

THE GLOCAL MAYOR

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Telos: Every time someone talks about the direct election of the Prime Minister, people use the very evocative expression “Mayor of Italy”. So is it true that a Mayor has, in the administration of his or her own city, more power than the Prime Minister has today?

Giuseppe Sala: That is not how I might pose this question. Both roles certainly entail taking on a lot of responsibility with respect to the city and the country. However, through the political-administrative leadership and by coordinating the efforts of the executive committee or of the Ministers, the Mayor and the Prime Minister perform their respective functions within a range of different competences. This is why talking about greater power for the Mayor compared to that of the Prime Minister seems like a bit of a stretch to me. If anything, we can say that Mayors have one specific characteristic: they liaise directly with their citizens. This truly is an advantage in defining and directing administrative action. The fact of being close to the city, present throughout the local area and sharing its problems allows the mayor to keep his or her finger on the pulse of citizens’ mood as well as on their needs and expectations. The Municipality is the first institution citizens turn to in order to resolve large and small everyday local issues that, along with all the realities in the country, define the overall national situation, which the Prime Minister is responsible for. This is why I believe that cities – especially those with a sound, unblemished international reputation like Milan, for instance – must play an increasingly more strategic role at the national and international level. Large metropolises have the gift of knowing how to relate at the global level, without losing sight of local needs.

The breakdown in the party system has likely been the source of people’s widespread anti-political sentiment. And yet this gap between citizens and politics is not nearly as wide when it comes to the Mayor. Are your citizens still passionate about politics?

Political disenchantment – starting with that of younger people – stems from the inability of politicians themselves to deal seriously and concretely with delicate, crosscutting issues that concern everyone. Environmental challenges, unemployment, social justice all come to mind, for example. It is up to us politicians to behave responsibly and in a way that is open to dialogue and constructive so that citizens can play a more active role in the choices that regard them. Unfortunately, the prevailing outdated, tedious attitude that is argumentative and disrespectful both among the parties in opposition to one another and within the parties themselves – today magnified by the social media – does not help bring people closer to the Institutions; it does not help generate interest in the decisions that regard each of our everyday lives. On the contrary, it exasperates people’s spirit and fuels tensions and social, political and economic instability. Quarrelling and rude behaviour between “allies”, the lack of a strategic vision and the ability to plan are what cause things to come unglued. Even in Milan people’s political passion is going through a difficult time. However, what I can say is that when opportunities are created for real, face-to-face discussion – from the presentation of redevelopment interventions neighbourhood by neighbourhood to meetings in the city outskirts, to breakfast gatherings in less conventional social areas – namely, when the institutions come out of the halls of power and go out to where the problems are without sticking their heads in the sand, then the people not only feel like they have been taken into consideration; they are present and take part. And in Milan this is also possible because the city can count on a strong network of organisations, brilliant expressions of civic mindedness.

You have just passed the halfway mark since you were elected in June 2016. So it is time to take stock of your initial results. What were the key points in your government programme and which of these did you manage to accomplish?

I am not the kind of person who takes stock at mid-term. And for as much as has been done over these three years, there is still plenty left to do. We have launched specific plans of action that are yielding significant results regarding dossiers that are strategic for the future of Milan. For example the “Piano Quartieri” [Plan for Neighbourhoods] consisting in projects involving all the city neighbourhoods and an overall investment of 1.6 billion euros. Moreover, we are moving ahead with a plan to restore vacant public housing: so far since May 2018 over 900 of 3,000 homes have been restored. We have been taking important steps forward in the area of the environment, starting by spreading solutions for sustainable mobility, from spreading car, bike and scooter sharing services to enlarging the underground system, creating the Area B (a limited traffic area covering most of Milan), to gradually replacing public buses with electric transport. And that is not all: I decided to group together the [executive committee] appointments regarding environmental transition and I am personally handling them, because the environmental question is largely political and requires effective answers. All of this, in addition to a cutting-edge, high-quality cultural and entertainment offering and an increasingly modern, contemporary skyline, helps reinforce Milan’s reputation, both on a national and international level.

The 2026 Winter Olympics, Milan’s candidacy to host the European Patent Office: basically, Milan is growing. And this is

without a doubt mainly because of your executive committee. People say this model could inspire a new idea of the centre-left, which moves beyond the Democratic Party (PD) to form a political subject that is ecologically minded, supportive and liberal. What do you think?

As I have explained on other occasions, I would like to see a more determined left. To the extent possible, I am trying to do my part in this. I think we need to concentrate on the issues citizens are most concerned about: the environment and social justice are priority matters that need to be dealt with seriously and pragmatically. All over the world, the progressive left has been discussing this. Now the PD still has room to grow, but not too much. And only a new political subject capable of providing real answers to people's questions, getting young people and others to vote, could make the country more competitive and allow it to overcome the stalemate and deadlock of the government of the League and the Five Star Movement. Can Milan be a model? Sure it can. Milan can be a guide because it is ready to try and get into the game, taking on the biggest challenges of the environment and rights as opportunities for cultural and social development. Milan is also a top-notch social and political laboratory. Just think of last 2 March when 200,000 people gathered in Piazza del Duomo to demonstrate against racism or other important things Milan has been recognised for and how it always ensures rights are safeguarded.

