

May 21-23, 2025 Córdoba, Argentina

24th Conference of the International Observatory on Participatory Democracy (OIDP)

"Connect, Integrate, and Humanize: Cities Facing the Challenge of Building Community"

The 24th Conference of the International Observatory on Participatory Democracy (OIDP) is organized by the Municipality of Córdoba and the World Organization of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG). It will bring together local leaders, academics, activists, and key players to discuss the challenges of democracy, the defense of local autonomy, and the promotion of citizen participation as a tool to strengthen public policies.

In a global context of increasing urbanization, rising inequalities, and challenges such as climate change or the current technological revolution, with democracies and institutions at risk, this conference aims to create a space for dialogue and learning on how cities can foster more integrated, participatory, and resilient communities. Under the theme "Connect, Integrate, and Humanize: Cities Facing the Challenge of Building Community," the event will contribute to strengthening democracy and trust in institutions, key elements for ensuring a more just and sustainable future, while also strengthening international cooperation for more effective and inclusive local governance.

The conference is framed within the localization process of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the implementation of the New Urban Agenda. Additionally, the UCLG Pact for the Future and the municipalist feminist movement are key references in the debate on local democracy, human rights, and gender equality. These international processes must be pushed and implemented through the decisive action of local governments, both in direct action and through the international municipalist movement.

Objectives of the Conference

- Defend and promote a pro-democratic agenda focused on Human Rights, which strengthens inclusive citizen participation and democratic rights.
- Defend local autonomy and decentralization as pillars of effective and legitimate governance.
- Contribute to the agenda of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and the global municipalist movement.
- Reflect on the role of citizen participation in social cohesion and democracy.
- Analyze the impact of digitalization and artificial intelligence on the relationship between citizens and government.
- Promote collaboration between cities and international actors to innovate in participatory governance.
- Contribute to the implementation and localization of the SDGs, with special attention to SDG 5 (gender equality), 10 (reduced inequalities), 11 (sustainable cities), and 16 (inclusive and participatory institutions).

Thematic Areas

1. Citizen Participation for Community Building

Strengthening citizen participation is key to creating more inclusive and resilient communities. We will seek to address the new challenges that municipalities face in terms of citizen participation, such as the need to adapt to changing demands and expectations of the population, the inclusion of people with disabilities through accessibility efforts, the integration of traditionally excluded groups such as youth, the elderly, vulnerable individuals, or marginalized communities, and the alignment of participatory processes with decision-making.

Community strengthening is essential to achieve more cohesive societies and more resilient democratic systems. We will address the challenges of achieving community building in a context of increasing individualism and social isolation. This exchange aims to inspire and guide municipal governments worldwide in implementing policies and programs that promote a more active and engaged citizenship.

This area will address:

- Successful experiences of participatory budgets and citizen assemblies.
- Mechanisms for including historically excluded groups in decision-making.
- Strategies to promote youth participation, gender equality, and civic engagement.

2. Administrative, Operational, and Political Decentralization of Cities

Decentralization allows for a more efficient management, and one that is closer to the needs of citizens. We aim to discuss the various models and advances that cities and metropolises around the world have had in decentralization efforts. Different cities worldwide have made progress in this direction over the last thirty years, with diverse experiences and very different approaches to the challenge of bringing services closer to citizens and, in turn, improving representation.

Additionally, this thematic area proposes debating issues related to self-sufficiency and the distribution of taxes within each country towards cities.

Urban populations around the world are growing at an accelerated rate, and as a result, the role of local governments is increasingly important. This requires a discussion on autonomy and municipal self-sufficiency. We are talking about a concept that contrasts with centralism and empowers local governments as entities capable of generating their own solutions. A city's government becomes independent when it can respond to its citizens by managing its own resources, and this is where decentralization plays a key role.

In this area, we will discuss:

- Models of local autonomy and decentralization and their impact on governance.
- The transfer of competencies and resources to local entities.
- Challenges and opportunities in cooperation between different levels of government.

3. Citizenship and Government in the Digital Age: New Technologies and Artificial Intelligence Challenges in Public Management

New technologies have transformed the relationship between citizens and government, creating opportunities and challenges for participatory democracy. They offer new tools and channels to facilitate interaction between citizens and public administrations.

The emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) and new technologies requires careful discussion and management by leaders so they can become tools to build smart cities, enabling public services to be more efficient, accessible, and oriented towards improving citizens' quality of life. The goal should be to optimize resources and administrative processes, facilitating citizens' daily lives and allowing direct participation or oversight of decision-making. However, the risks and new conflicts that may arise from their application must also be considered.

One of the most prolific uses of Information and communication technology (ICT) is related to the creation of digital platforms for citizen participation. These bring citizens closer to governmental information and public services, promoting greater transparency and accountability. Through websites, mobile apps, and social media, governments can encourage active citizen participation in decision-making by collecting their opinions, suggestions, and demands.

This area will explore:

- The impact of artificial intelligence on public decision-making.
- The potential and challenges of digitizing participatory processes and their accessibility.
- The use of open data and transparency to strengthen citizen trust.

Conference Methodology

The 24th OIDP Conference will combine plenary sessions, thematic panels, interactive workshops, and spaces for experience exchange. A dynamic and participatory approach will be prioritized, promoting mutual learning and collective solution-building. The City of Córdoba will organize technical visits to discover best practices in local public management. Additionally, it is expected that other networks and organizations will meet within the framework of the conference. We want the Conference to serve to strengthen local, national, and international alliances and communities present at the event.

Participants

The event will be directed to:

- Representatives of local and regional governments.
- Civil society organizations and citizen movements.
- Academics, experts, and researchers on democracy, participation, and digital innovation.
- International organizations and city networks.

Expected Outcomes

As a result of the 24th OIDP Conference, the Córdoba Declaration will be adopted, which will gather the main conclusions and commitments made by the participants. This document will serve to strengthen the pro-democratic agenda, promote decentralization and participation, and contribute to the global strategy of UCLG and the municipalist movement. During the conference, the winners of the 19th edition of the OIDP Award for Best Practices in Citizen Participation will also be presented.

The 24th OIDP Conference in Córdoba will be a key space for reflection, learning, and jointly building strategies to strengthen participatory democracy in cities. In a time of profound changes and challenges, it is essential for cities to connect, integrate, and humanize to successfully face the challenge of building community.

We look forward to seeing you in Córdoba from May 21 to 23, 2025