

Cosmopolitanism: from urban experience to politics

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A resurgence of the concept of cosmopolitanism in both the social sciences and political philosophy is currently being observed. This has a lot to do with the new awareness of the context of globalisation, on the one hand because globalisation tests modern democracies and has reopened the question of post-national political regulation, and on the other, because it gives rise to a reshaping of the cultural, economic, and political aspects of social life.

In anthropology we are witnessing the emergence of a new *globalist* current, which distances itself from micro-local ethnology in favour of a diasporic approach, centred on flow dynamics, thought to be more appropriate in a world dominated by globalisation, as suggested, for example, by Arjun Appadurai (1966). In this approach trans-local cultural forms are the primary object of analysis, and are understood in terms of *métissage*, hybridity, and cosmopolitanism. Thus “a major current of the social sciences already obliges those specialising in societies to recognise the mixed, creolised, hybrid, fragmented and de-territorialised nature of cultures, and indeed to study the (contradiction in terms that is) ‘world culture’, be it virtual or actual” (Assayag 1998, p.203).

The notion of cosmopolitanism, which originated in political philosophy, has also been adopted by many authors in that discipline to consider the political dimension of globalisation (Cheneval 2005). In a context where nation states are losing

their power to regulate and their ability to meet the needs of democracy – which involve the “domestication of capitalism” (Habermas 1998) and participation in global evolution – cosmopolitanism is reappearing in political theory as part of a more ethical and political approach to globalisation (an interpretation foregrounded in the term *cosmopolitical*). Here it is understood in its modern definition, developed by Kant, who saw it as an unreachable ideal of perpetual peace, established through a process of communication and involving a free federation of states, in a universal political and juridical order based on the right to

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hospitality. In the current context, the cosmopolitan approach is seen as a possible response to globalised juridical and economic inequalities and to the regimes of exclusion produced by the nation state (in which citizens are distinguished from foreigners). Europe (Ferry 2005) and the transnational networks of the NGOs (Beck 2006) are seen as its testing ground. Thus “in the cosmopolitical idea, modern political thought has a powerful conceptual tool to fill the political void that globalisation has created by limiting the importance of the nation state” (Cheneval 2005, p.261). The cosmopolitical approach is prospective, bringing cosmopolitanism into dialogue with democracy, law, and citizenship, in order to consider the preconditions it requires and the ways it might be brought about on a global scale.

So the notion of cosmopolitanism is now often used to consider cultural and political forms in the context of globalisation, in analyses that look beyond its empirical manifestations in a given space. For although globalisation is a matter of flow, its dynamics appear on the ground – “the fact that the ‘transnational’ is not confined by territory does not mean . . . that it is ‘without a place’ ” (Assayag 1998, p.213). In their emphasis on flow rather than places in a regime of globalisation, approaches to cosmopolitanism are said to lose sight of the empirical constraints that would require it to be understood as rooted in a specific context.

It is in urban sociology that cosmopolitanism is considered on the basis of its empirical manifestations – in the heritage of the Chicago School, which regards the city as a place where diverse populations coexist, as the quintessentially cosmopolitan space (Grafmeyer and Joseph 2004). This school defines cosmopolitanism as part of urban culture, and the city as the place where it leaves the realm of philosophy and its normative demands to become embodied in forms that can be grasped empirically. It is generally approached from the case of foreigners, the experience of socio-cultural diversity and migrant networks. As a result, for many authors, because globalisation works through increasing exchange and migratory flow, it reinforces the cosmopolitan nature of the city, which becomes the hub where these movements, global dynamics, and their contradictions are crystallised. Thus, according to Jean-François Côté, “because metropolitan cities are primary trustees of these developments linked to the phenomenon of globalisation, they would indeed seem to be foregrounded in the representation of contemporary cosmopolitanism” (Côté 2005, p.239), because they reveal globalised forms of wealth and poverty, because they contain people of many disparate origins rubbing shoulders, and because they make visible the various social fractures caused by globalisation. Cosmopolitanism reveals its full importance in this context and can thus be seen as an experience proper to ordinary urban life, giving rise to hybrid cultural forms that can be grasped empirically.

So from urban experience to political project, cosmopolitanism takes different forms in different interpretations, which can be understood in terms of Ulrich Beck’s distinction between the cosmopolitan condition (which he sees, for example, in

the sharing of global risk) and self-reflective cosmopolitanism as a growing awareness of that condition and a political perspective (Beck 2006). However the shift from a situation to an analysis of the issues involved in that situation – which could lead to a critical dialogue between cosmopolitanism as defined in urban sociology, anthropology, and political philosophy – is not the aim of empirical approaches – even though, for many authors, the shift to the *second modernity* brought about by globalisation is characterised by an increase in reflective thought.

