



17th C O N F E R E N C E

IOPD | MONTREAL
2017

PARTICIPATION WITHOUT EXCLUSION

PROCEEDINGS OF THE CONFERENCE

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Commission Inclusion
Sociale, Démocratie
Participative et Droits
Humains de CGLU



Collaborators



Relations
internationales,
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Secrétariat à l'accès
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des institutions
démocratiques

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In June 2017, at the invitation of the Office de consultation publique de Montréal, the greater international democratic participation community came together in Montréal for the 17th International Conference of the International Observatory on Participatory Democracy (IOPD), held for the first time in North America.

The International Observatory on Participatory Democracy is a space open to all cities of the world and all bodies, organizations and research centres seeking to learn about, share and implement experiences related to participatory democracy on a local level, with a view to furthering democracy in city governments. The network was formed in 2001 within the framework of decentralized cooperation projects of the European Commission's URBAL program. Today, the IOPD helps to develop the production of innovative knowledge serving local governments in the area of citizen participation. The presidency is assigned to a city, through a decision of the annual meeting of members. That city then becomes the site of the annual Conference of the IOPD. It was during the 16th Conference held in Matola, Mozambique, that the City of Montréal was appointed to the presidency of the IOPD and assigned with organizing the 17th Conference. More

specifically, responsibility for organizing the Conference was given to the Office de consultation publique de Montréal, the OCPM. The latter exists by virtue of the Charter of Ville de Montréal for the purpose of holding public consultations entrusted to it by the City's public decision-makers. It deals primarily with land-use planning issues, but it may hold consultations on any issue assigned to it by the City. The OCPM has been around for some 15 years. It has over 130 consultation mandates to its credit and has been actively involved in the work of the IOPD for many years.



The Conference, held from June 16 to 19, 2017, at the UQUÀM's Cœur des sciences pavilion, brought together some 500 participants from three different communities: local governments; university research centres, and civil society. Attendees included participatory democracy practitioners and thinkers from municipal structures (elected officials, technicians), as well as associations and institutions focusing on a great variety of practices. Over the course of the four days, all of the participants had the opportunity to learn about, share and promote participatory democracy practices.

With an agenda born of a resolutely participatory process involving 80 speakers from 35 different countries, the Montréal Conference offered 80 activities revolving around the theme "Participation without Exclusion," as well as a full day of seminars focusing on participatory budgets. Overall, the program aimed to answer a series of questions:

How do we ensure that all strata of the population participate in participatory democracy activities?

How do we avoid the exclusion of certain groups, notably among minority groups and citizens with less formal education or lesser access to information?

What are the causes of under-representation of certain groups in participatory democracy processes? Is it possible to achieve greater participation in real time?

What can we do to ensure that families, young people, immigrants and seniors participate in the debate?

In this digital age, what can we do to ensure that ICT do not also become tools of exclusion?

Moreover, what are the specific advantages and limitations of virtual participation compared with those of real-time participation?





Divided among some 30 workshops, participants got down to the business of sharing their experiences and identifying remedies to citizens' profound lack of confidence in their public institutions by strengthening participatory democracy.

Opening night well attended

In the presence of IOPD Secretary General Fernando Pindado Sánchez, the mayors and elected officials of some 60 countries throughout the world, and a number of dignitaries and special guests, the mayor of Montréal and president of the IOPD officially launched the 17th Conference.

In his opinion, participatory approaches ensure the credibility and effective action of today's cities, as the latter increasingly and unquestionably become players on the international scene. They have an important role to play in the development and dissemination

of democratic practices across all continents. Referring to the Association des grandes métropoles (Métropolis) and the Association Internationale des Maires Francophones, which were about to hold their own annual meetings, he also underscored Montréal's strategic role at the interface of all of those networks. "I fully expect that their endeavours, like those of the IOPD, will allow all parties to talk, share and learn in order to become more in tune with our fellow citizens."

For his part, IOPD Secretary General Fernando Pindado Sánchez supported the mayor's statements by adding that the IOPD is a network comprising over 800 cities throughout the world as well as other bodies, organizations and research centres seeking to learn about, share and implement participatory democracy experiences at the local level to strengthen democracy in city governance.



“This annual Conference is definitely a good opportunity to learn from the experiences of others and to build alliances and cooperative strategies,” he said.

Work overview

It quickly became apparent that, in many areas of the world, citizen participation in democratic life is not a given. A number of groups fall victims to such a situation: people discriminated against because of their race, the LGBTQ community, women, indigent people, ethnic and cultural minorities, etc. However, the increase in practices based on the principles of participatory democracy enables the repositioning of citizens at the heart of decision-making processes and, for those of lesser means, the attainment of a greater level of influence allowing them to have an effect on their everyday lives.

The above was substantiated by the three keynote speakers. Anne Latendresse, professor of social and urban geography at the UQAM and former director of the Centre de recherche sur le Brésil, during the opening speech of the seminar on participatory budgets affirmed: “Under the guise of universalism, there were processes of segregation and exclusion that affected women in their diversity, racialized or indigenous groups, ethnic minorities, etc.”

