

Libertarian Municipalism, or on the Greatness of the Civil Society

Municipalismo libertario, o sobre la grandeza de la sociedad civil

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Abstract

The paper is an attempt to critically read and interpret political thought of the creator of libertarian municipalism. At the same time it is a research study on a variant of contemporary socialistic libertarianism. Besides the paper shows that there is a type of socialism today that doesn't run away from realistic world, doesn't hide in the sphere of abstractive advisements and doesn't bind common good-being with the existence of the state. Murray Bookchin is one of those seldom thinkers who not only proclaim normative applause to the civil society but also make a true contribution to the analysis of its institutional sphere, people's motivation regarding associational freedom and requirements of system's change. Bookchin simply shows the idea of citizenship in an attractive way.

Keywords: Libertarian municipalism of Murray Bookchin, left-libertarianism, libertarian socialism, social ecology.

Resumen

Este artículo pretende realizar una lectura e interpretación críticas del pensamiento político del creador del municipalismo libertario. Al mismo tiempo, es una investigación sobre una variante del libertarismo socialista contemporáneo. El artículo muestra, además, la existencia a día de hoy de un socialismo que no huye del mundo real, que no se esconde en la esfera de la indicación abstracta y que no vincula el bien común con la existencia del Estado. Murray Bookchin es uno de esos raros pensadores que no sólo alaba formalmente la sociedad civil, sino que hace una auténtica

contribución al análisis de su esfera institucional, de las motivaciones de la gente en lo que respecta a la libertad de asociación y de los requisitos para un cambio del sistema. Bookchin sencillamente expone la idea de ciudadanía de una manera atractiva.

Palabras clave: Municipalismo libertario de Murray Bookchin, libertarismo de izquierdas, socialismo libertario, ecología social.

Anyone who tries to characterize libertarianism reliably, faces a troublesome question: is there libertarianism or libertarianisms? Firstly, when mentioning famous libertarians, it is not easy to find anything they have in common. Secondly, “libertarianism” is a word of praise, condemnation and a term of self-identification at the same time. Contrary to popular belief, libertarianism is not only the name of the extreme pro-ownership and pro-free-market theories which were developed by American thinkers in the second half of the 20th century. The earliest recorded evidence of the use of a term “libertarianism” is 226 years old (first appeared in 1789), and the history of using it in ethical and social sense - is 158 years old (started appearing in 1857). In a given meaning of the term “libertarianism” and its derivatives like to identify a number of social movements and doctrines recognizing the highest value of freedom (whether personal, social or political), among others anarcho-communists, ikarians, anarcho-individuals, mutualists, anarcho-syndicalists, anarcho-ecologists, anarcho-educators, anarchist theorists of free love, anarcho-feminists, neoliberals, social liberals, anarcho-capitalists, minarchists, socialists, Marxists and feminists. Generally, libertarianism background is the history of opposition to various forms of authoritarianism, tyranny, despotism, violence or hierarchy. In terms of the economy libertarianisms can be divided into the following types: socialist and capitalist (ownership). Without going into details it can be said that the first ones affirm freedom, self-governance and equality (not only in freedom, but also in material means of its implementation), the second ones are in favor of freedom, self-government and private property. Socialist libertarianisms emerged as the first and they formed much longer and probably more diverse tradition than capitalist libertarianisms.¹

In this article the idea of a libertarian municipalism will be examined in the form in which it was expressed by Murray Bookchin. The stated hypothesis is as follows: M. Bookchin in libertarian municipalism has to say about very important issues that are needful in contemporary public debate about local government, also Polish one. The concept of “civil society”, which is used in the title of the article, is related to the social field which is the antonym of a state, independent of the central government social self-organization formed with a multiplicity of voluntary associations (eco-

¹ See D. Sepczyńska, *Libertarianizm. Mało znane dzieje pojęcia zakończone próbą definicji* [Libertarianism. Little known history of the notion finalised with defining attempt], Olsztyn, IF UWM in Olsztyn (Institute of Philosophy at University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn) 2013.

conomic, religious, cultural, educational, charitable, territorial and others) expressing the interests and meeting the private and public needs, debating among themselves about public affairs.²

Bookchin (1921-2006) was an American activist and philosopher, primarily interested in ecology, freedom and social justice. He was born in family of Russian immigrants and communists. It is not surprising, then, that as a young man he was a Marxist. In the '60s of the 20th century he discovered authoritarianism and its obsolescence, he converted to social eco-anarchism. In the '80s he created the concept of libertarian municipalism, with which he identified himself until his death, even after deserting anarchism (1999). He always remained anti-capitalist. He is thought as one of the most important figure in the anti-globalization and the Green movement, and the main theorist of social ecology. He was an animator of the Institute for Social Ecology in Plainfield.³

