

# The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities



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## **Integration and participation of young people at local and regional level**

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Explanatory memorandum  
Committee on Culture and Education

### Summary:

Increasing youth participation in local and regional life remains an important challenge for local and regional elected representatives.

The Congress proposes strategies and lines of action to stimulate young people's interest and commitment on the local and regional level, notably looking at legal issues, means of implementation and the role of the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life.

The revised Charter offers elected representatives a flexible and coherent framework, based on the principle that every policy area should have a youth dimension. For local and regional authorities, the priority areas for applying these participation principles are in the promotion of youth employment, education and professional training, sport and leisure. They should use practical tools for improving youth participation such as training courses, advice centres, youth projects and using local media created for and by young people.

Better dissemination of the Revised European Charter and some good practice examples should help those local and regional authorities that have yet to take action to put in place appropriate structures for its implementation. The setting up of a network of Youth Councils in Bosnia-Herzegovina, based on the recommendations of the Charter is a good example of how such a network can be implemented at the national level. Such actions point the way forward to giving the Charter the impact that it deserves.

R: Chamber of Regions / L: Chamber of Local Authorities  
ILDG: Independent and Liberal Democrat Group of the Congress  
EPP/CD: European People's Party – Christian Democrats of the Congress  
SOC: Socialist Group of the Congress  
NR: Members not belonging to a Political Group of the Congress



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## 1. Youth integration and participation in Europe

*“The secret message communicated to most young people today by the society around them is that they are not needed... Yet the fact is that the society, the rest of us, needs young people... For society to attempt to solve its desperate problems without the full participation of even very young people is imbecile.”*

*Alvin Toffler*

The current public opinion, fuelled both by politics and mass media, often pictures a dramatic decline of young people's political engagement who are portrayed as the apathetic fun generation that can only be motivated by punishment and rewards. “Young people are jeopardising the future of democracy”, many lament and claim that youth is undermining and eroding society's foundations. “We don't have youth problems, we have community problems. The issue is not with young people, but rather with our tired and old structures from ancient times”, others might respond, pointing to the many alternative forms of participation springing up everywhere in Europe and the world.

It is between these two extremes that the political and academic discourse on youth participation and integration takes place, trying to address and resolve the paradoxical dilemma of institutions that are not easily accessible – and thus hinder participation – and young people who are not willing to participate – even if democracy might have different expectations – unless they can engage with honest politics in which their voices will sufficiently influence political processes and their outcomes.

*“There is a direct relation between the real participatory power of young people and their readiness to get involved in the political process and public policies.”*

*Peter Lauritzen*

The “Revised European Charter on Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life” makes a valid contribution to the participation and integration of young people at grassroot level by translating this relation between real power and involvement of young people into fundamental principles and policy suggestions. By addressing rights, means, space, opportunity and support, the Charter provides a coherent context and a flexible framework in which local authorities and civil society can co-determine and co-construct social change. In doing so, the Charter takes the principle of transversal, evidence-based and co-managed policy development from the institutional realm of the Council of Europe to the much wider sphere of regions, municipalities and communities in Europe.

Yet, the Charter is by no means a guarantee that democratic participation will increase wherever it is applied. No less importantly, the youth focus of the Charter should not obscure the fact that participation is waning in democracy at large: the paradox described above is not confined to young people. The Council of Europe has long acknowledged this, and recently published a report on “The Future of Democracy”. In particular with the “Revised European Charter on Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life”, the organisation can play a key role in shaping the future of democracy with, for and by young people.

## 2. Youth integration and participation in a policy context

The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe has adopted a wide range of recommendations and resolutions related to the participation and integration of young people at local and regional level in recent years. These policy papers contain both proposals for general policy provisions and measures as well as a variety of specific examples and concrete practices at the disposal of relevant actors in local and regional contexts.

While not all of these recommendations and resolutions focus exclusively on young people as primary subjects, but at times refer to broader groups such as foreigners or local citizens, the provisions of these policies concern young people as well, in so far as they constitute a substantial part of the target groups addressed.

The following resolutions jointly underline the vital and indispensable role of local and regional stakeholders for the integration and participation of young people. Being the level of administration and politics closest to citizens, it is here – in local and regional contexts – where most can be done through

taking on shared responsibility aiming to establish sustainable co-operation between different actors, and where much remains to be done to enhance and increase the integration and participation of young people.

There are three recent initiatives (resolutions and recommendations) related to the main policy instrument of the Congress in the area, namely the “Revised European Charter on Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life.” These are:

2.1. Recommendation (2003) 128 on the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life

The recommendation invites the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to adopt the European Charter as a recommendation to all member states and encourages to request relevant services from the organisation in the field of local and regional youth participation.

2.2. Resolution (2003) 152 on the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life

With the resolution, the Council of Ministers adopts the Revised European Charter and identifies concrete actions to be undertaken by different stakeholders, in particular the member states of the Council of Europe, the Committee on Culture and Education of the Congress and non-governmental youth organisations, in order to promote the Charter at local and regional level. *More specifically, member states are invited*

- to use the Revised European Charter as an inspiration for their work,
- to promote and disseminate the Revised European Charter,
- to try to involve young people in decision-making in their municipalities,
- to promote co-operation between municipalities and regions, and
- to facilitate participation of young people who have less opportunities to participate.

*The Committee on Culture and Education of the Congress is held responsible*

- for monitoring the implementation process of the Charter’s principles, and
- for gathering examples of good practices in the area of youth participation.

2.3. Recommendation (2004) 13 on the participation of young people in local and regional life

Through this recommendation, the Committee of Ministers recommends that the governments of all member states promote and support the implementation of the “Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life.”