This distinction between cosmopolitanism as situation and as political perspective enables us to gain an empirical grasp of a movement whose actors publicly question, debate, and reflect on their situation, in a given context. It is this arena of work that this article proposes to open up, based on an ethnographic analysis carried out in Brussels, a city that can be defined as cosmopolitan in the sense the term has in urban sociology – it is caught in the flow of globalisation, with a multicultural population, including actors of international power and globalised representatives of wealth and poverty (from European officials to refugees). It is also a city where we can currently observe the notion of cosmopolitanism being used by actors seeking to mobilise the inhabitants in support of their political aspirations in response to major changes in the city’s socio-spatial configuration brought about by the dynamics of globalisation. So we can understand the city as a space where cosmopolitanism, as situation and lived experience, can be considered by urban civil society and so made part of its inherent political, normative perspective, in the context of a desire for political, economic, cultural, and social openness to those of a different nationality.

We need to start by understanding how the everyday experience of globalisation leads to a shift in the issues that polarise the urban debate, in order to identify the context in which cosmopolitanism emerges in the language of urban actors, marking a movement from the cosmopolitan situation to awareness of that situation. In the second stage we shall consider how these actors use cosmopolitanism in their thinking, in order to reformulate the democratic needs of a city caught up in globalisation. Our starting point for this approach will be an ethnographic analysis of the Brussels Citizens’ Forum, an event mobilising a large number of inhabitants, where cosmopolitanism

provided the shared perspective for a plurality of actors and was central to their demands. Lastly, we shall consider the way in which the requirements identified by these actors in a cosmopolitan context were themselves integrated, or not, into their own practices. The paradoxes, limits, and issues involved in cosmopolitanism could thus be analysed, at least as currently defined in Brussels, European capital and “world small town” as actors call it, caught up in Belgium’s inter-communal conflicts.

From cosmopolitan situation to problematisation

The emergence of the notion of cosmopolitanism in Brussels, brought about by civil society actors, cannot be fully understood without a consideration of two elements that characterise the city. On the one hand, it is the capital of Europe; the stamp of political globalisation is embedded in the city and clear to its inhabitants. When the European institutions moved in, so did the headquarters of multinational companies, lobbyists, and legal firms, leading to a fundamental restructuring of the city. This has led to many conflicts, from the 1970s to the present day, gradually generating debates on the cultural, political, and urban planning issues facing the European capital and, more broadly, an international city. On the other hand, as part of a federal Belgium, Brussels has a particularly large number of community groups and organisations. In a country with three recognised regions, responsible for urban planning and economic development (Flanders, Wallonia and, much more recently, Brussels) and three linguistic communities responsible for education and culture (French-speaking, Dutch-speaking, and German-speaking), the Region of Brussels is Belgium’s only bilingual region. Located within the Dutch-speaking area, but with a majority of French speakers, Brussels as a region has had to struggle – and still struggles – for recognition of its full political autonomy in a context where the linguistic communities use the capital as a battlefield, tending to ignore issues specific to a capital, and leaving community organisations to take care of them.

The importance of the current debate around cosmopolitanism in Brussels cannot be understood without reference to this particular context: the debate is undeniably linked to aspirations for

political autonomy for the region and for greater democratisation in relation to the impact of internationalisation on the city. These aspirations emerged a few decades ago. In the 1960s, when Belgium was in the throes of federalisation – which recognised the political autonomy of Flanders and Wallonia as linguistic entities (Communities) and economic entities (Regions) – Brussels, as the country’s bilingual capital, was run by the Federal government. This government supported real estate promoters in turning the city into an international centre for administration and finance through major modernisation projects to reflect its European role, without taking the needs of inhabitants into account. In the 1970s the residents of Brussels set up neighbourhood committees and began to fight the major construction projects, which were accompanied by expropriation of local inhabitants. The local committees responded with plans based on renovation, the importance of maintaining a mix, both in social terms and building use, and the protection of heritage, as manifested in the old European city (Aron 1978). They demanded both the regionalisation of planning policies and their own involvement in them. It was not until 1989 that the two Communities finally reached an agreement, enabling the creation of the Region of Brussels. This new region based its planning policies on its inhabitants, adopting a combination of renovation and local participation. Localism became a crucial element of public policy, and not only in Brussels but also in many other European cities.

