

COMMONS & MUNICIPALISM MODULE

“Democracy was born at local level, and that’s where we can win it back”

In June 2017 around 600 participants from 180 cities around the world came together in Barcelona for the International Municipalist Summit entitled “Fearless Cities”. The summit was organized by the political platform “Barcelona en Comu”, which won local elections in 2015 by proposing decentralized, locally rooted and emancipatory ways to repoliticize citizens, rethink Left-Green politics and take up the challenge of direct democracy. Since 2016 municipalist platforms *Zagreb je naš!* (Zagreb Is Ours) and *Ne da(vi)mo Beograd* (Don’t Let the Belgrade D(r)own) emerged in Southeast Europe.

Municipalism stands for political and economic democratization at the local level. Municipalist platforms aim to steer some of the energy of progressive social movements into political organizations that run for elections. At the same time, these platforms aim to serve as vehicles for further institutional democratization through creating direct and participatory democracy models for residents in cities and towns. They aim to bridge contentious and institutional politics by not simply redirecting protest energy from the streets into formal political institutions, but by creating a double political front best described as “a foot in the institutions and a thousand in the streets”. Taking this on board, this module explores municipalism as a progressive political ideology, maps municipalist platforms in Europe and discusses challenges that they face in their political work.

In addition, this module relates municipalism to critical theory of the commons, as a body of academic and activist work that has been explored through several previous Green Academies. Elinor Ostrom’s theory of the commons has been developed by critical scholars who understand the commons as a relational social practice and include normative criteria to defining the commons. According to these conceptions, political struggles against privatisation and etatization of common resources are constitutive to the commons political paradigm. This module will explore such critical theories of the commons as well as bring out examples of progressive commons governance in cities.

In summary, this module aims to connect the municipalist political agenda and contemporary struggles for institutional democratization with commons theory and experiments in governing urban resources for radical democratization of society. It is comprised of lectures and workshops. Introductory lectures on municipalism and on the commons will be followed with a lecture on ways in which these political paradigms and initiatives relate to challenges of contemporary democracy such as right-wing populism. There will also be lectures on gender and the commons, and a Global South perspective on progressive transformation of cities. Finally, we are planning a workshop on campaign design, focusing on the topics of water as a common good.