*European governments are invited to encourage local and regional authorities*

- to take into account the principles advocated in the Revised European Charter when developing and implementing youth policies and programmes,
- to develop co-operation with youth NGOs and to establish consultative bodies,
- to promote youth participation in associative life and educational institutions,
- to provide information to young people regarding participation and promote training of all relevant actors in youth participation and democratic citizenship, and
- to follow up and monitor the implementation of the “Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life.”

Further to the three resolutions and recommendations related to the “Revised European Charter on Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life”, there are two main policy initiatives related to participation in local affairs with specific reference to young people. These two initiatives are:

#### 2.4. .... Recommendation (2001) 19 on the participation of citizens in local public life

This recommendation outlines a policy framework designed to promote citizens' participation in local public life. Local and regional authorities are invited to undertake the implementation of this policy and to take any measures necessary to support citizens' participation (e.g. by improving local regulations or practical arrangements).

The document lists the basic principles of local democratic participation policies, such as recognising the role and potential of children and young people for the sustainable development of local communities. Appendix II includes steps and measures to encourage citizens' participation in local public life, among other things suggesting to incorporate citizen education in school curricula and training syllabi.

Appendix II also addresses the participation of young people more in depth by proposing ideas and actions to encourage the integration of citizens with little or no access to participation, including young people. With regard to young people, the suggestions include the promotion of flexible forms of community involvement (youth centres, youth clubs, etc.), the lowering of the voting age, and the establishment of youth councils at municipal level.

#### 2.5. .... Recommendation (2005) 182 on public participation in local affairs and elections

This policy initiative includes recommendations aiming to address the phenomenon of civil society groups that are actively participating but are not represented in elected decision-making bodies. Seeing that young people are often excluded from electoral bodies (mostly due to voting age restrictions) and thus not represented in local parliaments and committees, this recommendation also applies to youth and represents an important instrument in fostering young people's integration, inclusion, and participation.

The text recognises the role and potential of various forms of participation beyond electoral representation and draws attention to the need for legislative and institutional frameworks in relation to the participation of non-elected groups.

*In this context, the member states are invited to encourage local authorities*

- to establish a framework for group participation,
- to hold local referendums on questions having direct effect on a local community,
- to support participation of less involved groups like young persons, and
- to promote the Revised European Charter.

In addition to the three resolutions and recommendations related to the "Revised European Charter on Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life" and the two previous recommendations on local civic participation, there are two policy initiatives on the integration and participation of migrants with references to young people. These two initiatives are:

#### 2.6. .... Recommendation (2002) 115 on the participation of foreign residents in local public life

This recommendation invites all member states to sign and ratify the "Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local Level" and notes that special attention should be given to the participation and integration of young migrants of first and second generations.

#### 2.7. .... Resolution (2004) 181 on a pact of the integration and participation of people of immigrant origin in Europe's towns, cities and regions

Rooted in the Final Declaration of the Stuttgart Conference "Foreigners' Integration and Participation in European Cities", held on September 15 and 16, 2003, this resolution recognises the key role of local and regional authorities in implementing integration programmes despite their very limited involvement in the corresponding decision-making on migration and integration at national or European level.

While the resolution does not address young people exclusively or specifically, as a substantial part of the targeted people of immigrant origin in Europe they can clearly benefit from the measures advocated through the initiative.

In addition to the three resolutions and recommendations related to the “Revised European Charter on Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life”, the two recommendations on local civic participation, and the two declarations on the integration and participation of migrants, there are two policy initiatives on economic participation with specific reference to young people. These two initiatives are:

2.8. Recommendation (2006) 198 on promoting entrepreneurial spirit among young people in Europe's regions

This recommendation addresses the problem of youth unemployment and lack of economic activity at local and regional levels. It notes that although regional authorities support young entrepreneurs in creating their businesses, there is very little done to promote the spirit of enterprise – or entrepreneurial culture – which plays an important role in combating youth unemployment. Therefore the policy document recommends that the Committee of Ministers ask member states to provide resources to regional authorities necessary to work in this field and to create a national strategy for entrepreneurial education – in co-operation with regional authorities providing the local context.

2.9. Resolution (2006) 221 on promoting entrepreneurial spirit among young people in Europe's regions

*This resolution calls on all regional authorities in Europe*

- to act as a link between national and local authorities in the area of youth transition and enterprise training policies,
- to develop and implement a territorial strategy for enterprise education tailored to the specific regional context, and
- to support young people with specific needs (migrants, disabled youth, ethnic minorities etc.) in entrepreneurial initiatives.

Last but not least, one resolution exists on young people and new technologies in addition to the three resolutions and recommendations related to the “Revised European Charter on Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life”, the two recommendations on local civic participation, the two declarations on the integration and participation of migrants, and the two policy initiatives on economic participation.

2.10. Resolution (2006) 207 on young people and new information and communication technologies – a new opportunity for local democracy

With this resolution, the role of new information and communication technologies in increasing young people's interest in public life and active citizenship is recognised – as well as the contribution of new information and communication technologies to the development of new forms of participation. The initiative invites local authorities to use information technologies when promoting the Charter and when targeting young people in general, and to support the training of professionals working with youth in relation to the use of new technologies.

2.11. Analysis of the selected recommendations and resolutions

This selection of the ten most relevant recent recommendations and resolutions of the “Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in Europe” exemplifies the wide range of areas and entry-points covered in relation to the integration and participation of young people.

Their combined subsets of specific observations, suggestions and proposals provide local and regional authorities – as well as other interested actors and stakeholders – with an impressive array of ideas and actions that can be implemented on local level.