In the 1990s the effects of economic globalisation became more pronounced and created a new global hierarchy of places (Castells 1998). While the internationalisation of the city, closely bound up with the arrival of the European institutions, had hitherto occurred without any real political will behind it, the growing competition between metropolitan cities gradually led Brussels’ representatives to reorientate planning policy towards attractiveness; this approach was firmly established with the International Development Plan (PDI) presented to the government by the region’s president in October 2007. Using the same methods as many other cities, this plan, drawn up by a private consultancy, sought to attract financial capital through the construction of prestige large-scale infrastructure and city marketing to promote the image of Brussels internationally (Calay 2007). While principles of participation were established

at the micro-local level, these were often weakened by the increased emphasis on attractiveness, which was accompanied in public policy by expansion and the increasing use of external expertise in the form of consultants. Thus no public consultation on the PDI took place prior to its implementation.

This new direction in regional policy was strongly criticised by many civil society actors (mainly trades unions, neighbourhood panels, and arts organisations), who were indignant at not being consulted on regional development policy, which thus took no account of either their knowledge of the city, its problems and issues, or their responses to them. These actors expressed their criticisms in many different places, starting a debate around urban planning issues in the context of globalisation. As well as sharing criticism of the lack of public consultation in drawing up internationalisation policies, the neighbourhood committees, arts organisations, and trades unions all based their critiques on an observed dualisation of the city. It was on this basis that cosmopolitanism emerged in their analyses, from a perspective of the democratisation of urban planning policy.

It is clear that the city's profile has profoundly changed since the 1960s with the intensification of the flow of migration. Today one in two of the inhabitants of Brussels are of non-Belgian origin (Corijn *et al.* 2008). However, many studies show that this multicultural shift has gone hand in hand with processes of socio-spatial differentiation; the city is becoming split between vulnerable populations on the one hand, often migrants of extra-European origin (mostly Turkish and North African), concentrated in the run-down neighbourhoods to the north-west, and, on the other, wealthier socio-professional categories, notably linked to international organisations, who live in the residential neighbourhoods of the south-east. Civil society actors talk about *top-down* and *bottom-up* forms of internationalisation.

These two different population types tend to be concentrated in different spaces and to have separate social networks (for example, European officials benefit from private nurseries and schools), separate relationships to the space, and separate urban centres; they seem to live parallel lives that never meet (Tarrius 2000). The growing importance of the city within global flows has been accompanied by an increased polarisation of its spaces. This is seen as specific to world cities, and tends to foster social inequalities. These issues go

beyond the urban planning context and relate to the social inequalities observed in the 1980s (Sassen 1996).

So it is through consideration of different facets of this process of socio-spatial differentiation, which, according to Côté (2005), is part of the cosmopolitan experience, that the residents' committees, trades unions, and socio-cultural organisations developed their critique of regional policies.

The residents complained that local needs were neglected in favour of business travellers and tourists; they criticised the power granted to foreign investors, which risked increasing the dualisation of the city, given that the vulnerable populations would be the first victims of policies that took no account of them, ignoring the imperatives of social justice. They also criticised these policies for emphasising the use of external rather than local resources to develop the city, which they regarded as contrary to the demands of sustainability.

The trades unions criticised the development model adopted by the authorities, which they saw as excluding the city's vulnerable populations, who would not then benefit from its internationalisation. Populations of immigrant origin develop informal transnational networks, marginalised by the authorities, which the unions regarded as far more conducive to socioeconomic integration than the forms of development that were being promoted. We should note that Tarrius (2000) analysed the underground international economies that emerged in the late 1980s in response to the effects of the global economic crisis, for which Brussels appeared as a traditional hub. The unions called for recognition of this *informal* internationalisation as a base on which to develop a social economy. This position is similar to the critique set out by Sassen, for whom "the advanced sector excludes other economies and workers from representations of the economy and managerial culture portrays them as 'different'. It excludes other ways of being present in the city and in the economy" (Sassen 1996, p.47).

In addition to the unions and neighbourhood committees, the other important actors in this debate were the arts organisations, which emerged in the late 1990s around issues relating to the city's cultural diversity (Genard 2006). They established interculturality as a matter for public debate; this had not been recognised by the communities, which had responsibility for culture in Brussels,

due to the exclusive nature of their functioning. Interculturality was also said to echo the role of Brussels within Europe, for which it should be a place of reflection, hybridity, and cultural recognition, an exchange hub for Europe and the world, and fertile ground for artistic experimentation. The *Zinneke Parade* (*zinneke* meaning mongrel dog in the Brussels dialect) offers an eloquent example of this kind of practice. It was launched in 2000, alongside many other activities, when Brussels was selected as European Capital of Culture. As culture comes under the umbrella of the Communities rather than the Regions, the Brussels arts and culture organisations came together in a broad partnership for the occasion, supported by the region, to set up an arts project that would involve the local population and promote the city's multicultural identity and its position at the crossroads of European cultures (on the border between the Germanic and Latin cultures). They wanted the project to connect the inhabitants of the city's different neighbourhoods. The *Zinneke Parade*, a big parade of local people, was the result of months of work with the city's inhabitants, encouraging them to join in and supporting their preparations. It has continued on a biennial basis ever since, as a multicultural carnival in which the inhabitants of Brussels, in all their diversity, are invited to *take over* the city centre for a day. Since its inception, two networks of arts associations have formed, one French-speaking, the other Dutch-speaking, which work closely together to promote arts events combining creativity and intercultural exchange.

