

Creating our futures

ECTP-CEU

European Council of Spatial Planners
Conseil européen des Urbanistes

EUROPEAN CHARTER ON PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY IN SPATIAL PLANNING PROCESSES





Most political decisions have direct or indirect impacts on spatial development, and on the quality of living spaces. The 'common ground' on which our life in society is based is the 'common land' on which we live and where we exercise our rights under, and with a respect for, democracy.

Therefore we must constantly promote and protect our European democratic aspirations, and this is not done by fossilizing them and making them rigid, but by continually revisiting them over time to reinvigorate them with the democratic ethos within which we shape the future development of our nations and local communities.

Integrated and cohesive cities and regions require cross-cutting policies: in order to find, within the richness of cultural diversity, the strength for a "better living together"; and in order to provide the foundation of social and cultural cohesion necessary for territorial cohesion and economic development.

Culture should be considered as the fourth pillar of sustainability. We therefore have to remember that no planning action is without cultural implications. Information, training and participation are strong culture-related factors.

The involvement of individuals and communities in the definition of their living spaces is therefore critical. The Charter of European Planning highlights its importance to the implementation of true participatory democracy. We, the Spatial Planners of Europe present this **Charter on Participatory Democracy** in spatial planning processes and call for it to be approved and applied to every decision impacting everyday life of people.

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- Considering that the participation of individuals and communities in public life at all levels - national, regional and local - is part of the core values of Democracy and that the direct involvement of populations, mindful of their civic rights and duties, is the lifeblood of any democratic system;
 - Convinced that local democratic legitimacy is one of the cornerstones of Democracy and that its reinforcement is a key factor in delivering long term economic and social stability;
 - Convinced that cities and regions are the natural place to exercise Participatory Democracy, in view of the very broad range of topics related to Spatial Planning that have a direct impact on the quality of life of European populations;
 - Aware from the diagnosis of problems to the setting out of solutions, through single projects, strategic plans and spatial development visions, that any planning process has to be undertaken with the people and not only for the people;
 - Considering that Planners, as political advisors and mediators as well as designers, are committed to making sure that Participatory Democracy is implemented through complete information and participation of the formulation of solutions in order to reach support and acceptance of planning policies and projects as stated in the Charter of European Planning (ECTP-CEU Barcelona 2013);
 - Convinced that the quality of living spaces cannot be considered separately from the provision of access to essential services, mobility, particular needs and well-being of all social groups which are also fundamental to ensure the respect of human rights;
 - Considering that 'living together in diversity' is stated as a priority and fundamental principle of the Council of Europe, and requires consideration of differences and specific needs;

PREAMBLE:

- Considering that the added value of Participatory Democracy allows more broadly constituted and spatially sensitive application of the Aarhus Convention principles of the right to involvement in decisions that affect a person or a community group;
- Considering that democracy has to operate in a new challenging context resulting from the radical political, economic and social developments that have occurred in Europe and through the process of globalization;
- Considering that authorities from local to national have and must assume a shared leading role in promoting community participation and that the success of any democratic participation process depends on the commitment of these authorities;
- Considering the recognition and enhancement of the role played by civil society, through associations and groups of individuals, as key player and driving force in developing and sustaining a true Participatory Democracy;
- Convinced that a healthy model of Participatory Democracy which supports representative Democracy, seeks both inclusive processes and inclusive outcomes, and makes dialogue with local communities part of the formal decision-making arena;
- Convinced that the rapidly changing context of social engagement requires stronger integration with participatory processes if traditional representative democratic processes are to retain credibility;
- Convinced that the emergence of big data and real time information systems needs to be managed and interpreted through the lens of 'lay knowledge' derived through democratic based participatory processes.

4 HAVE AGREED AS FOLLOWS:



Article 1 - Definition

A Participatory Democracy process in spatial planning is an approach to public participation to facilitate decisions which minimise conflicts created by competing differences in needs and concerns through co-produced decisions driven by the general common interest.

Article 2 - Aims

Spatial planning policies have a major impact on people's quality of life and quality of living spaces. They guide and support the choices as to where people live, express their cultural diversity, where business can be established, how public utilities and public services are distributed across the territories and how access to them is ensured.

