

Intersectional Spaces of Participation: Inclusive, Resilient, Embedded. INSPIRE 2024

Title of the project:	Intersectional Spaces of Participation: Inclusive, Resilient, Embedded. INSPIRE
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Web page:	https://research.birmingham.ac.uk/en/projects/inspire-intersectional-spaces-of-participation-inclusive-resilient
Area:	New participatory democracy models – Participatory democracy, deliberative democracy, digital participation, coproduction of knowledge, arts-based participation, assemblage theory.

What?

INSPIRE is a Horizon Europe project aiming to improve participatory and deliberative democracy (PDD) by promoting intersectional equality. It prioritizes inclusion, resilience, and integration with political decision-making institutions. Through concepts such as the political economy of participation, co-design, and assembly theory, it addresses socioeconomic barriers to participation, employs diverse methods for inclusive spaces, and acknowledges the complexity of participation dynamics. By using these approaches, INSPIRE seeks to foster democratic and inclusive participation at different levels of governance.

The proposal integrates 17 participating institutions with a total budget of approximately 2.5 million euros, of which 101,000 euros correspond to the UAB, which will be responsible for co-leading WorkPackage 2.3: *Intersectional participatory assemblages: co-designing inclusive participation*.

Who?

IGOP's postdoctoral researcher **Adrian Bua** leads WorkPackage 2.3: *Intersectional participatory assemblages: co-designing inclusive participation*. Bua investigates public participation, participatory governance, and democratic innovation. He joined IGOP in 2023 as a Marie Curie fellow to research the politics of stability and change in urban regimes during the wave of New Municipalism in Spain.

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Why?

Representative democracy is undergoing a deep crisis of legitimacy. Climate assemblies, participatory budgeting, and civic tech are examples of democratic innovations that connect the voices of everyday people to decision-makers (Smith 2009; Geißel and Newton 2012; Elstub and Escobar 2019).

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On the one hand, these participatory and deliberative democracy (PDD) processes are celebrated for their potential in addressing political distrust and polarisation by deepening public engagement. On the other hand, they are accused of being cosmetic solutions to deep-seated problems that continue to exclude already disempowered groups (along socioeconomic, gender, racial, physical, and mental ability lines).

INSPIRE tackles these accusations and failures by creating participatory spaces that are: inclusive, starting from the needs and assets of marginalised groups; resilient to changes in government and developing upon existing grassroots work to support community resilience; and adaptively embedded within the wider public sphere and in productive relationships with policymaking institutions (Bussu et al 2022a; Escobar 2022).

How?

PDD designs too often decouple citizen participation from the socio-economic context in which it happens. INSPIRE takes a holistic approach that examines how participatory practices emerge, interact and change in relation to a situated context with a strong focus on socioeconomic factors that affect people's capabilities to participate, or the political economy of participation.

INSPIRE's transdisciplinary approach brings together researchers, practitioners and digital designers with extensive knowledge of democratic innovations. The proposal combines:

- macro and meso-level research on the social, economic, political and cultural conditions that shape intersectional equality within participatory assemblages and affect embeddedness and resilience of PDD processes;
- co-designing and micro-level analysis of spaces of participation with disempowered groups, through a series of seven pilots across consortium countries;
- coproduction of new knowledge with public officials and a range of stakeholders to evaluate and compare inclusive approaches to digital and analogue participation.

University of Birmingham is Coordinator of INSPIRE, which involves other 17 partners that are: Universitaet Frankfurt; Fundacion Platoniq; Univerzita Karlova; IPSOS NV; Uniwersytet Warszawski; University of Ireland; Aphelion Ltd; Filosoficky Ustav; Instituto Ciencias Sociais; ARCFUND; TK; PROSDM; Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona; University of Lancaster; King's College London and University of Edinburgh.

When?

April 2024 - March 2027.