These two networks have been very actively engaged in the critique of internationalisation policies in Brussels, which reduce culture to spectacles and events meeting international standards, and ignore dynamics between local groups and the issues they seek to address, which are about creating spaces of *intercultural* creativity through collaboration and networking.

So the coexistence of different populations in one space, which constitutes the city's cosmopolitanism for urban sociology, becomes a seedbed for collective action, even if this is not yet consciously signified in the term. Such action can be seen as reflecting a cultural openness to the plurality of the city's audiences and promoting the hybrid forms that can arise out of their meeting.

So we can see that the different critiques come together in the terms *zinneke*, interculturality, diversity, and *bottom-up* internationalisation.

The city's position within global flows is re-problematised by civil society actors, who include its working-class dimension. While this is ignored by the authorities (a neglect criticised from the urban planning, economic, and cultural points of view), actors from arts organisations and the unions see it as part of the city's international aspect, or its cosmopolitan nature, to use the terms of urban sociology. It is on the basis of this problematisation that cosmopolitanism acquires a political dimension – marking its passage into reflective thought – founding a new, democratic urban plan offering potential alternatives for the government and development of a city caught in the dynamics of globalisation, which include its citizens in all their diversity.

Cosmopolitanism as the political context of a global small town

This shared context really came into its own at the Brussels Citizens' Forum of September 2008–April 2009. This involved a wide range of public figures in the forefront of Brussels civil society, representing various organisations and groups, including the Dutch- and French-speaking neighbourhood committees, the Brussels sections of trades unions and business organisations, the Dutch- and French-speaking networks of Brussels arts and culture organisations, and self-styled *citizens'* groups (in which city actors held bilingual or trilingual meetings to debate institutional matters related to Brussels). The city's three universities were asked to support the actors in this process. The aim of the Citizens' Forum was to set out a joint project for Brussels in a period of regional elections and institutional negotiations and a context of intercommunal crisis. It sought to make Brussels voices heard, and to give them more weight, by joining forces around a shared position. It lasted almost eight months and took different stages. The actors involved began by identifying a number of urban issues (sixteen in all, including employment, culture, and housing) and asked academic researchers to produce a paper on each issue, made accessible online. Interactive debates were held on each of these topics, with the academic paper serving as a basis for debate, and participation invited from "civil society, organised or not". The actors leading the process then

conferred with each other to draw up a concluding text, the fruit of the entire process, in the form of a city plan proposed to the government. This was the point where actors representing multiple and often opposing approaches to the city came together in agreement around shared perspectives that were themselves the fruit of discussions, negotiations, and compromise.

The city plan seeks to respond to the process of dualisation, observed by both the academics and the civil society actors and taken as a starting point. However, although the Citizens' Forum actors had a common desire to include those segments of the city's populations that had been excluded from development policy, their proposed responses differed, with employers favouring policies to make the city more attractive, the unions favouring stronger social policies, and the residents' committees favouring local participation. The compromise ultimately reached by the actors integrated and linked their different approaches to the city and employed the semantics of interculturality and cosmopolitanism, already encountered. Its nature can be grasped from the concluding text proposing a city plan, extracts from which will be provided below.

In a context of communalised institutions that does not permit the recognition or promotion of cultural diversity, that diversity is asserted as a characteristic of Brussels, echoing its European status: "More than half the population is of foreign origin, almost half of households are multilingual. Brussels is a resolutely international, cosmopolitan city by virtue of its diverse activities, its multi-capital status, the European component of its population, its position at the centre of several major European axes as well as through its history and heritage, at the crossroads of great cultures." The city plan was developed on this basis, with the ambition of using the city's characteristics as a starting point for rethinking its modes of development and government.

Where development is concerned, for example, the different proposals include, in addition to supporting the *top-down economy*, "developing the existing economy using the work and talents of working-class immigrants", "making good use of the ethnic origins of the populations of Brussels, notably in commerce", and "also supporting local social economy projects combining market resources, state aid and the voluntary sector". Where policies relating to the image of

Brussels are concerned, "the most important thing is to show who we are, without denigrating anyone, as mixed and therefore *zinnikes*", using initiatives from the city's proliferation of organisations and artists. The actors also propose to draw up "a metropolitan development and solidarity pact" that would involve the users of the European civil service, in order to fund public facilities using "the financial spin-offs of efforts agreed by the inhabitants of Brussels for the international development of Brussels and its economic attractiveness". The Citizens' Forum actors thus laid the foundations for a potential redistributive justice at city level that would include every section of its inhabitants.

