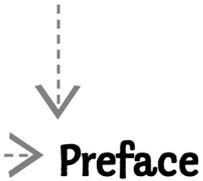


Council of Europe Award "Young Active Citizens" 2005

**Active participation by young people
in the European Year of Citizenship through Education**



Preface

For the fourth year running, the Council of Europe has organised the “Young Active Citizens” Award in order to promote participation by young people in society, especially at local and regional level. In 2005, the European Year of Citizenship through Education, the Award seeks in particular to generate a more profound sense of citizenship among young people, to create a feeling of belonging to a democratic society and to stimulate a commitment to that society.

In accordance with the general Award rules, priority was given to projects meeting one or more of the following criteria:

- the project is implemented in one of the 48 states parties to the European Cultural Convention;
- the project fosters active participation by young people in social, political and cultural life;
- the project is carried out by, with and for young people aged 16 to 30;
- the project is in keeping with the spirit of the Council of Europe revised Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life;
- the project fosters direct cooperation between young people and local and regional authorities;
- the project is in keeping with the principles of the Council of Europe youth sector;
- the project is innovative, in particular as regards the strategy employed to involve young people as active participants;
- the project can serve as an example to others.

The prize was open to projects stemming from initiatives by young people, local and regional authorities, non-governmental organisations and youth networks and other structures operating in the youth sector in the 48 states parties to the European Cultural Convention.

The Council of Europe decided to declare 2005 “European Year of Citizenship through Education”. The organisation wished to draw attention in this way to the crucial part played by education in developing active citizenship, a democratic culture and social cohesion. In this perspective, the Council of Europe’s action is concerned with education in the broad sense, that is to say both formal and non-formal and with a view to lifelong learning.

The Year aims to convey the message that citizenship is not merely a legal and political concept but a global one. Citizenship presupposes, on the one hand, that all citizens are able to exercise their human rights in full and to feel that they are



protected by democratic society, and on the other hand presupposes active, responsible participation by citizens in all areas of social life, together with constant respect for the rights of others. Because democratic citizenship cannot be "assimilated" unless it is practised, education for citizenship is closely bound up with the concepts of democratisation and participation.

In conjunction with the European Year of Citizenship through Education, the 2005 "Young Active Citizens" Award seeks in particular to support young people's initiatives in the field of education for citizenship. Projects illustrating concrete examples of educational methods and tools useful in promoting the various aspects of citizenship received more particular attention.

The jury consisted of two members of the Programming Committee on Youth, the decision-making body of the European Youth Centres and the programmes of the European Youth Foundation, a representative of the Council of Europe's Education sector, and two staff members of the Council of Europe's Directorate of Youth and Sport.

The jury reached the following decisions:

Five projects were selected. Each of them, in its own way, aims to create a sense of belonging and of commitment to democratic society. Together, these five projects thus cover education and participation for citizenship in their broadest interpretation.

- "Representative democracy?" A project designed to offer a different approach to the elected representatives. Carried out by the school organisation "St-Ursula-Gymnasium Attendorf Fachschaft Sozialwissenschaften" (Germany).
- "I'm voting for the first time". A project entailing a large-scale active information campaign for secondary-school pupils – new potential voters – about their civil rights and the importance of participating in political and community life. Carried out by the "GONG" organisation (Croatia).
- "The Clubs Continent. It's my right". A project carried out by the All Russian Union Children Centre "Orlyonok", "Olimpiyskiy" (Russian Federation)
- "Net instead of bars". A project to create different support clubs for young people, in particular those from minorities. Carried out by the "Association for Romany Culture and General Education" (Hungary).
- "WIMPS (Where Is My Public Servant?)" www.wimps.org.uk. A project carried out by the organisation "Public Achievement" (Northern Ireland).