These policies must be transparent, responsive and effective, in terms of public participation and delivery of appropriate responses to cultural, social, environmental and economic challenges.

The goal of a Participatory Democracy process in spatial planning is to achieve shared ownership and a common acceptance of plans or policies and programmes of action which will resolve conflicts and achieve a co-produced decision-making in which general interest always prevail on every individual interest.

Article 3 - Involvement and representation

In a Participatory Democracy approach, a broad range of interests and needs are expressed by as wide as possible range of concerned people. The process must enable each of those impacted by or having an interest in a plan, policy or programme of action to participate.

Awareness-raising measures involving appropriate groups in civil society should be considered at the outset as a central part of the process.

Article 4 - Information and education

A Participatory Democracy process implies a full and comprehensive level of information and a full access to it. All the participants have to be provided with all the necessary information and means of communication in order to ensure the same level of understanding.

This requires that processes are promoted through collective learning where all the participants acquire and share the same level of information and the same level of understanding. Knowledge must be therefore developed collectively so that a shared understanding can be built across the diverse participants. This informed process needs to be fostered / promoted by planners.

6 **Article 5 – Operational Rules**

Rules of operation must be tailored from one case to another to be responsive to local circumstances. Methods and processes must vary in relation to the scope of the plans, the planning level and the populations concerned as well as into the local administrative structure.

Nevertheless, a true participatory process cannot be ensured without establishing appropriate robust rules of operation and decision making within the communities involved.

The issue of representation is crucial. It is for the competent public authorities to define the criteria under which the representation of groups of people or individuals corresponds with the legal procedures and have a real interest in delivering action.

Article 6 – Access and expression

Everyone who feels concerned and affected by a planning project or policy must have access to a choice in the means of expression, giving them the opportunity to voice their needs and concerns.

Planning authorities or other bodies involved in the process must ensure that people feel respected, comfortable and free to express their opinions.

All people with a potential interest should be encouraged to express and discuss their needs and concerns in informal, multi-modal and multi-directional exchanges, the goal of which is to improve active dialogue and shared understanding of the challenges, and develop common interests and concerns in order to create a common vision and the possibility of the co-conception of planning solutions.

New technologies must be used. They should be fully accessible, comfortable, convenient, and satisfying the participants. Genuine deliberative and reflective techniques will need

to be used and allow participants to express and listen to a variety of perspectives and opinions regarding the issue at hand.

Article 7 – Continuity

All the participants are fully enabled and integrally involved throughout the planning processes from initiation through conception, decision making and implementation to monitoring and evaluation of planning policies.

Article 8 – Relevant experts

It is important that spatial planners with adequate skills as facilitators provide the professional technical support required to enable the full representation of participants' arguments and proposals.

Spatial planners should also provide independent expertise to monitor or audit Participatory Democracy processes and ensure fairness and compliance to rules and laws whilst being open to experimentation and innovation.

Article 9 – Decision-making authority

Decision-making authorities at different levels must undertake participatory planning as part of their responsibility for the processes and/or in taking account of the concerns of stakeholders/participants affected by their decisions. This includes all authorities whose decisions about development have an impact on the quality of life. These authorities must possess or be enabled to acquire an understanding of the specific context and issue, communication skills, technical assistance and time availability.

A public body or authority must be impartial in monitoring and auditing the Participatory Democracy process to ensure that it is open, fair, inclusive and unbiased. Therefore there should be recourse to an independent appeal process to protect the rights of individuals and communities in the participatory process.

8 **Article 10 – Monitoring of the implementation of the Charter**

A group of experts set by ECTP-CEU, in partnership with relevant Council of Europe and European Union relevant bodies, will assist in the development of, and advise on, the implementation and monitoring of the Charter. This will also enable the dissemination of experience about the good practice and about practices which should be avoided and discouraged.

Article 11 – Awards

In addition to the promotion of this Charter, the Signatories to it will disseminate and celebrate good practice and exchange of experiences, including through the granting of specific awards of excellence in Participatory Democracy.

Article 12 – Relationship with other instruments

The provisions of this Charter are in line with and directly inspired by the Charter of European Planning.



