



Agenda for Local Democracy

The General Assembly of the International Observatory on Participatory Democracy, held in Barcelona on 27th November 2018, bringing together the debates that have taken place throughout the year in different towns and cities around the world along with the contributions of the Observatory's Annual Conference, which started on 25th November and finished on the same day, 27th November, with the participation of representatives of local governments, social organisations and research centres, along with other professionals in the field, agreed to a work resolution that seeks to be a reference for local governments throughout the world.

THE IOPD AND CITY NETWORKS

1. Local governments will work to promote the drafting of a World Charter of Local Self-Government that incorporates citizen participation as a key element of a democratic government.
2. The organisation of the IOPD and the actions taken thereby will take into account regional diversity and different local government types (metropolises, cities, large and small towns, singular communities) and their budgetary capacities.
3. The IOPD will act as an instrument of pressure in the international sphere in questions related to local democracy and in the defence of the political rights to citizen participation in general and, in particular, those of elected representatives.
4. The IOPD will pay specific attention to spheres of research and innovation, in order to pave the way for the transfer of knowledge, promoting links with the academic sphere and the deployment of citizen laboratories.
5. The IOPD will develop information networks and facilitate their democratic access, in an only platform.
6. The IOPD will promote the cooperative work of digital communities to further and improve digital participation platforms.
7. The IOPD will maintain a relationship of collaboration with other city networks for the defence of participatory democracy and local self-government.

CONSIDERING



1. That citizen participation and the improvement of democracy form part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) approved by the UNO as part of their 2030 Agenda.
2. That SDG 11 consists of making *"cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable"* and the 11.3 talks about the importance of citizen participation: *"By 2030 enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacities for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries"*.
3. That the goal of SDG 16.7 is: *"Creating institutions, at all levels, that are effective, transparent and accountable"* and *"Guaranteeing the adoption, at all levels, of decision-making that is inclusive, participative and representative."*
4. That the importance of citizen participation also appears in the Quito Declaration on Sustainable Cities and Human Settlements for All, within the framework of Habitat III – United Nations, 2016, around which a New Urban Agenda has been drawn up.
5. That the Agenda, specifically in section 41, sets out a commitment to *"promoting institutional, political, legal and financial mechanisms in cities and human settlements to broaden inclusive platforms, in line with national policies, that allow meaningful participation in decision-making, planning and follow-up processes for all, as well as enhanced civil engagement and co-provision and co-production."*
6. That section 48 encourages *"effective participation and collaboration among all relevant stakeholders, including local governments, the private sector and civil society, women, organizations representing youth, as well as those representing persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, professionals, academic institutions, trade unions, employers' organizations, migrant associations and cultural associations, in order to identify opportunities for urban economic development and identify and address existing and emerging challenges"*.
7. That section 92, states that it is necessary to *"promote participatory age and gender-responsive approaches at all stages of the urban and territorial policy and planning processes, from conceptualization to design, budgeting, implementation, evaluation and review, rooted in new forms of direct partnership between governments at all levels and civil society, including through broad-based and well-resourced permanent mechanisms and platforms for cooperation and consultation open to all, using information and communications technologies and accessible data solutions."*



8. That section 92 says that the New Urban Agenda is committed to *“promoting the strengthening of the capacity of national, subnational and local governments, including local government associations, as appropriate, to work with women and girls, children and youth, older persons and persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and local communities, and those in vulnerable situations, as well as with civil society, academia and research institutions in shaping organizational and institutional governance processes, enabling them to participate effectively in decision-making about urban and territorial development.”*

ACKNOWLEDGING:

1. The fundamental role of cities and towns as the motors of sustainable development, good governance and the promotion of human rights and peace.
2. The diversity of democratic forms and ways in which local communities can fight poverty, ignorance, inequality, the lack of freedoms, discrimination, exclusion, insecurity, environment degradation and cultural deterioration.
3. That democracy is not simply a formal value, but must be constantly updated and revised in order to guarantee equality and the participation of all citizens.
4. That democratic innovation and citizen participation experiences have, over the last few decades, been developed in many towns and cities, covering aspects such as urban development, social policies, participatory budgets, economy, management of resources and public goods, the environment, etc., building up a vast bank of resources and experiences to share and promote.

STRESSING:

1. That citizen participation through democratic mechanisms is a political right of all people and that democracy is the only form of government that is capable of respecting people as political subjects
2. That towns and cities are necessary political actors when it comes to tackling the problems of human beings in the world and that democracy is the best possible way of fighting for freedom and against inequalities.
3. That the democratic reinforcement of local governments in any country also reinforces democracy at other levels, such as national or regional, as well as globally.



4. That a specific agenda is needed for the development, not only of channels of participation, but also of veritable local democracy ecosystems.

