

Talk by the Mayor of Barcelona, Jordi Hereu, at the London School of Economics

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Barcelona: an urban model for social cohesion

First of all,

I would like to thank the Fundació Rafael Campalans and its director Mr Albert Aixalà, the Cañada Blanch Centre for Contemporary Spanish Studies, the London School of Economics, and Paul Preston for the invitation and opportunity for me to be here with you today.

It is a pleasure for me to share ideas about a topic which is both exciting and relevant: **The topic is models for city development.**

I will do so talking about Barcelona. About its values and the project. About what the model can do especially at a time of difficulties like the present times. As the 21st (twenty first) century advances, we need to make certain reflections, and in a very special way when it comes to cities.

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City models are very important in the current context. On the one hand, for solid statistical and demographical reasons, given that **currently most of the world's population lives in cities**¹, and this fact **gives cities an undeniable importance in world politics.**

¹ According to figures from the United Nations since 2008 more than half of the human population, 3,300 million people, live in urban areas. Currently in Europe, North America and Latin America, 70% of the population is urban. It is calculated that by 2050, 70% of the world's population will live in cities.

On the other hand, because cities are a point of reference for globalization. It is **in cities where the effects of globalization are seen and felt**: It is here we find the problems, challenges, and importantly, the opportunities.

I speak to you today as Mayor of a city, **Barcelona, which is global and feels global, And it wants to continue being so.**

It is a city that lives the effects of globalisation in the first person, every day. I am a realist on principle and progressive by conviction, From both points of view, I believe fully in the capacity of cities.

You might believe that cities have become the most fragile and vulnerable setting in a world of uncertainty,

And there are many examples. But I am sure that **cities are, at the same time, the most suitable spaces for finding solutions to these uncertainties.**

In other words, cities are constituted **in a space that should and can offer more and better certainties** at a time of uncertainty.

Within this context, and faced with the evidence of globalisation and its unarguable imperfections, which have all seen in recent times, I would say that **greater globalisation brings a greater need to develop adequate local policies.**

This is not a contradiction, but, more probably, the solutions depend on resolving this equation properly.

Therefore, in the 21st century, policies are either local or don't exist at all. This fact adds an important degree of complexity to local policy. **Very often we have to manage global phenomenon from a local perspective and with purely local instruments.**

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The challenges are common and the changes faced by societies in a globalised world do not distinguish, or elude to, any city, any region or any State. These would include the increase in plurality, demographic changes and changes in our family model; greater economic inter-dependence that modifies the life of cities and generates new needs and new ways of living the city experience and living in the city.

The difference (and I can assure you there are differences) can be found in the way in which cities face these challenges. And this is something that has values as its starting point.

Political projects, and more so if they want to be a reflection of the social realities that they generate, are not, and **cannot be independent of these values.**

Values are the essence of life in society. The years of economic boom seemed to have relegated values to the background, but this isn't the case, and cannot be so.

This should be clearly stated: **over the past thirty years the majority have defended the thesis that reality could only be constructed according to the strength of the market, without any counterweight through the regulation of the social or public powers.**

However, **I am convinced that it is only possible to justify political action if that is based on certain values. The way of constructing cities isn't something innocuous**, and the model of Barcelona, its major transformation from the 1980s onwards, is a clear example of that.

For sure, our particular history has a lot to do with this. Precisely 30 years ago Barcelona had just recovered democracy. After 40 years of dictatorship and in our just born democracy, the traditional European values, I mean the values that Europe has always represented, were our reference and our aim. We wanted to construct a society, and at the same time a city, that revolved around the values of democracy and progress.

Nowadays **Barcelona feels an active part, and if I might say, a defender of these inherent values in Europe.**

A Europe that is in fact risking its future depending on its ability to defend and bring the values that define it up-to-date.

Values have therefore been fundamental in the construction of the **Barcelona we know**. For this reason **Barcelona has led a new way of constructing a city, its own project, that has marked the difference** and that has placed it among the main cities of the world.

Barcelona shows clearly that **there is another way to construct cities. This goes against the aim of an ideological neutrality** that hides a model that has tried to become dominant, wanting to be the only possibility.

