



V CONFERENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL OBSERVATORY OF PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

The work of the V Conference of the International Observatory of Participatory Democracy, held in San Sebastián under the title “Learning to participate and building citizenship”, took place in two sections.

The first, on 8 and 9 November 2005, consisted of internal sessions with the member cities, the cities involved in the Local Observatory of Participatory Democracy project, and the partnership entities and promoter cities of the Peripheral Local Authorities Forum.

In these internal sessions work was done on drawing up the participatory democracy index and the role of the Local Observatories of Participatory Democracy in its creation. Also tackled was the relationship with the Local Authorities Forum and the “United Cities and Local Governments” (UCLG) organisation.

The partner members, following the 2004 Buenos Aires accords, agreed to reaffirm their position as a specific group within the OIPD — and expressed their thanks for their recognition — by generating their own areas on the Observatory’s website and undertaking to publicise their work and activities connected with participatory democracy, promoting opportunities for theoretical debate and thought, making themselves available to all interested members and municipalities, and working in partnership with the OIPD’s working groups.

The second section consisted of open sessions on 10 and 11 November attended by some 400 people from various Spanish, European, Latin American and Canadian cities. They were drawn from the technical, political and academic spheres, from government and the professions, from associations and the non-organised citizenry and from the media, and their discussions and thinking were based on the central theme of “Learning to participate and building citizenship”

involving three main issues: "Participation and social transformation", "Identity and citizenship" and "Participation and communication".

As the result of this thinking and debate, the Conference presents the following:

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The democratic system is based on the recognition of the sovereignty of the people. However, democracy neither imposes it on us nor does it build it for us; we build it every day between all of us. Participation of the citizenry is essential in mapping out the policies which affect their freedom and quality of life, that is to say their happiness. This recognition means that the maintenance of the system is a collective task which affects everyone and which is carried out every day through the actions of us all.

Globalisation is giving rise to substantial changes in the means of production and distribution, in the forms and content of relationships between people and countries, in trade exchanges and in the consumption and use of territories and natural resources.

This phenomenon is giving rise to new ways of violating rights (forced emigration due to economic circumstances, sex, ethnic and cultural discrimination, etc.) and favours the creation of new pockets of social exclusion, the combating and eradication of which requires positive action on the part of public authorities in ways that confront the merely economic imperatives of the market.

Changing this reality means that in addition to town planning, social, educational, economic, etc. policies, there is also a need for policies which promote respect for and the deepening of people's rights, which strengthen democracy so that it is genuinely participatory and egalitarian, and continues to be the system that enables the quality of life of all people to be improved.

This strengthening means recovering the voice, presence and meeting up of different bodies of civic knowledge. There is a need for areas and channels which allow for the shared creation of solutions, based on different viewpoints and translating the different languages.

There is a need to fight against the centrifugal trend that expels extensive population groups from decision-making spheres, whether due to a lack of identification with the community or abstention arising from discontent or lack of trust. Here the processes of participation can play an important role in fostering this identity, this sense of belonging that goes beyond the family or group.

Nevertheless, it will be difficult for social change to take place without individual transformations. These processes of participation, the involvement of people in

collective issues, are also educational processes, in which we learn new ways of relating to others and working together in daily life, turning learning into teaching and both into personal and collective transformation.

Moreover, communication strategies are especially important. Without communication there is no relationship, without recognition there is no dialogue, and without commitment there is no participation. It is for this reason that participation processes must have as a fundamental component their own communication channels and strategies.

There is a need to bring on board the media as active agents in these processes while simultaneously thinking about their role in improving the quality of democracy.

People should not just be passive subjects of rights but rather actors involved in the mapping out of possible futures. Governments should be active agents who further collective approaches for the better exercise of these rights and should not restrict themselves to providing formal protection for them.

In this respect we see democracy as a regulatory framework, as somewhere in which to share powers and capacities, with enormous potential to create, recreate and transform. However, we also see it as a renewed aspiration, as a goal to be attained, based on the conviction that there is a lot to be done and that another world is possible.

