

Enthusiasm and capacity to achieve his goals. Just a few words are enough to describe Massimo Zedda who, more than a year after his election as Mayor of Cagliari, has already produced a major turning point in the management of the City. A groundbreaking figure since the primary elections, when he defeated Senator Antonello Cabras, the Pd candidate, by twelve points. He was called the "Renzi" of Cagliari, but there is nothing more incorrect than this. Zedda did not show up in TV programmes, he did not enjoy the support of a big party apparatus. But all this belongs to the past. Today he tells us about his meticulous work to reduce wasteful public spending in what he describes as the *complex machine of the Public Administration*: an austerity programme that, as he is proud to stress, didn't affect the quality of services

provided to citizens. He disagrees with the conventional opinion that describes the good city Administrator as a good family man: the latter may sometimes afford a touch of insanity, while the management of public finances does not admit the slightest derogation, especially in times of crisis. He describes the economic crisis as an almost endemic condition of his land, Sardinia, which amplifies the effects of the global turbulence. But you will not find an even veiled whining in Zedda. His words reveal the profound knowledge he has of his land, of the tangible perspectives of the action of a Mayor, without illusions nor make-believes. His analysis goes beyond local or regional boundaries, and includes critic remarks on the action of the Government, to which he sends practical and under set suggestions (the passage on increasing public spending to

meet growing needs is emblematic). Another unexpected position is that about generational turnover in politics. Zedda argues that this problem is even more evident in the world of professions than in politics. And once again he makes a surprising statement: in a moment when the citizens' discontent with politics has reached unseen levels, he says, almost *naively*, that *participation in politics and democracy are the only tools in the hands of young people to change their destiny*. We share this hope, as does the group of citizens who hanged up a huge sign with the plea, previously addressed to the Virgin of Bonaria: "Mayor Zedda, free us from concrete on the Bonaria Hill". Just a miracle or a tangible possibility?

Mariella Palazzolo

Telos is a member of the FIPRA network

ZEDDA

MAYOR, CAN YOU ALSO PERFORM MIRACLES?

“Over the last years, the expenditures of the State and the Regions have increased, while those of the local Administrations have dropped. So why relating to Mayors as simple tax collectors? Viable solutions are at hand. In the short term it is essential that the whole revenue of the local property tax is left in the hands of Local Authorities.”

Telos: One year has passed since your election as Mayor and even your more stubborn political opponent has to admit that your spending review has been incisive. What was it all about?

Massimo Zedda: The reduction of wasteful spending in a complex machine such a Public Administration is a continuously evolving work. Above all, a necessary one. I was often asked whether in managing a city one should behave as a good family man. It's a good term of comparison in some ways, but up to a certain point: the family man, saving money on this or that, in some cases may afford some whims. But this doesn't work for a Mayor: each euro saved must be reinvested in profitable projects for the City. We started from the analysis of the City budget and of the public services funded through local resources, and we tried to distinguish the spending programmes that are essential from those that are superfluous. We introduced spending assessment criteria that enabled us to eliminate unessential expenses without reducing the budget for vital social services. We cut spending for hiring external consultants, reduced the number of dedicated cars available to the Members of the City Council from 15 to 5 and we replaced them with a car-sharing system. We cut the budget for festivals and celebrations without affecting their cultural and religious value and we canceled leaseholds that the City paid to private individuals, despite having a unused large real estate patrimony. The result of all this is that, despite the €35 million reduction of the State funding, essential services were not affected.

Local Governments have been assigned a relevant part of the correction of public finances. In particular, the Government's decision to withhold 50% of the revenue of the local tax on non-primary residences and real estate properties belonging to businesses excited a lively reaction from Mayors. How does a City Administrator combine budget recovery, social equity and development?

