

A makeshift editorial

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Four years ago, we created the SOSTENIBLE? journal, the first edition of which covered the phenomenon of globalisation. Sir Shridath Ramphal began an initial political analysis of the issue, which has become even more complex over the last four years. As far as the political aspects of the governability of the planet is concerned, various groups and alternative choices have become visible. It is no longer sufficient to think in terms of the G7, the IMF and the World Bank. We must now consider Davos, the anti-globalisation movements, Porto Alegre and many other initiatives that make it clear that, as Bob Dylan said, times are changing.

The Editorial Board's choice of democracy as the focus of this year's SOSTENIBLE? Journal is therefore hardly surprising, and even less so if we consider that local, autonomous community and national elections will shortly be taking place in Spain.

Democracy is a long-standing challenge which has perhaps never truly been met, and has not always reached the lofty objectives that seemed to be within its reach. It all began with the very first attempts in Athens, where not everyone had a say or the right to vote in the public assembly, through to today's skewed forms at the service of what are referred to as representative democracies. When we examine the latter, however, and when we consider the discrepancies in opinion between these governments and their citizens on issues such as Bush's war (not Iraq's war), it is not always clear whom our political "representatives" are representing. Also, we must not forget the attempts at direct democratic systems in the 20th Century (workers' councils, including the *Soviets'* version, among others).

It is easy for people in the first world, in the northern hemisphere, to think that democracy has taken an irrefutable root. We must remember, however, that most of the world's citizens do not live in conditions that can even be considered democratic in the formal sense, despite attempts to disguise that which is nothing other than the rule of the powerful by whatever means necessary.

This does not mean that efforts to open new paths to more participatory democracies are redundant, however. The challenge of governability, both global and local, in this era of globalisation must lead to new reflections on the

forms and possibilities for democracy and political participation, particularly now that we are sure that the continuity of life on the planet is threatened. The rate at which we use up resources and generate waste in certain parts of what is now known as the North has begun to endanger the survival of the planet, particularly if, as foreseen, the rest of the planet, or what we now call the South, jumps on the bandwagon of those who misuse the limited resources of what Kenneth Boulding called "Earthship" in the 1960s.

To analyse democracy as it stands at the beginning of the 21st Century, we have set up various collaborations and have gathered the opinions of different specialists, with the intention of making these accessible to people with no specialist knowledge but who are interested in some of the most pressing issues of our time.

Pere Comín takes a brief overview of the concept of democracy itself in order to establish the basis for subsequent reflections, such as Joan Subirats's analysis of the relationship between democracy and globalisation. The Corporate Europe Observatory research group considers the process of European unification in relation to the ever-growing power of multinationals, and the need for local participation ("Think globally, act locally" as they say) is explored by Quim Brugué and Salvador Martí.

In addition to the views of political scientists, the multidisciplinary approach so favoured by the people at the UNESCO Chair at UPC of Technology, Sustainable Development, Imbalance and Global Change has lead us to compile supplementary information on topics that are a little unusual in this context, including a paper by Maria José Aubet, where she considers individual views on the eminently social phenomenon that is democracy from a psychological standpoint. Inevitably, because we are part of a technological university, we also present a brief reflection by Miquel Barceló on the relationship between democracy and technology.

As usual, we feature a bibliography and Internet reference list, prepared by Roser Gómez and Miquel Puertas. Given the amount of documentation available, they have found it necessary to limit themselves to the topics of globalisation, democracy and electronic participation.

The fact that democracy is the least flawed amongst the different forms of government does not invalidate the search for ways to improve it. This is what it is all about.