

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Resolution 258 (2008)¹ Child in the city

1. Europe's towns and cities do not offer the social and structural conditions necessary for children's well-being and development. The excessive presence of the car and children's limited access to public space prevent them from developing the autonomy and confidence required to flourish and become integrated into society.

2. The urban environment does not offer a suitable setting for families to raise children and those who have the necessary financial means are leaving city centres in search of a better environment. This trend, which is reinforced by demographic ageing and low birth rates, weakens the economic and social vitality of towns and cities.

3. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe is convinced that local authorities must respond to these challenges and create towns and cities which offer people an attractive environment in which to live, work and raise a family. Towns and cities should become spaces for living where children have a central role and which are adapted to their needs, taking into account their greater vulnerability. This inclusive approach would improve the quality of life for all inhabitants and encourage different generations, social and cultural groups to interact and to share the same space and facilities.

4. Sustainable cities are also child-friendly cities. They are towns and cities where mobility policies promote the use of public transport, cycling and walking and discourage excessive automobile use. They are places where housing, schools, childcare, parks, businesses and shops are in close proximity, thereby facilitating mobility.

5. Children need to be able to take possession of their surroundings and explore, understand and change them. They should be able to consider their locality, both indoors and outdoors, as a space for their use. This sense of possession awakens children's resources, their senses, imagination, creativity and independence. By experiencing public space, children share the life of the community, its exchanges, encounters and responsibilities.

6. The home is at the heart of a child's world and ensuring the provision of attractive and affordable housing for families in urban areas should be a priority for local and regional authorities. The housing supply should correspond to the changes in lifestyle and family structure which are taking place throughout Europe.

7. The Congress believes that children should be treated as fully fledged citizens who offer a fresh perspective on urban

planning. Local authorities should include children in spatial planning and in consultation processes both relating to projects designed for them and to other projects planned in their locality.

8. Local and regional authorities have an important role to play in encouraging policies which offer ways of reconciling work and family life for the benefit of all sections of society. There is a need for a paradigm shift among stakeholders whereby all workers are assumed to have family and caring responsibilities – whether for children, parents or others – and the work environment should be organised flexibly to allow people to reconcile their personal and their work life.

9. The Congress welcomes the Council of Europe programme "Building a Europe for and with children", which promotes children's rights, ensures their protection from violence and helps them find their rightful place in society. It is pleased to be able to contribute through examples of innovative practices taking place at local and regional levels.

10. In the light of the above, the Congress calls upon local and regional authorities in Council of Europe member states to:

a. develop compact cities and towns where housing, schools, childcare facilities, shops and businesses are in close proximity, thereby easing the pressure on transport infrastructures and enabling children to move more easily from place to place;

b. draw up housing policies to improve the quality and quantity of the housing stock and offer young families and vulnerable categories of people affordable housing which responds to the requirements of today's family structures. Home ownership for young families should be encouraged, particularly through public and private partnerships;

c. design the built environment from the child's perspective by making public and private spaces more welcoming and less dangerous for them, taking into account their smaller size and greater vulnerability, including by:

i. implementing integrated mobility policies which provide affordable, comprehensive public transport networks and improved walking and cycling facilities, thereby making the streets safer and encouraging the use of less aggressive means of mobility;

ii. taking measures to reclaim the streets for children and adults through the introduction of car-free town centres, reduced speed limits in home and school zones and "safe routes" to schools and to play and recreational areas;

iii. encouraging children's games and play mobility by adapting street furniture and other facilities, both indoors and outdoors, in dedicated play areas, green spaces and public areas in general;

iv. ensuring that play spaces are well integrated within towns and cities and that the different facilities are interactive;

v. promoting natural spaces in towns and cities which help children discover nature and reinforce their sense of geographical belonging and sociocultural identity;

d. develop innovative intergenerational structures where young and old share the same facilities, thereby encouraging interaction while taking into account the specific experiences and needs of each generation. In this respect, school buildings could become community spaces for multifunctional and multigenerational use outside of school hours;

e. encourage children's participation in decision-making processes regarding "their" space and, moreover, in all aspects of urban planning. The approach could be fun and should take advantage of children's familiarity with electronic communication tools;

f. reinforce road safety and civic education, raise children's awareness of the importance of preserving the environment and encourage them to share their knowledge with adults who may be less receptive to these issues;

g. participate in the European networks of local and regional authorities, particularly the European networks "Child Friendly Cities" and "Cities for Children" which aim to support the exchange of experiences and to promote innovative initiatives for child-friendly towns and cities.

1. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 29 May 2008, 3rd Sitting (see Document CG(15)9RES, draft resolution presented by S. Kalev (Estonia, L, NR), rapporteur).