According to Bookchin libertarian municipalism is one of the modern varieties of libertarian socialism, anti-authoritarian and anti-centralistic left, which determinants are four points:

- support for decentralized confederation of municipalities;
- opposition to statism;
- belief in direct democracy;

² Authors who wrote about understanding of civil society are e.g.: S. Chambers, W. Kymlicka (eds.), *Alternative Conceptions of Civil Society*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2000; J. Cohen, A. Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 1992; V. Pérez-Díaz, *The Return of Civil Society: The Emergence of Democratic Spain*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1993, pp. 1-54; K. Michalski (ed.), *Europa und die Civil Society*, Stuttgart, Klett-Cotta, 1991; D. Sepczyńska, *Spoleczeństwo obywatelskie [The Civil Society]*, in: S. Opara, D. Radziszewska-Szczepaniak, A. Żukowski (eds.), *Podstawowe kategorie polityki [The Basic categories of policy]*, Olsztyn, INP UWM w Olsztyn (Institute of Political Sciences at University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn), 2005, pp. 245-250; J. Szacki (ed.), *Ani książę, ani kupiec: obywatel. Idea społeczeństwa obywatelskiego w myśli współczesnej [Neither prince nor merchant: The citizen. The idea of civil society in contemporary thought]*, Warszawa-Kraków, Znak, 1997.

³ Regarding Bookchin biography see J. Biehl, "Introduction", in: M. Bookchin, *The Murray Bookchin Reader*, J. Biehl (ed.), London, Cassell, 1997, retrieved 30 December 2014 from: http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist_Archives/bookchin/reader/intro.html; as well as *A Short Biography of Murray Bookchin*, retrieved 30 December 2014 from: http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist_Archives/bookchin/bio1.html; M. Douglas, "Murray Bookchin, 85, Writer, Activist and Ecology Theorist Dies", *New York Times*, 2006-08-07, retrieved 30 December 2014 from http://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/07/us/07bookchin.html?_r=0; Ch. Heller, *Libertarian Municipalism*, retrieved 29 December 2014 from: <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0805/heller/en>; A. Price, "Murray Bookchin, Political Philosopher and Activist who became a Founder of the Ecological Movement", *The Independent*, 2006-08-19, retrieved 30 December 2014 from: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/murray-bookchin-412486.html>.

— vision of libertarian-communist society.⁴

Libertarian socialism includes anarchism, Marxism and social ecology.⁵ Generally, social ecology

tries to show how nature slowly phases into society without ignoring the differences between society and nature on the one hand, as well as the extent to which they merge with each other on the other. The everyday socialization of the young by the family is no less rooted in biology than the everyday care of the old by the medical establishment is rooted in the hard facts of society. By the same token, we never cease to be mammals who still have primal natural urges, but we institutionalize these urges and their satisfaction in a wide variety of social forms. Hence, the social and the natural continually permeate each other in the most ordinary activities of daily life without losing their identity in a shared process of interaction, indeed, of interactivity. Obvious as this may seem at first in such day-to-day problems as caretaking, social ecology raises questions that have far-reaching importance for the different ways society and nature have interacted over time and the problems these interactions have produced. How did a divisive, indeed, seemingly combative, relationship between humanity and nature emerge? What were the institutional forms and ideologies that rendered this conflict possible? Given the growth of human needs and technology, was such a conflict really unavoidable? And can it be overcome in a future, ecologically oriented society? How does a rational, ecologically oriented society fit into the processes of natural evolution? Even more broadly, is there any reason to believe that the human mind - itself a product of natural evolution as well as culture - represents a decisive highpoint in natural development, notably, in the long development of subjectivity from the sensitivity and self-maintenance of the simplest life-forms to the remarkable intellectuality and self-consciousness of the most complex.⁶

⁴ See M. Bookchin, *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism. An Unbridgeable Chasm*, Edinburgh-San Francisco, AK Press, 1995, p. 60. Bookchin used the adjective “libertarian” much earlier. He used it in reference to the theory of anarchism, based on common ownership of the production means or its principles (i.e. a balanced community, democracy “face to face”, eco-technologies and decentralized society), as well as to one of its varieties - social ecology, which was created by him. See M. Bookchin (under the pseudonym Lewis Herber) “Ecology and Revolutionary Thought”, *Comment*, 1964, retrieved 16 April 2009 from: http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/anarchist_archives/bookchin/ecologyandrev.html.