The Citizens' Forum actors thus sought to bring the city's different populations into the processes of urban development in order to include all its residents at the economic, cultural, and political levels: "We must develop a common policy that emancipates the population as a whole, in which the processes of 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' internationalisation intersect and reinforce each other". This required the population to be involved in drawing up the policy, or at least the establishment of dialogue with their representatives, in order to consider their needs and the dynamics they create. It was then necessary to lay the groundwork for the democratisation of urban planning policy, so that the diverse dynamics and potential of the inhabitants of Brussels could be recognised as being fully part of the city's development. Proposals included the reinforcement of political involvement at a micro-local level, both up and downstream of the realisation of projects, and the inclusion of a socio-economic dimension in participative urban planning mechanisms; crucially, the actors set out new demands in relation to citizenship. Given that cosmopolitanism as developed in political theory is intimately linked to the issue of citizenship, these demands can enable us to understand its political perspective, as envisaged by the Citizens' Forum actors.

The actors of the Citizens' Forum frequently mention the multicultural nature of Brussels, which requires that the region's political organisation be reconsidered: "The electoral system must be a better reflection of reality on the ground: Brussels is a multicultural, multilingual city rather than the juxtaposition of two mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive linguistic communities. From this perspective the trilingual identity card [French, Dutch and English] and extension to non-Belgians

of the right to vote in regional elections are not only highly symbolic, but also a democratic necessity, providing bulwarks against the principle of sub-nationalities, which destroys the very essence of urban harmony in diversity". According to the actors of the Citizens' Forum, full recognition of foreign residents as citizens of Brussels is fundamental to their participation in political life: "To mobilize the population and give them a taste for public life, all the citizens of Brussels must first be given a voice in regional and local elections." This residential, post-national conception of citizenship is a first step in the direction of a cosmopolitan politics at the regional level, since it means removing the distinction between Brussels residents of Belgian and non-Belgian origin. It also goes beyond the Kantian conception of the right to hospitality, confined to the right to visit.

In reality, according to Jean-Marc Ferry, "post-national identity, in other words access to citizenship located beyond the nationalist principle, does not specifically involve leaving the territorially defined national community behind. Rather it is objectively characterised by the fact that the granting of fundamental rights, regarded by liberal tradition as the predicates of citizenship, becomes independent of any belonging to the nation that grants those rights. In other words, there is a movement towards disconnecting citizenship from nationality" (Ferry 2005, pp.181–182). Moreover, in the view of the actors of the Citizens' Forum, it is the primary precondition for what they call a "democratic global small town". It then becomes necessary to extend citizenship to all categories of the population so that they can have an input into the elaboration of a development plan (in its planning, economic, and cultural aspects).

Furthermore, the city's cosmopolitan aspect echoes its European role and leads to a new understanding of what that role implies: "Brussels must take on the task of becoming the multilingual, cosmopolitan city of Europeanness, a sustainable, inclusive city, an example of attractive, emancipatory European integration".

When we look at the joint proposals set out in the concluding text, there is an observable shift in the understanding of what it is to be a citizen of Brussels, which can be linked to the everyday experience of globalisation. Cosmopolitanism is taken as the basis on which are set out, alongside alternative proposals for urban development, the democratic requirements of a global small town.

Echoing the city's European role, and in opposition to the communal identities in the foreground of Belgian politics, this text asserts the limits of institutional multiculturalism, which has permitted the political recognition of linguistic communities by granting them cultural autonomy, but has at the same time neglected to establish mechanisms for collaboration and dialogue. This does not enable responses to the issues of a culturally diverse city, in which disparate populations coexist: "Brussels remains dependent on a Belgian model of representation. Today we can rethink the city, structuring it in a different way, in order to foster intercultural exchange rather than simply multicultural juxtaposition." The cosmopolitan perspective thus fosters aspirations to alter policy in accordance with regional realities. In Brussels it becomes allied to particularism rather than opposed to it, as it is generally understood by a political philosophy that considers cosmopolitanism in its universal dimension.

Thinking in terms of the cosmopolitan makes it possible to incorporate *top-down* and *bottom-up* internationalisation – seen as the two sides of the dualisation process – into a shared city plan and at the same time to consider the different audiences it relates to, from tourists to European bureaucrats to refugees. It thus opens the way to discursive agreement between actors with a plurality of often antagonistic approaches to the city and makes it possible to justify a diverse range of proposals relating to different areas, from city marketing to the legal domain of citizenship. For its various actors it appears as the context that allows them "to think and act together" (Abélès 2008, p.156) to build a shared compromise around modes of cultural, economic, and political inclusion of the city's different populations in its development, in the context of globalisation.

