of the regions But at the same time, however, an increased control of local government revenues is being put in place (e.g., 2009-abolition of the business tax), the obligation to control spending, stricter conditions for the payment of grants, and a national vote on the obligation to implement policies in the territories without their elected representatives having had the opportunity to express their opinion on them. Everything today restricts local freedoms.

And yet "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity", the motto of our Republic, which has always been affirmed, is still being put to the test during this period: freedom of action for all our territories - equal access to health and public services for all - and fraternity, undoubtedly the most questioned item when wealth is held by a majority of the population to the detriment of the most disadvantaged social classes, as we often see. Because communities always respond, they must demand greater consideration.

Decentralization

What is decentralization at a time of budget cuts, tax nationalization, and the obligation to reduce operations subject to contractualization, which is still as leonine as ever. Decentralization ? when public services are increasingly disappearing from our territories: health, school, sécurité, justice, post office, transport ...

Words far from deeds: the law of December 27, 2019 relating to involvement in local life and the proximity of public action had a clearly announced objective, that of restoring confidence in elected officials by facilitating their action, but the Philippe government did not wish to retain the positive amendments of the Senate; as for the 2020 finance law, it was the result, before the crisis, of an increased difference between rhetoric and reality: where the government says stability, communities suffer regression¹.

Also, the Republican cursor must be moved because deconcentration is not decentralization. It is when freedom resonates with responsibility that it is possible to choose another path. It is up to the elected representatives who are able to affirm their convictions, to build plural majorities that are concerned about the link between the two.

¹ André Laignel-Mayor of Issoudun, first vice-president of the Association of Mayors of France -Speeches at the 2019 Mayors' Congress

It is up to them to claim their full place in the aftermath of this health crisis that is shaking up our system.

It is up to them to bring the solidarity we need at the end of this period.

New situation, new organization

The two societal alerts

The pandemic reminds us violently that our social, economic, cultural and democratic organization is not a reliable situation since it leaves part of our territories, our populations, the most vulnerable, facing the drama.

No, it is not a war; it is a struggle against an invisible enemy whose weapons are not known and who is shaking up our economic system; this virus worries and confronts society with the obvious: to return to the essential so that everyone can regain their place, their dignity, their value, and the possibility of circulating and working freely.

Repeated terrorism, always present, reaches our Republic today through the barbarity that took the life of a public and secular school teacher. Let us allow ourselves to associate these two fears that haunt all societies whose economy is globally integrated. It is probably the end of a cycle, often denounced for its liberalism, consumerism and productivism. And which has led to social fractures by increasing financial misery and intellectual misery, the bedrock of all populisms and extremes.

Where are we now?

Is it a crisis of power? The capacity for resilience is being questioned, and this is a cause for concern because it also affects the exercise of power, the guarantee of public liberties and the legitimacy of authorities, particularly in democracies.

Is it just an economic crisis? It is so special because the recession that is looming is a mix of a supply shock and a demand shock.

A crisis of sovereignty? it questions the autonomy of states in a world where multilateral institutions are struggling to organize collective and disinterested decision-making on a global scale.

Or a crisis of representation? because our democratic model, born of the industrial revolution, is fundamentally a model of representative democracy: it is based on the consent to delegate the power that the right to vote gives to men and women who will exercise it in our name and for the good of all. We choose representatives who we believe will be able to carry out the policy we aspire to, in a relationship of shared trust that should be based on benevolence and otherness.

This consent, like this trust, is increasingly being broken down, the trend being less towards the general interest than towards the accumulation of particular interests².

² DSK- Being, having, power in the crisis ... tribune of April 7, 2020

The time of the territories

All eyes turn to the State, to the Member States of the European Union who are today the only decision-makers.

But who are really confronted with our fellow citizens on a daily basis? It is the local authorities, the women and men who represent them. The capacity for territorial resilience: it is not just a question of integrating, repairing, but also of going beyond. Society, like everyone else, is literally traumatized; we cannot repair in the same way. Yes to proximity, listening, trust, iterations, but not to the ever-increasing constraints, not to contempt.

