

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

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

CONCEPT NOTE

Session 8

Local Democracy: Experiences of Citizen Participation

Date: 22 May 2025

Time: 11:00 AM - 12:30 PM

Venue: UCC Auditorium, Córdoba, Argentina

Thematic Area: **Community Building**

CONTEXT

In recent decades, citizen participation has taken on an increasingly central role in the agendas of local governments as a way to **democratize public management, strengthen the legitimacy of decisions, and create bonds of co-responsibility between citizens and institutions**. However, this momentum now faces profound challenges. Multiple crises—social, economic, environmental, democratic, and technological—**have weakened public trust in governments**, increased social fragmentation, and cast doubt on traditional forms of doing politics.

In this context, cities are emerging as key arenas to rethink participation through a more **inclusive, territorial, and community-based lens**. The local scale enables more direct dialogue between citizens and governments, and opens the door to experimenting with **new mechanisms for collective decision-making, public deliberation, and joint policy-making, all rooted in proximity**.

At the same time, participatory processes must adapt to **new realities**: the widespread use of digital technologies, the emergence of artificial intelligence, the demand for greater transparency, the need to ensure universal accessibility, and the urgency of incorporating voices traditionally excluded from public debate. **Participation cannot be a privilege; it must be a right actively guaranteed by governments and embraced by citizens as a way of democratic life.**

Furthermore, participation goes beyond institutional spaces. It is also expressed in social movements, community networks, territorial activism, and other forms of citizen organization that challenge the state from the ground up. Therefore, strengthening participation also means **recognizing and engaging with these diverse expressions of collective action.**

This panel is designed as an opportunity to critically reflect on these transformations, review concrete and innovative experiences, and collectively build a **renewed vision of participation as a tool for community building, fostering solidarity, and strengthening more vibrant, inclusive, and resilient local democracies.**

OBJECTIVES

- **Reflect on the value of citizen participation as a driver of social cohesion and a tool to strengthen local democracies** in times of fragmentation and uncertainty.
- **Highlight concrete examples of citizen participation** implemented by local governments, with an emphasis on those that have achieved transformative results in their territories.
- **Analyze the barriers that limit effective participation**, especially for historically excluded populations (youth, women, people with disabilities, migrants), and discuss strategies to overcome them.
- **Analyze how a care-centered approach can serve as a tool** for more inclusive and resilient models of citizen participation.
- **Explore ways to articulate participation and institutional structures**, ensuring that citizen voices and social movements truly influence public decision-making.

METHODOLOGY

This **90-minute panel** will begin with an introduction to establish the foundations of citizen participation. Next, a panel of local government representatives will share their

models and experiences in citizen participation, including their challenges and opportunities. Speakers will have the chance to discuss their experiences, exchange practices, and explore solutions to advance toward newer and more inclusive models. An interactive questions and answers session will follow, encouraging audience participation.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- How can citizen participation contribute to rebuilding the social fabric in contexts of polarization, distrust, and isolation?
- What elements make a participatory policy truly accessible and inclusive?
- What strategies can local governments use to engage those who do not usually participate?
- How can citizen participation be integrated into the institutional structure and day-to-day management of local governments, beyond isolated processes?

SPEAKERS (Preliminary)

- **José Farhat**, Secretary of Citizen Participation, Government of the Province of Tucumán (Argentina)
- **Emiliano Arena**, National Director of Citizen Participation (Argentina)
- **Oscar Arias**, Secretary of Territorial Management, Government of the Province of Córdoba (Argentina)
- **Iván Mizzau**, Secretary of Citizen Participation and Community Relations, Government of the Province of Salta (Argentina)