And it is a way that **believes in the market as a force for constructing cities, but one in which the city, by means of its democratic representatives with a deep sense of collective complicity, acts as a counterweight, or better still, as a promoter.**

This is a way of constructing a city that is based on freedom, a **freedom understood as autonomy**. As the **capacity of the citizens to develop the life project they want**. A freedom that also lets them **participate actively in collective decisions**.

It is a way of making a city based on equality: **equality of rights and duties for everyone**, and the **guarantee that no citizen sees their vital opportunities limited to reasons beyond their own capacities**.

A means of creating a city in which **solidarity understood as caring about and paying attention to fellow citizens** is something fundamental which, moreover, humanizes the city.

Barcelona cannot be understood without the **involvement of the citizens in the common project.**

In fact, the major transformation that **the city has undergone in the last 30 years is the result of the sum of values shared by the city, the citizens and the City Council.**

This explains how **Barcelona has been constructed by means of the capacity for enthusiasm and innovation of people prepared to take risks, to create, to make sacrifices for the city.** The citizens have constructed Barcelona, in an organised way or not, that remain attentive to the changes and needs of our neighbourhoods. It has been constructed by the shops and commerce, many of them over one hundred years old. These are fundamental for the vitality of the urban fabric. And it has also been constructed by the companies and businesses that have known how to appreciate the great potential of our economy and have backed the city.

This by no means a trivial question. **The involvement of the citizenship in the construction of a city is essential to ensure social cohesion and a sense of belonging to a common project.**

To face these new challenges, **cities should be capable of involving citizens in the collective project, recovering the value of the common good, of shared commitment.**

This is how we have understood it in Barcelona. The involvement of social, private and civic stakeholders, in the transformation and improvement of the city has made these major achievements in our city possible. These have come with the support in some cases, and the leadership in others, of the City Council.

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Globalisation has placed cities at a historical crossroads in which they need to decide how to face new challenges.

The economic crisis is putting cities to the test. And the facts show that **the cities that progress are the ones sustained by certain collective values, and these then become a certain model.**

We therefore find ourselves facing new problems, new challenges that we have to turn into opportunities.

Within this context, **I believe that Barcelona represents a concept of city construction that can make very valid contributions to how we should face the next stage.**

I don't know what image you have of Barcelona. It is possible that it is the one that prevails of the Barcelona reborn after the Olympic Games. It is a magnificent image, a key moment that gave the city the international prestige that we still enjoy today. But that is a long time ago. The project of Barcelona didn't stop after

the Olympic Games, but has continued evolving. **And today's Barcelona is closer to that of 2020 than 1992.**

30 years ago our vision was fixed on **overcoming the obscurity of the Franco years and the inertia of the policies of economic development and modernisation of the city.** Subsequently we faced **the first major urban and infrastructural transformation based around the Olympics.** In the mid 1990s, we tackled the **change in the economic patterns of the city** with a future strategy based on the knowledge society. **Today, the aim is to give solidity, coherence and cohesion to the city.**

And we will do so, once again, by means of a new model for constructing the city. **A formula that hasn't become outdated because it adapts to change and as such responds to the needs and desires of citizens.**

Municipal leadership, the involvement of civil society and citizen participation. This is our formula, this is our model.

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For this reason, **faced with the economic crisis, the best response is to continue developing our city project.**

Because at times of difficulty, you can waste time or win a common cause like the one that the city of Barcelona represents. And this

means that **we won't put the brakes on any of the planned projects, or any of the actions we are committed to.**

In the strictly economic field, everything related to our economic development model, **we have spent years working on changing our growth model. This is somewhat more a complex, but at the same time also safer than the one carried out by other cities in Spain, which have sustained their major economic growth in recent years due to the boom in construction.**

It is an option which has made us grow more slowly than other Spanish cities but is now seen to be the right one. **A choice which, once again, has a lot to do with the values upon which cities are constructed.**

In Barcelona we haven't promoted just any old sort of economic growth, but we have worked on an economic growth linked to social cohesion.

It is important to take into account that **the risk of social division also exists in times of economic growth**, as can be seen in some cities. I won't give specific examples, we are all aware of them, but it is evident that certain models lead to growing social division. Models which are not the same as ours.

