

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Resolution 268 (2008)¹ The need for regional cultural identity

1. Regional authorities have a special responsibility for developing, promoting and protecting the cultural identities of their regions. Strong and dynamic identities are a crucial element in a region's development and vitality.

2. Increases in migration and social mobility and the rapid development of information and communication technologies have increased the pace of change of regional identities and increased the means at the disposal of regional authorities to influence and stimulate identity formation and development. On the other hand, the growth and integrating forces of the new media pose a challenge to regional authorities, as citizens are more easily able to participate in social networks outside their region.

3. In promoting identity, a balance needs to be found. Regional authorities should pay special attention to preserving a sufficient degree of openness. They need to recognise the presence of different cultural groups on their territory and the contribution that these groups make to the region's identity, including those who are perceived as recent arrivals and temporary residents.

4. Language is a key element in identity. Where regional and minority languages are actively supported and promoted, they make an important contribution to the unique and special character of a region. A sense of place is also a vital element in identity formation; landscape and heritage, the natural and built environment deserve to be treated accordingly.

5. Because of their unique characters, regional identities have a natural tendency to define themselves in relation to each other and, often for historical reasons, are not automatically attracted to each other. The Council of Europe needs to develop instruments to ensure the compatibility and positive interaction of individual regional identities. This includes awareness-raising activities, such as the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue and promotional measures to acquire and improve intercultural communication capacity.

6. In the light of the above, the Congress,

a. bearing in mind the Council of Europe's White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue (to be adopted at the May 2008 session of the Committee of Ministers);

b. convinced of the value of strong regional identities for the well-being of regional populations and for the social and economic development of regions;

c. convinced of the need to develop regional identities which are inclusive of all social, ethnic and cultural groups;

d. believing that two of the key assets of regions are the diversity and the cultural heritage of their populations,

7. Calls on regional authorities to:

a. pay special attention to the development of their regional cultural identities, taking into consideration the value of strong regional identities for a region's development and social cohesion;

b. ensure that their cultural policies include an ongoing evaluation of the region's cultural identity, aiming to ensure that it continues to develop and to reflect the diversity of the population of the region, taking into account the elements in identity formation set out in the explanatory memorandum (identifying the region, identified with the region, identifying with the region);

c. ensure they recognise the valuable cultural contribution that recent immigrants can make to the region and pay due attention to the principles of non-discrimination and intercultural dialogue;

d. give active support to associations which contribute to the region's cultural creativity and development, through access to facilities and training;

e. take care to ensure the compatibility of their region's identity with the national identity, avoiding the promotion of inward-looking and ethnocentric identities;

f. seek to make the best use of the regional and minority languages that are present in their regions, by using them in the public bodies and giving them due access to regional media;

g. ensure that regional cultural administrators are sufficiently trained in the complex nature of identity formation, so that they can recognise and avoid the pitfalls and dangers of exclusion and alienation;

h. seek to develop their cultural ties with neighbouring regions through joint cultural activities and exchanges.

1. Debated and approved by the Chamber of Regions on 28 May 2008 and adopted by the Congress on 29 May 2008, 3rd Sitting (see Document CPR(15)4RES, draft resolution presented by K.H. Lambertz (Belgium, R, SOC), rapporteur).