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"If Mayors Ruled The World: Dysfunctional Nations, Rising Cities", Benjamin R. Barber, Warszawa 2014 : [recenzja]

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REVIEWS

Benjamin R. Barber, *If Mayors Ruled The World: Dysfunctional Nations, Rising Cities*, Warszawskie Wydawnictwo Literackie Muza SA, Warszawa 2014, pp. 480.

Reviewer: Piotr Pięta (Nicolaus Copernicus University, Toruń, Poland)

Benjamin R. Barber is an American political philosopher and theorist. Moreover, he is also known as a former political advisor of such politicians as Bill Clinton and Howard Dean. He is also an author of a very popular and substantial book entitled *Jihad vs. McWorld*. In his last book *If Mayors Ruled The World: Dysfunctional Nations, Rising Cities* he makes an interesting diagnosis of the condition of nation-states in the current century. Global issues remain unsolved for example terrorism, poverty, climate change, trafficking of drugs, guns, and people. International organizations and its states are ineffective and dysfunctional in the face of these challenges. In the reviewed book B. Barber convinces that the best solution of this situations are cities and their pragmatic and creative mayors. State representatives take part in ideological debates which are unsatisfactory. At the same time mayors repair roads, build parks and squares, take care of environment and exchange experiences during the international meetings.

The reviewed book has a specific construction. The book is divided in two parts and every chapter is preceded by a short summary about the selected mayors from different parts of the world such as Boris Johnson (Mayor of London, 2008-2016), Michael Bloomberg (Mayor of New York, 2002-2013) or Ayodele Adewale (Mayor of Lagos). The main point of the political concept which is presented in the book is to create a global parliament of mayors. In fact a lot of organizations and structures exist and they are useful in exchange of best practices between cities for example C40 Cities, City Protocol Society and Cities for Mobility. However, B. Barber claims that the cities should

formalize these relations. This postulate seems to be unclear, because in the 8th chapter the author describes that formalization may be destructive for free and voluntary form of cooperation (p. 271). Generally, the cooperation between the cities, which is strongly stressed by the author in some cases is possible. For example, the so called twin town or sister cities usually have only formal aspects. However, it is rather an exception. B. Barber clearly describes in his detailed analysis of international cooperation of cities that in many cases it is a very effective partnership. Global parliament of mayors - the main idea of the reviewed book - consists of many interesting and debatable points. Moreover, some issues which are omitted may also inspire the discussion. For example, the role of the villages is marginalized in this book. The author only informs that the village should be included into metropolitan regions (p. 396).

The author prefers cities because he claims that they solve a lot of important problems much better and they also implement practical solution in different areas. The cities are also more effective in some areas, where states lose. B. Barber convinces that the state is an archaic organization which cannot be productive - first of all, because of sovereignty. Generally, B. Barber is right, if we take into account that in the course of many meetings states cannot come to an agreement and their results are often unsatisfactory. But, on the other hand, we should remember that the state is *de facto* complementary to cities in many aspects. For example, states are responsible for such areas as jurisdiction, legislation or army. States are also responsible for many agreements, which create conditions for international cooperation between the cities. Moreover in fact the city has the same problematic issues as the state for example poverty, unemployment and social inequalities. The author also suggests that cities achieve assumptions of democracy much better than states. One of the most popular and successful achievement in this area is, without a doubt, participatory budgeting (p. 387). However, it should be also noted that typical problem for many local democracies, which is still unsolved, is low turnout in local elections. Moreover, B. Barber in his general description of the potential of cities overvalues their capacity to make the law. He claims that the cities have possibilities to decide in such areas as public health, immigration issues or access to weapon (p. 22). In a certain sense the author is right, because cities in the United States usually have possibilities to make the law in these matters. It depends on legislation in each country and most cities rather have no possibilities to control these issues.

Barber in his concept also proposes particular rules which should be the basis of global parliament of mayors. According to his idea, listening should be more important than speaking and injunctions should be replaced by voluntary taking selective solutions which are suitable for each city (p. 391). However, avoiding some situations might be very difficult. First of all, it is hard to believe

that the mayors will be ready to resign from their particular interests and none of them will have aspirations to be the a leader of the parliament. B. Barber also claims that a strong feature of mayors is the fact that they don't attach importance to sovereignty and national identity. However, it is not so obvious if in the real global parliament of mayors, they would behave in the same way. The process of removing the national identity will be very long or just impossible to realize. Probably the societies will react very quickly, because it is a very bold and contradictory idea to conventional beliefs and rules.

The reviewed book has many interesting threads which inspire a discussion. Presented diagnosis of current effectiveness of states at the international level is very convincing and accurate, if we take into account a lot of issues which remain unsolved for many years. Some of these matters were mentioned by the author, for example: terrorism, poverty, climate change, trafficking of drugs, guns, and people. Moreover, in the last years we could observe some new issues especially in Europe, such as the migrant crisis and the financial crisis. At the same time various types of international entities of cities try to take care of these matters. Despite that some facts in the reviewed book are interpreted too general, the main concept is interesting. Important value of the reviewed book is the fact that its contents certainly initiate many discussions, especially about the current condition of the nation states and a rising role of the cities.