In its time, the phrase "it's the economy, stupid" became famous, and surely here lies the key to that period. Nowadays, despite the fact that

we find ourselves in a deep economic crisis, or precisely because of this, I would say **“It’s social cohesion, ladies and gentlemen”**. Or if you prefer, **“a city either it has cohesion, or it isn’t a city at all”**. The model, **“That is the question”**.

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Does this mean that economic strategies are ineffective? Not at all. And if I may, I would also suggest that Barcelona has something to contribute in this sense.

In Barcelona we are committed to **a model of growth with a relatively less weight given to construction sector and other sectors of low added value**. (Barcelona has a diversified productive structure in which construction only represents 6% of the employment of the city and only one economic sector contributes more than 20% of the GDP of the city).

Ours is a model that **places new cutting-edge sectors at the centre, those axes of the knowledge society, with innovation and creativity** as the fundamental characteristics of an economy that at the same time **brings the more traditional sectors up-to-date – these are the productive basis of our reality**. All in all, **a more stable model and one that is less subject to momentary changes**.

Barcelona wants to be, and above all has the capacity to be the central axis and motor of the Catalan and Spanish economy.

Having the capacity to drive the economy when faced with a crisis such as the one we are suffering at present, is no trivial matter, especially within the Catalan and Spanish context. **Not everyone can this, do we can.**

A clear proof of this is that, while in **Spain a large number of town and city councils have had to paralyse projects, and reduce public spending, Barcelona boasts very sound finances. One figure, for example: we have a debt of 471 Euros per inhabitant, compared with 2,032 Euros per inhabitant in Madrid.**

And it is this solvency that is allowing us to carry out the biggest investment in the history of the city: 1,028 million Euros (one thousand and twenty eight euros) this year.

Investments like, for **example**, we are carrying out in what we call the **“landing strip” of 22@** (‘Twenty two at’).

22@, situated in the old neighbourhood of Poblenou (the so-called Catalan Manchester) is an industrial area that we are turning into the technological district of the city. Here, we are promoting and attracting **new activities in strategic sectors**. We are transforming a traditionally industrial area, that ran the risk of becoming impoverished and being marginalized, into one that will become a pole of economic growth in the 21st century.

It is a space which is receiving urban clusters in the fields of ICT, energy, media, medical technologies, design and fashion. An area where 1000 companies have set-up in recent years, creating 31,000 jobs. As well, a university campus and research centres are also setting up there. And all of this side-by-side with residential activity, with a specific weight being given to publicly promoted housing.

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It is a question, once again, of tackling complexity. Because 22@ is also an example of the way of developing the city of Barcelona from an urban planning point of view.

It is a model of urban transformation based on a wider perspective of what needs revising and what we need to improve without losing our own identity.

A model that includes **quality of public space**, fundamental for social cohesion, with **ambitious projects that provide the city with personality** and strengthen the links of Barcelona with the **forefront of architecture and international design**.

It is an urban planning model based on constant improvement and rehabilitation. Because **Barcelona hasn't finished in urban planning terms**. In fact, it never will be because it will never stop adapting to new times, taking advantage of new opportunities. And that

is something, far from being negative, **shows the dynamism of the city, and keeps it from decadence.**

A clear example of what I am trying to explain to you, is the fact that **the amount of physical and urban transformation of all projects underway in Barcelona at the moment is higher than that which took place during the transformation of the city due to the Olympic Games of 1992.**

We are transforming the city to make it grow, to improve it, to make it known to the world, and to adapt it to new times. But above all, **we are transforming the city to improve the quality of life of citizens. Urban quality is the right of all citizens,** and if we want a citizenship linked to the city, we have to ensure quality public space.

Our commitment to quality public space also has a smaller scale: the neighbourhoods.

From our point of view, looking after the quality of the public space means above all, **working for a city beyond its historical centre, attending to, and taking care of each and every one of its neighbourhoods.**

This doesn't mean that we don't believe in the centre. Quite the opposite. **We strongly believe in the centre, and we believe in it so much that we are creating many centres.** But we don't only believe in the big centre.

