



COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL INCLUSION AND PARTICIPATIVE DEMOCRACY OF THE UCLG

Participative Democracy Workgroup

Some questions relating to the concept of participative democracy¹ and the role of cities:

Declaration of principles

We local authorities are responsible for promoting a culture of civil participation as a means to achieve social inclusion.

- Participative democracy, culture, a culture of peace and non-violence, civil participation and social inclusion are concepts that encompass a new paradigm, a new model of development and governance in which cities are thrust into the centre of a stage that provides all the right conditions for innovation and democratic experimentation.
- Direct mechanisms for intervening in decisions that affect the lives of citizens are fundamental in order to improve life in cities, promote social development and social inclusion and consolidate measures. Civil participation is simply the real capability of citizens to make decisions, and this participation should have a decisive impact on raising the level of real democracy in society.
- We are mindful of the limits of local experiences, but our local practices, in which culture and civil participation are restored to their rightful prominence, demand the construction of a local know-how that, through networking, becomes part of a larger democratic and inclusive project that offers an alternative to the problems of the world today.
- These are general principles. In order for them to be effective, it is important to take into account the differences between developed cities with resources and poorer cities, between cities in the North and those in the South, between large and small cities, and between cities with a whole host of other characteristics.

¹ This document has been drawn up by the Participative Democracy Workgroup of the Forum of Local Authorities for Social Inclusion (FLA), co-ordinated by Córdoba, Belo Horizonte and Montevideo, with the support of the expert and executive secretariat of the FLA and the Committee on Social Inclusion and Participative Democracy (CSIPD) of the UCLG. This document is based on the contributions and conclusions of the various events in which local authorities that are members of the CSIPD participate, in particular the Participative Democracy Workgroup of the FLA and the **Participative Democracy: A Challenge to "Another Possible World"** workshop organised by the FLA on 23 January 2006 in Caracas, Venezuela.

Proposed core themes and concepts of the Committee on Social Inclusion and Participative Democracy of the UCLG

- **New governance: relations between states and civil society.** The city is the territory of citizens. It is here that central government power is closest to people and it is here that participation mechanisms can be more direct. There are two major challenges facing relations between states and civil society: a change in political culture and a new institutionalism and adaptation of the administrative apparatuses in order to provide responses to a new citizenry based on new participative, better-informed and reflective demands for a greater say in decision-making and a move away from the old rigid and hierarchical formats of participation, enabling citizens to become involved in arenas and organisations that are more horizontal and democratic in their functioning. We recommend that the capability of the institutions and administrative apparatuses in our cities be evaluated.
- **Citizens' rights and the culture of civil participation.** There is no real possibility of exercising the right to citizenship unless there is a minimal degree of social equality between citizens. It is important to defend the rights of citizens (new neighbours, immigrants' rights, etc.) for the ultimate purpose of seeking to establish equity through the redistribution of resources and power. Municipal authorities can play an important part in giving a voice to those who go unheard by facilitating and respecting arenas and organisations that are more horizontal and democratic in their functioning.
It is essential that the autonomy of social organisations be preserved. It is equally important for municipal authorities to be able to contribute to raising its members' skills, thereby boosting their intervention in participative arenas. Improving the communication mechanisms between the state and society is another important step forward.
- **Promotion of financial rights and rights of social inclusion.** We cannot assume that citizens are automatically equal or that they are all affected by the economic divides and social exclusion that affect our countries.
Local authorities do not define the economic policy of their countries but they can have a political impact on the issue by engaging in debate on the most suitable policies and on municipalities' budgets and their social responsibilities.
This debate may encourage more politicised civil participation.
Local authorities must still promote local development initiatives and social inclusion as a means to achieve participation. These efforts must be funded using locally available resources.
- **Democratic pluralism** as a strategic goal for the development of a city and an essential element in building alternative citizenries. Participative democracy is founded on a new 'social grammar', the main components of which are the concepts of social and cultural diversity, pluralism, active citizenship, the defence of identities and subjectivities, autonomy, the reinforcement of the public space, etc., which will introduce new concepts into the treatment of relations between society and the state.