The extent and variety of addressing youth participation and integration shows how much importance is given to the topic both on local and regional level, with members of the Congress working on these issues continuously, and on European level, with the Congress itself returning to youth participation and integration on a regular basis.

The diversity of policy initiatives, however, also represents a serious obstacle for interested parties – finding the relevant texts is not easy unless one is aware of their existence, and the fragmentation of recommendations and proposals is (while, arguably, politically necessary and understandable) not always helpful for immediate help or a holistic overview. Moreover, it somewhat contradicts the approach of the Charter in viewing youth policy as a holistic policy area, cutting across the traditionally horizontal structures of administration and politics. Additionally, interested parties face a substantial linguistic barrier, as most texts are available in English and French only (with some exceptions of a few resolutions being made available in additional languages).

It is furthermore striking that the recommendations and resolutions almost exclusively focus on the political and economic aspects of participation and integration – and mostly address traditional forms of participation. It seems that the members of the Congress currently lack expertise beyond the realms of more established ways of integration and participation – or that such expertise has, if existent, not yet gained enough attention on European level.

The majority of the policy initiatives call on municipalities to provide opportunities for participation and empower young people, for example through training, to make use of such possibilities. In doing so, the texts fail to acknowledge that young people very often have developed their own, myriad ways of expressing their voices, and that there lies an enormous chance for local and regional actors in opening up to these groups and initiatives in a spirit of partnership and co-operation between equals.

Last but not least, the policy initiatives lack mechanisms to monitor their implementation – both in terms of the suggested framework (youth policy) and in terms of the suggested practice (youth work and training). While it is clear that the role of the Congress is neither to become operational at local level nor to control its members, a mechanism to guide, observe, stimulate, promote, support and report on the implementation of the Charter on a continuous basis would certainly help in maximising the potential of such a crucial instrument.

### **3. Initiatives of the Council of Europe and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities addressing youth integration and participation**

Based on the Council of Europe's mission *to safeguard and promote human rights, pluralist democracy and the rule of law*, participation and integration are vital working areas for the organisation and its different organs, committees, and directorates – including the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (the Congress) and the Directorate of Youth and Sport (DYS).

The DYS – one of the two key players in this policy field – has four main priorities for the programme period 2006 to 2008, youth participation and democratic citizenship being one of them. More specifically, the youth sector aims to promote and sustain the role of youth organisations in the development of democratic participation, to promote citizenship education and participation of and by young people, and to promote access of young people to decision-making.

In this context, the Directorate of Youth and Sport is concentrating its efforts in relation to the promotion and sustainment of youth organisations on four particular areas, namely:

- support to youth NGOs as spaces for young people to develop their capacities to become active citizens,
- support to the capacity of youth NGOs in Europe to become more sustainable, bearing in mind the structural challenges facing them,

- support to the development and integration of a viable youth NGO sector in the member states of Eastern Europe, South-East Europe and the Caucasus, as well as in the framework of Euro-Mediterranean co-operation, and
- support to the emergence and development of new forms of organisations and networks of vulnerable young people or groups under-represented in society.

The Congress – being the second key actor of the Council of Europe in the field of youth participation and integration – has identified six priority working subjects for the period 2007 to 2008, the first one being the reinforcement of local and regional democracy in Europe. Within this priority, the Congress aims to promote participation in local public life, and more specifically to promote the participation of young people in public local life and to identify and develop means to associate young people with decision-making in districts and cities.

It is within this larger political framework, that – specifically related to the “Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life” – several activities and initiatives have been organised in recent years, aiming to make the Charter known, to advocate for using its potential, to empower stakeholders to utilise the Charter, and to facilitate exchanges of experience made in applying the Charter to a variety of local and regional contexts.

### ***3.1. Conferences on integration and participation and related themes***

#### **3.1.1. Krakow Conference “Young People – Actors in their Towns and Regions”**

This conference was organised in March 2002 in Krakow, Poland to celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the “European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Municipal and Regional Life”, adopted in 1992.

The final declaration of the conference stresses that young people are citizens of municipalities and regions like any other age group, and that they should therefore have access to all forms of participation ranging from political participation and involvement in decision-making processes and elections to taking an active role in providing cultural, social, economical and political events and projects for young people by young people.

#### **3.1.2. Conference on the implementation of the Revised European Charter**

This conference on the implementation of the “Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life” was organised in June 2005 in Komsomolsk, Ukraine as a joint initiative of the Congress, the Council of Europe’s Directorate of Youth and Sport and the City of Komsomolsk.

The conference aimed to look at good practices in implementing the principles of the Charter. The participants of the conference adopted a declaration underlining the role of local and regional authorities in disseminating, promoting and implementing the Revised Charter in co-operation with other local actors, suggesting national launch events and educational activities related to the Revised Charter and encouraging the Congress to include the Charter in the framework on monitoring local and regional democracy in the member states.

#### **3.1.3. Conference “Integrated Childhood and Youth Policies in Europe”**

This conference took place in January 2006 in Strasbourg, France. It has also been referred to as the “Berlin Process” and provided the space to collect and exchange experiences and approaches in the field of childhood and youth policies – with a special focus on disadvantaged neighbourhoods. The process has the ambition to initiate the realisation of a visionary concept – the “Social City for Children and Youth” – which aims at creating a complex and horizontal policy framework for young people and children.



### 3.1.4. Conference “Foreigners’ Integration and Participation in European Cities”

This conference was convened in September 2003 in Stuttgart, Germany. The participants of the European symposium agreed on a final declaration stating that the integration and participation of immigrants should be regarded as one of the priority aims of municipal policy. The declaration also stresses that the implementation of the declaration’s intent requires the involvement and co-operation of several local stakeholders including municipal authorities, civil society and economical actors and calls for the introduction of an “Integration Pact”.