But how these demands for openness to the city's different publics – and particularly those of immigrant origins – that characterise cosmopolitan action are themselves integrated into the practices of the actors who articulate these proposals and demands in Brussels, remains an open question.

Cosmopolitanism at work

Having approached cosmopolitanism as a political perspective emerging in a discursive space, we now propose to discuss its manifestations in the practice of the actors leading the Citizens' Forum, who

express this perspective in public – in other words to compare words and deeds. According to Catherine Neveu, “the set of debates and initiatives around the development of more participatory forms of democracy offer fertile ground for research. First and foremost, they make it possible to test explicit and implicit models of democracy (and thus citizenship) at work” (Neveu 2004, p.97). If we adopt this author’s point of view, manifestations of cosmopolitan citizenship can be tested in terms of the modes of participation and mobilisation defined by these same actors at the Citizens’ Forum, which have been subjected to ethnographic analysis.

The debates were officially open to all (they averaged a good hundred participants). However, unsurprisingly, groups and associations already involved in public life were over-represented; there was very little participation by those regarded as part of the city’s cosmopolitanism – a fact deplored by the organisers themselves. Different reasons can be given for this.

In addition to “affectedness” (Dewey 1927), engagement and participation in a debate require particular skills that have not always been acquired by publics unfamiliar with the usual forms of public expression – the ways of speaking and acting that constitute public life (Cefaï 2002). Let us start with linguistic competence: the debates were held in three languages, French, Dutch, and English as a “universal language”, and were not translated. An understanding of academic language was also required, as a text written by specialists was sent out in advance and introduced by academics as a framework for the debate. The same academics also responded to contributions from the public. The organisers required contributions to be short, polite, and neither anecdotal nor too general, demanding skills in developing an argument and a particular form of expression. “It is this ability to censure and transform what is said and done that constitutes the skill individuals require in order to access the public space. It is thus the extent to which individuals are able to state their experience in the required form – in other words ‘objectively’, without indexicalisation, etc. – that conditions their chances of being recognised as political ‘subjects’ in a public space” (Cardon *et al.* 1995, p.14). Thus participation in public debate requires a set of cognitive, discursive, and argumentation skills that are acquired through socialisation in the political sphere and are unequally distributed across the

population. There seems to be a conflict between the call to participate and the requirement for thinking based on academic expertise. One major limitation of these debates was thus their lack of accessibility to a wide range of publics and forms of expression, their lack of “communicative flexibility” (Joseph 1998, p.126). This observation invites us to look more deeply into the relationship between accessibility and cosmopolitanism (which will be addressed in the following point).

Secondly, the desire to leave political divisions aside went hand in hand with the silencing of any acknowledgement of inter-community tensions for the sake of good relations and, more broadly, with the silencing of conflicts and power relations between the different cultural communities present in Brussels. However, failure to deal with these tensions makes any real intercultural negotiation impossible, given that the effects of power inequalities between the city’s different populations are denied (Assayag 1998). The requirement for interculturality seems to go hand in hand with the implicit blocking of any expressions of a communal nature, thereby limiting the inclusivity of the debate.

Lastly, the ways in which participation was invited also help to explain why the cosmopolitan audiences had such a weak voice in the public debate. Information about the Citizens’ Forum was disseminated and participants mobilised through the networks of the organisers (emails were sent to all their contacts). People unconnected to the groups and organisations leading the Forum were informed via the press and a few leaflets and posters were distributed here and there in the city. Although strategies were proposed for reaching the working-class population, notably immigrants to Brussels (such as including groups working with these sectors in the Citizens’ Forum steering group, holding debates in working-class neighbourhoods, and producing texts in Arabic), none of these proposals was adopted for lack of time, resources, and ease of access. Some representatives of groups working with residents of non-Belgian origin were present at the debates; however, they were not invited to join the organisers, although it was precisely through these groups that working-class and non-Belgian residents might have been brought into the Citizens’ Forum.

Although they enabled dialogue following the conventions of debate, compromise, and politeness between French and Dutch speakers, these

exchanges were seriously limited by their inaccessibility to a large section of the population. While bringing the need for the political, cultural, and economic integration of non-Belgian residents of Brussels into the political domain, the Citizens' Forum did not give those residents a *voice*, nor recognition as competent participants.

So we might ask whether the notion of the cosmopolitan, arising out of a consensus between the inhabitants of Brussels, was not invoked first and foremost as a means to mediation between Belgium's two national communities, whose conflicts are played out in Brussels. The dialogue it fostered in the city was bi-communal rather than intercultural. In the Belgian context the inhabitants of Brussels can be seen as embodying Park's definition of the cosmopolitan as an intermediary "between two worlds", a cultural hybrid sharing the cultural life and traditions of two different communities (Grafmeyer and Joseph 2004). But we might wonder whether the cosmopolitan can act as a link and means to understanding for groups associated with internationalisation, whose points of reference lie outside the Belgian context. The transnational seems here to crash headlong into the national.

