

COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL INCLUSION AND PARTICIPATIVE DEMOCRACY

UNITED CITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Working Group on Participative Democracy

Some questions relating to the concept of participative democracy¹ and the role of cities:

Declaration of principles

We local authorities are responsible for promoting a culture of civil participation as a means to achieve social inclusion.

- Participative democracy, culture, a culture of peace and non-violence, civil participation and social inclusion are concepts that encompass a new paradigm, a new model of development and governance in which cities are thrust into the centre of a stage that provides all the right conditions for innovation and democratic experimentation.
- Direct mechanisms for intervening in decisions that affect the lives of citizens are fundamental in order to improve life in cities, promote social development and social inclusion and consolidate measures. Civil participation is simply the real capability of citizens to make decisions, and this participation should have a decisive impact on raising the level of real democracy in society.
- We are mindful of the limits of local experiences, but our local practices, in which culture and civil participation are restored to their rightful prominence, demand the construction of a local know-how that, through networking, becomes part of a larger democratic and inclusive project that offers an alternative to the problems of the world today.
- These are general principles. In order for them to be effective, it is important to take into account the differences between developed cities with resources and poorer cities, between

¹ This document has been drawn up by the Participative Democracy Workgroup of the Forum of Local Authorities for Social Inclusion (FLA), co-ordinated by Córdoba, Belo Horizonte and Montevideo, with the support of the expert and executive secretariat of the FLA and the Committee on Social Inclusion and Participative Democracy (CSIPD) of the UCLG. This document is based on the contributions and conclusions of the various events in which local authorities that are members of the CSIPD participate, in particular the Participative Democracy Workgroup of the FLA and the **Participative Democracy: A Challenge to "Another Possible World"** workshop organised by the FLA on 23 January 2006 in Caracas, Venezuela. Ecatepec de Morelos (México), with the support of Córdoba (Spain), has recently led the revision of this document. At the moment, it is only available in Spanish (see UCLG website).

cities in the North and those in the South, between large and small cities, and between cities with a whole host of other characteristics.

Proposed core themes and concepts of the Committee on Social Inclusion and Participative Democracy of the UCLG

- **New governance: relations between states and civil society.** The city is the territory of citizens. It is here that central government power is closest to people and it is here that participation mechanisms can be more direct. There are two major challenges facing relations between states and civil society: a change in political culture and a new institutionalism and adaptation of the administrative apparatuses in order to provide responses to a new citizenry based on new participative, better-informed and reflective demands for a greater say in decision-making and a move away from the old rigid and hierarchical formats of participation, enabling citizens to become involved in arenas and organisations that are more horizontal and democratic in their functioning. We recommend that the capability of the institutions and administrative apparatuses in our cities be evaluated.
- **Citizens' rights and the culture of civil participation.** There is no real possibility of exercising the right to citizenship unless there is a minimal degree of social equality between citizens. It is important to defend the rights of citizens (new neighbours, immigrants' rights, etc.) for the ultimate purpose of seeking to establish equity through the redistribution of resources and power. Municipal authorities can play an important part in giving a voice to those who go unheard by facilitating and respecting arenas and organisations that are more horizontal and democratic in their functioning.
It is essential that the autonomy of social organisations be preserved. It is equally important for municipal authorities to be able to contribute to raising its members' skills, thereby boosting their intervention in participative arenas. Improving the communication mechanisms between the state and society is another important step forward.
- **Promotion of financial rights and rights of social inclusion.** We cannot assume that citizens are automatically equal or that they are all affected by the economic divides and social exclusion that affect our countries.
Local authorities do not define the economic policy of their countries but they can have a political impact on the issue by engaging in debate on the most suitable policies and on municipalities' budgets and their social responsibilities.

This debate may encourage more politicised civil participation.

Local authorities must still promote local development initiatives and social inclusion as a means to achieve participation. These efforts must be funded using locally available resources.

- **Democratic pluralism** as a strategic goal for the development of a city and an essential element in building alternative citizenries. Participative democracy is founded on a new 'social grammar', the main components of which are the concepts of social and cultural diversity, pluralism, active citizenship, the defence of identities and subjectivities, autonomy, the reinforcement of the public space, etc., which will introduce new concepts into the treatment of relations between society and the state.
- **Administrative decentralisation.** It is acknowledged that local authorities are closer to citizens, but this is not always so true in large cities. Consequently, the introduction of mechanisms to achieve administrative decentralisation are important to guarantee civil participation. These mechanisms can themselves be achieved through the involvement of citizens.
- **Democratic experimentation: experiences and instruments.** Cities are more vulnerable than any other space to the negative impact of the process of neoliberal globalisation, a situation that means that the new challenges and problems are growing bigger and more complex. Cities are emerging as key players and as the most appropriate scenario for innovation and democratic experimentation. Consequently, it is important that the sharing of experiences on mechanisms for defending public interests is promoted in order to democratically radicalise the way the public interest is built, examples being Participative Budgets, Community Strategic Planning, integrated social inclusion plans, Local Agenda 21s, etc.
- **Networking between cities and local authorities in conjunction with civil society:** Some local authorities, together with organised social movements, are embracing a commitment to act locally to influence this context of unfair globalisation by encouraging new ways of engaging in and understanding politics. In so doing, they are reaffirming their commitment to a strong and organised world civil society and to local governments connected by means of networks and acting politically on the international stage. In the light of this, the right to communication and information is evidently a central question for cultural and democratic development.



- **Planning.** Planning is not just a management tool but also an extremely important political instrument to enable us to achieve our goals concerning social equity and civil participation. The technical mechanisms of planning and evaluation need to be employed in order to increase their effectiveness. A debate and sharing of experiences on planning, including participative experiences, would also be useful.