### 3.2. Educational activities and initiatives on integration and participation

The Council of Europe has implemented a number of educational projects and initiatives on the integration and participation of young people, mostly through the Directorate of Youth and Sport (DYS), and partly also under the partnership with the European Commission.

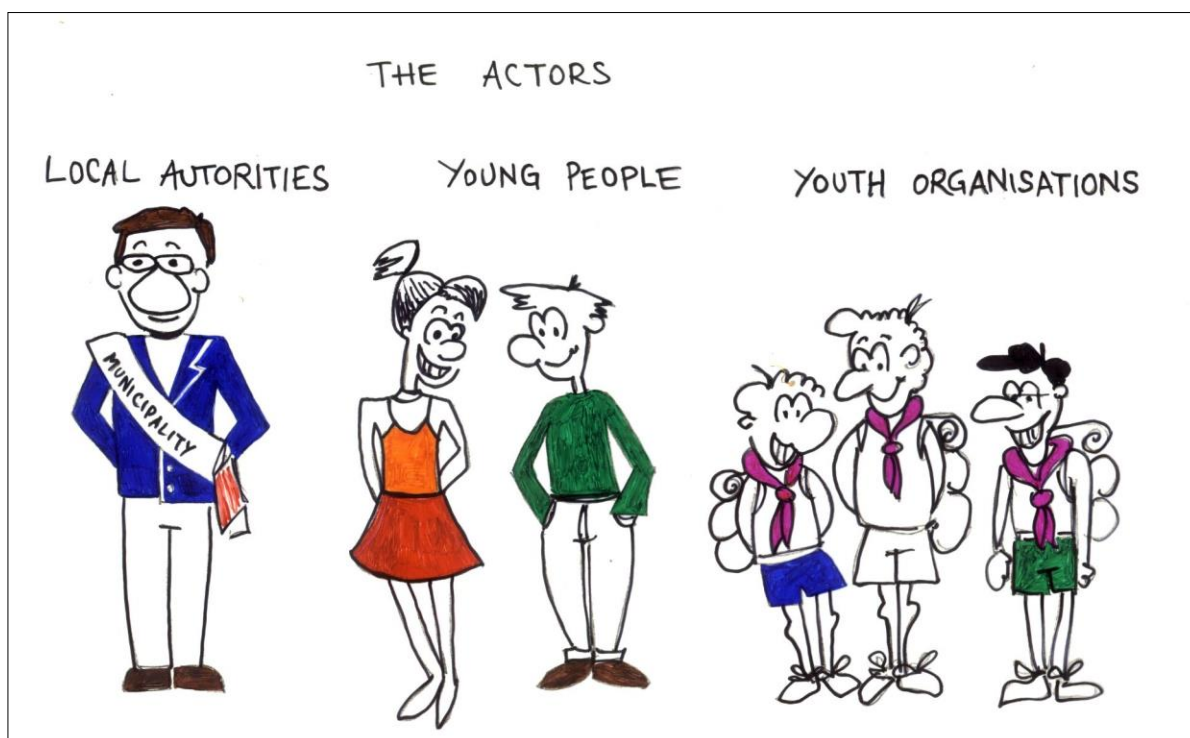
#### 3.2.1. Training courses on local youth participation

Since 2005, three training activities on local youth participation have been organised by the DYS, focusing on the development and implementation of participation projects at local and regional level in co-operation between civil society and public authorities.

In the framework of the courses, which aimed to facilitate the initiation and development of innovative projects for youth participation, the “Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life” was introduced and utilised as a key instrument for the integration and participation of young people at local and regional level.

The courses have stimulated a number of follow-up projects, some of which are referred to in later chapters of this report. In addition, materials were developed that have been used to present the Charter and exemplify its different areas – including some uniquely engaging and youth-friendly material.

#### 3.2.2. Training courses on themes related to participation and integration



Cartoon from the pilot training course on youth participation in 2005 / Created by Guiseppina Rossi.

The Directorate of Youth and Sport (DYS) and the Youth Partnership between the Council of Europe and the European Commission have organised a number of training courses on themes related to participation.

Since 1998, the DYS has worked on the theme “European Citizenship” by means of a series of training courses and modules as well as publications (including a training kit dedicated to the theme) and co-operation projects with the European Union. In all these activities, questions of civic engagement, youth participation and integration have played a vital role.

Human Rights Education has been a second long-standing priority of the educational work in the DYS, by which important aspects of participation and integration are continually addressed, such as the inclusion of minorities (for example through educational offers aiming to provide training and empowerment for minority youth participation).

### **3.2.3. Study sessions on integration, participation and related themes**

The Directorate of Youth and Sport (DYS) offers youth organisations the opportunity to hold study sessions at its residential centres in Strasbourg, France and Budapest, Hungary with educational support from professional, experienced staff.

The DYS is co-managed by governments and non-governmental youth organisations in a structure of shared responsibility that is unique and exemplary within and beyond the Council of Europe. The co-management structures not only determine the biannual work priorities of the youth sector (democratic citizenship and youth participation being one of them), they also decide on grants for study sessions under these priorities.

Several youth NGOs organised such study sessions on integration and participation and related themes, and many more applied. The study sessions included “Action: key to participation and change” by the European Young Christian Workers (EYCW), “Participation of rural youth in Europe” by Rural Youth Europe (RYE), and “Youth at the forefront of a new inclusive Europe” by the International Union of Socialist Youth (IUSY).