Marco Sonsini

Editorial

Did you know that, according to the annual report of Italy's national social security institute INPS, Milan is home to one out of every two of the country's Super Rich?

In particular, the capital of the Lombardy Region is home to 54% of the top 0.01% of the population – a very narrow swath that earns more than 533,000 euros a year – and 42% of the top 0.1%, earning over 217,000 euros a year. What is more, the Municipality of Milan can also be considered one of the Super Rich. According to a study by Area Studi Mediobanca, in the five-year period between 2013 and 2017 the city's public services made the Municipality of Milan the wealthiest shareholder in Italy. Its portfolio – which includes the Milan transport company ATM (bus, tram and underground), the Milan waste collection company AMSA plus its shares in the SEA Group (Linate and Malpensa Airports) and the Orio al Serio International Airport in Bergamo – is worth 1.5 billion euros in terms of net worth pro quota. Our August guest for PRIMOPIANOSCALA is the Mayor of this fortunate city: Beppe Sala. Sala is not your run-of-the-mill mayor: although this is his first experience in politics, he has not limited himself to just administrating; he has endowed his role with considerable political significance. After all, in our interview he indeed says: *'I believe that cities – especially those with a sound, unblemished international reputation like Milan, for instance – must play an increasingly more strategic role at the national and international level. Large metropolises have the gift of knowing how to relate at the global level, without losing sight of local needs.'* How else can cities play this role except through their Mayor? This is the path Sala has pursued, and he has continued to strengthen his international relationships by focussing on four key issues: the environment, immigration, climate and attracting capital.

As a result, the *Financial Times* has put him on par with other democratic and labour Mayors (Eric Garcetti, of Los Angeles, and Sadiq Khan, of London) who, in their own countries, have been leading the big cities' battle against their national governments, to rise, they too, sooner or later to national roles. The *FT* provides a detailed portrait of the role of big cities in an article that came out in early June, 'Why city mayors are stepping up to tackle global problems'. According to the *FT*, it is also indeed because of his leadership and drive that this northern metropolis is now generating 10% of Italian GDP *'at a striking pace'* compared to the Italian average. Many Italian political commentators think that this may be a prelude to Sala's entering the upcoming political elections as the national leader of the centre-left: a possibility Sala has never denied, but has never openly acknowledged either.

Yet this time Sala – after talking to us about his constant commitment to solving housing problems in Milan through, for instance, a programme to restore vacant public housing as well as his decision to advocate to himself all the executive committee appointments that regard the environment *'because the environmental question is largely political and requires effective answers'* – does not back down and tells us that he would like a more 'determined' left-wing. He reminds us that he is *'trying to do his part'* and openly states that the Democratic Party (PD) is not enough to re-enchant disenchanted party members and defeat the populists. Hence, a *'new political subject'* is needed: Sala very significantly told us that Milan can and must offer a model for this new political force. Obviously, he did not say who was going to lead this new political force, so it is up to us to read between the lines...

As you may remember, for our series on mayors we have been designing some rather unique covers that portray a distinguishing feature of the city but are more than just postcards. In many cases, we have associated a popular saying – in the local dialect, if possible – with the image. For Milan we have chosen its historic yellow streetcar: the *Ventotto*, which roamed the streets of Milan in the Thirties and has now become an icon of the city of San Francisco.

ATM decided to donate ten streetcars that were not in operation to the San Francisco Market Street Railway. Here the old *Ventottos* still run like ordinary streetcars. And what could top off this interview better than the saying *'In Milan even the mulberry trees produce grapes'*. Because Milan is a city that can render anything productive, thanks to the hard work and skills of the people of Milan.

Mariella Palazzolo

Giuseppe Sala has been the Mayor of Milan since June 2016. After winning, in February of the same year, the primaries called by the centre-left coalition to choose who would run to succeed the outgoing Mayor Giuliano Pisapia, he conquered Palazzo Marino (this is the name of the Palace where the City Hall is located) in the run-off, defeating the centre-right candidate Stefano Parisi with 52% of the votes. The electoral campaign for the Municipality of Milan represents the first political experience for Giuseppe Sala. His professional career had led him over time to assume positions of responsibility both in the private sector and in the public administration.



From 1994 to 2001, he was first Director of management control and strategic planning, then CEO and Senior Vice President of Pirelli Tyre. In 2002, he moved to the telecommunications sector and took over the role of CFO (Chief Financial Officer) of TIM, where he remained until 2006. After working as a consultant for Nomura Bank, in 2009 Sala was appointed General Director of the City of Milan by the then centre-right Mayor Letizia Moratti. He maintained this role until 2010, when he became CEO of Expo 2015 SpA, the Italian company in charge of managing the Universal Exposition in Milan. In May 2013, he was appointed Chief Executive Officer of the Italian Government for Expo Milano 2015. The success of the organisation of the event would be a major asset at the time of his candidacy as Mayor of the city.

Beppe Sala was born in Milan in 1958, and graduated in Business Administration from Bocconi University.

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