⁵ See J. Biehl, “Bookchin Breaks with Anarchism”, *Communalism*, no. 12, 2007, retrieved 20 February 2011 from: http://theanarchistlibrary.org/HTML/Janet_Biehl_Bookchin_Breaks_with_Anarchism.html.

⁶ M. Bookchin, *Society and Ecology*, The Anarchist Library, 17 October 2009, p.10. See also *idem*, *Remaking Society. Pathways to A Green Future*, Boston, South End Press, 1990, pp. 30-39; *idem*, *The Concept of Social Ecology*, in: *idem*, *The Ecology of Freedom. The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy*, Oakland-Edinburgh, AK Press, 2005, pp. 80-108.

And further:

Social ecology clearly expresses the fact that society is not a sudden “eruption” in the world. Social life does not necessarily face nature as a combatant in an unrelenting war. The emergence of society is a natural fact that has its origins in the biology of human socialization. The human socialization process from which society emerges - be it in the form of families, bands, tribes, or more complex types of human intercourse - has its source in parental relationships, particularly mother and child bonding. The biological mother, to be sure, can be replaced in this process by many surrogates, including fathers, relatives, or, for that matter, all members of a community. It is when social parents and social siblings - that is, the human community that surrounds the young - begin to participate in a system of care, that is ordinarily undertaken by biological parents, that society begins to truly come into its own. Society thereupon advances beyond a mere reproductive group toward institutionalized human relationships, and from a relatively formless animal community into a clearly structured social order. But at the very inception of society, it seems more than likely that human beings were socialized into “second nature” by means of deeply ingrained blood ties, specifically maternal ties. We shall see that in time the structures or institutions that mark the advance of humanity from a mere animal community into an authentic society began to undergo far-reaching changes and these changes become issues of paramount importance in social ecology. For better or worse, societies develop around status groups, hierarchies, classes, and state formations. But reproduction and family care remain the abiding biological bases for every form of social life as well as the originating factor in the socialization of the young and the formation of a society⁷

The final version of Bookchin social ecology is divided into two parts, dialectical naturalism concerning methodological and ontological issue, and philosophy of history and libertarian municipalism relating to politics.⁸ The concepts of libertarian municipalism was announced by Bookchin in 1985. In his later works in the field of political philosophy he only developed, clarified and disseminated the idea.⁹

⁷ *Idem, Society and...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-8.

⁸ See *idem*, “The Communalist Project”, *Harbinger*, 2002, vol. 3, no. 1, retrieved 7 June 2012 from: <http://www.social-ecology.org/2002/09/harbinger-vol-3-no-1-the-communalist-project>. About short description of dialectical naturalism see *idem, Remaking...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 170-171, 198-200.

⁹ See *idem*, “Theses on Libertarian Municipalism”, in *Our Generation*, vol. 16, 1985, no. 3-4, pp. 9-22. See also *idem, The Rise of Urbanization and Decline of Citizenship*, San Francisco, Sierra Club Books, 1987; *idem, Remaking...*, *op. cit.*; *idem*, “Libertarian Municipalism: An Overview”, in *Social Ecology Project's Readings in Libertarian Municipalism*, Burlington, Social Ecology Project, 1991; J. Biehl, M. Bookchin, *The Politics of Social Ecology: Libertarian Municipalism*, Montreal, Black Rose Books, 1998; *idem, The Communalist...*, *op. cit.*; J. Biehl, *Bookchin Breaks...*, *op. cit.*

According to Bookchin the goal of the natural social development is libertarian municipalism. For the present we are only signalling that it is decentralized confederation, the unit of which is ecological mini society functioning as a participatory democracy.¹⁰

This concept harmonizes with traditions started by John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant or democratic socialism through the emphasis on the transformative potential of the world and a more free, just and egalitarian society and the possibility of reason processing which is inherent in man. It consciously draws from critics of the early modern period: Rousseau's thoughts, anarchism or critical theory of society. Bookchin against environmentalists, feminists and post-modernists thought that the Enlightenment is the "unfinished project",¹¹ which must be corrected, supplemented and complemented, rather than rejected. He understood the Enlightenment differently from the representatives of the Frankfurt School. In his view, it is not a way of thinking, not a form of rationality, but a specific historical and cultural age - the age of reason, science and technology set in the 18th century in the so-called Western societies. In his opinion, there were some ideas characterising the Enlightenment:

- assumption of the human nature universality in its rational dimension;
- principle of the common interest of all men;
- the thesis about progress existence, which comes to the belief that human society is in the improvement process and can become a rational society;
- ethical affirmation of freedom, equality, justice and brotherhood.

