

THE HIGH-QUALITY LIVING MAYOR

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Telos: In Italy the Prime Minister is indicated by the Parliament. However, every time there are talks about changing the Constitution and go for a direct popular election, people use the expression 'The Mayor of Italy'. This seems to imply that Mayors have more power to impact on their citizens' everyday life even than the Head of the Government. Does this apply also to Sweden?

Anna König Jerlmyr: As Mayor of Stockholm I have the overall responsibility to ensure that all functions of the municipality of Stockholm live up to its duties. The municipality is responsible of many different areas of everyday life, for example schools, elder care, maintenance of parks and streets and many other things. There is, in Sweden, a principle of municipal self-government where many functions are decentralised and where municipalities have extensive leeway to decide many of these issues. In Sweden we believe in the principle of subsidiarity where decisions should be made as close as possible to those whom the decisions affect. The most important and rewarding part of my job as Mayor is the possibility to improve the living conditions of our citizens in a really meaningful way. To provide our children and elderly with the quality education and care they deserve, to actively contribute to a more inclusive society with equal opportunities for all and to ensure that our citizens can feel safe and secure in public spaces. That is why I got into local politics, and why I find this job so rewarding. Does the Prime Minister of Sweden have the same impact? I can't tell!

The crisis of the political parties is probably the origin of the globally spread anti-political sentiment. However, this theory seems to be less true in the relationship between citizens and Mayors. Do you agree?

As Mayor, the day-to-day dealings of my office allows me to keep a close relationship with voters and citizens. For any elected official it is important to maintain trust and confidence in the public eye. Throughout this year I have been meeting businesses and citizens from all parts of Stockholm to listen to their concerns, suggestions and hopes. Together we will build a city for the future. Moreover, as I've already many times, with far-right, anti-immigration, nation-first and populist parties making advances across Europe and now in government in Austria, Norway and Finland, may spur anti-political sentiment also in our Country, but at a national level. This is not the case of the City of Stockholm where we work to make it easier for all our citizens to take an active part in public life.

15 October 2018 was your first day at work as Mayor of Stockholm. When you decided to run for this post you surely had your vision for the city's future. A year went by since then, too little time to take stock, enough to understand what can realistically be achieved. Do vision and realism match? If so, where?

Together with our coalition partners we have achieved much the last year and yet there is still more to be done. During our first year we lowered taxes, invested in safety measures and ensuring that our city is as clean as can be. Our upcoming challenges lie in ensuring that we build new housing, keep unemployment low and make Stockholm an attractive city to invest in again as well as doing our part in the fight against climate change. Many European cities have adopted much more ambitious climate targets than their national governments - and we are ready to work with all levels of government to ensure a climate neutral Europe by 2050. To steer innovation towards practices that drive real societal change, cities need to be key players in the partnerships that are created to do this. As I said in the event 'Stockholm and the Battle for Global Talent' we are currently working on attracting international universities to Stockholm, like Harvard or MIT. For that matter, we want to start a marketing programme - many international cities have one and that would be really helpful. It is about creating high quality living in Stockholm. All this seems quite realistic to me.

When in Italy we talk about ideal societies, about impeccable public administration, about integration, among the examples to refer to, Northern Europe is always on top of the list, and in particular Stockholm. Why should Stockholm be taken as a model?

Stockholm is a modern city and is one of the fastest growing cities in Europe, with a large and dynamic economy. Quality of life in Stockholm is high with good healthcare, education and efficient bureaucracy. Integration is a priority for the municipality and its therefore important that public and private sector come together to create new jobs. Learning the Swedish language is key to integration and becoming a part of Swedish society. However Stockholm is about so much more than just one place. It is about a way of life. Our city consistently ranks as one of the most innovative in Europe, and I think that you can see and feel that everywhere you go. From the lasting stamp that music and design have left on our city to the imagination of authors like Astrid Lindgren and Stieg Larsson, the openness of our citizens and their willingness to look forward and try new things.

It isn't easy to understand what happened in Sweden after the September 2018 elections. What we really need to do is take a closer – albeit brief - look. On the same day, both the national and local elections were held. This marked a turning point for Sweden - a model country in terms of welfare and competitiveness - that saw an increase in local sovereignists. For example, the new anti-migrant right - Sverige Demokraterna (SD) headed by its young leader Jimmie Akesson, who has turned into a xenophobe in a double-breasted suit - obtained almost 18% of the votes in Parliament. This vote just goes to show how difficult it would have been for anyone to govern without taking into account the SD's proposals: mass refusals, closed borders and letting the people decide on future relations with the European Union. What's going on in Stockholm? In the city of the Mayor we've interviewed this month, the incumbent centre-left coalition - made up of Social Democrats, the left-wing party, the Greens and Feminist Initiative - although still the largest bloc, has lost the majority.

Anna König Jerlmyr – leader, in the city, of the Moderates, a party founded in 1904 by a group of conservative Swedish MPs and that in 1970 abandoned the positions of the nationalist right and more recently came to adopt the stances of liberal conservatism - has managed to very quickly form the city government, bringing the local Greens party over to her side.

