



The iDEM Project: Barcelona Use Case

Inclusion, Participation and Democratic Legitimacy

An initiative by:



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Acknowledgements

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The iDEM Project: Inclusion, Participation and Democratic Legitimacy

Over recent decades, European democracies have made significant progress in incorporating citizen participation mechanisms, with the aim of strengthening transparency, shared responsibility and proximity in public decision-making. However, these advances coexist with a persistent structural challenge: ensuring that all people can genuinely participate on equal terms.

As the research carried out within the iDEM project shows, participatory processes continue to present significant barriers, particularly linguistic, cognitive and communicative ones. The use of technical language, complex documents or inaccessible dynamics limits the participation of some people, such as people with intellectual disabilities, older people and migrants.

This situation has a direct impact on **democratic legitimacy**. Having formal channels of participation is not enough: for democracy to be complete, these channels must be understandable, usable and meaningful for all citizens. When part of the population is excluded by barriers of understanding or access, deliberative processes lose representativeness and democratic quality.

In this context, the European project **iDEM (Innovative and Inclusive Spaces for Deliberation and Participation, 2024-2026)**, funded by the Horizon Europe programme, was created to help overcome these limitations. The project combines **technological innovation and methodological transformation** to move towards more inclusive models of participation.

A central element of the project is the development of an artificial intelligence tool, **the iDEM app**, which makes it possible to **simplify and convert complex texts into texts that are easier to understand, written in plain language**, as well as to adapt them to different linguistic needs and detect possible biases.



iDEM project actions

The iDEM project is structured around three major complementary lines of action.

On the one hand, a **process of analysing the barriers** that hinder participation has been promoted, identifying the problems associated with the complexity of language, the lack of accessible information and the limitations in the design of participatory processes.

On the other hand, **innovative technological solutions** have been developed, most notably the iDEM app, designed as a support tool that makes information easier to understand and strengthens participants' autonomy.

Finally, the project has deployed **use cases** to test both the tools and a **new model of inclusive participation** that incorporates **specific support, adapted methodologies and the direct participation** of the people involved in the trial.

The consortium

iDEM is the result of an international consortium of twelve partners that bring together academic knowledge, institutional experience, technological capacity and expertise in the social third sector.

Participants include universities such as Pompeu Fabra University (UPF) and the University of Leeds (UOL), research centres such as NEXUS, public administrations such as the Municipal Institute for People with Disabilities and the Barcelona Ombuds Office, as well as civil society organisations and specialised technology companies.

This configuration ensures an interdisciplinary approach geared towards real-world implementation, so that the solutions developed are useful and applicable.



The Barcelona Use Case

The Barcelona use case took the form of an **in-person participatory pilot** linked to the city, focused on the transformation of public space and urban mobility.

Its implementation was made possible thanks to the collaboration of various municipal bodies—the Barcelona Ombuds Office, the Municipal Institute for People with Disabilities, the Department of Participation and the Directorate of Urban Strategy Services, both part of the Urban Planning and Housing Management, and the Decidim Barcelona team—as well as local social organisations such as TEB and CAI de la Marina, with technical support from El Globus Vermell for facilitation. In addition, Pompeu Fabra University, as coordinator of the entire European project, led all the technological implementation in Barcelona.

In parallel, to complement the in-person activities, **a specific use case page was created on the Decidim Barcelona platform**, which helped share project information among participants and gave access to simplified versions of relevant documents.