For this reason, an important part of the urban transformation of the city is aimed at achieving 73 centres. **This means generating spaces in each neighbourhood in which people meet up, relate and interact.**

We are working on making Barcelona **a pluri-nuclear city**, a city established in new and diverse centralities that at the same time generate new pride.

The urban transformation and improvement of cities is a fundamental element for “creating citizenship”, to foster a sense of belonging to a common city project based on values and principles shared by all.

The public space, the squares and streets of the city must be lived on a day-to-day basis by citizens. Citizens who make the public space theirs, turning it into **a space for relation and co-existence, or put another way, a school of citizenship.**

This determination is related to the **concept of the dense city, of the Mediterranean city that Barcelona represents.** A city where **residential uses, productive uses, and services and leisure, all live side by side.**

The fact of not having certain areas disconnected from the centre is neither evident in Europe or other parts of the world. It is a

commitment that apart from fostering social and territorial cohesion, is also very important to ensure the safety of the city.

This is not a minor question. What for other cities is seen as normal, the fact that after a certain time of day it is not advisable to walk in certain areas, in Barcelona, this is unthinkable.

Given the choice between the trends of society towards complexity, and the tendency of the market towards specialisation, in Barcelona we clearly opt for complexity. We are not going to specialise either territorially, functionally or socially. And we are not going to do so **because it is in complexity and its mix that you can find the key to urban vitality, and to a great extent to the social and territorial cohesion of the city.**

Based on this concept we also carry out major urban transformation projects that, as well as their positive impact on the economy of the city, will change and improve the appearance of large areas.

The urban planning of Barcelona is a **combination of proximity and ambition, between the day-to-day life of the neighbourhoods and the major projects – it is a reflection of the essence of the city project that we are carrying out.**

What I mean here is that, most probably, **one of the achievements of Barcelona is that it has managed to become a big city of small**

things without renouncing the major projects typical of a major city.

A complex equation, but one that has made Barcelona the city it is. Because **Barcelona is both a major city of international prestige and the Barcelona of the neighbourhoods.**

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The first of the factors of this equation is, without doubt, **proximity, dialogue and the actively listening to citizens.** This implies the development of our city project based on **direct knowledge of the reality of each of our neighbourhoods.**

From our point of view, **ensuring opportunities for everyone is only possible by being present in each of the neighbourhoods of the city, guaranteeing public facilities and services of quality in each neighbourhood.**

Facilities that are major achievements and important improvements in the daily life of citizens. And although social cohesion cannot be constructed with only these, it can however be constructed thanks to them. For this reason we are making the maximum effort to improve the quality of public services and the facilities in each neighbourhood. Because they don't only generate social cohesion but also cohesion of the neighbourhood and a sense of belonging.

Proximity also means **counting on valid interlocutors in each neighbourhood thus allowing an adequate response both in terms of time and the place where things happen.**

For a city it is extremely important to have people, either individually or participating in associations, that worry about their city, working to keep the network of associations in good condition: demanding, supporting, warning and following thoroughly each of the decisions and actions carried out by the Government of the city.

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So, does this mean reducing the city to a small scale? Evidently, no. **Some people have wanted to interpret this, working from neighbourhood to neighbourhood, to mean a lack of ambition. It couldn't be further from the truth. I can assure you that being committed to proximity, and cohesion, constitutes a process of maximum ambition.**

And of maximum importance, because it is at this level (on the stairs of your building, at school, at the doctor's surgery or in the square) where a country starts to win or lose its future. And we want to win.

In the same way we want to win the battle of size. **Because in times of globalization, it is as important to guarantee cohesion as it is to achieve a specific weight, or size, so as to get noticed.**

And in this sense, two aspects take on special relevance in the present and immediate future of Barcelona and its projection: **the metropolitan government and the capital of the Mediterranean.**

Twenty years after dismantling it, Barcelona is on the verge of getting back its metropolitan government. Giving institutional and political capacity to Barcelona and its metropolitan area is **absolutely essential if we wish to play an outstanding role in the league of the main European and world cities.**

I believe that **you will really understand this very well, from your own experience, and the significance and degree of relevance of what I am explaining here.** You know very well what it means to lose a metropolitan authority; and you will be aware of the inefficiencies and difficulties caused by a lack of metropolitan government. Although fortunately, you were able to get yours back some years ago!