Living up to their hopes they were to be realized through education, technology and the use of science.¹²

In general, according to Bookchin the advantages of the Enlightenment were that "it brought the human mind from heaven to the earth". It rejected the concept of political inequality in the form of the aristocracy reign and the clerical hierarchy and feudal particularism (folk, tribal, nationalist). It was therefore anti-absolutist, anti-theocratic and anti-feudal.¹³

What undermined the project of the Enlightenment was its capitalism. The point is that industrial capitalism abused and distorted the ideals of the Enlightenment.

¹⁰ See M. Bookchin, *Remaking...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 168-169, 172-173, 181-182.

¹¹ The phrase borrowed from the Polish translation of an essay by Jürgen Habermas *Die Moderne – Ein unvollendetes Projekt. Philosophisch-politische Aufsätze* (Leipzig, Reclam 1990). See "Moderna – nie dokończony projekt" [The Unfinished Project of Modernity], in: S. Czerniak, A. Szahaj (eds.), *Postmodernizm a filozofia. Wybór tekstów [Postmodernism and philosophy]*, Warszawa, IFiS PAN, 1996, pp. 273-318.

¹² See M. Bookchin, *Remaking...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 110, 165-166, 169, 174.

¹³ See *ibidem*, p. 110.

Among other things: it reinterpreted freedom as the freedom of trade, equality as the right to employ opponents or brotherhood as the obedience of the proletariat in relation to the capitalists. Capitalism led to:

- the separation of mind from being;
- reduction of reason to instrumental rationality focused on efficiency;
- radical polarization of society into two layers: the millions of poor and “a handful” of very rich;
- people objectification, commodification of human relations, subjecting them to market mechanisms;
- people anonymity;
- human uncertainties exposed to social forces;
- creation of consumerism, unsatisfied desire of material goods;
- waste goods;
- contamination of the environment, the ecological crisis, which threatens to destroy many species of plants and animals.

The tools of capitalism included mathematisation of perspective on the world, mechanization, the use of science and technology for the exploitation of nature (including human), urbanization, mass production and consumption, the concentration of industrial centres, excessive division of work, and bureaucracy.¹⁴

The aim of capitalist society (whether it manifests itself in the form of Western corporate capitalism or Eastern bureaucratic capitalism) is the control of nature and human beings, the concentration of power in capitalists and state hands. Its principle of operation is unlimited expansion and capital formation. Capitalist society is supported by theories based on assumptions dominion over nature and the centralization of political and economic power.¹⁵

Bookchin was not a pessimist of the philosophy of history. He thought that the Enlightenment is open to the future - new, better times. His actuality reveals in the assumption that humanity must be united, immersed in understanding and empathy.¹⁶ His performance will be libertarian municipalism. What path leads to it? According to Bookchin it is a social revolution understood not as an isolated case, but a long process of taking control of your municipality and rebuilding it on the basis of neighbourhood gatherings. “We are confronted with the need not simply to improve society or alter it; we are confronted with the need to *remake* it”.¹⁷ Elsewhere we can read that the revolution is to take place not only in politics, but also in political

¹⁴ See *ibidem*, pp. 132-134, 157, 166, 169; *idem*, *The Meaning of...*, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

¹⁵ See *idem*, *Remaking...*, *op. cit.*, p. 157, 169.

¹⁶ See *ibidem*, p. 167.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 170.

culture, “that embraces new ways of thinking and feeling, and new human interrelationships, including the ways we experience the natural world”¹⁸.

The success of the revolution depends on the indication of general social interest that unites people despite powerful and deep class, national, ethnic and gender differences occurring between them. It will be formulated under the new libertarian program, which is based on “the most obvious limits capitalism faces: the ecological limits to growth imposed by the natural world”¹⁹. In other words, in Bookchin’s view what links people in support of the changes is ecology. For the purposes of libertarian municipalism fall the creation of a new balance between:

- a man with nature;
- human and human;
- a town with a village.

There is a specific correlation between selected tasks. The condition for the harmony between human beings and nature is to achieve harmony in human relationships.²⁰

The revolution will also rely on the creation of a libertarian movement passage:

- from centralized, statist world to decentralized confederation of municipia;
- from the capitalist social conflicts to equal access to prosperous life;
- from the availability of democracy for those who have free time to equal and active citizenship of all.

