

AI & local democracy: What are we talking about?

How can participatory democracy meet the challenge(s) of artificial intelligence?

Date: 21 March 2025

Time: 16:00-18:00 CET ([click for local time](#))

Organizers and supporters: International Observatory on Participatory Democracy (OIDP), Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR), UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights (UCLG-CSIPDHR), International Alliance of Inhabitants (IAI); PHOENIX Project/CES - University of Coimbra; International Association of Facilitators (IAF).

Registration Form: [Zoom Link](#)

Languages: EN/ES translation will be available in Wordly through this [link](#).

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and technology are rapidly transforming the chains of command (from global to national to local levels), and the way we govern, communicate, and make decisions. The rise of AI in governance presents both unprecedented opportunities and significant risks and challenges for participatory democracy and the protection of human and environmental rights.

While AI and technology can enhance accessibility, inclusivity and efficiency in decision-making processes and promote innovation in public policy, its challenges and risks are still concerning. Freedom from external technocratic political/financial constraints, access to information, transparency and accountability are key for democratic and legitimate decision-making, and AI's technology is often still very opaque, and energy and extractive resources-intensive. Bias correction, monitoring and regulation gaps fail to keep pace with the rapid development of new technologies and their impact from outside on local governance, leaving human and environmental rights and democratic values at risk.

As we embrace the digital age, we must reflect critically on how technology can enhance inclusive decision-making, while ensuring that it does not undermine democracy or reinforce inequalities, forcing local authorities and citizens to be subject to mechanisms, decisions and policies coming from outside the democratic process. This webinar will explore the intersection of AI, technology and other digital tools, governance, and participatory democracy, emphasizing the importance of human and environmental rights and inclusivity in shaping the future. As we face an increasingly digital future, it is crucial that local authorities, social organizations and academics collaborate to ensure that technology serves the people and is educated to human and environmental rights, promotes equal opportunities and inclusivity, and strengthens democratic processes resisting techno-fascist interference.

The OIDP is committed to bring this discussion at the core of our agenda, for that we hosted two sessions during our 23rd Conference in Valongo last October 2024 and we will dedicate one of the three axes of our next 24 OIDP Conference “Connect, Integrate and Humanize: Cities facing the challenge of generating Community,” to be held in Cordoba (Argentina), from 21 to 23 May 2025. The video of this event will be uploaded in the YouTube pages of the OIDP, PHOENIX and other co-organizers, together with a small written summary of the discussion held.

The **objectives** of this webinar are to:

- Examine the ways AI can be used to support decision-making, optimize public services, and engage citizens in governance processes for a responsible future
- Identify the potential risks that AI and technology pose to democratic processes, such as political/financial constraints from outside on local governance, biases in algorithms, loss of privacy, misinformation and the exclusion of workers, migrants, gender and marginalized communities from decision-making processes
- Reflect on the importance of embedding, as main priorities, the human and environmental rights principles within the use of AI and technology in governance, ensuring equitable access to technology and its benefits
- Identify new and existing good practices for local authorities, technologists, civil society, and policymakers to collaborate and design technology solutions that enhance democratic participation and respect for human and environmental rights
- Initiate the construction of a shared platform of democratic institutions, social organizations and academics for interchange, knowledge, analysis, training, and networking local/international instrumentation with the ability to understand and address AI challenges through defending participatory democracy, human and environmental rights.
- Provide inputs to the collective reflection to be carried on in the in-person event “Facilita” that is happening in Milan between 20-22 March, organised by IAF-Italy.

Our commitments

As we embrace the potential of AI and other emerging technologies, it is imperative that we do so with a commitment to uphold human and environmental rights. Technology must never be a tool for exclusion or oppression. Instead, it should serve as a means to empower individuals and communities to have a voice in the decisions that shape their lives.

We must reflect on how AI is used to ensure that it enhances - rather than diminishes - the freedoms, responsibility and rights of individuals and communities. AI's potential to increase

efficiency in governance must be balanced with the necessity to protect individual freedoms, privacy, and the right to participation, as well as mechanisms to fight the spread of misinformation. This requires the implementation of frameworks that “educate” AI to prioritize accountability, equity, and transparency in all steps of development, including educating the technology to democracy, nature and future generations.