The time of the territories has come. Let us rediscover, through a real decentralization of powers and means, the respect of our fellow citizens and the pride of the elected officials to act as close to the ground as possible. How can we fail to see that it is **local authorities** who can provide the most concrete support if we give them the means to do so by strengthening them, because even if we increase the debt, we must restore public services and their local development based exclusively on criteria of the best that can be said of ecology, health and education; we must finance reconversion, innovation and a simplified investment policy; and dare to take binding measures in favor of the same emergencies: ecology, health and education (culture being in education). This period shows forcefully and unambiguously that the territorial level is indispensable to the cohesion and functioning of our Republic.

Taking into account vulnerable people (the elderly, the disabled, migrants) - supporting economic activity and the cultural sector - are all gestures of relief and protection that communities have carried out effectively. This is what this crisis has revealed to us.

Territorial strength

The responsiveness of local authorities is confirmed, and they remain on the move despite their lack of resources and their recent reorganization. Never have the last local mandates been so difficult to fulfill with constraints that have been accumulating for more than a decade with the restriction of means, including the last two years. (Pact of Cahors), the increase in missions, institutional reforms (MAPTAM law - law NOTRe- Reform of the regions), the tightening of supervision (distribution of competences, suppression of the clause of general competence, prefectural power...), the growing demands of citizens (demand for participation, yellow jackets...) and all this crowned by the barbarism of terrorism and repeated incivilities towards elected officials.

Beyond the difficulties experienced, the local authorities always respond, once again we must stand united against terrorism. A unity that communities know how to bring to bear whenever circumstances require it. As a reminder, all the associations of elected officials united for a common expression at the Congress of Regions in Marseilles in September 2018 around "United Territories"³.

³ www.territoiresunis.fr/l-appel-de-Marseille

The central power today gives them the status of "pillars of the Republic". And we hear talk of decentralization, but how can we believe in it when it is the opposite that we are experiencing?

This is a major challenge for our country and in this period of crisis it is reinforced: France's responsiveness and its sovereignty at the European level depend to a decisive extent on the dynamics of the territories, which cannot be reduced to metropolises and an illusory runoff. Ecological transition, health, education, housing, mobility and security are shared policies that can only succeed through joint and concerted action. Solidarity, culture, sports and everyday services are being carried by our communities on a massive scale and require new resources.

To be fair, to be effective, France needs a strengthened grassroots democracy. This renewed contract between the central government and the territories requires a new stage of decentralization.

Conclusion and recommendations

In conclusion

This new stage of decentralization must be thought out boldly and communities are ready to work on it. It must release energies through greater freedom and appropriate means. The socialists' project must embark on a process that is indispensable for our country, necessary to revitalize the imperative of democracy.

The revival of our organization can be based on more committed values of sharing, social justice and ecology both at the micro scale (conurbations, communities of communes, or new communes (whose creation must be systematic today for a commune with a minimum of 1000 inhabitants), macro scale (metropolises, departmental and regional councils - regional natural parks - SCOT with abandonment of administrative borders if necessary) as well as at the national and European scale.

Recommendations⁴:

- Make energy transition and climate change a major competence of local authorities.
- financially outrageously reduced today.
- Respect the free administration and self-government of communities.
- To define the competences which, beyond the regalian, must be assumed by the central State, with everything else being decentralized, thus finally giving full application to the principle of subsidiarity. (Build a transversal service of culture and education at the national level, to be shared with the communities).
- Preserve and strengthen public services and increase resources in sensitive rural and peri-urban areas.
- To guarantee by the Constitution the place of the municipality and its general clause of competence.

⁴ Vincent Aubelle and Nicolas Kada, "Pour une nouvelle décentralisation de la République" (For a new decentralization of the Republic) Note Fondation Jean Jaurès

- Bridging the digital divide
- Promote mobility (public transit and reopening and/or creation of lines)
- Standardize (normalize?) relations between the State and communities⁵.

This territorial vision of the **project of the socialist and ecological left** must constitute the basis of a new "**welfare system**" on which to build trust and a renewed citizen pact.

Signatory :

Karine Gloanec Maurin, president of the Communauté de Communes des Collines du Perche.

⁵ Rethink a Senate that is a true assembly of the territories and civil society with extended powers (veto power over the public service budget, greater power of self-referral by commissions of inquiry, in environmental matters or the operation of public services) and a voting system open to proportional representation.
elected representatives from the associative and/or professional sector (sort of super CESER)