While there are no available figures indicating how many seminars were organised on integration and participation of young people outside the DYS in recent years – for example with the support of the European Youth Foundation or the European Union “Youth in Action” Programme – it can be assumed that there have been numerous activities whose thoughts, findings, reports and recommendations would be worthwhile discovering.

### **3.3. European campaigns on integration and participation**

The European Youth Campaign “All Different – All Equal” was run between June 2006 and September 2007 by the Council of Europe in co-operation with the European Union and the European Youth Forum.

The main themes of the campaign were participation, human rights and diversity. Covering these three themes, the campaign sought to encourage and empower young people in Europe to contribute to building participatory, inclusive and peaceful societies.

The first campaign of the same title was organised in 1995 by the Council of Europe to reinforce the fight against racism, anti-semitism, xenophobia and intolerance.

### **3.4. Research activities on youth participation, integration and related themes**

The Council of Europe has had a long history of working with researchers and has – at the latest since Resolution (70) 18 on the co-ordination of research on a European level – placed strong emphasis on the co-operation of researchers in general and – reinforced by Recommendation (92) 7 – of youth researchers specifically.

In 2003, the Council of Europe has strengthened its attempts to facilitate and encourage evidence-based youth policy by forming a research partnership with the European Union. Meanwhile, a network of experts has been built up, indicators for youth policy were developed and a “European Knowledge Centre on Youth” has emerged (with an extensive section on participation and the Revised European Charter – <http://www.youth-partnership.net/youth-partnership/ekcyp/BGKNGE/Participation>).

Most of the research activities have significantly contributed to – and at times even initiated – some of the following publications, most notably the seminars “What about youth political participation?” in 2003 and “Diversity – Human Rights – Participation” in 2006.

### **3.5. Publications on youth participation and integration**

Brocke, H. and Karsten, A. (2007): *Human Rights Education and Youth Participation: Towards a common culture of co-operation between civil society and local authorities*. Project Report, Centre Français de Berlin – under the auspices of the Council of Europe, Berlin.

Forbrig, Jörg (2005): *Revisiting political youth participation. Challenges for research and democratic practice in Europe*. Council of Europe, Strasbourg.

EYC Budapest (2002): *Hearing on the specific situation of young migrants. Summary of proceedings*. Council of Europe, Parliamentary Assembly and Directorate of Youth, Budapest.

### **3.6. Publications on the Revised European Charter**

Gozdzik-Ormel, Zaneta (2007): *Have your say: Manual on the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life*. Council of Europe, Strasbourg.

Bänziger, D. and Doorley, J. et al (2007): *Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life – The Plain Language Version*. A youth-friendly version of the Charter. Council of Europe, Strasbourg.

## **4. European Union approaches to integration and youth participation**

The current approach of the European Union in the field of youth participation and integration is mainly based on the White Paper “A New Impetus for Youth”, which was adopted in November 2001 after wide-ranging consultations at national and European level and which presented a milestone by establishing an EU-wide youth policy centred around participation.

In June 2002, the European Council decided that the “**Open Method of Co-ordination**” – the Union’s voluntary governance instrument featuring benchmarks, indicators and reports – will be applied to the theme of participation, one of the four key priorities of the White Paper.

In April 2003, the European Commission suggested **common objectives on participation**, based on the analysis of member state’s responses to questionnaires sent out in the framework of the open method of co-ordination. In 2005, the Commission began to publish first national reports on the implementation of the common objectives.

In parallel, the EU developed and adopted the **European Youth Pact** in support of its participation policies. The pact seeks to promote and enhance social integration and inclusion of young people and aims to support the Lisbon strategy objectives – to make the EU the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy of the world – in the youth field.

In July 2006, the European Commission presented a communication outlining the progress in realising the common objectives in the field of participation, followed by a resolution of the Council in December 2006 on implementing the common objectives for participation by young people in view of promoting their active European citizenship. In September 2007, the Commission outlined how to promote young people’s **full participation and integration** in education, employment and society in a communication to the Council, the Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions.

Based on this wide range of policy initiatives and in the context of the widely published “Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate”, the European Union has developed the instrument of a **structured dialogue** with young people as a means of mutual communication between authorities and young people in the genuine spirit of constructive partnership.

A structured dialogue is designed to be a bottom-up process, bringing issues of real concern to young people at grassroots level to the European-level discourse. Local, regional and national consultations for such dialogues are taking the form of seminars supported by the “Youth in Action” Programme, while the European dialogues are organised as biannual youth presidency events and annual youth weeks. The conclusions of structured dialogues are discussed between youth non-governmental organisations and the “Troika” of the current European Council Presidency, the European Parliament and the European Commission.

On a larger scale, the “Youth in Action” Programme supports the participation of young people in democratic life with the overall objective to encourage young people to be active citizens and demands that all projects use **participation as a pedagogical principle**.

## **5. Local and regional experiences with young people’s integration and participation**

Local and regional actors working on youth participation and integration have repeatedly expressed a strong need for an exchange of good practices and a facilitation of learning from each other’s experiences. So far, this demand has not been fully responded to, and during the previous months and years only a very limited number of representatives of different municipalities and regions have had the opportunity to explore the potential of the Charter in a European intercultural environment.

It is by this limited scope of prior exchange and the lack of internet-based tools or platforms in relation to the Charter, that this chapter is necessarily incomplete. And yet it shows that the experience gained so far at local and regional level across Europe is already very rich: the various initiatives involve different sets of stakeholders, have multiple dimensions and formats, address distinctive problems, and involve young people in specific ways.

