

# Citizens assembly and new reflections on governance

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*\* Transcription of the interview to Pierre Calame - Charles Léopold Mayer Foundation for the Progress of Humankind in Paris in June 2008*

Citizens' assemblies are a concrete expression of a wider reflection – a reflection on governance. They are the many ways by means of which a society is peacefully run. When we think about running a society, the notions of institution, political democracy, power and counter-power, public sector and private sector, local / state / European Union associations, all rapidly arise. That is to say, a populace is, deep down, an institution.

If we want to understand how a 21st century society may be run, two leaps, two successive methodological and intellectual breaks are necessary. The first one introduces the notion of governance, not in the World Bank's sense of good governance, not as a recipe of good governance, but conversely as an expansion of the reflection upon the management of society. This expansion becomes necessary because no problem can be solved with a chief of state, because states are confronted globally by inter-dependences from which they cannot escape, even if they are against economic liberalism, climatic change, fossil fuel shortage, or even biodiversity evolution; the idea comprises everything. So we need to get away from the evidence imposed on us by recent history... we have lived through the Republic's institutions, we have lived through the construction of democratic institutions, we know what a Parliament is, and so on. All these are concrete circumstantial ways limited to certain centuries; they are some examples of the way in which societies have been learning for centuries to be run and to be destroyed, when badly run. Therefore, what we need to say first is that, when confronted with the inevitable breaks of the 21st century, we need to widen again our area of reflection and we need to understand how, through the millennia, societies have learned to run themselves. This is the step from the idea of state to the idea of governance governance. The second leap, the second break, requires us to understand that, because of this, the governance recipes imposed on us, especially those welcome by international institutions as well as by political science, administrative law and other courses, correspond to a state of society that can be run in a segmented way. There is a public sector, a private one, what depends on the environment, what depends on education, what depends on the economy, a state sector, what depends on local associations, in our case what depends on the European Union. All these segments have been overcome, though deep down the problems are inter-related.

Therefore, if we want to live and develop, if we want the human adventure to have some sense for our grandchildren and great-grandchildren, we are doomed to find ways to run our society which no longer fit into those segments, which are capable of aptly managing the links between things and people, and thus my own work consisted of exploiting, in a

way, the experience that I have accumulated over forty years in this field, in order to be able to claim in a book entitled *Democracy in crumbs* what I had found out about governance. In my book, I quote Einstein, not because I consider myself one, but because I believe his formula is beautiful and moving, and because I believe it applies quite well to the issue of governance. He said, “the most incomprehensible things about the world is that it is comprehensible.” My own itinerary as a high official in France, and later on as director of the organization have led me to discover the way in which society is run on different scales in different continents and I have realized that deep down governance and – even more – the future’s governance, inhabits in a small number of universal principles. This has been a rather important discovery, but we still have to be careful not to mistake principle with solution. The nature of principles is that each of us has to invent where they are, in which specific context, never identical to our neighbor’s; we need to find a way to put these principles into practice. The five principles I have come up with are the following :

The **first one** is that power must be legitimate and that formal institutions, as I exemplified with the populace upholding their political leaders during democracy, are not enough to guarantee this legitimacy. But what is legitimacy? In short, it is feeling that we are being governed correctly. We get the feeling that all sacrifices imposed on us are for a common good. The common good is what is truly aimed at, and not at a certain class, caste, part or majority, social group or sector’s interests. It is feeling that we can understand how we are being governed. This corresponds, in my opinion, from family level to the highest level; it corresponds to the way that the exercise of power is viewed; that the leaders we have are competent and worthy of our trust; that the methods they use are adequate to the problem; that those in power are really concerned – in protecting the common good – about giving us the greatest possible freedom. This is what legitimacy entails. And here we return to the topic of Citizens’ Assemblies, which is why a community is instituted in the recognition of the need to administer a common good and, as a result, to accept sacrifices. Some times we hear people talk about tax consent, which is an old issue from democracy. At the beginning, the vindication of the consent to tax was even the foundation of the struggle against totalitarian regimes. This consent to tax is used as a set phrase, but what is it really? There is the idea that it has a common good and, as a result, a common end, and this means that it deserves sacrifices, that is to say, that it comprises a solidarity dimension, but solidarity with whom and from whom? How is that feeling of solidarity built? This is why the institution process is part of legitimacy.

