

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Resolution 386 (2015)¹ Bringing down barriers to youth participation: adopting a lingua franca for local and regional authorities and young people

1. There is an apparent paradox concerning youth participation in contemporary society: political institutions are placing greater emphasis on its promotion while young people seem to reject the opportunities on offer, as the decline in their election turnout and recent protest movements would suggest.

2. Young people's distrust of politics could threaten European democracy, which, to a certain extent, is being undermined by a weakening of its institutions' and policies' legitimacy in the eyes of young citizens. For them, this legitimacy can only be recovered when their voices are heard and their participation in decision-making processes is ensured.

3. Young people's rejection of politics can be seen as the expression of a feeling that society has betrayed and alienated them – they have been hardest hit by the crisis, facing high unemployment and difficulties in their transition to adulthood. Participation is crucial to the development of young people's sense of responsibility for community life, helping them to acquire democratic citizenship skills, and more importantly empowering them to take active charge of their lives and communities. Hence, they are motivated to express their needs through new practices of civic involvement, although these are sometimes perceived as anti-political or apolitical.

4. Unfortunately, when it comes to (re)-establishing dialogue between young people and political institutions, misunderstandings and difficulties in communication abound. The two sides speak different languages: young people have created a new "vocabulary of citizenship", whereas the authorities still seem to consider voting as the only relevant instrument of political activity and consultation. What's more, authorities tend to see "youth" as a transitional phase to control and manage, policies being aimed at guiding young people through their transition to adulthood, placing them in a subordinate position and perceiving them as something "in the making" rather than as full citizens.

5. Young people are increasingly mobilised by very specific issues, more closely linked to their (personal) interest in a given issue than to a general interest in politics and daily experiences. They choose to be involved in collective forms of civic and political action characterised by lower levels of formality and perceived as less binding and "labelling"

than political parties, preferring to effect small but profound changes through their daily interactions. Young people are increasingly active in civic associations, charities, NGOs and voluntary activities. In addition, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have drastically changed youth participatory behaviour and political action, updating traditional actions, like sending e-mails to politicians, or offering new ones, like protesting through mail bombing. Local and regional authorities should promote strategies that help to link these new types of action to the conventional participatory paths.

6. However, due to their scale of action and the tools used, many practices are scarcely visible or are classed as incivility, with the result that young people are not only failing to make their voices heard but also are being misjudged. In addition, youth abstention from the political institutions feeds a vicious circle of self-marginalisation: if young people do not vote, subscribe to political parties or trade unions, or do not stand in elections, their position will be considered as less politically relevant by politics and politicians.

7. Local and regional authorities' vocabulary of youth participation can be described as too narrow. Authorities tend to see young people as a homogenous group, placing teenagers and 30-year-olds on the same level. They do not take properly into account differences in socio-economic backgrounds and other forms of social disadvantage. In addition, the tools of participation they propose are limited mainly to voting, standing for election or public consultation.

8. Municipal and regional youth councils are valuable instruments of youth consultation; however, some do not offer young people the opportunity to participate meaningfully in decision and policy-making procedures. It would be useful to analyse municipal and regional youth councils' characteristics, powers and activities to see how these can be fully utilised to promote real youth participation in decision and policy making.

9. Finally, local and regional authorities tend to limit youth participation to issues that "concern young people directly", keeping the "big issues" for the "grown-ups", presupposing that young people are not interested in the economy, environmental issues, health and educational policies, etc.

10. The Congress welcomes the setting up of its ad hoc group on the participation of young people and awaits its conclusions on how the Congress can promote a structured dialogue with young people from across Europe and their participation in its work.

11. The Congress reaffirms its intention to pursue the fruitful co-operation its secretariat has established with the Council of Europe's Directorate General of Democratic Citizenship and Participation, in particular the Youth Department, on promoting youth participation and suggests the organisation of a joint conference on youth participation so as to promote dialogue between its members and young people.

12. In view of the above, and in order to create optimal conditions for achieving the meaningful participation of young people, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe urges local and regional authorities to

implement its recommendations contained in Resolution 346 (2012), Resolution 319 (2010) and Resolution 259 (2008),² and in particular to:

a. mainstream the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life in all aspects of their youth policy making;

b. in co-operation with young people in an open and transparent process, and within a reasonable time frame, create a platform for structured dialogue, for example by setting up joint decision and policy-making bodies;

c. encourage wider knowledge of democratic practices among young people, for example by introducing citizenship, human rights and democracy education, including teaching on how political systems work, in schools within their competence, and giving school pupils the opportunity to practise democracy by setting up joint school councils which will be consulted on the running of the school;

d. hold debates between local and regional elected representatives and children and young people in order to strengthen links between them and dispel misunderstandings;

e. organise joint training activities for elected representatives, local/regional government staff and young people to break down misunderstandings and to promote a participation-friendly community culture;

f. engage in a process of dialogue and consultation with young people from disadvantaged areas;

g. investigate, in the case of regions with legislative powers, the possibility of lowering the voting age to 16 in regional elections.

13. The Congress reiterates its invitation in Resolution 346 (2012) that the national delegations include some young elected representatives as both full and substitute members.

14. The Congress also draws attention to its Resolution 207 (2006) on young people and new information and communication technologies: a new opportunity for local democracy, and encourages both local and regional authorities to implement its provisions. In addition, in view of the limited tools for participation offered by local and regional authorities, the Congress invites the latter to provide training in ICTs for their elected representatives and staff to increase the use of those tools favoured by young people.

15. Furthermore, in order to strengthen the linkages between young citizens and political authorities, the Congress invites local and/or regional authorities to use the methodologies and tools referred to in Congress Resolution 394 (2015) on E-media: game changer for local and regional politicians, as a means of mobilising young people and increasing their participation in decision and policy making.

1. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 20 October 2015, 1st Sitting (see Document [CG/2015\(29\)7FINAL](#), explanatory memorandum), rapporteur: Malcolm Byrne, Ireland (R, ILDG).

2. [Resolution 346 \(2012\)](#) on youth and democracy: the changing face of youth political engagement; [Resolution 319 \(2010\)](#) on integration of young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods, [Resolution 259 \(2008\)](#) on integration and participation of young people at local and regional level.