WE AGREE A LOCAL DEMOCRACY AGENDA

That brings together the actions that local governments can take to improve citizen participation, facilitate citizen commitment, stimulate social and community enhancement, improve democracy and produce more effective policies that take into account citizen needs, meet Sustainable Development Goals and implement the New Urban Agenda.

1. LOCAL DEMOCRACY AS AN ECOSYSTEM

- 1.1. Local governments will promote the implementation of local democracy ecosystems.
- 1.2. The ecosystem has to be sustainable and effective and must be capable of improving relations both between the citizens themselves and between citizens and local governments.
- 1.3. The democracy ecosystem must take into account actions and instruments within all three dimensions of democracy: representative, deliberative and direct.
- 1.4. As well as respect for all of the political rights included in international declarations, the representative dimension also includes access for citizens to information related to different public interventions, including transparency and the publicising of such information as is necessary to allow citizens to take in and understand the extent of those interventions. Local governments must also periodically render accounts with regard to their governing actions.
- 1.5. The direct dimension includes the holding of referendums or the implementation of similar channels in which the citizens as a whole, by freely exercising their vote both directly and secretly, can decide with regard to certain interventions, while also including the regulation of citizen agenda initiative mechanisms, along with citizen legislative initiatives, so that the community can propose policies and other types of decisions to their local government.
- 1.6. The deliberative dimension includes start-up mechanisms, such as forums of debate, citizen councils, citizen juries, citizen assemblies, along with other similar mechanisms, wherein people can participate, either on a voluntary basis or by drawing



lots. Through these channels debate is promoted and arguments, for and against determined interventions, can be evaluated, seeking the highest possible levels of plurality and diversity of people, in-line with the social reality of the affected territory. The conclusions reached in such debates must be given their due weight when it comes to decisions that affect citizens.

- 1.7. It must be possible for the different channels and processes of the local democracy ecosystem to be activated by local governments.
- 1.8. It must be possible to activate participation channels and processes by means of citizen initiatives that have been promoted by a sufficient number of people to accredit the collective interest of such proposals, based on the collection of a specific number of signatures.
- 1.9. Local governments have to promote collaboration with their citizens for the co-production, co-design and co-implementation of policies and services.
- 1.10. Local governments, either on an individual basis or in coordination with other local, regional or state authorities, must approve the legal norms that will guarantee the structuring of this system and its development. This regulation will have to explicitly include the right of all of the people living in the town or city to participate and must specify precisely what duties this implies for the local administration.
- 1.11. The ecosystem has to include a set of guarantees, on the basis of internal government bodies and external bodies, made up of other people, who can ensure reliability, transparency and smooth running; as well as the rights of the citizens with regard to participation.

2. INCLUSIVENESS

- 2.1. The people that live in towns and cities are of diverse and varied characteristics and cannot be considered as a homogeneous whole. Equity must be sought.
- 2.2. When it comes to implementing local democracy ecosystems, as with the implementation of independent participation policies, local governments must consider inclusion as a fundamental element.
- 2.3. The channels and instruments for local participation have to be adapted to the conditions and singular traits of the persons, and the channels have to reflect and respond to that diversity seeking both quality and quantity.
- 2.4. Diversity and plurality are essential elements of democracy and the channels and



processes must enable the expression of opinions in conditions of equality.

3. PUBLIC GOODS, COMMUNITY AND CITIZEN ENHANCEMENT

- 3.1. Local governments have to open up channels so that the associations, with their different levels of formality, as well as social movements, can ensure that their voices are heard when it comes to public decision-making.
- 3.2. All of the people will not have to participate in associations or social movements. It is indispensable to open up channels and mechanisms for the participation of those who do not form part of any social organisation or who, through a lack of time or resources, find it difficult to become involved in collective affairs.
- 3.3. Local governments also have to incorporate the feminist viewpoint and gender perspectives in the actions that they take, particularly with regard to the deployment of participation channels, in order not to exclude women or other collectives that cannot be easily fitted into templates established on the basis of masculine populations and that, even though they represent a high percentage of the populations of towns and cities, come up against barriers to their involvement in collective affairs.
- 3.4. Local governments have to make a singular and specific effort to incorporate children, adolescents and young people, the seeds of the future for towns and cities, seeking out specific channels and programmes in neighbourhoods, public spaces and educational, recreational and sports centres, in order to encourage the new generations to learn about democracy and participate in the decision-making process in regard to those questions that affect them. At the same time, they must also promote the participation of the elderly, offering them alternatives that are in line with their needs.
- 3.5. Local governments have to adapt their information and participation channels to people with functional diversity, to ensure that their situation does not result in discrimination or marginalisation in those matters that concern public and collective life.
- 3.6. Local governments have to draw up specific programs to ensure the participation of those communities that are notorious, recognised as rural communities or indigenous peoples, offering them singular channels for their involvement and bearing in mind their cultural and social traits.
- 3.7. Local governments have to promote the formalisation of external and/or internal



surveillance and supervision bodies that can guarantee the inclusiveness of participation mechanisms and channels.

4. DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURES

- 4.1. With the aim of reaching more people, the development of different channels and infrastructures for the promotion of more inclusive participation, digital tools will have to be included that can be used in a way that is complementary to in-person participation channels and that will form an essential part of the local democracy ecosystem.
- 4.2. Local governments have to place, at the disposal of their citizens, digital infrastructures in which all of the channels of the participation ecosystem, processes and mechanisms are reflected, in order to pave the way for the use, extension, traceability and transparency thereof.
- 4.3. The use of digital infrastructures has to form part of a hybrid model that must not abandon the provision of both in-person tools and spaces. Local governments must design both of these elements in a coordinated way so that they will mutually reinforce each other.
- 4.4. The code for the platforms, along with the modules, library or any other code developed for the functioning thereof, will have to be based on free and open software. Moreover, the contents, data, API's or interfaces that the infrastructure uses to interact with whatsoever type of user, will also have to comply with interoperability and open standards, always tending towards a maximum level of integration with the most widespread open standards at any given time.
- 4.5. Local governments have to guarantee the accessibility of the digital infrastructure, making possible the use thereof by people with functional diversity and with greater difficulties in using it, such as the elderly or people with a limited educational level. Measures that are aimed at reducing the digital gap must be implemented.
- 4.6. The governance of the infrastructure has to pave the way for the participation of people who are users in terms of the design, implementation and execution of the various functionalities thereof.
- 4.7. Digital infrastructures must expedite the use of electronic signatures in order to channel citizen initiatives and electronic voting, always insofar as there is a guarantee



that such voting will be both secret and reliable.

5. EVALUATION OF POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

- 5.1. The ecosystems have to include mechanisms for the evaluation of the different elements that make them up, such as channels, processes, infrastructures along with any other mechanisms.
- 5.2. Local governments have to promote a system of qualitative and quantitative indicators in order to evaluate and promote the monitoring of the way in which the ecosystem functions.
- 5.3. The design of each participation channel, infrastructure or mechanism has to include the possibility of evaluating its function on the basis of pre-established criteria, such as the quality of the decisions, accessibility, inclusiveness, the effect on the people participating, etc.
- 5.4. Local governments have to develop a system of qualitative and quantitative indicators for monitoring the implementation of the decisions taken on the basis of participation processes and channels. Local governments also have to allow citizens to lead this evaluation.
- 5.5. Local governments have to encourage the monitoring of compliance with the evaluation indicators and also have to provide knowledge with regard to the extent that this has been achieved.
- 5.6. Local governments have to provide access to public data, while also maintaining an active transparency policy.
- 5.7. The ecosystem has to provide the means for the monitoring and control of the action of the government's actions and this should, preferably, be published on digital platforms.

6. LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT

- 6.1. Local governments have to defend self-government at the local level, their competences, capacity for self-management and the resources that allow them to instigate activities and undertake the projects that have been marked out by the opinions of citizens.



- 6.2. Local governments undertake to collaborate with other local governments in their province, region or state, and also with those of other countries, in the defence of local self-government and the competences thereof; while also guaranteeing the capacity for self-management, fully respecting the law and rights, and solely subject to judicial control should they deviate therefrom, while maintaining independence from other levels of State government.
- 6.3. Local governments have to promote spaces for collaboration at regional and state level, in order to ensure sufficient financing to guarantee control at the local level when it comes to the exercise of their competences.
- 6.4. Local governments have to seek coordination with regional, sub-state and state tiers of government for the promotion of policies and standards that will pave the way for the improvement of citizen participation.
- 6.5. To the same ends local governments, wherever possible, have to foster their relationship with supra-state levels of government and regional international organisations.

7. STRATEGIC PLANS FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF DEMOCRATIC QUALITY

- 7.1. Local governments have to promote, in a participatory way, the approval of plans of action aimed at improving the democratic quality of towns and cities.
- 7.2. Such plans will have to contribute to the diagnosis and definition of existing channels of participation, as well as boosting specific programs and actions aimed at the implementation of this agenda.
- 7.3. The plan will have to incorporate programs of training and enablement for political leaders, staff working in local administrations, social organisations and the citizens in general, in order to provide knowledge and know-how in the use of different resources, channels, standards and infrastructures.
- 7.4. Local governments will have to dispose of an administrative organisation, suitably provided in terms of the human, material and financial resources, and which will allow them to comply with the obligations derived from starting up participation systems.
- 7.5. The plan will have to anticipate indicators and systems of evaluation and revision.