The thing is that revolution requires that people are prepared intellectually and morally for the arrival of new wonderful world. The condition of self-government is in fact self-awareness, in turn, its premise is the appropriate cognitive-moral level. Left-wing movement should not only undertake actions for changes but also to create a clear and distinct vision of a free and ecological society. It should indicate long-term solutions, but also appropriate response to immediate problems, popularize the ideas of the future social life and precise them. According to Bookchin new libertarian program should be universal, but also at every stage of its accomplishment should be rearranged or associated with local libertarian traditions. The plans for its implementation should be very accurate in terms of conditions of the region, so as to retain its characteristics. Libertarian organization should publish and distribute local newspapers and organize civic assistance in daily affairs. It should also choose people who will participate in the existing

¹⁸ *Idem, The Meaning of..., op. cit.*, p. 5.

¹⁹ *Idem, Remaking..., op. cit.*, p. 169.

²⁰ See *ibidem*, pp. 171, 181-182, 185-186.

self-government institutions of the national state and using them to transform the municipium system into the libertarian one.²¹

Bookchin's student, Chaia Heller, thinks that the libertarian revolution of municipalism can pass through three phases at the local level. The first comes to the formation of the libertarian municipalism group. In the other, group members gain the knowledge about the libertarian municipalism, primarily through reading texts on the idea of direct democracy. In the last phase the libertarian municipalism organization develops. In this stage, a body of principles and values relating to "face to face" democracy, municipal economy, ecology and social justice, and the choice of candidates for the local elections are created. After entering the local government these people acting under libertarian municipalism program will change their town or village and educate other residents about libertarian municipalism.²²

At the core of the libertarian municipalism it is the fact that the power is in the hands of citizens' assemblies: rural, cooperatives, communes, municipalities, districts, towns, cities. This is the concept of democratic politics, which does not involve representation (parliamentarism), but direct self-government communities at the local level. It is based on the principle that every person has sufficient powers to deal with the affairs of the community to which he or she belongs. Its cognitive base is versatility and general knowledge, respectively, its ethical foundation is solidarity and friendship.²³

It seems that the concept of Bookchin proposed two-element politics. Its first and primary element is the democratic forum for creating will and opinion of the community in which all members of the community propose, debate and determine solutions to common problems. The way of reconciling common position of the assembly is not consensus (as John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas mentioned), but majority voting. Assume that there is citizens' power understood as a general power, all (free and equal) citizens as a corporate body. Administration is only the implementation of civic power decisions, it realizes the social power of attorney. It can be concluded that there is an administrative authority. It has a limited nature and it is subject to the public control. Who can govern? Committees or collectives of people who were selected by a democratic forum. That citizens' assembly can also disrupt any administrative body or a term of its member.²⁴

Democratic assemblies can operate in the building, street, block, district, town, city or village. The number of citizens, however, should be always small. Assemblies should strive for self-sufficiency, financial independence and meeting their needs through the civic effort, they should not exclude entering into relationship with oth-

²¹ See also *ibidem*, pp. 160, 168-169, 172, 179-182, 184-187, 194-195.

²² See Ch. Heller, *op. cit.*

²³ See M. Bookchin, *Remaking...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 172-173, 175, 176, 185-187.

²⁴ See *ibidem*, pp. 173, 175, 181-182.

er cooperatives. They ought to be coordinated by the mechanism of confederation during full implementation of the libertarian municipalism project. If the city is too large due to the effective functioning of democracy, it should be divided into several confederal united assemblies. There were city and regional administrative institutions over the local assemblies. Therefore municipium in this perspective is self-governing way of social life and managing it at the local level, which shall enter into confederation dependence on the principle of freedom to other local assemblies. All of the communities and their confederation, would involve the same constitution including ecological and social principles. Bookchin did not propose them because he believed that the people themselves have to complete the principles of cooperation, direct democracy, social justice, ecology and lack of hierarchy. The regulations are so general that they are open to many interpretations. In this concept, the economy would be municipalised too and the resources would be integrated regionally in the confederation system. Simply, Bookchin's politics concept also includes economic affairs which are subordinate to civil authority.²⁵ Relations between local communities will regulate the mechanism of coexistence between communities, characterized by the mutual benefit of such a degree that combines virtually all the groups.