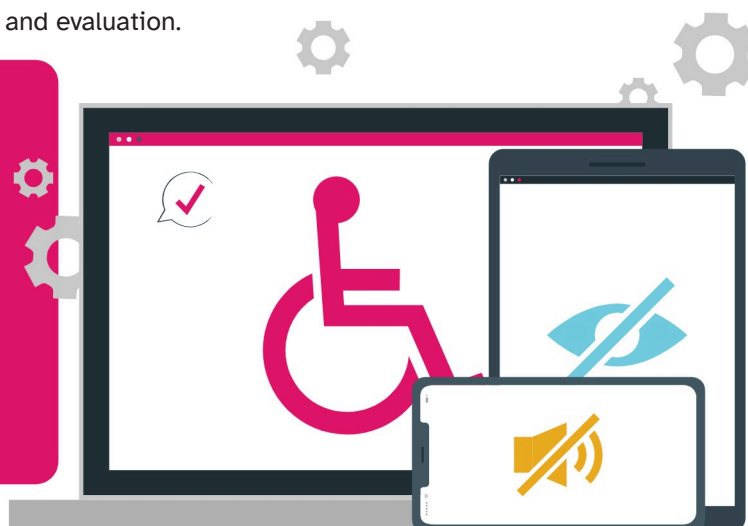
31 people took part in the pilot, with diverse representation in both social and gender terms (**19 women and 12 men**). Notably, they included **14 people with intellectual disabilities**, as well as 11 older people and 6 people with a migrant background.

Design and Implementation of the Sessions

The process was structured into four in-person sessions, conceived as a progressive journey combining capacity building, understanding, deliberation and evaluation.

All sessions were designed with universal accessibility criteria to enable the full inclusion of everyone in the process.

The measures adopted included a prior accessibility assessment of all spaces, processes and materials, as well as multiple channels for resolving questions.



INITIAL SESSION (SESSION 0):

Session aimed at preparing the technical and facilitation teams. It focused on **accessible communication tools**, knowledge of participants' specific needs, inclusive facilitation methodologies and the accessibility resources available. Work was also done to overcome **attitudinal barriers** by promoting clear, respectful and inclusive communication.

SESSION 1:

Three sessions (one for each participant profile), which became a first meeting space where the project and the iDEM app were presented. Texts related to participation in Barcelona were used so that users could try out the simplification tool. The session served to assess how the app works in a real context.

For this session, key documents such as the **informed consent form and the project information sheet** were adapted into easy-to-read format.

SESSION 2:

Joint session with all participants, focused on the debate on mobility in public space. The session opened with a presentation of the topic by City Council specialists, with an explanation adapted to the audience's diverse needs. Debate and interaction among participants were then encouraged. Through active moderation and facilitation and the use of **accessible tactile models**, understanding of the topic and the construction of arguments were made easier. Handling the elements of the model encouraged the expression of opinions and discussion. The debate addressed issues such as urban mobility, urban greenery, rest areas and urban design. In the discussions, participants shared concerns about getting around, the coexistence of bicycles and vehicles, and the location of benches and accessible spaces.

SESSION 3:

As a closing session, the last session focused on the use of the iDEM app and on the issues raised during the debate on public space. Participants compared **complex texts and simplified texts** using the artificial intelligence tool (iDEM app) to assess the direct impact of simplification on the understanding of written messages, making it possible to assess comprehension and consolidate the conclusions. There was broad consensus on the need to prioritise pedestrians, widen pavements and pedestrian crossings, improve urban greenery with suitable species and strengthen public transport, such as buses. Improvements to mobility and coexistence in public space were also proposed. The session included the evaluation of the three sessions and of the app, as well as the closing of the pilot, with a positive overall assessment and participation.

Finally, the process was evaluated through **adapted questionnaires**, which also include an **easy-to-read version**, tailored to participants' needs, to ensure an inclusive and accessible assessment.



Recommendations for Improving Inclusion in Participation

The pilot carried out in Barcelona identified ten key factors for moving towards more inclusive participatory processes, which are presented at the end of this document (**Decalogue of recommendations for improving accessibility and inclusion in participatory processes**).

These factors include the need to train teams in accessible communication, simplify materials and calls for participation, ensure accessible physical spaces and incorporate support resources that facilitate understanding, both technological and simpler materials (drawings, photographs, models...). The essential role of facilitation and accompaniment in including people throughout the process should also be highlighted, as well as the importance of having evaluation mechanisms adapted to participants' needs.

