

# THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

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## Recommendation 261 (2009)<sup>1</sup> Intercultural cities

1. Intercultural cities are a necessary counterweight to the worldwide movement towards economic and cultural integration, commonly known as globalisation. European cities have a fundamental interest in promoting cultural exchanges and multicultural identities, since these components form the bedrock of Europe's cultural diversity.

2. It is in the interest of national governments and regional authorities to make cities fit for cultural diversity, by helping them to provide the necessary space and instruments for the setting up and promotion of intercultural exchanges and intercultural dialogue within the cities. At the same time political decision makers should make sure that identities can be expressed freely and are fully developed at the local level and this should be the object of continual evaluation by the cities themselves.

3. Strong cultural identities need not detract from the strength of a national identity. On the contrary, the national identity has to be sufficiently open and flexible to incorporate and accommodate the specific characteristics of citizens' different cultural origins and backgrounds that make up a pluralistic state.

4. In promoting cultural diversity, inclusion needs to be the priority in order to counterbalance today's exclusion. The cities themselves bear the main responsibility for preserving a sufficient degree of openness. They need to recognise the presence of different cultural groups on their territory and the contribution that these groups make to the social coherence of the city, including those who are perceived as recent arrivals and temporary residents. Governments should help cities to face the challenge of developing inclusive identities. A sense of place is a vital element in identity formation.

5. In the light of the above, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe,

*a.* convinced of the necessity to further promote Congress Recommendation 115 (2002) on the participation of foreign residents in local public life: consultative bodies;

*b.* convinced that foreign residents who are lastingly and legally settled on the territory of a state should be granted rights, including political rights, in return for their acceptance of duties towards the host community;

*c.* observing that many towns across Europe have already taken initiatives at their own level to remedy this democratic deficit, especially by setting up consultative councils for foreigners;

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

*e.* convinced of the necessity to further foster community perception of diversity as a resource, rather than as a threat;

*f.* convinced of the need to encourage local authorities to facilitate cultural mixing and interaction;

*g.* convinced of the need to develop multicultural identities which are inclusive of all social, ethnic and cultural groups;

*h.* believing that one of the key assets of intercultural cities is linked to the diversity and cultural heritage of their populations;

6. *Recommends that the Committee of Ministers:*

*a.* encourage member states to recognise the contributions made by non-nationals to the political stability and prosperity of cities, to the creativity, vitality and well-being of their citizens and their successful integration, and support the work that is done in the cities;

*b.* encourage member states to allow foreign residents to vote in local elections and to consider ratifying the Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local Level (ETS No. 144);

*c.* recognise that strong inclusive intercultural cities, which have succeeded in encouraging citizens of diverse origins to identify with their city, demonstrate a capacity for innovation and are able to use the resources, skills and creativity of their populations to raise the city's attractiveness and to bring new investment and job opportunities;

*d.* ensure that cities have sufficient means at their disposal for forging inclusive identities, which are at the same time sensitive to all the groups on their territories, and pay proper attention to the principles of intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, the protection of minorities and respect for their cultural rights, remaining aware of the dangers of ethnocentrism;

*e.* ensure that country-wide programmes for civil servants and employees in social services are put in place to train those who are in charge of migrants and people with migrant backgrounds, to avoid the pitfalls and dangers of exclusion and alienation;

*f.* ensure that civil servants in charge of intercultural conflict management and cultural mediators receive special training before taking up their duties in order to get in-depth knowledge of the variety and complexity of the specific cultural identities that are present in the city in which they are working;

*g.* encourage public media to contribute to the development of multicultural identities by setting up nationwide media partnerships and programmes for a balanced diversity of reporting;

*h.* recognise the importance of language for cultural identity and cultural diversity and urge those member states which have not yet done so to ratify the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (ETS No. 157) and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ETS No. 148), as well as to promote the use of regional languages by administrations at regional and local level;

*i.* recognise the importance of migrant associations, socio-economic organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other consultative bodies;

*j.* support the planning and implementation of neighbourhood rehabilitation projects and programmes offering access to housing facilities, community centres and other public spaces which encourage and enable cultural mixing and interaction;

*k.* provide support for national, regional and local associations and bodies to set up programmes and campaigns to combat racism, discrimination and xenophobia;

*l.* encourage the introduction of intercultural curricula in schools with a view to civic partnerships for citizenship and human rights education at all levels – national, regional and local;

*m.* support the setting up of local consultative bodies on integration issues, actively involving migrant representatives as well as intercultural and interfaith councils, in order to closely associate them in the decision-making process.

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1. Debated and approved by the Chamber of Local Authorities on 4 March 2009 and adopted by the Congress on 5 March, 3rd Sitting (see Document CPL(16)1REP, explanatory memorandum, rapporteur: J. Nillson (Sweden, L, SOC)).