Despite this observation, the cosmopolitanism defined by the actors still has performative effects in the sense that it challenges the political, cultural, and socioeconomic foundations of urban development, shifting these issues to the centre of the urban debate.

However, today it has tended to be used in the city marketing strategies of both the region and business (particularly as it gives the city a distinct character internationally, in a context where political crises have had a negative effect on Belgium's attractiveness to foreign investors), while the political implications defined by the civil society actors have not been given concrete expression. So cosmopolitanism in Brussels is reduced to manifestations of a commercial, aesthetic, or folk nature, in a context promoting diversity (Friedman and Ollivier 2004), and is emptied of its political demands, which suppose recognition of the relations of socio-spatial and cultural dominance and social inequalities brought about by globalisation as it materially shapes the city. Thus many authors note the elitist dimension of the cosmopolitanism becoming established today in different areas, notably the economic and cultural spheres – and indeed the political, as in the Citizens' Forum – at

the risk of reinforcing socio-cultural inequalities. For many authors, multicultural democracy requires cultural recognition twinned with social justice (see Fistetti 2009). Responding to these needs necessarily involves engaging in dialogue with the city's other cultural minorities, so that the conditions necessary for cosmopolitanism as defined by the Citizens' Forum actors can be tested, and its form can be discussed by the social sectors to which it refers. This is all the more important because the issues relating to the political, cultural, and economic participation of those involved with international organisations and those relating to the participation of working-class immigrants are not the same, given the discrepancies in resources and the levers these different sectors can use to have their activities recognised in the urban framework. In practice we can identify two distinct regimes of urban hospitality (Gotman 1997) (also linked to the legal distinction between Europeans covered by the Schengen agreement and non-European foreigners) – which, in a cosmopolitical perspective, would then require differentiated adjustments.

Based on an analysis of the actions undertaken from a cosmopolitan perspective, we can then see the current limits of cosmopolitanism in the urban context. While Brussels can be described as a "cosmopolitan" city in Côté's sense of the term, a major paradox is apparent. The arenas in which cosmopolitanism is consciously considered, and modes of development and urban government are debated with a view to modifying them in its light, are not places of visibility and expression for the relevant social sectors. The paradoxes and limitations of cosmopolitanism as defined and manifested in Brussels invite us to reformulate the questions of, on the one hand, what its specifically urban requirements are and, on the other, in what conditions it is discussed. This latter question can be approached through issues of accessibility, as set out by Isaac Joseph (1998, 2007).

From urban accessibility to political accessibility

While cities are often presented as bastions of cosmopolitanism, Joseph adopts a cautionary stance, both because "the fact of living between two worlds or two cultures does not mean that one is immediately a citizen of the world" (Joseph

2007, p.215), and because the meaning of cosmopolitanism is often reduced to the circulation of elites (the circulation of capital and goods being promoted, where that of human beings is seen as a threat). In response to the “paradoxical vulnerability of cosmopolitanism today, at a time of globalisation” (Joseph 2007, p.215), he suggests seeing the cosmopolitan city in terms of the experience of foreigners and their public skills. For “before being individual citizens we are all linked, and it is in this distant proximity with foreigners that we learn to give shared meaning to the notion of the world” (Joseph 2007, p.216).

He approaches urban cosmopolitanism through activities found in spaces of co-presence and, in particular, public space, which he defines in terms of its accessibility to a plurality of publics and practices. Public space thus becomes a place where people learn to coexist – through spatial proximity and social distance – and to acquire the skills of assembly, as opposed to belonging, that are the preserve of humans as public beings. For this reason the author regards public space as the primary public good. The shared accessibility of a public space to different populations and a plurality of activities is thus a precondition for learning and negotiating how to coexist with others. “The multiculturalism of contemporary societies is not a cohabitation of pre-formed identities in a particular territory, but shared accessibility” (Joseph 1998, p.16). Joseph thus shifts and sharpens the focus on the city’s cosmopolitanism, which is no longer seen as a given of urban experience, but grounded in the accessibility of its public spaces, enabling openness to others.