These recommendations point towards consolidating a model in which cognitive and communicative accessibility becomes a structural element of participatory processes.

Conclusion

The Barcelona use case shows that it is possible to move towards more inclusive models of participation by combining technological innovation, methodological design and institutional commitment.

Incorporating tools such as the iDEM app and adapting deliberative processes make it possible to reduce barriers and broaden citizens' effective participation. In this sense, the project contributes directly to strengthening **democratic legitimacy**, ensuring that collective decisions reflect the real diversity of society.

iDEM thus establishes itself as a pioneering initiative that opens the door to new standards in public participation that are more inclusive, accessible and representative.



Decalogue of Recommendations for Improving Accessibility and Inclusion in Participatory Processes

Below are ten recommendations aimed at ensuring the accessibility of participation spaces and enabling everyone to get actively involved with the necessary resources.

1

Training for Staff Involved in the Participatory Process.

Project technical staff, facilitators of participatory processes and participation experts should receive specific training to communicate naturally with the diversity of participants (people with disabilities, migrants, etc.), convey key project information in multiple formats (plain language, tactile models, graphic presentations) and ensure that everyone can take part in participatory activities (debate, deliberation and voting).

2

Accessible, Easy-to-Understand Call for Participation.

The written call inviting citizens to take part should have a standardised format that is easy to understand and digitally accessible. For citizens to feel addressed, a short text in plain language should be used, stating when, where and what the meeting is for. Accompanying the call with a brief project description sheet can help to focus and anticipate the topic.

3

Announcement of the Available Accessibility Resources in the Call.

The call should include a contact channel (telephone and online) so that citizens can send any queries. It is also important that the call announces the accessibility measures the session will have and those that can be added on prior request.



4

Choosing an Accessible Physical Space for Participation.

The venue chosen for the participation sessions must be accessible and have accessible toilets. The surroundings and the route from the nearest public transport must be free of barriers. It should include specific signage identifying the project to make it easier to arrive and find the meeting room independently.

Priority should be given to rooms equipped with a hearing loop and a good wifi/mobile data connection, so that assistive technologies work properly. Seats should be reserved to make it easier for those who need it to see and pay attention; some seats can also be reserved next to the exit for people who need to leave.

5

Use of the Digital Participation Space.

The digital space is a complement for accessing information and deliberation, but it is not sufficient on its own.

Personal support and adaptation of debate and deliberation materials are needed to ensure that everyone can take part.

Training on how to use the Decidim space should be strengthened.

6

Use of Supporting Technological Tools (Tablets with the iDEM App).

The simplification technology tested with the iDEM app and the use of tablets to access written information were very well received.

It is considered that the use of tablets with personal support may encourage participants' interest, as a future project. When technology makes understanding easier, the sense of autonomy and the interest in taking part grow.

7

Designing the Project's Explanatory Documentation in Accessible Formats.

It is important to simplify written texts considerably.

Complex language distances and disconnects citizens from the Administration.

Written information should be accompanied, whenever possible, by images and examples that help to contextualise ideas and avoid abstraction.

The cognitive accessibility of a participatory process cannot be limited exclusively to simplifying language.

8

Use of Complementary Materials to Facilitate Deliberation.

Incorporating hands-on and interactive elements such as 3D tactile models strengthens the connection with the topic of debate and facilitates the construction of arguments, debate and the spontaneous exchange of opinions. It also improves access to the content, which becomes less abstract. These materials are essential to ensure that everyone understands what will be discussed and which issues are to be voted on.

9

Active Role of the Facilitation Team During Debate and Deliberation.

The role of facilitation is decisive in balancing everyone's participation, for example by sharing out speaking turns, fostering respect for the diversity of forms and rhythms of expression, and being flexible to ensure the comfort of all participants.