### **5.1. Examples of local and regional experiences**

In a joint initiative aiming to promote the active participation of young citizens, the Education and the City Youth Departments started “**The Voice of the Young**” in Helsinki, Finland. In an open forum accessible to all school students, the project creates enormous spaces for involvement and participation – in 2007, 50.000 young people were involved and discussed, among other things, which facilities and initiatives would respond better to the needs of Helsinki’s young citizens.

In a pilot project seeking to implement the national youth policy on local level, “**Youth Municipalities**” were created all over Denmark. Innovation is encouraged in the framework of this programme, and over the years, many new ways were discovered to engage young people actively in the shaping of their communities: local ombudsmen were established, youth headquarters were opened, youth radio stations were founded and many ways were tested in which to use new information and communication technologies.

In a co-operative venture wanting to introduce participation in a playful way, the youth club and youth department of Sabadell, Spain created “**The Game Conspiracy**”. The simulation introduces young people to basic concepts and processes of participation, exclusion and inclusion through non-formal education and, in return, encourages and strengthens skills to prioritise, co-operate, negotiate and agree on compromises.

In a project of transnational collaboration aiming to re-claim public urban spaces for young people, youth organisations and urban planning departments of several cities in Austria and Slovakia created the “**Teens Open Space Project**”. Based on common city walks, ideas for improvements were collected and new solutions were developed for re-designing public spaces in the interests of the city’s

youth. Finally, the negotiated proposals were implemented and many spaces and places were re-shaped for, with and by young people.

In an educational project seeking to raise awareness on the human rights situation of migrants and refugees in hope of improving their situation, a local youth organisation and the education department of Poznan, Poland established “**Different – but the same**”. Using approaches of non-formal education, young volunteers take different lessons and scenarios to local schools and, through peer education, contribute continuously to the integration of young people with migration or refugee backgrounds.

## **5.2. Analysis of the experiences made so far**

Despite the limited scope and range of (access to) prior experiences and the highly contextual specificities of each project, the described initiatives suggest that

- co-operation and partnerships between different actors provide mutual benefits and strengthen links with different parts of local communities,
- early involvement of young people often are the largest success factors of sustainable projects and bring about higher participation from their peers – in other words:
- initiatives and projects starting from the needs of young people – and a participatory process of needs analysis – are a fundamental prerequisite for success,
- beyond the necessity for social change identified by young people themselves, projects need to provide a realistic opportunity for change,
- projects aiming at improving the situation of young people need to be complex and address various policy areas and aspects of life, but
- not all projects seeking to increase integration and participation can be and need to be all-embracing,
- young people, when allowed to do so, will connect not only with other young people, but also adults, institutions, children, parents and teachers to create social change,
- such social change will always have to be negotiated within the local community and should be based on mutual respect and non-judgemental behaviours and actions,
- exclusive promotion of traditional forms of (political) participation tend to exclude the majority of young people and alternative ways of inclusion and engagement become increasingly important – traditional democratic arrangements have become inadequate for contemporary youth,
- the potential of new information and communication technologies are not utilised well enough – and seeing that young people are experts in this area, their involvement in discovering the opportunities of such technologies is essential,
- integration projects need to include human rights education for all young people and not only target excluded youth from minority or refugee backgrounds, and
- youth participation cannot be had cheaply anymore, reliable funding is a must.

## **6. Implementation of the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life**

### **6.1. Dissemination of the Revised European Charter**

In 2006, the European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ) – the governmental body of the co-management structures in the Council of Europe’s youth sector – observed in its synthesis report on the work of the Directorate of Youth and Sport (DYS) in the field of youth participation and democratic citizenship, that

*“it would appear that there was no coherent strategy on how to promote and disseminate the Charter following its adoption. The various actions undertaken came about as part of a number*

*of disconnected decisions. This may in part be as a result of the fact that responsibility for the Charter lay between the DYS and the CLRAE (now referred to as the Congress – ed.). While there have been some successes, such as in Bosnia-Herzegovina, in general it is apparent that the Charter is still largely unknown within the youth sector at local level and among local and regional authorities.”*

*Synthesis Report on the Work of the Council of Europe’s Directorate of Youth and Sport in the field of Youth Participation and Democratic Citizenship between 2003 and 2005. Document CDEJ (2006) 4, Strasbourg 2006. Page 6.*

While there is no data available illustrating to which extent the Revised Charter is known at local and regional level across Europe, it seems that not much has evolved since the above-quoted report drew attention to the strategic deficits in relation to a coherent promotion and dissemination of the Charter – responsibilities remain too unclear, most decisions remain disconnected, and the need for a consistent strategy to get the Charter known at grassroots level remains apparent.

## **6.2. Initiatives and practices related to the Revised European Charter**

From the nearly 50 member states of the Council of Europe and the more than 200.000 European municipalities and regions represented by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (the Congress), only a limited number of examples are known of projects and initiatives implementing the Charter directly. This might in part be accounted to the lack of a co-ordinating body or structure, but the more important reason appears to be lying with the continuing unawareness about the Charter’s existence of many local and regional stakeholders. The known examples of good practice include the following:

The capital of **Andorra** has officially ratified the Charter in 2006 as a document guiding local authorities in promoting youth participation across all sectoral policies in the municipality.

The Council of Youth Affairs in **Vilnius** established the strategic municipal youth policy using the suggestions and provisions of the Charter, following the participation of a member of the organisation’s board in a training course of the Directorate of Youth and Sport (see 4.2.1).

The **Bosnia-Herzegovina** mission of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) has based their youth programmes on the principles advocated in the Revised Charter, which has been translated into the different local languages. As a result, the network of youth councils has been created in accordance with and based on the Charter.

