

INTERPRETIVE POLICY ANALYSIS CONFERENCE 2021

Panel Title:

P7 - Public participation in local governance: the implications of COVID-19

Panel Convenors:

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Democratic systems across the world are undergoing a period of both upheaval and renewal (Elstub and Escobar, 2019). Local governance is the frontline where much of this contestation and experimentation is unfolding. Local public spheres remain key sites for interactive governance, opening up new spaces and relationships between citizens and institutions (Edelenbos and van Meerkerk, 2016). Various collaborative, agonistic, participative and/or deliberative processes entangle a multiplicity of local actors (e.g. authorities, organisations, community groups, activists) in new ways of responding to local priorities, making policy, and developing public services. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought in its wake a new economic crisis, widening geographical and social inequalities, as well as new financial challenges for local authorities. At the same time the rapid mobilisation of the voluntary sector and new forms of local collaboration have been driven by the necessity of COVID-19 emergency response and recovery planning. Digital participation has accelerated, but as yet it is unclear if the pandemic has had the effect of speeding up or impeding processes of local democratic governance and reform. Or, if it has had other impacts, that we have not yet considered.

The purpose of this panel is to bring together researchers in theoretical, methodological and practical discussions on the implications of COVID-19 for public participation in local governance. We welcome papers that explore participation in all its varieties, from agonistic to deliberative approaches; and papers that offer insights on the role of local participatory practices in both responses to, and recovery from, the pandemic.