- **Administrative decentralisation.** It is acknowledged that local authorities are closer to citizens, but this is not always so true in large cities. Consequently, the introduction of mechanisms to achieve administrative decentralisation are important to guarantee civil participation. These mechanisms can themselves be achieved through the involvement of citizens.
- **Democratic experimentation: experiences and instruments.** Cities are more vulnerable than any other space to the negative impact of the process of neoliberal globalisation, a situation that means that the new challenges and problems are growing bigger and more complex. Cities are emerging as key players and as the most appropriate scenario for innovation and democratic experimentation. Consequently, it is important that the sharing of experiences on mechanisms for defending public interests is promoted in order to democratically radicalise the way the public interest is built, examples being Participative Budgets, Community Strategic Planning, integrated social inclusion plans, Local Agenda 21s, etc.
- **Networking between cities and local authorities in conjunction with civil society:** Some local authorities, together with organised social movements, are embracing a commitment to act locally to influence this context of unfair globalisation by encouraging new ways of engaging in and understanding politics. In so doing, they are reaffirming their commitment to a strong and organised world civil society and to local governments connected by means of networks and acting politically on the international stage. In the light of this, the right to communication and information is evidently a central question for cultural and democratic development.
- **Planning.** Planning is not just a management tool but also an extremely important political instrument to enable us to achieve our goals concerning social equity and civil participation. The technical mechanisms of planning and evaluation need to be employed in order to increase their effectiveness. A debate and sharing of experiences on planning, including participative experiences, would also be useful.

Activities organised:

- **Forums, seminars, conferences and talks**
 - 6th FLA in Caracas: January 2006 (www.fal-caracas2006.org)
 - 2nd meeting of the CSIPD in Nanterre, March 2006
 - World Urban Forum in Vancouver on Participative Budgets, June 2006
 - International Seminar on Participative Budgets, Citizens' Rights and Civil Participation, Córdoba, 26-28 June 2006, and the meeting of the FLA Participative Democracy Workgroup
- **Sharing of experiences, training and capacity building:**
 - R9-A4-04 "Participating in local governance: the impact of participative budgets on local public administration", Ayuntamiento de Córdoba, Spain (available for downloading from <http://www.ayuncordoba.es>)

- R9-A5-04 "The participative budget as a means to combat social and territorial exclusion", Comune di Venecia, Italy
- R9-A6-04 "Instruments for linking regional planning and the Participative Budget", Prefectura Municipal de Belo Horizonte, Brazil
- R9-A1-04 "The participative budget and public-private partnerships and their links to social economy for solidarity", Municipio de Cuenca, Ecuador
- R3-B2-04: International Observatory on Participative Democracy (IOPD), Barcelona
- **Generating knowledge: research, producing manuals and working tools, and publications.**
 - Report of the 4th FLA
 - URB-AL Network 9 projects, Local Finance and the Participative Budget, co-ordinated by POA:
 - Baseline document of the URB-AL Network 9
 - The contribution of the Cuenca project: other development models based on solidarity
 - The contribution of the Venice project: the inclusion of the excluded in local management
 - The contribution of the Córdoba project: new relations between the state and civil society. Towards integrated management models using the tools of participative democracy (Publications available for downloading at <http://www.ayuncordoba.es>)
 - Projects
 - UN-Habitat and governance
 - WB and transparency
 - URB-AL, decentralised co-operation
 - IOPD: local observatories on participative democracy
 - Co-operation funds, etc.

Work Schedule

November 2006

- 3rd Meeting of the CSIPD, Marrakech

January 2007:

- 7th FLA, Nairobi

October 2007:

- 28th to 31st World Congress of the UCLG, Jeju.

December 2007

- World Forum on Participative Democracy in the Regions, Lyon. Organised by the Conseil Régional de Rhône-Alpes (France)

Specific agenda:

- Define concepts
- Define the creation of a database of experiences and gather existing documentation and availability on the Internet
- Define the contribution of the CSIPD to GOLD (Global Observatory of Local Democracy and Decentralization): point B of the GOLD report presented at the meeting of the Executive Bureau in Washington in February 2006 deals with civil participation. In conjunction with the UCLG, we could expand the part on observing the development of innovative forms of civil participation in local political life. Describe and analyse practices.
- Participation in UCLG World Congress - Jeju