In a co-operation of the Directorate of Youth and Sport and the Russian National Youth Council, a series of training courses was run in the **Russian Federation** in 2006, promoting the Charter and aiming to empower local stakeholders for its implementation.

In **Albania**, radio programmes have been developed and broadcasted throughout the country, promoting the Charter to listeners including young people and policy-makers. Following the most recent training course on active youth participation of the Directorate of Youth and Sport in 2007, the Charter is also being used in a project entitled “Youth near Local Government” in Tirana.

In the 2007 training course, participants developed “Active Participation Action Plans”, aiming to promote participation and integration of young people at local and regional level throughout **Europe**. At the time of writing, no structured analysis was available as to how far these action plans have been or are being implemented.

## **6.3. Analysis of the prior experiences related to the Revised European Charter**

It would appear that the majority of the few projects seeking to implement the Revised Charter that are known at European level are connected to or have been initiated by personal encounters, such as training courses, seminars and conferences.

As much as such a multiplying effect suggests that the offered educational and political events and gatherings have been useful and well conducted, it is perspicuous that such European intercultural experiences are only accessible to very few people. Clearly, this cannot be enough to support the distribution and promotion of the Charter at grassroots level, and consequently this report puts forward a number of suggestions to stimulate the organisation of activities allowing for personal interaction on national, regional and local levels.

Going beyond such informative and stimulating events, the implementation of the “Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life” on local and regional level calls for a coherent strategy for the dissemination of the Charter, consistent offers for educational support beyond the European level, structured experiences of exchange, and scientifically sound monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

## **7. How to further enhance youth participation and integration at local and regional level? – Recommendations and conclusions**

The value of the “Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life” for young people and their organisation and for local and regional authorities is immense. At the same time, the Charter is a highly significant and useful document for the Council of Europe in general and, more specifically, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (the Congress) and the Directorate of Youth and Sport (DYS). It is, moreover, an institutional instrument shaped through the same co-managed structures it suggests to implement and, in having been informed by research findings, it confronted intentions with evidence for its own benefit.

On the basis of the analysis done for this report, it would appear, however, that while the Charter has produced a number of outstanding reports and excellent materials, not enough has been done to secure its implementation and follow-up beyond a number of disconnected conferences and training courses. It could be argued that the high number of resolutions and recommendations does not correspond to the few concrete and tangible actions. It is in this context that the following recommendations focus on stimulating action.

### ***7.1. Recommendations addressed to the Member States and the Committee of Ministers***

The “Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life” is a powerful political instrument, but it lacks the necessary follow-up and monitoring mechanisms. It is therefore recommended to the Member States and the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to equip the organisation with such a mechanism and support the implementation of the Charter through:

- The establishment and resourcing of a monitoring system on the principles promoted in the Charter. Such a system should necessarily be complementary to (or become an integral part of) the framework of the Congress on monitoring democracy and the “Open Method of Co-ordination” of the EU. The system should be established in collaboration with the network of experts on youth policy and take into account the Council of Europe’s youth policy reviews.

### ***7.2. Recommendations addressed jointly to the Congress and the DYS***

The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (the Congress) and the Directorate of Youth and Sport (DYS) of the Council of Europe should intensify their co-operation and strengthen the implementation of the Charter through:

- The intensification of the co-ordination of educational, policy and research initiatives in relation to youth integration and participation and the Revised European Charter.
- The establishment of a “Charter Implementation Unit” as suggested by James Doorley in the synthesis report on the work of the Directorate of Youth and Sport (DYS) in the field of youth

participation and democratic citizenship for the European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ). Such a unit in partnership between the Congress and the DYS is a prerequisite to strengthening the promotion of the Charter and could later be developed into a “European Youth Participation Agency”.

- The organisation of a major international symposium on how new technologies can be utilised to promote youth participation, as suggested in the same synthesis report. Such a symposium should aim to explore and examine the potential of web-based technologies to foster young people’s inclusion and involvement, serving as a starting point for a strategy encouraging local and regional authorities to better utilise information and communication tools. Necessarily, the symposium should contain an element based on web-technologies – if necessary, external expertise should be commissioned, preferably a youth agency, to develop this e-component.
- The continuation of educational offers bringing together representatives of local and regional authorities with representatives of local and regional youth organisations and youth councils in a setting based on equality and co-operation (50-50 courses).
- The establishment of a bimonthly newsletter on youth participation.

### ***7.3. Recommendations addressed to the Directorate of Youth and Sports***

The Directorate of Youth and Sport, with its extensive educational expertise, should strengthen the implementation of the Charter through:

- The development of a set of reproducible training units on the Charter, which can be adapted to and easily used in formal and non-formal education contexts in a variety of formats (such as short workshops, information sessions, and one-day trainings). The units should draw on the experiences of the courses implemented so far, and use some of the material developed there.
- The training and qualification of the trainers’ pool of the DYS on the Charter, and the formation of a specialist group of trainers on local and regional youth participation.
- The support of the development of engaging, youth-friendly information, promotion and training material that can be used and spread widely (such as cartoons, videos, radio spots – but also presentations, leaflets, stickers).
- The continuation of political, promotional and educational efforts to support the implementation of the Revised European Charter beyond 2008 in the framework of the Directorate’s efforts to strengthen youth participation.

### ***7.4. Recommendations addressed to the Committee of Education and Culture***

The Committee should strengthen the implementation of the Charter through:

- The encouragement of the “European Network for Training Organisations for Local and Regional Authorities – ENTO” to include training units developed by the DYS in courses, activities and projects organised for municipalities – thus increasing the amount of people with access to training and information on the Charter.