The Government's choices in local taxes have been inadequate and short-sighted so far: its efforts should have focused on increasing taxes on those categories in the capacity to pay them, particularly on those who have never paid, instead of reducing the incomes of families and small and medium enterprises (SME). Following the Monti Austerity Package, Mayors faced a forced choices scenario. In any case, I hope the Government will change its course and allow Municipalities to take care of their citizens: this is aim of the confrontation in which the National Association of Italian



Massimo Zedda. 36 years old last January, from Cagliari, Zedda was elected Mayor of his hometown on 1 June 2011, with almost 60% of votes. He is the youngest Mayor of a Regional Capital. Following the footsteps of his father, who was an executive of the Italian Federation of Young Communists together with Fassino, he engaged in politics since high school, when he founded and took part in the activities of various cultural associations. Afterwards he became Secretary of the Left Youth. In 2006 he was elected city councilor with the political group "La Sinistra-Rossomori" and in 2009 he was elected to the Regional Council of Sardinia. He did not join the Democratic Party, choosing the more left-wing *Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà* Party (SEL) instead. He recalls that in 2007 many comrades invited him to join Pd Secretary Veltroni, whose political project he did not share. As a member of SEL, in January 2011 he ran as a candidate and won the primary elections of the Left-wing coalition in the Municipality of Cagliari. Some personal notes: he claims he likes *distinguishing between the authority conferred by a charge and the authority conferred by charisma*. He was about to quit smoking but started again. Once he used to swim up to 2 and half miles per day but not anymore. As the story goes he is a hearty eater and in fact he argues that *politics is a serious thing, but urchins...are part of the mankind's pleasures heritage*. And then *he has always loved rock, even the hardest one*.

Municipalities is engaged on every ongoing negotiation with the Government. Data are revealing: over the last years, the expenditures of the State and the Regions have increased, while those of the local Administrations have dropped. So why relating to Mayors as simple tax collectors? Viable solutions are at hand. In the short term it is essential that the whole revenue of the local property tax is left in the hands of Local Authorities, and that the spending cap mechanism imposed by the internal stability pact is softened, at least for investments: that would enable Mayors to reduce the local surtax on personal incomes and the local real estate tax, thus relieving the tax burden on households and enterprises, and to raise public spending to meet the citizens' growing needs.

The City noted that everyday 500 people ask for a meal at the Solidarity Centre. In real terms what was the impact of economic and financial crisis on the economic-entrepreneurial environment and social cohesion in Cagliari?

Cagliari is the capital of a Region where the economic crisis is endemic and this amplifies the impact of the international crisis. Many of those 500 people would have been regarded as *above suspicion* in normal periods: men and women who until recently were completely unknown to our social services.. It is clear that concrete measures are needed. Our decision not to cut the resources allocated to our welfare programmes and to focus our efforts on cutting wasteful spending with a view to even increasing welfare spending goes in the right direction. The crisis has led to an increase of the unemployment rate, mainly among the youngest and the over-50: this trend might even worsen, given the high number of SMEs which are facing the risk of closing down. We are trying to do our part, within the scope of our jurisdiction: our Administration pays its suppliers within reasonable periods, shorter than the national average, and we managed to allocate to investment projects nearly €100 million funding, granted by the national Government and the European Union, which we were facing the risk of losing due to the inactivity of the previous Administration. We are focusing our efforts on public transport and mobility: in a moment when the price of petrol approximates €2 per litre, enabling citizens to leave their private cars at home is a tangible help. Unfortunately Local Authorities can do little, especially after the severe cuts to the central Government's funding implementing a serious National economic recovery programme is the only way to improve the situation before it's too late.

At 36 years of age, a politician is typically regarded as mature... everywhere except in Italy. Is a generational turnover in the ruling class feasible? Can the rise of a new generation of politicians contribute to bring fresh air into the contents and methods of politics itself?

In Italy, generational turnover is a matter which affects the whole ruling class, not only the political one: in the Academia as well as in the business community, many people of my own generation are unable to find room to express their skills. This is in part the consequence of the Italian mindset of waiting for someone to leave his chair. When I think about my experience as a Mayor, which started with the primary elections of the left-wing coalition in Cagliari, I come to the conclusion that politics provides young leaders with more opportunities: not by chance, there are several young administrators who are doing well in various local environments. On the contrary, it gets more difficult to find a permanent job or to emerge as leaders in the professional world. And yet, politics is often held up as a negative example: a consequence of the success of the anti-political movement. I think that this way of thinking is wrong or at least oversimplifying: political participation and democracy are the only possible ways for young people to change their destiny, at all levels. Our country needs to overcome the generational issue that keeps millions of my peers deprived of the stability which is essential to enable them to live and realise their own potential. These issues will only be brought to the attention of the national political debate when the youth will commit to a first-person political participation.