



**Ajuntament
de Barcelona**



IOPD
18th CONFERENCE
CITIZEN INITIATIVE AND
DIRECT DEMOCRACY
BARCELONA 2018

18th Conference of the International Observatory on Participatory Democracy (IOPD)

**Direct Democracy and Citizen Initiative
Towards a System of Inclusive Democracy**

26, 27 and 28 November 2018– Mercat de les Flors, Barcelona

Concept Note

Our starting point is the belief that **democracy is the only form of government that respects people as citizens entitled to rights. It is further the best way to fight against inequalities and make social justice possible.** We also believe that improving the quality of democracy in cities contributes to the improvement of democracy at State level.

Democracy is grounded in the participation of citizens, as active subjects and holders of popular sovereignty. Such participation takes several forms, ranging from the election of representatives to direct decision-making, not to mention other modes of political engagement. **We are interested here in highlighting citizens' initiatives and direct democracy, both implemented in a way that promotes maximum inclusiveness.**

Democratic cities are those that not only state the importance of citizens' participation, but also offer the means to promote it; they incentivise inclusive participation so that all inhabitants can get involved in the collective construction of the policies that affect them. The quest for inclusive participation in this sense is a constant struggle against a *status quo* that limits or conditions the political participation of those who face bigger obstacles because of their characteristics or situation. Rebelling against this *status quo* compels local governments to be proactive in the search for the most suitable channels to foster inclusive participation.

We believe that it is crucial to find **an appropriate combination of two elements. The first is institutional action, such as the deployment of direct-democracy mechanisms; the second is citizens' initiative, advanced by the community.** It is also essential to improve the relationship between these two driving forces and the programmes that strengthen communities, the fight against exclusion and citizen participation in defining and



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implementing policies. We need to share and encourage the various successful experiences of cities from all over the world in this domain.

The 2018 Barcelona IOPD Conference and Assembly aims to be the result of a process of debate and exchange of ideas and practices, based on ***citizens' initiatives and direct democracy as ways of encouraging inclusive participation***. This exchange will take place from now until the conference in November 2018. In addition, the conference should be an opportunity to reflect on how cities develop the **New Urban Agenda** and the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)** involving citizens in the planning, co-creation and design of city policies.

That is why we are inviting interested cities and local governments to promote seminars, conferences and other kinds of events to be held across the world with the aim of debating these subjects and thereby enriching the 2018 conference and assembly.

We must also take advantage of this period to go back to reflecting on the function and organisation of the IOPD, so that in Barcelona we can make a decision that enables us to enhance the role of cities and local governments in improving democracy throughout the world. To that end, we propose the creation of a specific working group to address the IOPD model and its governance.

The conference will be organised into keynote speeches, plenary sessions and workshops in parallel sessions, as well as several networking and content-display activities. Members of the IOPD and relevant organisations from the municipalist, academic and political domains will be invited to submit proposals for workshops and other activities. The organising committee will select these workshops based on criteria such as diversity, quality and availability of space.

Results of the conference: a final statement, developed with participants' inputs and consensus, and approved at the IOPD's General Assembly meeting, will be read out during the closing session. This statement will be a political commitment of local governments to promote participatory democracy not only through the implementation of concrete participatory tools, but through the creation of participatory systems at the local level. The organising team is also committed to disseminating the outputs of the conference through edited videos and a written publication.

Participants: Around 500 expected

Working languages: English, French, Spanish, Catalan and Portuguese



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What is the IOPD?

The International Observatory on Participatory Democracy (IOPD) is a network of more than 1000 cities from around the world, entities, organisations and research centres that wish to know, exchange and apply experiences of participatory democracy at the local level in order to enhance democracy in the governing of cities.

The IOPD began in 2001 as part of the decentralised cooperation projects of the European Commission's URB-AL programme. It has been working in collaboration with the organisation **United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)** since 2006 and currently contributes to the development of the organisation's strategic working areas, by producing innovative knowledge in the field of participatory democracy at the service of local governments.

The IOPD accepts the challenge of **reflecting on matters of participatory democracy** at global level to innovate and recommend specific policies to public authorities around the world, **preferably local ones, using the exchange of experiences as its main working method.**

Since it was first set up, the network has been chaired annually by a local government member of the IOPD, which organises an international conference, undertaking the commitment to advance the debate on participatory democracy and share experience and knowledge in this field. The IOPD is currently chaired by the City of Barcelona.