- The pro-active encouragement of local and regional authorities to make use of the educational offers of the Directorate of Youth and Sport and the specialist group of trainers on youth participation.
- The development of incentives for bodies and structures working for local and regional municipalities to organise information and training events on the Charter. Such encouragements would strongly support the work of the DYS and ENTO and provide further access to information and training on the Charter.
- The creation of a pilot network of 10 municipalities across Europe willing to fully implement the Charter – jointly and concurrently. Through such a co-operation, local and regional authorities would have direct partners in their (otherwise solitary) attempts to develop a holistic youth policy – a scenario providing both encouragement and competition. Additionally, the Congress would be able to use this co-operation as a pilot initiative and as an excellent example of good practice.
- The commission of the manual of best practices in relation to the participation of young people, as outlined in Recommendation (2003) 152. Such a manual could include examples outlined in this report as well as other best practices, such as youth parliaments. The manual should be translated into as many languages as possible.
- The continued close affiliation with the “Berlin Process”, which aims at creating a complex and horizontal policy framework for young people through the visionary concept of a “Social City for Youth” – in the framework of this process, the numerous opportunities for influential co-operation should be capitalised on.
- The initiation of a study describing and analysing non-traditional forms of youth participation. Such a study would not only respond to an increasing interest of municipalities and regions, but also help to de-mystify the discourse on (alternative forms and a lack of) participation of young people.
- The provision of easier access to the youth participation dossier of the Congress, for example through a banner on the website (similar to the Kosovo election dossier). The dossier should include a database of best practices, based on the manual.
- The development of additional approaches to give the youth participation work of the Congress higher visibility and priority. One possibility could be the announcement of a European photo competition on youth participation in co-operation with a youth-led initiative such as [www.youthphotos.eu](http://www.youthphotos.eu). The winning photographs could be shown in an exhibition in the main building of the Council of Europe, and elsewhere in Europe.

### ***7.5. Recommendations addressed to the Congress and the EU Committee of the Regions***

The increasing political importance of youth participation in the European Union and the existing structures of co-operation between the Council of Europe and the European Union offer a unique opportunity for the Congress to lead the development, resourcing and realisation of a major campaign to raise awareness on the Charter and its potential across Europe and to powerfully stimulate its further implementation.

The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe should, together with the European Union’s Committee of the Regions, strengthen the implementation of the Revised European Charter through:

- The exploration of possibilities for collaboration between the Congress and the Committee on promoting the Charter, including and going beyond the proposals outlined below. By working together, both bodies could establish themselves jointly as the main European policy actors in the field of youth integration and participation – and, most importantly, earn both political and public recognition. Further co-operation with the Council of European Municipalities (CEMR) should be explored.
- The revision of existing European Union programmes and initiatives – including the regional policies, “Europe for citizens” with its town-twinning aspect, the “European Youth Pact” implementation, and the “Youth in Action” programme – for priorities related to youth participation. Some of these programmes may benefit from the coherent and holistic approach to youth policy promoted by the Charter.
- The initiation of a major campaign in co-operation with the European Youth Forum to raise awareness on the Charter and its potential across Europe and to stimulate action. Such a campaign should address local and regional authorities on the one hand, and local and regional youth councils on the other hand. It should aim to encourage co-operation between the two partners, based on their shared motivation to increase the involvement and inclusion of young people.
- The development of a European Co-operation Prize for Youth Integration and Participation, giving projects between municipalities and youth organisations implementing the Charter acknowledgement, attention, confidence and recognition.
- The installation of a European Year of Youth Participation (alternatively: the European Day of Youth Participation or the International Day of Youth Participation), complementary to the existing days referring either to youth or to participation. With their combined representative functions and joint advocacy work, it should be possible for the Congress and the Committee to achieve such an ambitious aim.
- The organisation of a joint symposium addressing the role of local and regional authorities vs. Europe and the state in fostering integration and increasing inclusion, integration and participation.

### ***7.6. Recommendations addressed to youth organisations***

Youth organisations have the capacity and advantage to be able to easily develop material that is youth-friendly and engaging. Run by and for young people, they are responsive and quick in adapting to new technologies and new forms of participation. Their support has already been most useful in the development of the Charter’s plain language version. Youth NGOs should further strengthen the implementation of the Charter through:

- The development of a youth participation portal ([www.youth-participation.net](http://www.youth-participation.net)) bringing together all information and experiences related to the Revised European Charter. Such a platform would be most powerful and integral if developed together with all relevant partners, including the Congress, the Directorate of Youth and Sport, the Youth Partnership, and the European Youth Forum. While the institutional partners should guarantee sufficient funding, the portal itself should remain independent and be managed by youth organisations, allowing for a critical but authentic approach.

- The support of a study to review and summarise the policy papers of the Congress, the DYS, the EU and the COE (recommendations, resolutions and motions) related to participation and integration. The result of such a study should be published for the benefit of municipalities, regions and youth non-governmental organisations – and, necessarily, be translated into the different European languages. While the study itself should be co-ordinated and financed by the institutional partners, youth NGOs could be invited to carry out the research, allowing for an engaging and accessible product.
- The application for the development of information material on youth participation in general and the Charter more specifically under Category B of the European Youth Foundation. Under this category, priority is given to projects using new information technologies and those with an innovative nature – exactly the same kind of projects needed for the strengthening of the Charter's implementation.
- The gathering of information related to the implementation of the Charter through the many national, regional and local youth councils and youth organisations. This information should be shared with the Congress for its manual on good practices and for the online database for best practices, which is to be developed.