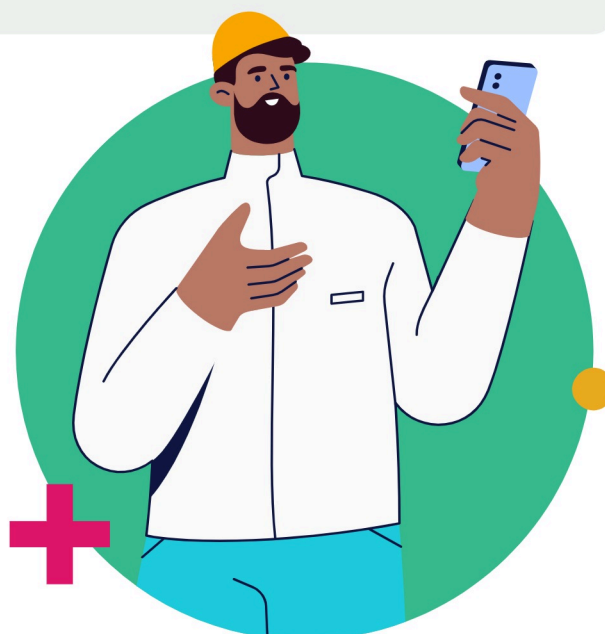
It is important to design short sessions to help participants stay focused. To keep everyone engaged, questions can be asked to make sure everyone is following the session, what has been said can be summarised, and attention can be paid to comfort for real inclusion.

At the deliberation stage, support can help to progressively narrow down the voting options and clarify the consequences of each option, so that the results are more meaningful and relevant.

10

Evaluation Process in Accessible Formats.

It is important to have accessible paper and digital versions of the standard evaluation questionnaires. In addition to the standard version, a simplified version should be available for profiles that require cognitive accessibility (for example, it is advisable to reduce the response options from five to three and indicate the meaning of each value).



Decalogue of Recommendations for Improving Public Space of the iDEM Project

Mobility

1

Prioritise Pedestrians in Urban Design

Streets should be conceived as pedestrian-centred spaces, reducing the weight of private vehicles and removing obstacles from pavements.

2

Improve the Safety and Accessibility of Pedestrian Crossings

There is a call to increase their number (especially mid-block), add refuge islands and ensure better visibility and continuity of the pavement.

3

Optimise Public Transport and Bus Stops

Bus frequency and capacity should be increased and stops located at safer points (preferably before pedestrian crossings and free of obstacles).

4

Reorganise Coexistence Between Modes of Transport

Safe cycle lanes (preferably central) should be introduced, signage strengthened and conflicts reduced between bicycles, scooters, vehicles and pedestrians.



Green Spaces and Places to Stay

5

5. Increase Urban Greenery with Health and Safety Criteria

The presence of trees should be increased, prioritising species that do not cause allergies, dirt or risks (roots, resins or slipping).

6

6. Ensure Shade, Comfort and Environmental Quality

Green spaces should provide shade and climate comfort while maintaining visibility and a sense of openness.

7

7. Improve and Diversify Rest Areas

The number of benches should be increased, with different types and strategic locations (near facilities, shaded areas and pedestrian crossings), adapted especially for older people.

Public Space Design

8

8. Clear Obstacles from Pavements and Reorganise the Services Strip

Elements such as waste containers, motorbikes or bicycles should be placed off the pavement to guarantee accessible and safe passage.

9

9. Improve the Distribution and Management of Street Furniture

Containers should be grouped, more litter bins added and a functional layout ensured that makes use and recycling easier.

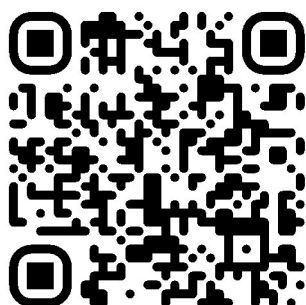
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10. Design More Accessible, Safe and Inclusive Spaces

Non-slip paving should be installed, physical barriers removed, universal accessibility guaranteed and situations of insecurity minimised, especially at junctions and busy areas.



More information on our website
idemproject.eu/cat



Scan the QR code to
access the use case



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