

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

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

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**CONCEPT NOTE**

**Session 7**

**Local Democracy Through a Youth Lens: Emerging Leadership and Digital  
Transformation**

**Date:** 22 May 2025

**Time:** 11:00 AM - 12:30 PM

**Location:** UNC Hall (Hall A), Córdoba, Argentina

**Thematic Area:** **Community Building**

**CONTEXT**

The participation of young people is key to **strengthening democracy, trust in institutions**, and building more **just and inclusive societies**. The younger generations are often the ones who experience the present-day challenges more directly, such as the climate crisis, social inequalities, and lack of opportunities. Therefore, their active involvement in decision-making processes is crucial to **ensure that the policies and actions adopted effectively respond to the needs of all people, and that young people regain trust in democratic institutions**. However, we still face significant challenges in ensuring their effective participation in these spaces, both in terms of **access** and **representation**, which limits their ability to influence political and social leadership.

Technology and digital tools emerge as key factors in promoting youth participation. Digital platforms provide a **more accessible and democratic space**, allowing young people to get involved in politics and social leadership without the **traditional barriers**

**to access.** However, it is important to note that the use of digital technologies also presents challenges, such as **misinformation, the digital divide, and the exclusion of certain youth sectors** that lack access to these tools. Therefore, it is essential not only to promote these tools but also to ensure that they are fair and accessible spaces for all.

In this session, co-organized by UCLG and the Municipality of Córdoba, within the framework of the NextGenC project led by LSE Cities, alongside the Colombian universities ICESI and Los Andes, we will explore **how to foster youth leadership, create real participation spaces, and promote new forms of leadership adapted to current challenges, where young people are recognized not only as the leaders of tomorrow but as active agents of change.** Additionally, we will address how digital tools can be a catalyst to improve youth participation and impact on democracy. Through dialogue with young leaders and local government representatives from all continents, we will reflect on strategies to make democracy a more open, innovative, and representative project, one that not only listens to young people but also empowers them to lead change in their communities and beyond.

## OBJECTIVES

- **Reflect on the importance of youth participation in democracy,** ensuring that policies respond to current needs and protect the interests of present and future generations.
- Examine the **barriers that limit youth participation in political and social leadership at the local level,** and discuss strategies to overcome these obstacles.
- Promote **new forms of local governance anchored in youth leadership** that recognize young people as active agents of change, not just as leaders of the future.
- Analyze **how digital tools can be used to strengthen youth participation,** considering both the opportunities they offer and the challenges related to the digital divide, misinformation, and inclusion.

## METHODOLOGY

The goal of the session is to carry out a **participatory session in workgroups**, where the groups will have around **60 minutes** to discuss a **case study or a group of questions.** The session will start with an introduction to present the context and objectives of the session. The speakers will present a **case study** (or a set of questions to discuss), and

groups will then be divided by topic of interest. The session will conclude with the **conclusions from the rapporteurs** of each working group.

Session Presentation: 15 minutes

Work in the groups: 60 minutes

Conclusions (shared): 15 minutes

### GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What are the main barriers young people face to participate and lead in decision-making spaces at the local level?
- What strategies or mechanisms can be effectively used to strengthen their leadership and ensure their voice has a real impact on democracy?
- What role do digital tools play in youth participation in decision-making processes? What technological gaps exist?
- How can local governments support the renewal of leadership and ensure that young voices are heard and valued?
- What are the biggest concerns/issues guiding the participatory work of young people?
- Distrust of governments - youth / notions of democracy/governance (rephrase the question...)

### SPEAKERS (Preliminary)

- **Olga Lucía Sorzano**, Project Manager and Police Officer, NextGenC (Colombia)
- **Karen Naundorf**, External Communications Advisor, NextGenC (Switzerland)