Confederalism as a principle of social organization reaches its fullest development when the economy itself is confederalized by placing local farms, factories, and other needed enterprises in local municipal hands - that is, when a community, however large or small, begins to manage its own economic resources in an interlinked network with other communities. To force a choice between either self-sufficiency on the one hand or a market system of exchange on the other is a simplistic and unnecessary dichotomy. I would like to think that a confederal ecological society would be a sharing one, one based on the pleasure that is felt in distributing among communities according to their needs, not one in which "cooperative" capitalistic communities mire themselves in the *quid pro quo* of exchange relationships.²⁶

Furthermore, libertarian municipalism requires "exceed traditional considerations of specific job, workplaces, status and relations of ownership, and create common interest based on the community problems".²⁷

To sum up, pursuant to Bookchin confederalism:

It is above all a network of administrative councils whose members or delegates are elected from popular face-to-face democratic assemblies [...] . The members of these confederal councils are strictly mandated, recallable, and responsible to

²⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 170-172, 175-177, 188.

²⁶ See *idem*, *The Meaning of...*, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

²⁷ See *ibidem*, p. 6.

the assemblies that choose them for the purpose of coordinating and administering the policies formulated by the assemblies themselves. Their function is thus a purely administrative and practical one, not a policy making one like the function of representatives in republican systems of government. A confederalist view involves a clear distinction between policymaking and the coordination and execution of adopted policies. Policymaking is exclusively the right of popular community assemblies based on the practices of participatory democracy. Administration and coordination are the responsibility of confederal councils, which become the means for interlinking villages, towns, neighbourhoods, and cities into confederal networks. Power thus flows from the bottom up instead of from the top down [...].

What is an essential condition for the confederalism achievement?

[...] the interdependence of communities for an authentic mutualism based on shared resources, produce, and policymaking. If one community is not obliged to count on another or others generally to satisfy important material needs and realize common political goals in such a way that it is interlinked to a greater whole, exclusivity and parochialism are genuine possibilities. Only insofar as we recognize that confederation must be conceived as an extension of a form of participatory administration - by means of confederal networks - can decentralization and localism prevent the communities that compose larger bodies of association from parochially withdrawing into themselves at the expense of wider areas of human consociation. Confederalism is thus a way of perpetuating the interdependence that should exist among communities and regions - indeed, it is a way of democratizing that interdependence without surrendering the principle of local control. While a reasonable measure of self-sufficiency is desirable for every locality and region, confederalism is a means for avoiding local parochialism on the one hand and an extravagant national and global division of labour on the other. In short, it is a way in which a community can retain its identity and roundedness while participating in a sharing way with the larger whole that makes up a balanced ecological society.²⁸

Overall, the concept of Bookchin's citizenship appealed to the Greek *polis* transforming its ideal of *paideia* from the elite into the egalitarian. He maintained that the citizen is an active author of the politics, loyal to the assembly, who may appear as a consequence of appropriate education in formatting nature of such virtues as self-awareness, self-determination, self-discipline, responsibility, dialogism based on arguments, willingness to civic services, the orientation of the general interest.²⁹

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 7.

²⁹ See *idem*, *Remaking...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 176, 178-181.

Note that a positive model of Bookchin's power does not refer to a centralized state or state power. He believed that the relationship between the state and the social life base on a zero-sum game. Whatever the state gains, it does so at the expense of social life. And contrary. The legitimacy of state power (including the participation in parliamentary elections) delegitimatises the civic power. And contrary. Overall, the state is the domain of evil. Libertarian municipal confederalism is not a concept of social life in the existing state. Confederal municipalities are conceived by Bookchin as a counterweight to the power of the nation state. In his mind, there was always tension between localism and the state. These two systems cannot coexist for a long period of time. One of them always wins.³⁰

What do the local community in libertarian municipalism do? Actually, they handle all public matters, in particular transport, housing, living needs, education, work and culture. In this model, for example, the land cannot be owned, it should be divided. The harvest crops and the result of working people should be available to all pursuant to the principle "according to needs". This does not mean that Bookchin precluded the institutions of private property. He only argued that no one would have the right to own property where the lives of others are determined by it. In addition, the democratic assembly should fight with the hierarchy manifested in all its forms (the psychological, cultural, social, class, ownership, state), work on the reduction of consumption to reasonable limits. Life and management should also be based on local renewable resources (e.g. solar energy, wind energy, cropland, fish resources, air quality, water, geothermal energy), monitor self-sufficient systems that support the creation and development of environmental technologies, recycling, eliminate the creation and the use of devices that destroy the planet and human health. Every citizen ought to deal with ecological forms of obtaining healthy food. Everyone should work on improving the state of soil. Transport should be formed on collective use of vehicles. There would be job rotations and individual tasks between urban and rural areas. The day would be divided into the politics, plant cultivation, crafts, education, entertainment and production. Generally, production (buildings, furniture, appliances, clothing) would return to the old rules relying on quality, not quantity. Industry would use modern, multi-functional, fuel-efficient machinery which save work of people.³¹

