

19th International Observatory on Participatory Democracy (IOPD) Conference

When democracy catches up with us...

PARTICIPATORY CITIES WITH FULL RIGHTS

participatory democracy and the right to the city,
in the light of both Agenda 2030 and the New Urban Agenda,
and from the perspective of communities and local governments

7th, 8th, 9th and 10th December 2019, in Iztapalapa, México

Conceptual Note

Faced with the intense onslaught of unbridled urban development that is devastating our cities, transforming them into commodities that are beyond the reach of many of their inhabitants and preventing them from being able to fully exercise their rights, the 19th IOPD Conference invites us to reflect on the meaning of Democracy in its deepest sense, along with its intrinsic link with the full exercise of rights in our cities and the strategic tasks that both communities and local governments must push through in order to ensure that living and coexistence in the city will be more human, democratic, sustainable, equitable, fair and solidary.

Overcoming a restrictive definition of democracy -which limits it to nothing more than a political regime with a set of rules, regulations and procedures and reduces it to a form of government in which the most outstanding aspect are direct elections- implies not only conceiving democracy but also exercising it in a broader and more profound sense: as a social project that affects all society's relationships (economic, social, political, cultural, day-to-day); as a form of political-social coexistence organised by society based on the will of the people and the common good; as the quality that impregnates all of life's dimensions, reciprocal relationships and the way that society works, the principal elements of which are democratic coexistence, relationships of social well-being for the majority and social justice in every sphere.

Our point of departure is also based on democracy being both a key element in the full exercise of our rights and a human right in itself. Democracy cannot be based on anything other than a respect for human rights. The fight for the exercising and full achievement of all rights is intrinsically related to the construction of citizenship, active social participation and the democratisation of our societies. Elements that have given life to and made sense of a great many movements, of women, settlers, producers, Indians, people of colour, tax payers, retiree's or ecologists, who are claiming their right to take part in the decisions that concern their present and their future.

Along the same lines we have the recent "Guidelines on the Effective Implementation of the Right to Participate in Public Affairs" (2018), drawn up by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), which acknowledges how *"Participation allows for the promotion of all human rights; plays a crucial role in the promotion of democracy, the rule of law, social inclusion and economic development; is essential for the reduction of inequalities and social conflicts; and is one of the fundamental elements in approaches based on rights aimed at eliminating marginalisation and*

discrimination”.

At the present time two agendas have been put in place -primarily for the purpose of guiding and steering the policies of national, regional and local governments- these are Agenda 2030 and the **New Urban Agenda**. A great many governments, worldwide have reached agreement on and signed these two instruments, and in this sense a thoughtful and timely review is due of what they effectively have to offer in terms of determining the democracy that we are proclaiming, in the exercising of the right to the city for which we are also fighting.

The Conference seeks to stimulate debate and reflection on the importance of, and the key role played by, active citizens’ participation and local democratic governments in the modification of the negative trends of powerful, speculative interests that stand in the way of human rights, preventing tendencies the right to housing and the right to the city; while at the same time aligning the voice of those cities committed to realising the right to the city; the right of all inhabitants, both male and female, to live in cities that are more human, more habitable, more democratic, fairer and more solidary; and against the commodification thereof, which generates looting, segregation, gentrification and the destruction of the social fabric.

The Conference is to be organised around a series of plenary sessions, keynote speeches, round table debates based on thematic areas, territorial round tables based on the exchange of experiences, popular encounters in local districts, utopian round tables, participatory innovation and creativity, cine-debate sessions, in which pride of place will be given to exchanges between participants. Parallel and organised networking activities may also be proposed by IOPD members; academic, political and municipal bodies, as well as the social networks and movements, which will then be selected by the programming committee on the basis of criteria of quality and diversity, and also depending on the availability of spaces.

Local actions will also be promoted in different cities throughout the year leading up to the 19th IOPD Conference, based on the different thematic areas to be dealt with at the Conference, cycles of conferences, cine-debates, workshops, seminars, etc. that reflect the plurality of the social and political actors involved. Likewise, at a worldwide level, the systematisation of experiences will be promoted, along with the contribution of theoretical inputs and remote interactive dialogues centred on the different thematic areas, concepts and approaches that are key to the stimulation of the debate. We invite all interested cities and local governments to promote and run workshops and seminars, or any other kind of events, throughout the world to debate these contents and, in this way, to enrich both the 2019 Conference and the Assembly.

Results of the Conference: A final consensus declaration will be drawn up by the participants, based on an express, previously organised process, which will be approved at the IOPD General Assembly and will subsequently be read out at the closing ceremony. This declaration will represent a political commitment on the part of local governments to defend and strengthen participatory democracy and the right to the city as strategic axes in the processes and actions that are to be taken, contingent on the materialisation of the SDG’s and the New Urban Agenda. The organising team also undertakes to publicise the contents of the Conference via the edition of videos and a written publication.

The Conference will also serve as the framework for the awarding of the “Best Practice in Citizens’ Participation Distinction” which the IOPD organises every year.

Participants: It is expected that 1,000 participants will take part in the Conference (mayors, councillors, representatives), local government technicians, the staff of international organisations, academics, social movement and civil society activists from different countries and geographic areas.

Working languages: Spanish, English and French (Portuguese, to be decided)

Proposed areas of discussion (for optional inclusion, in any case as an annex)

1. **The Stage.** Cities without people and people without cities... or rights. What about democracy? Current dilemmas of participatory democracy and the right to the city. The present day context of neo-liberal territorial, urban and housing policies, the role of the market and the state, the violation of the rights to adequate housing and shelter.
2. **The Director.** Who decides on the project for the city? The democratic and participatory construction of cities: limits, challenges and alternatives. How and by whom are the decisions being made on life in our cities, how they are to be used and what their fates will be? What are the policies, the mechanisms and the instruments that are to be applied to define the course of the city? Who will be included? What is the role of local governments in these decisions? Valuable experiences in which participatory democracy propagates the decision making processes, with their achievements, limits and challenges, indicating possible alternative routes for the most effective materialisation thereof.
3. **The Actors at Play.** Who builds the cities of today? Between two models for creating the city: unbridled urban development and organised popular settlement. Participatory planning and sustainable social urbanism experiences for the democratic construction of the city.
4. **The Desired Plot.** Democracy, habitat, ecology and economy: An indissoluble quaternomial for the generation of inclusive, equitable, habitable, safe, sustainable, productive, enjoyable and participatory cities and communities. Reflection and experiences of effective dialogue between the different actors, where the central components of the right to the city are positively combined and articulated and have resulted in urban spaces or cities that can be lived in and enjoyed by all.
5. **The Projected Denouement.** Agenda 2030 and the New Urban Agenda. What strategies will strengthen participatory democracy, the right to the city and sustainable development at local level? The co-creation of an urban, metropolitan agenda, through the specific participation of all of the parties involved, which will approach socio-territorial inequalities by seeking the right to centrality of all of the inhabitants of all of the territories that make up the city. Experiences that vindicate the right to the city through active democracy and spatial justice.