Paul John Murdoch, executive secretary of the Cree Nation Government, also pointed it out during his talk on the situation of his people in Québec. In his eyes, the participatory processes are deeply anchored in indigenous tradition. The Cree Nation’s citizen participation in the negotiations of the Plan Nord led to better developed projects offering tangible benefits for the populations.



Moreover, during the feature interview, writer Alexandre Jardin, the brains behind the Zèbres movement (bleublanczebre.fr) and author of the book *Révoltons-nous!* indicated that citizens' disaffection with institutions also attests to the crisis and limitations of representative democracy. He sang the praises of "doers," those civil society operators who identify original solutions to local problems. He recommended original thinking on successfully marrying those who find practical solutions in the field with those responsible for implementing programs to define a new relationship with democracy. According to him, local citizen involvement promotes citizen expression, and may counter the rise of populisms.

For Conference participants, the main challenge involves shrinking the moat that forms between elected officials and citizens and fighting exclusion. To do that, citizens must have access to information and become active participants in the decision-making process. The advantages of that imperative are that it helps to legitimize decisions and make their application more effective. That probably explains why elected officials are increasingly involving citizens in the drafting of legislative proposals, notably through the establishment of digital platforms.

As attested to by the approximately 80 speakers and panelists of the fight against certain forms of extremism to the improvement of daily life on a very local scale, the development and implementation of inclusive mechanisms and devices that can guarantee and strengthen the participation of all levels of society must be in keeping with the regulatory context and cultural aspects to achieve real results.

A large part of the discussions and workshop demonstrations were devoted to the creation and design of devices that take into account the diversity of cultural expressions, habits, state of health, various other handicaps, and the recently observed professionalization of occupations relating to participation.

Another important topic emerged during this 17th Conference of the IOPD: new terminology. The participants underscored the multiplicity of concepts that are now implicitly included in the field of participation. Among others, the expressions direct democracy, consultation, consensus-building, co-construction, and citizen participation are now used daily by participatory democracy practitioners. Nevertheless, the boundaries become fuzzy between those areas of activity and adjacent disciplines having other goals and more closely linked to the notion of political power, such as public relations, mediation and citizen mobilizations.

Consequently, it is difficult to compare the credibility of the processes and tools one against the other. Some ethical, professional and militant considerations are amplified by the multiplication of the under-contractualization of public participation operations, which launches another open debate with no easy answer.

In any event, everyone agrees on the necessity of supporting the creation of spaces for citizens and their recognition. It is also important to promote, on a local level, premises for sharing, discussion and coordination, as attested to by the large number of candidacies for the 2017 Prize of the IOPD.



Some major perspectives come to light. The focus is the issue of disseminating the culture of participation. Making practices evolve nonetheless implies a progressive, inclusive approach. Therefore, the reflections of the network are naturally focused on the place of digital and technological innovation in citizen participation. The relationship between digital and real-time participation initiatives, and the establishment of new participation spaces in the image of the 21st Century, such as Fab Labs and citizen innovation labs, give rise to new experiments.

A large part of the debates also focused on the issues of major global movements and their impacts on local activities as well as the growing influence of local governments on central governments. For example, the planetary citizens' debate led by the Commission nationale du débat public in France and the

Danish Board of Technology and the consultation on reducing dependence on fossil energies conducted by the OCPM were presented. The co-decision-making initiatives in the area of city and public service development using participatory methods were also presented as other indicators of the paradigm shift we are currently experiencing.

The issue of the institutionalization of tools was often brought up. The examples of the Bureau d'audiences publiques sur l'environnement (BAPE, Québec), the Commission nationale du débat public (CNDP, France) and the OCPM (Montréal) served as working material for the round table on legal frameworks and mechanisms. In fact, establishing a form of engineering or device uncovers political problems, as largely demonstrated by the charters of public participation in France and Barcelona. The same train of thought was

at the root of the Québec Government's Cadre de référence gouvernemental sur la participation publique, launched by minister Rita De Santis at the closing of the Conference.

Like any other undertaking, participation should be evaluated from various angles, including the object, the composition of participation, processes and their impacts. That is basically the conclusion reached by OCPM President Dominique Ollivier, who moderated the panel on evaluation.

All of the discussions over the course of the four days allowed the exploration and promotion of various aspects of an "open democracy," which, beyond the

exercise of the right to vote, focuses on the transparency and circulation of information in a spirit of cooperation among the relevant players and the citizens. The participants came to the conclusion that promoting citizen interaction profoundly transforms the role of politics from decision-maker to moderator and energy catalyst. That also requires a certain acceptance of the conflict inherent in participation, which, however, also offers numerous benefits. It develops a feeling of belonging, promotes discussion, strengthens relationships of trust, enhances projects, enlightens decision-making and promotes the emergence of innovative solutions.