Nevertheless, I would insist that **in a globalised world, in which the frontiers are blurred, it becomes more and more essential and something which cannot be put off further, to provide government instruments and coordination to a Metropolitan Area that constitutes the sixth largest urban conglomeration in Europe, the fifth largest**

industrial concentration, and in which 4 million people live and work.

The total sum and coordination are a fundamental strategy for positioning the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona at an international level in those fields which are really key and can mark the difference. **Those fields that can help to turn us into an international reference in innovation, creativity and entrepreneurial capacity.**

It is time to go from a collaboration of metropolitan municipalities based on volunteerism, to a coordination based on the common interest, and common policies and projects.

The Government of the Generalitat de Catalunya has also understood it this way, and has set in motion the process for elaborating the new Metropolitan law.

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The other major achievement that strengthens the presence and weight of Barcelona internationally is **the decision to make the city the headquarters of the Permanent Secretariat of the Mediterranean Union.**

This is the most relevant event, after the Olympic Games, to have happened in Barcelona in the last 30 years, in terms of international projection.

Now Barcelona is officially the capital of the Mediterranean. **“De facto” it has historically always been so, and the fact that the city hosts the headquarters of the Mediterranean Union is above all recognition of the task and work carried out over many years by the city in this area.**

Being the Euro-Mediterranean capital will imply a greater and more qualified presence of institutions, entities and corporations in Barcelona; as well as increasing our relations at all levels. **We will not limit ourselves to simply playing the role of hosts. Our aim is that society as a whole plays an active role in the construction of the Euro-Mediterranean area.** We will promote the tightest possible coordination among all the organisms working in the region. We will draw together contributions from the cooperation, business, economic, trade union, cultural and university entities, etc. .

In comparative terms, Barcelona will be the “Brussels of the Mediterranean”.

The role we should play is by no means a minor one. **The Mediterranean is one of the key areas for world governance and Barcelona will contribute its experience and international prestige, as well as its historical Mediterranean vocation.**

In this way, Barcelona is **strengthening its commitment to the construction of Europe, while at the same time taking an active**

part in one of the most relevant, complex and necessary regional and global policies.

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I am coming to a close. I believe that **in Barcelona we have managed to carry out a unique city project: a city capable of combining growth, urban transformation and social cohesion in a diverse, yet common and shared territory.**

I really think that it can become a **certain benchmark in a much needed debate that, from the global point of view, we must have, because there are some things we must change.**

This is something the economic crisis makes very clear.

It is a way of making a city which will make **Barcelona a city of knowledge par excellence.** Because if traditionally we have been the factory of Spain, now, fully immersed in the knowledge society, **we will continue to be the economic motor of Spain by means of innovation and creativity.**

A way of making a city **that isn't only committed to just any economic growth but believes in a growth that provides projection and competitiveness to the city, while at the same time generating opportunities for everyone.**

It is a way of making a city that will continue carrying out **an ambitious urban transformation, but that also takes into account the people who live in the city every day.** This is based on quality urban planning and architecture, the commitment to public space, the mix of uses, the maintenance of a compact fabric, and a scale of city that makes it more human.

It is a way of making a city that has pushed us **to being very attentive to people as a priority of our actions.** One that was already a priority when we were growing at 3%, and that in difficult economic moments like now, it is one that will still require an even greater effort.

It is a way of making a city that is, above all, at the root of what its citizens are, and that believes and looks for the complicity of citizens, who are the true protagonists.

Barcelona has always stood out because of **its modernity and capacity to lead and anticipate major social, political and economic changes that have subsequently spread to the rest of Spain.** In the years to come, we will again take on this role.

We will overcome the current economic difficulties, and we will face the new challenges of today's world. Therefore, faced with the crisis, Barcelona will be more Barcelona than ever. And looking to the future, more than ever we will make strategic decisions based on the values that our city expresses now, that it has expressed in the past, and that it will always express.

