

Opening Speeches, Plenary, 18th April 2009-04-18

Green politics is local politics

In their opening remarks to the Local Councillors meeting, the panel of European Greens commented on the crucial importance of local government for a sustainable future. Any successful implementation of the Green New Deal rests on the active involvement of the cities and local councils. This local empowerment should go hand in hand with an increased level of competence at the EU level, to address social and economic matters in a coherent framework.

The challenge thus remains for the Greens to link these levels, in particular to highlight the importance of the local as well as the European elections. Green parties across Europe score up to twice as many points in the cities compared to the national elections, and it is from their stronghold in the cities from which they have entered the national political landscape. Similarly, the cities have benefitted from the Green policies on the EU level, from the opposition of the liberalisation of local politics to the inclusion to the right of local government to give tenders for public procurement based on social and ecological criteria, rather than on a purely financial basis.

Time and time again, this increased linking of the local and the global through the Greens, with their expertise in both areas, has led to increased prosperity. Barcelona is a case in point. Under the pressure from Green councillors, it is responding to the global crisis, on the local level.

In a country whose economy is driven by the construction of housing – of which 80% stays empty -, Barcelona has built a diversified economy, that invests in decent, medium-to-high education jobs in the renewable energy sector. The budget to strengthen social policies has almost been doubled, recognising that poverty belongs to one of the most unsustainable features of our current society. In a symbolic gesture, Barcelona plans the transformation of one of its most important roads. The ‘Diagonal’ shall be transformed from a car-dominated avenue into a boulevard served by a tramway.

The opening speeches were followed by the first screening of a documentary of 7 Green communes across Europe. Amongst these were a wide range of different cities, from sun-powered Barcelona, the sustainable living district in Freiburg that was achievable for everyone, to the renovation of old communist housing blocks in Brno. It involved pushing for cycling lanes in London, communicate between homeless squatters in Helsinki and the city council and the housing district in Vienna.

Green politics is local politics, on a global level.