The toolkit fair

Largely focused on the practical, the Conference provided an opportunity for participants to learn about the latest technological and social innovations in the area of citizen participation and the use of collective intelligence. The offerings included card and mock-up workshops, software supporting public participation, and several innovative tools aimed at making participation more enjoyable. Consultation experiences using a number of different channels simultaneously were also analysed.



The IOPD General Meeting

The Conference also provided a venue for the General Meeting of the IOPD, with 130 members in attendance. In addition to the reports of the thematic work groups, the Montréal Conference led members to review the very structure of the organization and the best way to ensure its development and long-term survival. The discussions will continue in 2018, as Montréal passes the torch to the City of Barcelona, which will hold the 18th international Conference.



The 2017 IOPD Prize

As always, the Conference served as the scene for the presentation of the IOPD Prize for good citizen participation practices. Following a public call for candidates, 48 files were submitted, from 24 different countries, and the prize was awarded based on an international jury's evaluation of the candidacies.

Six finalists received special mentions: the municipalities of Ampasy (Madagascar) for their participatory budget, of Austin (Texas, USA) for their experience "Conversation Corps," of Nanterre (France) for their "Agora Permanente," of New Taipei (Taiwan) for the experience "Participatory budget for the promotion of employment among people with



handicaps in the district of Sanxia,” of San Casciano Val di Pesa (Italy) for the community transit network “Muoverse in Comune,” and of Tenerife (Spain) for the communication strategy “Hey! Tenerife.”

The municipal government of La Paz (Bolivia) was awarded the 11th IOPD Prize for its program “Neighbourhoods and Communities of Truth,” which, over the past 11 years, has reached out to 110,000 residents in more disadvantaged neighbourhoods of the city’s urban areas and surrounding rural communities. Created in 2005 by Juan Del Granado (former mayor of La Paz) with a view to reducing marginalization, the support and public deliberation program helped to change the lives of people living without basic services, in precarious,

unsanitary and unsafe conditions. Not only did the project manage to bring physical infrastructures to areas that sorely needed them, but it also helped to strengthen the capacity of local communities and to ensure their personal, social and community development.

Mr. Rodrigo Soliz Bonilla, secretary of municipal infrastructures for La Paz, accepted the prize from the Québec minister responsible for Access to information and the Reform of democratic institutions, Ms. Rita de Santis, the municipal councillor responsible for the Office de consultation publique de Montréal, Mr. Russell Copeman, and Mr. Fernando Pindado Sánchez, secretary general of the IOPD.



The Montréal Declaration

The work of the Conference concluded with the following observations:

1. The territories are essentially spaces earmarked for the operationalization of development agendas, and local governments are vital political players in the resolution of the many challenges facing our world. As they are in direct contact with citizens, they are in a position to immediately assess the impact on the population of major social, economic and environmental global issues.

2. Participatory democracy processes and practices are essential to involve people in their development and to combat the negativism and cynicism that too often prevail in our societies. Participatory democracy allows the mobilization of the greatest number in the emergence of more

inclusive, fairer and more equitable societies.

3. The fight against exclusion must be reaffirmed and pursued diligently so that our cities and villages may benefit from the contribution of large segments of the population that are under-represented in public debates.

4. All stakeholders must intensify their cooperation at the local, national and international levels, in order to facilitate the inclusion of all of the often more fragile or vulnerable segments of the population that are not sufficiently involved in defining and implementing development agendas for their living environments.

5. The use of new technologies must be intensified in order to increase the number of citizens participating in the various participatory democracy

mechanisms. Those digital tools are very precious and rapidly developing. However, Conference participants drew attention to the fact that we must all bear in mind that access to those tools is unequal and groups of citizens are in danger of being excluded from the revolution in the way that participatory democracy is applied. Digital fracture must be reduced.

All of the above orientations have been incorporated into a document entitled the Montréal Declaration.





The debate continues

The activities of the 17th Conference showcased the objectives, players, methodology, results and obstacles of every experience.

The various participatory democracy experiences presented (participatory budgets, consultations, co-constructions, neighbourhood councils, citizens committees, etc.) are enlightening in many respects in terms of the broadening of citizen participation. We understand that the thawing out process often begins at the local level, where the first mechanisms of participatory democracy take shape. The Conference Web site,

www.oidpmtl2017.com, aims to remain an open space where those interested in such issues can relive, at their own pace, this important gathering of democracy in action. In addition to the reports on all activities that will serve as the proceedings of the Conference, the site provides video and audio archives of the Conference, as well as reference documents from the various speakers. It is a research tool for researchers interested in the evolution of practices, and for citizens in general seeking to rebuild their confidence in institutions and to transform the seats of power into true representations of the will of the people.



This brochure on the Proceedings of the 17th Conference of the IOPD cannot possibly reflect all the richness of the discussions and exchanges that took place over those few days. To get a better idea of the debates, we invite you to visit the Conference Web site. It provides a detailed program, biographical notes on the speakers, summaries of the presentations, videos, and much more.

oidp2018.com

The 17th Conference of the IOPD was organized in Montréal by the Office de consultation publique de Montréal



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