Bookchin was also involved in exploration and indication of libertarian municipalism traces in history. He concluded that he was present in the confederal, socialist and libertarian programs and practices, and communes. In practice, he appeared, among others, in attempts at resistance against the social evil performed by the Spanish *comuneros*, the American revolutionaries, the French *sans-culottes*, during the Paris Commune, democratic revolutions, and other revolutionary projects (including

³⁰ See *ibidem*, p. 161; *idem*, *The Meaning of...*, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

³¹ See *ibidem*, p. 4-5; *idem*, *Remaking...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 162, 168, 181-183, 186-191.

anarchist, e.g. in the Spanish Revolution of 1936). In theory he reflected his ideas in the libertarian utopias, anarchism, socialism. Contemporarily, he noticed it in the squatter movements, neighbourhood initiatives and non-governmental organizations of social care.³² Bookchin emphasized that libertarian municipalism differs from previous (e.g. the anarchist) spins of communalism. The 19th century anarchists found that communism should serve mainly an administrative role (provide “public services”). Decision taking is the responsibility of labour associations, producer groups, collectives or cooperatives that create the federation. Libertarian municipalism, however, understands commune as a form of direct democracy, expressing the will of the people, composed of self-governing assemblies, and confederation as the administrative body with limited prerogatives.³³

What are the assumptions of anthropological libertarian municipalism? In this aspect, Bookchin insisted on the anthropological optimism. In his opinion, ordinary people in the appropriate conditions are able to think of the level of the most outstanding people and they may act like Socrates. He also defended the idea of human dignity and of moderate anthropocentrism describing them as “ecological humanism”. He thought that humanity is unique and has a unique position in the natural and social evolution, but it should not organize the relationship with the environment according to the hierarchical principle of domination and subordination. In his opinion, there are four capabilities that testify about particular man:

- to conceptual thinking;
- to verbal communication based on a number of concepts;
- to change the natural world;
- to intentional act.³⁴

We can read in *Society and Ecology*:

In asking these highly provocative questions, I am not trying to justify a strutting arrogance toward nonhuman life-forms. Clearly, we must bring humanity’s uniqueness as a species, marked by rich conceptual, social, imaginative, and constructive attributes, into synchronicity with nature’s fecundity, diversity, and creativity. I have argued that this synchronicity will not be achieved by opposing nature to society, nonhuman to human life-forms, natural fecundity to technology, or a natural subjectivity to the human mind. Indeed, an important result that emerges from a discussion

³² See *ibidem*, pp. 95, 108-126, 180-181; *idem*, *The Meaning of...*, *op. cit.*, p. 5, 6; *idem*, *Theses on...*, *op. cit.*, p. 17; *idem*, *The Rise of...*, *op. cit.*

³³ See *idem*, *The Meaning of...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-4; *idem*, *Theses on...*, *op. cit.*, p. 17; J. Biehl, *Bookchin Breaks...*, *op. cit.*

³⁴ See M. Bookchin, *Remaking...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 194-195, 198.

of the interrelationship of nature to society is the fact that human intellectuality, although distinct, also has a far-reaching natural basis. Our brains and nervous systems did not suddenly spring into existence without a long antecedent natural history. That which we most prize as integral to our humanity - our extraordinary capacity to think on complex conceptual levels - can be traced back to the nerve network of primitive invertebrates, the ganglia of a mollusk, the spinal cord of a fish, the brain of an amphibian, and the cerebral cortex of a primate.³⁵

The revolution, which Bookchin mentioned about, should be self-conscious, planned and rational in meeting the needs of humans and other creatures in this way it would be a step in the spontaneous evolution of nature. From his perspective, it will be a process where accidental human activities will be replaced by a rationally and morally oriented change.³⁶ The moment of the creation of libertarian municipia confederation does not mean the end of history for it.³⁷