The jury awarded consolation prizes to three projects:

- "Young people + local authorities = youth participation". A project to foster partnership between young people and local authorities in the interests of active citizenship and combating exclusion of young people. Carried out by "The Azerbaijan Volunteers Public Union" (Azerbaijan).
- "Youth community work foundation". A pilot project to combat the social exclusion of young people through participation. Carried out by the Municipality of Cartagena and various local associations including "Asociacion de Vecinos Barriada Virgen de la Caridad", "Caritas", "Asociacion Rascasa" (Spain).
- "Creation of a rural youth forum". A project carried out by the organisation "Haltwhistle European Rural Youth Forum" (United Kingdom).



"Representative democracy?"

"St-Ursula-Gymnasium Attendorn Fachschaft Sozialwissenschaften" - Germany

"Representative democracy?" sought to draw the attention of young people to politicians, to afford a better understanding of their work, their obligations and constraints, and to foster transparency between young people and the world of politics.

The project aimed to provide a different approach to the population's elected representatives and also to broaden traditional classroom activities and schoolchildren's everyday experience, so as to give them a fuller understanding of political work, which is presented only very sketchily in school textbooks.

A group of about 70 pupils from age 16 to 20 carried out a project in several stages:

- interviews and debates between young people and politicians (ministers, MPs, opposition leaders, etc.) in the course of which the young people often wanted to move away from the usual approach and focus on very precise questions, such as "Would you have been so successful if you had been a woman?".
- The debates centred on certain subjects decided on by the pupils – "European politics", "Young people and disappointment with politics", "The media and politics", etc.
- This group of young people then developed teaching software available to everybody in the form of a CD-rom or on the internet, containing the interviews and research material with which to get to grips with political issues.



This project enabled the young people to meet a range of political leaders, to understand their work and their difficulties, and to obtain first-hand information. This journalistic experience taught them about the dilemma between a plethora of information and limited media time and gave them an awareness of the influence of the media in today's society.

But the project was also rewarding for the politicians. Many elected representatives admitted that they would rather be interviewed by young people than by professional journalists. They also observed that young people could still take an interest in politics and that their opinions were relevant.

Thus there was genuine reconciliation between young people, the authorities and political life in general.

These young people had an opportunity to work not only with the politicians they met, but also with various institutions such as the press office of the Rhineland-Westphalia Parliament and numerous media. Some fifty articles and reports appeared in the press.

This project further demonstrates that young people can communicate with elected representatives. The world of politics has been opened to them.

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→ "I'm voting for the first time"

GONG – Croatia

The GONG organisation's project was based on the finding that secondary school children in Croatia are unaware of their future civil rights, are mistrustful of institutions and are somewhat uninterested in getting actively involved in civil society, though this is a necessary condition for the strengthening of democracy.

The project "I'm voting for the first time" sought to remedy this state of affairs by way of a large-scale active information campaign among secondary pupils aged 17-18 – new potential voters – about their civil rights and the importance of participating in political and community life.

Some forty GONG participants and trainers, mostly students, met pupils from 272 secondary schools during workshops divided into three parts – the first part taking stock of the pupils' knowledge of civics, the second clarifying uncertainties, and the third taking case studies (action to defend civil rights when infringed, eg. setting up an internet café). Educational material was distributed at the end of each workshop – a booklet in questionnaire form with questions and answers between participating pupils and students, a booklet on defending civil rights when infringed, and a contraceptive symbolising the importance of making responsible choices.



The pupils engaged in the project through the interactive workshop approach, the young trainers and the scrupulous analysis of their assessment forms at the end of each workshop.

The Croatian Minister of Education, Youth and Sport, as well as municipalities such as Zagreb, encouraged the GONG initiative by way of an official letter of recommendation and grants.

Teachers are now using the results of the workshops in social science teaching.

The result of the project "I'm voting for the first time" is highly positive – 95% of the young people who took part have clearly stated their intention to vote and to join the GONG organisation.

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→ **"The Clubs Continent",
"it's my right".**

All Russian Union Children Centre "Orlyonok", "Olimpiyskiy" - Russian Federation

Young people and society in general do not exercise human rights and children's rights enough. The project aimed to make young people aware of human rights through non-formal education.

