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## **Unpacking Local Council Meetings: a Sociolinguistic Approach and Its Lessons for Participatory Democracy**

**Abstract:** This article is an investigation into the conditions of possibility and the practice of participatory democracy in the context of local council meetings in Romania. I discuss local council meetings as scripted social actions that are highly ritualized. My fieldwork observations have showed that within the social frame of local council meetings, the actually-existing citizen's voice is quite rarely heard. In my account of this lack, I argue that the rather utopic model of participatory democracy implies a working model of social and personal governance, based on trust and self-trust, both of which require time to be built and fostered. Learning how to trust oneself and how to trust others, acquiring knowledge and practical wisdom, as well as building communities of democratic practice can occur naturally, within the community, but higher education institutions can play a formative role as well.

**Key words:** participatory democracy, city council meetings, governance, trust, education.