Like many cities caught in processes of globalisation, Brussels is today characterised by different forms of socio-spatial differentiation. When we consider the communities said to form the cosmopolitanism of Brussels, we see social worlds that are parallel, superimposed (Tarrus 2000), and disconnected both on the spatial level and also culturally, economically, and politically. In the neighbourhoods where these communities live, the urban public spaces have generally ceased to be places where they meet – from the European quarter in Brussels, which tends to be frequented only by members of the international organisations communities and where the imperatives of security have greatly reduced the quality of public spaces (inhabitants moreover refer to it as the *forbidden city* or *European ghetto*), to the enclaves in the

north of the city where the working class immigrants are concentrated – so that there is now a demarcation of space in terms of identity (Tarrus 2000). While cities have often been regarded as places for meeting, encounter, and exchange, and the flow of migrations has created even greater diversity in their populations, this function of the city – which many urban sociologists regard as underlying its cosmopolitan nature – has today been undermined by forms of socio-spatial differentiation fostered by globalisation.

But, for Joseph, accessibility goes beyond the issue of public spaces and is also a quality of the social experience and interaction, reflecting its receptiveness to a diversity of people and behaviours. From this author’s work, we can thus understand that, paradoxically, the spaces where cosmopolitanism is deliberately adopted as a political perspective for the city do not create a situation characterised by accessibility to diverse participants, which is the precondition for cosmopolitanism. In the light of the experience of the Brussels Citizens’ Forum, characterised by a strong academic, theoretical dimension and low numbers of participants of immigrant origin, accessibility to the spaces of political participation inevitably raise the issue “of the social skills necessary for the construction of shared norms” (Joseph 1998, p.125). We then need to redefine the modes of participation in urban debates, to make them more accessible to these sectors of the population, in order to give them their own voice. This is the precondition for recognition of their practices, needs, and capacities for independent action (Fistetti 2009).

Current expressions of cosmopolitanism can thus be approached through the regime of hospitality that it defines and which is at work in both urban public spaces and arenas of participation, by consideration of its limitations. According to Joseph, the excluded (foreigners, the poor, and the marginalised), who are kept invisible and non-participant in modes of co-existence (both public spaces and situations), mark the limits of urban cosmopolitanism (and its regime of hospitality), while inviting expansion of the urban community. The current issue for cosmopolitanism is thus the accessibility of public spaces, both urban and political, to the diversity of the city’s residents, and its realisation can be seen in the capacity for extending these spaces to different publics, in order to include those who are not currently visible in them.

Conclusion

While political tensions in Belgium grow more intense and dialogue between the communities is now so fragile that it seems increasingly difficult to reach the still-crucial compromise, the cosmopolitan perspective emerging in Brussels, has at least – and beyond the confines of its concrete realisation – fostered bi-communal dialogue and small-scale collaboration between some civil society actors.

The representations and practices of citizenship in Brussels attest to the separation between cultural belonging and political citizenship, which can be interpreted as a post-national (Ferry 2005) or cosmopolitical orientation at the regional level. Brussels' European role and the desire to leave community divisions behind foster aspirations to a democratisation of urban policy in this *global small town*, which requires the inclusion and participation of the city's diverse communities. However, in the actors' call for recognition of a cosmopolitan citizenship, this aspiration for democratisation has been articulated without engagement or voices from the communities concerned; so this action is not anchored in a practice that would give it its full coherence and legitimacy.

Thus we can observe an important paradox: while Brussels is regarded as a cosmopolitan city, in the sense of everyday experience and the cultural forms emerging from it, the spaces in which this characteristic is overtly discussed do not themselves show the openness and accessibility to the diversity of residents that are the preconditions of political and ethical cosmopolitanism. Urban and political cosmopolitanism do not seem to coincide,

despite the publicly expressed desire to link them. The need therefore is to consider the specifically urban demands of cosmopolitanism, in order to enhance the cosmopolitan experience that the city can offer, paying attention to the accessibility of urban public spaces as the precondition, according to Joseph, of learning to coexist. On the other hand we need also to consider how to move from urban to political cosmopolitanism, by opening a dialogue between groups regarded as *cosmopolitan*, bearers of practices of hybridisation that are part of everyday experience in the city, and those segments who analyse the city's cosmopolitanism, with a view to fine-tuning the modes of regional democracy. For, beyond the issue of recognising citizenship emancipated from national or community contexts, the cosmopolitan perspective calls for a focus on the accessibility of both public spaces and spaces of debate and participation.

In a context where cosmopolitanism is a matter for urban debate and public discourse involving a plurality of actors, the empirical approach enables us to grasp the current limitations, in terms of both urban planning and politics, of the regime of hospitality that it configures, and to discuss the issues raised by its realisation. It also opens the way to a critical dialogue with political philosophy, which turns to cosmopolitanism in its efforts to outline democratic forms appropriate to the context of globalisation. From this point of view, cities can be regarded as laboratories for a democracy to come, based on a new idea of cosmopolitanism and its needs (Derrida 1997), and reflecting the conditions that would make it possible.

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