



# 17<sup>e</sup> CONFÉRENCE OIDP | MONTRÉAL 2017 PARTICIPATION SANS EXCLUSION

## **Final declaration**

The 17th Conference of the International Observatory on Participatory Democracy was held in Montréal from June 16 to 19, 2017. It brought together several hundreds of participants from over 30 countries and different walks of life, including local authorities, university research centres, and civil society. They comprised participatory democracy practitioners from municipal structures, associations and institutions focusing on such practices, making the Conference a rich venue for the exchange of information.

The issue of “Participation without Exclusion” was at the core of the participants’ work.

The conference participants support the commitments made by the international community through various international agendas, including the Sustainable Development Goals and the new program for cities and human establishments, to promote the implementation of institutional, political, legal and financial mechanisms to establish inclusive platforms allowing effective participation by everyone in decision-making, planning and follow-up mechanisms, as well as stronger citizen participation.

The Conference participants understand that, in many areas of the world, citizen participation is non-existent. The thawing out process often begins at the local level, where the first mechanisms pertaining to participatory democracy take shape. The municipal level lends itself well to participation, as citizens feel a greater sense of involvement in the actions of local authorities, which directly affect their daily lives. That is how interventions like participatory budgets, which are widespread in several African and Latin American countries, were developed.

The new digital tools have considerably broadened the range of public participation. Sometimes, participants believe that using such tools may also lead to certain people being excluded. We must therefore strive to identify means of minimizing or avoiding digital fracture. In more general terms, we need to imagine a more effective connection between virtual and real-time participation.

In even more general terms, the reflection process of the Observatory and its members must address how to ensure that all strata of the population participate in participatory democracy activities. How do we ensure the participation of minority groups, citizens with less formal education or lesser access to information? Such exclusions are never intended, but we must question the under-representation of certain groups in participatory democracy processes. How do we resolve that issue? How do we promote greater real-time participation? What can we do to ensure that families, young people, immigrants and seniors participate? How do we strengthen the resources of local governments to allow them to take charge of the economic, social and cultural rights of people who are often excluded from defining development agendas? A number of models and tools were presented during the Montréal Conference.





# 17<sup>e</sup> CONFÉRENCE OIDP | MONTRÉAL 2017 PARTICIPATION SANS EXCLUSION

The work of the conference ends with the following observations:

1. The territories are essentially spaces earmarked for the operationalization of development agendas, and local governments are a vital political player in the resolution of many of the 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 global issues, be they social, economic or environmental.
2. Participatory democracy processes and practices are essential to involve people in their development and to combat the negativism and cynicism that 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 technology must be intensified in order to increase the number of citizens participating in the various participatory democracy mechanisms. Those digital tools are rapidly developing and very precious. However, the conference participants draw attention to the fact that we must all bear in mind that access to those tools is uneven and that 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. We must all work towards it!

Montréal, June 19<sup>th</sup> 2017