Ultimately, human and environmental rights for a responsible future must remain at the heart of technological advancement, ensuring that AI is people-powered and not used not as a substitute for human decision-making, but rather as a tool to strengthen democracy, inclusivity, and equality.

Guiding questions:

- What are the challenges and opportunities of integrating AI into local governance to enhance citizen participation and decision-making?
- How can local governments ensure AI empowers citizens rather than reinforcing top-down governance?
- Can we shape and educate AI tools to human and environmental rights?
- What successful examples can be shared of AI supporting participatory democracy and democracy at the local level?

Speakers/structure:

Welcome remarks:

- Adrià Duarte, Coordinator of the OIDP, UCLG Secretariat

Part 1. Setting the ground for AI at the service of participatory democracy: what could AI in local democracies look like?

- **“Artificial Intelligence and Democracy: A Political Imperative for a Participatory Future,” Flavia Marzano** (Expert of AI in the Taskforce for Open Government of OGP-Italy)

AI specialist, she has been an alderwoman in Rome (2016-2019) with responsibilities for Open Government, Smart City, Digital Agenda, Public Administration Modernization, Simplification of Citizen-PA Relations, Digital Skills, Enhancement of the statistical function, equal opportunities and gender policies.

- **“Intelligent participation or artificial democracy?” Michelangelo Secchi** (Eudema.net: Digital Sustainable Transitions):

TITLE: Setting the scene about the context, what is AI and what is just a digital environment, the problems around challenges and opportunities, pros and cons of AI in participation/democratic processes; what other tools can we use, and how can we make them learn from an environment aimed to intensify democratic practice?

Part 2. Transitioning from digital tools to AI: how AI can add value and develop participatory and democratic processes

- A few words from Anders Nordh, Development Manager at the Swedish Association of Local and Regional Governments (SALAR)
- AI in dialogue about urban development using an open-source AI platform, the city of Sundsvall, Mr. Andreaz Strömgren, Director of Urban Planning and Mrs. Ulrika Sjöberg, Communications strategist, City Planning Office Sundsvall

Part 3. Call for Action: Proposals for an alliance between democratic institutions, social organizations and academia to deal with the AI challenge by developing Participatory Democracy.

- **Gerardo de Luzenberger** - Global Chair of IAF (International Association of Facilitators)
- **Cesare Ottolini**, Global Coordinator of the International Alliance of Inhabitants

Resources:

- 23rd OIDP Conference in Valongo “Authoritarian Threats: Building Democratic Resilience through Participatory Communities.”
https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLLmmhAvuXI0Hw1iBZ-WDhjL4T_nS-yKV1&feature=shared
- ALDA Europe (2024), “Local Democracy in the Digital Age: towards unexploited opportunities and future challenges.”
<https://www.alda-europe.eu/local-democracy-in-the-digital-age-towards-unexploited-opportunities-and-future-challenges/>
- Bloomberg Cities Network (2024), “Strategies for spreading AI throughout local government.”
<https://bloombergcities.jhu.edu/news/strategies-spreading-ai-throughout-local-government>
- Democracy Next (2025). “The Case for Local and Regional Public Engagement in Governing Artificial Intelligence.” <https://www.demnext.org/projects/ailocalism>

- Verhulst, Stefaan G. and Claudia Chwalisz (2025), “The case for local and regional public engagement in governing artificial intelligence”, DemocracyNext, The GovLab, and The Data Tank. <https://www.demnext.org/projects/ailocalism>
- [Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions \(SALAR\), International Alliance of Inhabitants \(IAI\), Phoenix Project - Center for Social Studies at the University of Coimbra \(CES\). 23rd OIDP Conference in Valongo, \(2024\).](#) “The new frontier of alliances for the Right to the City. Participatory Democracy Challenging Artificial Intelligence.”