The concept of libertarian municipalism found the supporters in North America and Europe. There are some examples which operate successfully for instance in the UK - Social Ecology Network, in the United States - beside the Institute for Social Ecology also the Left Green Network with its headquarters in Burlington. We deal with its strong reception in Canada, especially in Montreal, where held an international conference of social ecology (1994), there are released Bookchin's periodicals "Our Generation" and "Kick It Over", Ecology Montreal under supervision of Dimitri Roussopoulos and Phillippe Chee functions there.³⁸

It seems to me that Bookchin's libertarian municipalism can serve several important functions. First, it contributes to how certain people (eco-anarchists, municipalists) think of themselves as citizens, of the purposes of their activities, of social and political institutions. Secondly, it can lower the anger of liberal democracy and its history. It shows how the institutions (civil society as the antonym of state, political cooperation), principles (freedom, decentralization) are reasonable, how they have developed to its present form. Is it not true that the establishment of a state based on the principle of limiting its intervention in social life, creating favourable conditions for the functioning of voluntary associations supposed to express that the state serves people, that the government is an instrument of civil society? Thirdly, it is a utopia, whose elements can and should be achieved in the era of confidence decline towards the institutions of local democracy, manifested in Poland, among others decreasing participation of citizens in local elections. Bookchin answered

³⁵ *Idem, Society and...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-10.

³⁶ See *idem, Remaking...*, *op. cit.*, p.198.

³⁷ See *idem, The Meaning of...*, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

³⁸ See J. Tomaszewicz, "Wolnościowy Muncypalizm Murraya Bookchina" [Libertarian Municipalism of Murray Bookchin], in *Inny Świat – Pismo Anarchistyczne*, nr 9, 1997, retrieved 8 June 2012 from: <http://innyswiat.most.org.pl/09/muncypalizm.htm>

the question: How would the best civil society look like? I suggest to interpret his answer for the question: How would a decent civil society look like, which would operate in a democratic culture, as we know? Of course, this is non-compliance with the Bookchin's recommendation. He believed that "without such wholistic cultural and political changes as I have advocated, notions of decentralism that emphasize local isolation and a degree of self-sufficiency may lead to cultural parochialism and chauvinism".³⁹ Further in the same text he wrote:

At the risk of seeming contrary, I feel obliged to emphasize that decentralization, localism, self-sufficiency, and even confederation each taken singly - do not constitute a guarantee that we will achieve a rational ecological society. In fact, all of them have at one time or another supported parochial communities, oligarchies, and even despotic regimes. To be sure, without the institutional structures that cluster around our use of these terms and without taking them in combination with each other, we cannot hope to achieve a free ecologically oriented society. Decentralism and self-sustainability must involve a much broader principle of social organization than mere localism. Together with decentralization, approximations to self-sufficiency, humanly scaled communities, eco technologies, and the like, there is a compelling need for democratic and truly communitarian forms of interdependence - in short, for libertarian forms of confederalism.⁴⁰

However, any actions against his will, like the omission of the radical concept of libertarian municipalism, the extraction of this theory only what is civil (related to excluding historiosophical metaphysical-ontological or methodological content), reducing confederalism to village, town, city or region, will inspire new activities of local governance and reinterpretation of its institutions. When civil society is formed it has a negative program that does not go beyond the protection of the citizens freedom. This is what releases vital and constitutive forces of society. Later, people organize themselves and work together performing with positive programs, which at this stage stimulate the energy of public members. Why could not we resist local politics on the non-party, transclass, indisputable worldview ground? Why would not we solve only those problems that affect all residents, that means they connect and not divide people? Why would not we lead to give the city budget partly (it has already been introduced in several Polish cities) or entirely in the hands of the residents? Why not try to reduce local government centres in terms of its geography and the number of people, and not connect them confederatially? Why not use more of direct democracy at the level of local democracy? Why schools do not educate active local citizens theoretically and practically? Why not reconstruct and popular-

³⁹ M. Bookchin, *The Meaning of...*, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 7.

ize the local tradition of autonomy and freedom, e.g. Food cooperatives of Edward Abramowski (it exists in several Polish cities)? Why not rely on local management of renewable resources, not support the creation and development of eco-technology and recycling? Why not prohibit the use of devices that destroy the planet and human health?

Academics and journalists of traditional media proclaim that the history of socialist thoughts has never been in worse condition than it is today. First of all, because currently it escapes from the reality into the philosophical abstraction. Is it true? Bookchin belongs to those thinkers who try to provide pieces of advice on practical action, subordinating philosophical speculation to the need of taking practical decisions, choosing the institutions in matters that brings everyday life.