At a summer camp in 2005, 28 young people of both sexes, from various regions of the Russian Federation, had an opportunity to extend their knowledge of human rights and put it into practice.

To begin with, these young people considered the application of human rights in different social spheres (school, street, transport, family, etc.) through sport, tourism and debates on human rights.

Next, they divided into small groups to construct projects illustrating the exercise of human rights.

Subsequently, in the context of a competition, they presented their projects to all the camp participants. The winners then had the opportunity to put their project into practice throughout the camp (2000 persons) in the form of a full-scale game run entirely by themselves. Apart from creating this large-scale game, the young



people performed a show and songs encouraging human rights. These tools are now available to others by way of examples and teaching materials.

This project gave the young people a knowledge of human rights and how to put them into practice. At the start of the project, only three young people out of 28 appeared to know what human rights were all about. At the end of it, all participants felt genuinely concerned. They will be able to take the message back into their own social environment.

Consequently, this mode of non-formal human rights education enables young people to assert their rights in the various situations with which they are confronted.

In addition, this project encouraged cooperation between forty regions in the Russian Federation and youth associations.

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→ **"Net instead of bars"**

"Association for Romany Culture and General Education" - Hungary

The population of Pécs, Hungary, includes 10,000 Roms. 40% of them do not complete their primary schooling, and 50% of those who have completed primary education drop out of school the following year. Consequently, they are the victims of segregation and the minorities mediator considers that too many young Roms are sent into specialised education establishments (eg. for handicapped persons) when their condition does not warrant this. The project "Net instead of bars" therefore aims to involve itself in education and recreational programmes for young Roms. The project creates a new service – the Club of Young Roms – designed to prevent delinquency among teenagers and young adults.

This club draws the attention of young gypsies and Roms to education and training, which are the only routes to social adjustment, advance and integration in order to avoid the growing marginalisation and discrimination they suffer.

In order to achieve these aims, the project in particular offers support to promising young people, for example by facilitating educational grants and tutorship for secondary pupils, with the help of Rom university students. In this way the project positively develops the Rom identity and stresses the importance of associating parents and institutions with these approaches.



In practical terms, the project has provided:

- a film club for 27 participants, showing films which prompt discussion on minorities, the terrible consequences of drugs, etc;
- an internet club for 25 participants, who learnt to use the internet on their own between January and June 2005. Furthermore, 36 young people were able to acquire basic computer skills;
- a "school support club" where 58 participants received help with homework and revision for exams. This club has also arranged visits to exhibitions;
- a "job-seekers' club" which, in particular, helped a score of young people to find employment;
- a "leisure club", offering facilities in particular for young people in specialised institutions.

The project as a whole was managed on an ongoing basis with the young people, who thus played an active part in its implementation.

"Net instead of bars", by reason of its offer of both formal and non-formal education, has enabled links to be forged among the young people of Pécs and has helped to integrate nearly 500 young people belonging to this minority into society.

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→ **"WiMPS (Where is My Public Servant?)"**
www.wimps.org.uk

"Public Achievement" - United Kingdom/Northern Ireland

The aim of this project was to foster communication between young people and the various authorities, especially local and international. It having been observed that young people in Northern Ireland took little part in political life, WiMPS was keen to create a practical, easily accessible tool to give young people a channel for expressing their views and enhance their commitment to voting procedures and political life.

Consequently, a group of young people created an internet site (www.wimps.org.uk) where dialogue with elected representatives is possible. In this way young people can discuss problems of society, local life, human rights, etc., and also put questions and make suggestions to politicians.

Over 900 messages from young people have been sent via this site to elected representatives and the media. The local authorities and the media facilitate links between the work of WiMPS and the politicians.

An external assessment has been carried out to quantify the results of the project. The report shows that the WiMPS internet site is a very useful "on-line" tool.

For example, the WiMPS project has been presented in several schools as an instrument of education for citizenship and a resource for communication campaigns.



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