Let's take another little step back: in 2004 in Sweden the Alliance for Sweden was established, bringing together the four non-Socialist parties (the Moderates, the Liberals, the Centre Party and the Christian Democrats). In 1979, the *Moderaterna* (as the Moderate Party is often called) became the largest party in the coalition and in 1986 its new leader, Carl Bildt, was elected, leading the party to victory in 1991. Bildt became Prime Minister in 1994. It was indeed this coalition that obtained, in 2018, the quasi-majority in the Stockholm City Council; and the Alliance surpassed, at the national level, albeit by a hair, the outgoing Social Democrat-Greens coalition. And yet while in the city the clever Anna König Jerlmyr has managed to immediately form a government and get elected mayor of the City Council, at the national level the inconceivable has happened. For the first time in history, newly appointed Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson, the 54-year-old leader of the same Moderate Party as König, did not win the confidence vote in the Swedish Parliament. What happened? The Alliance split when the news came out that Kristersson had sought the outside support of the Sweden Democrats. At that point, both the Centre and the Liberals withdrew their support and Kristersson ended up with just the votes - which were insufficient – of his party, the Christian Democrats and the Sweden Democrats. A good 4 months after the vote, in January 2019, a national government was formed, with a majority bringing together some of the parties of the two traditional blocs into a large, entirely new coalition with the Social Democrats, the Greens, the Centre Party and the Liberals. So, of the two spokespeople of the Moderates, who is the best politician? We gave this long-drawn-out introduction just to show you who Anna König Jerlmyr is. In her year of government, our Mayor for November has already achieved significant results: she lowered taxes, invested in security measures and guaranteed that the city was as clean as possible. Everything the Italians dream of happening in their own cities. Sure, things were already pretty good in Stockholm. For example, just a few days ago the city was ranked third worldwide in terms of air quality, just after Brisbane and Salvador. This certainly isn't something that can be accomplished in just a few months. However, at the same time, we can't forget the enormous social problems that Sweden has had to deal with in recent years and that have deeply affected the capital. In Europe, Sweden hosts the greatest number of refugees with respect to its population. According to UNHCR data, in 2016, at the height of the Syrian refugee crisis, Sweden peaked at 23.4 refugees for every 1000 inhabitants. In 2015 more than 160,000 requests for asylum were registered. Historically, Sweden has always promoted policies of openness to encourage the process of integrating resident foreigners through employment.

However, starting from the 2000s, these policies have proven to be not enough to ward off phenomena that are typical of other European cities: like ghettos populated almost exclusively by foreigners, where unemployment and petty crime rates are on the rise. In May 2013 popular revolts erupted in the Stockholm suburbs, where for 5 nights in a row the local population rose up and engaged in violent clashes with the police. According to one BBC headline: the revolts in Stockholm shine the spotlight on inequality in Sweden. All this tension culminated on 7 April 2017, when on the pedestrian walkway in Drottninggatan, right in the centre, a truck barrelled through a crowd, killing 5 people. The attack in Stockholm was perpetrated by an Uzbek man whose request for asylum had been denied and who declared he had acted in the name of ISIS. The new Swedish government immediately adopted a more rigid stance on immigration. For instance, according to the government programme, a mandatory Swedish language exam will be introduced as a prerequisite for citizenship. And in our interview, König herself defines knowledge of the Swedish language as essential to integration. Stockholm is and will always be an 'open and inclusive' city, according to the Mayor: a city that takes people in and welcomes everyone. A city where one thing is for sure: local politics works *'so that all citizens actively participate in public life.'* Regardless of violence and extremisms. The symbol we have chosen for our cover is the red horse of Dalahästar. Stockholm has many symbols, from the elk to the horns of the Vikings. The Dala horse, this is its name in English, has ancient origins. According to some, it is inspired by Sleipnir, the horse of Odin, but unlike Sleipnir it does not have eight legs. Another apocryphal legend says that it became a national toy in 1716 when soldiers loyal to King Charles XII, headquartered in the Dalarna region began to carve the toys as a gift for their guests. Yet the first references to the sale of wooden horses date back almost 400 years, more precisely to 1623, when, it is said that the craftsmen, given the icy cold that strikes Sweden in winter, in front of their fireplaces, with a knife, carved the resulting wood of the pendulum clocks, to make toys for their children. Today's Dala horse is still a handmade object, made of pine wood. At least nine different people contribute their skills to the creation of each horse. The horse is accompanied by an ABBA verse, their song 'I am the city', *'I am the city. The famous hotels and the cocktail bars and the funny smells and the turmoil the cars and the people, the parks and the squares that you see all the sounds that you hear and the air that you're breathing is me'*. No doubt they were talking about Stockholm.

Mariella Palazzolo

Anna König Jerlmyr was elected Mayor of Stockholm in September 2018. With grit and determination, Anna leads a green-blue political coalition. "We have chosen to enter into a green-blue cooperation" commented while presenting the new administration and added that decision was taken after "productive and intensive negotiations with the goal of finding a stable



and long-term majority." In fact, when the Green Party agreed to work with the centre-right Alliance parties in Stockholm's City Council, a power shift in the Swedish capital took place. Focusing on innovation and sustainability Anna is futureproofing the city, creating opportunities for growth and quality of life for its citizens. She is currently the President of EUROCITIES as well as C40 Vice Chair representing Innovator Cities in the C40 Steering Committee. Previously she was Member of the Swedish Riksdag from 2006 until 2010, then entering the Stockholm City Council in 2010. She served as Vice Mayor for Social Affairs and Chair of Stockholm's Police Authority until 2014. From 2014 until 2018 she acted as Opposition Vice Mayor, representing the Moderate Party - Moderata samlingspartiet, literally "Moderate Coalition Party" or "*Moderate Unity Party*" is a liberal-conservative part. She was born in Uppsala in 1978, and has a background in economics and communications.

Marco Sonsini

Telos Analisi & Strategie srl

telos@telosaes.it - @Telosaes - VAT IT11825701003 - REA Roma 1330388