

- 37 cities from 12 countries around the world took part in the 10th International Observatory on Participatory Democracy (OIDP) Conference "Global Crisis, Participatory Democracy and Local Alternatives" on 17th, 18th and 19th November in Mexico City.

On the **17th, 18th and 19th November** the **10th International OIDP Conference** took place in **Mexico City** under the title "**Global Crisis, Participatory Democracy and Local Alternatives**" in parallel with the 3rd UCLG World Congress and other meetings of international networks of local authorities.

The Conference was chaired by the Secretary for Social Development of the Federal District Government, Martí Batres, on behalf of the hosting local authority and by Ramon Nicolau, Barcelona City Council Councillor, representing the Technical Secretariat of the OIDP, and was attended by a total of 37 towns and cities from 12 countries: Mexico, Peru, Colombia, Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador, Argentina, France, Spain, United Kingdom and Senegal.

During the opening ceremony, as customary, the International Jury's decision as to the winner of the **5th Distinction** was announced, with the award to the Argentinean city of Rosario for its work on the "**Rosario Participatory Budget**". Likewise, there were also two special mentions for the following experiences: "**IDEAL-EU: Integrating the Motivators of e-Participation at Regional European Level**" (Generalitat of Catalonia, Spain) and "**Public-Private Civic Participation for Successful Living**" (Montufar Canton, Ecuador). A new feature at this tenth conference was that the award-winning city was allotted time in the plenary session to make a more complete presentation of their experience.

After the opening ceremony, the participants began the working sessions by approaching the central issue through two central panels, which endeavoured to cover the challenges that local authorities must face up to in order to respond to the global crisis (Panel I), along with an initial overview of the different alternatives that are being implemented (Panel II).

Taking as their starting point the importance of the local arena in the search for alternatives to the impacts of the global crisis (since it is the sphere which receives the heaviest impacts), special attention was paid to providing the different actors with a voice in local participatory democracy: local governments, social movements, territorial organisations, civil society organisations, intellectuals and academics, with the aim of giving priority to exchanges and debate on local experiences and proposals while, at the same time, seeking to establish which options are turning out to be real and viable in terms of tackling the global crisis.

On this basis, the second day began with working sessions on the different thematic axes, so that the central issue could be viewed from five different dimensions: political, social, cultural, economic and environmental. In each of these axes, different local actors presented case studies chosen for their capacity to help deepen debate and group thinking. By looking for a methodology that was as participatory as possible, the coordinators of each of the thematic axes started off the task by putting

some questions and thoughts up for public debate in order to encourage a horizontal dialogue between members of the public and the speakers. After recording the contributions made by the public, the next stage was to present the case studies and then the debate. Finally, the coordinators, together with the reporters assigned to each thematic axis, summarized the conclusions at the table to finish off the session. This day then brought to a close on the Thursday evening with the presentation of the conclusions to the five thematic axes, debated in the plenary session.

As a result of the work that had been done the host city, supported by the members of the OI DP's Coordinating Committee (and through them all the network members), presented the **Final Declaration** on the morning of Friday 19th. In summary, the following is a quotation from the same, to the effect that, in the face of a crisis which is *"multidimensional, and which not only affects the financial and economic sphere, but encompasses a crisis of values"*, the Conference participants established that it would be necessary *"to reinforce and promote participatory public policies, from the bottom up, to encourage the use of local currencies and community banking, as the alternative of a new economy, in order to strengthen urban agricultural policies"*. They also acknowledged that *"working with young people is a complex task requiring the availability of participatory mechanisms that will involve them and encourage them to associate. There is a need to move forward to levels of civic co-management that empower people for a community benefit, and break with the dominant mono-culturalism, which is an essential step towards recognising new types of community management. The legal instruments of participatory democracy should guarantee the right to participation and successful pilot experiences should be institutionalized without being bureaucratized"*.

Likewise it is also necessary to stress that, on that same morning, a round table was held concerning the **OI DP's first 10 years**, in which local authorities and representatives from the cities of Porto Alegre, Nanterre, La Paz and Barcelona (all of whom are founding members of the network) took part. This working session covered issues such as the role of civil society in participatory processes, the institutionalization of those processes, the value of internationalization, the creation of networks, and how the network should advance in the future.

Finally, during the closing ceremony, which also took place on the morning of Friday 19th, the city of Mexico DF publicly **passed on the Presidency of the Network** to the Spanish city of **Lleida**, where in April 2011, on 6th, 7th and 8th, the **11th Conference** will take place, taking as its central issue: **"New Technologies and Civic Participation. Civil Society and Instruments of Communication"**.