The **second great principle** revolves around democracy and citizenship. I understand by democracy “substantial democracy”, and not the vote to appoint a majority against a minority, a 51 % majority that will have the right to impose its rule on the 100 % - this is not the meaning of democracy. The Greek definition of democracy entails the possibility that each person takes part in the definition of the common destiny and its realization; therefore, it is here that we find in what ways, through what channels, through what processes, that common destiny will be built. Citizenship cannot be reduced to the accumulation of rights. Too many speeches have been made about democracy, based on the discourse of rights, for example about children’s rights and social groups’ right. I have heard, for instance, that rights intrinsically isolate whereas duty joins, and this is what happens in marginal groups, in which obedience creates a sense of belonging to the gang. This happens only by pretty much subordinating oneself to the rules of the gang, no matter how deviant this might be, because one belongs to a group and therefore feels that one belongs in society. It seems strange to have forgotten such a fundamental rule; it is strange to have forgotten that there is no right if this can be opposed to someone. I notice

my rights, but who grants them to me? Freedom of opinion and the right to vote are not too hard to grant, but when it comes to the right to a healthy environment, the right to work, the right to leave poverty behind, or even the right to diversity, who can I complain to when my right is not respected? Thus, we have become aware of the importance of the sense of responsibility, which is only the realization of the existence of inter-dependence, of responsibility. I have to take responsibility because I have an impact on my neighbor, and my neighbor is right now in Greenland, in the South Pole, as well as on my very same floor. Therefore, since I am aware of my responsibility, I become a citizen and I then become aware that the most important foundation in the construction of a community, which is key in governance, lies in the equilibrium between rights and responsibility. This is the second principle.

The **third big principle** is that the management of society should be based on methods, institutions, social bodies, both composing and belonging to the relevant issue. We can see everywhere that it implies the reformulation of the administrative system. We can see that the classic ideology of each person's public service in their environment, that competition, taking good care that we do not overlap with our neighbor's sphere, does not correlate with the management of complex problems; and, therefore, here as well as in other fields, new ways of doing things must be invented. The case of Citizens' Assemblies is just one example among others. We need ways of doing things in order to find solutions for everyone, but they need to be ways of doing things to run a city or a region of the world smartly, that is to say, we need to develop what I call "institutional engineering" – we need to learn to build institutions, rules, methods, processes, which are adequate for the problems that need to be solved. This seems basic, but it is actually very difficult to carry out and it is against the practices which claim: I take institutions as they are, I sometimes change, cut, merge offices, eliminate one of them, I create inter-office instances, but I do this always within a culture of cutting and segmentation which strongly resists dealing correctly with the facts. This is the third principle.

The **fourth great principle** is what I call the co-production of public good. Of course there are private interests, and there are public institutions, and not everything is intertwined. Actually, when today we examined the production of public goods, we saw it was the result of the cooperation between players; these could be the clients or suppliers of public goods, the businesses or research laboratories together with the state, they could be universities or learning the art of work in cooperation with other players through various means. That is where traditional segmentation is overcome, this belongs to the public domain and this to the private one, but health... is it private or public? How can we have cooperation between those players that produce health, including kindergarten and schoolteachers, mass media campaigns, pharmaceutical products companies, private medicine and public hospitals? How does all this produce the best health? This is what I am interested in.

And, finally, the **last great principle** is the articulation of the scale of governance, it is the idea I implemented thirty years ago when I was working in France and this is that no problem in society can be treated on just one scale. All our beliefs and political sciences negate that reality, though. Democracy is particularly obsessed with finding out who is responsible for what. Let's formulate the hypothesis that there is only one player responsible for each issue. For instance, who is responsible for energy? Well, families might be responsible if they do not switch off the lights, or even Europe or the world when it comes to organizing the management and supply of energy sources on a world scale. In other words, the principle of reality is negated and, as a result, the secret of governance

today is not the art of distributing responsibilities, but rather the art of articulating them; it is the definition of the rules through which – from the most local to the most global level – we learn to work as a team in order to find solutions for the problems. Therefore, we still need to come up with forms of judgment for the populace, which is still the foundation of democracy. It is the art of making representatives feel responsible for their acts in front of society, while understanding that this is not based exclusively on one competence. That is, we should be able to judge a mayor on his capacity to cooperate with the European Union, with the state, the region and his neighbors, on a variety of subjects. Thus, rules of articulation among scales have become essential. We can go back to what we were saying at the beginning about Citizens' Assemblies, crosscutting these principles, and we can see that they actually comprise basically each of the issues: the construction of legitimization, the construction of responsibility, all the citizens, and I ... what am I responsible for? And not just, what do I want my leaders to be responsible for? This includes a dimension for questioning the way to find new forms of public politics, it necessarily includes a dimension in which there is cooperation among players, and the process moves from local to global.