

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

**“Connect, Integrate and Humanize: Cities facing the challenge of generating
Community”**

CONCEPT NOTE

Session 4

Democracy, Management, and Digital Participation

Date: 22 May 2025

Time: 9:00 AM - 10:30 AM

Venue: UNC Auditorium, Córdoba, Argentina

Thematic Area: **Government in the Digital Era**

CONTEXT

Democracy can no longer be conceived separately from the changes transforming our societies: from **growing inequalities** to the **digital revolution**. **These phenomena not only challenge the responsiveness** of institutions, but also profoundly **reshape the relationships between governments and citizens**. Cities, due to their closeness to everyday life, become privileged spaces to experiment with new forms of public management. In this sense, digital tools can open the door to **more open, collaborative, and transparent practices**, but they can also **deepen inequalities** if not accompanied by **policies of inclusion and regulation**. The question is no longer whether we should “digitalize” government, but **how to do so in a way that enhances democracy** instead of fragmenting it.

The incorporation of digital tools in public management should not be understood merely as technical modernization, but as a rethinking of **how public decisions are made and who participates in them**. Initiatives such as **digital participatory budgets, citizen consultation platforms, or the use of artificial intelligence in social policies** demonstrate the transformative potential of digital technology. However, tensions also emerge: **automated decisions without human oversight, algorithmic biases, or the risk of mass surveillance**.

This session proposes to reflect on the **role of technology in transforming local public management and strengthening democratic practices**. It aims to go beyond technological enthusiasm and ask what **kind of democracy we want to build in the digital era**. Only an **integrated vision** — one that links technology, rights, and community — will allow us to harness the digital to create fairer, more transparent, and livable cities for all.

OBJECTIVES

- **Reflect on the impact of digital transformation on the relationships between governments and citizens**, and how it reshapes governance in urban contexts.
- **Debate how to incorporate technology into public management** not merely as a technical improvement, but as an opportunity to strengthen democracy, inclusion, and citizen participation.
- **Analyze concrete experiences of democratic digitalization** — such as digital participatory budgets, consultation platforms, or artificial intelligence applied to public policy — as well as the risks associated with automation, algorithmic bias, and surveillance.
- **Explore the elements necessary for a digital transformation with an integrated approach**, linking technology, accountability mechanisms, digital literacy, and rights.

METHODOLOGY

This **90-minute panel** will begin with an introduction to establish the foundations of the relationship between governance and technology. Then, **a panel of representatives from local governments will share their experiences and models of digitalization and use of technology in public management**, addressing issues of democratic digitalization, transparency, and digital risks. The speakers will have the opportunity to comment on their experiences, discuss practices, and explore solutions to move towards more accessible and equitable urban governance. An interactive question-and-answer session will follow, encouraging audience participation.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- How can digital transformation strengthen — or weaken — democracy at the local level and bring the state closer to citizens?
- What ethical, legal, institutional, and technological conditions are necessary for the incorporation of technology in public management to promote real and effective citizen participation?
- What ethical and political tensions arise from the use of digital tools in public decision-making?
- What kind of governance do we want to build in the digital age, and how does it align with the principles of inclusion, social justice, and citizens' rights?

SPEAKERS (Preliminary)

- **João Paulo Lima**, State Deputy of Pernambuco, Former Mayor of Recife (Brazil)
- **Carla de Paiva Bezerra**, Director of Digital Participation and Network Communication, Federal Government (Brazil)
- **Agustina Mallamace**, Undersecretary of Innovation, Lomas de Zamora (Argentina)
- **Sebastian Kowalski**, Team Leader of Participation and Dialogue Unit, Municipality of Krakow (Poland)
- **Ignacio Gei**, Secretary of Smart City and Digital Transformation, Municipality of Córdoba (Argentina)