The strategic lines that are set out here are a summary of the results of this work, and at the same time are designed to be useful for subsequent debates. It should be underlined that these words are the reflection of a large part of the work done at the Conference. They do not end the debate, but rather aim to point out the features which must enable it to continue.

ACTION STRATEGIES

ISSUE 1. PARTICIPATION AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

In internal organisation

1. To analyse and diagnose the current context at the political level (garnering politicians' commitment), the technical level (involving technicians in the process) and the citizenry level (finding out about their needs).
2. To train technicians in participatory processes and make politicians and technicians aware of the importance of the citizenry in the work of government.
3. To adapt models and increase transversality and internal communication channels.

In inter-governmental relationships

4. To promote the involvement of other levels of government in participatory processes with the mediation of the local authority.
5. To create areas of inter-governmental coordination to meet the needs of citizens.
6. To promote a local agreement about the division of resources, clarification of competencies and facilitation of relationships.

In relationships with economic agents

7. To increase awareness among and involve the economic agents in a territory by promoting the creation of economic observatories, themed forums in strategic plans, and incentives for committed companies which provide resources.
8. To promote the social economy through public action as a local development strategy.
9. To lay down ethical participation and sustainability criteria in public contracts.
10. To promote the democratisation of economic agent organisations (business associations).

In relationships with the associationism fabric

11. To foster the participation of associations right from the start of processes, furthering trust and joint responsibility through formal and informal communication channels.
12. To promote the democratisation of the associations.
13. To provide the associations and processes with resources: education and training, adequate time and places to meet, funding.

In relationships with the non-organised citizenry

14. To adjust the internal organisation of governments taking into consideration the needs of the citizen: bureaucratic simplification, improved communication, one-stop attention, etc.
15. To promote participatory processes especially geared towards the participation of citizens at an individual level: new technology, participatory budgets, open assemblies, etc.

16. To reinforce the “proximity” facilities and professionals in government (employees/community mediators, civic centres, state schools).

ISSUE 2. IDENTITY AND CITIZENSHIP

17. To recognise the existence of different identities in any community as an indispensable requirement for putting in place participation and involvement strategies.

18. To map out strategies for seeking out all identities so as to ensure maximum social representation.

19. To facilitate conditions of equity and equality which avoid the exclusion of some identities right from the start, using communicative styles which value the contributions of the people participating and avoid excessively androcentric or biased dynamics.

20. To reinforce the role of technical personnel in the design of the various perspectives of reality to be changed in terms of the different identities.

21. To promote the gender perspective as a transversal vision in all public actions. To develop gender indicators in all types of public policies.

22. To provide places and times either differentiated by gender or mixed according to the type of action to be carried out.

23. To manage conflict as a positive factor in personal and collective growth, based on respect for different identities and the search for meeting points, and to reinforce what is held in common to build a shared identity.

24. To promote the pedagogical perspective in participatory processes to develop new forms of relationships between the different identities which enables a better learning process and shared knowledge based on respect for difference.

25. To facilitate the presence of external agents to energise the processes which foster collective creation.

26. To further the political commitment to drive empowerment of the various actors who are part of the participatory process.

ISSUE 3. PARTICIPATION AND COMMUNICATION

27. To promote a change in attitude among, and the involvement of, all the actors so as to make good communication possible: more active organised citizenry; media with a greater sense of social responsibility; governments which open up channels and provide times and places for communication and participation.

28. To promote the putting in place of an undertaking or agreement between all the actors (citizens, government and media) which is committed to education in participation and drawing up and compliance with ethical codes and “communication plans”.

29. To map out public strategies which use the media to improve knowledge and trust among the various social agents.

30. To foster suitable training for those people who work in government, social organisations and citizenship in general, so that the media may be used appropriately.

31. To promote instruments of social control of the media through, for example, “social observatories”, participation in management bodies and information verification mechanisms which ensure pluralism and citizen participation.

32. To involve the educational system in the task of educating for participation and communication.