

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Recommendation 209 (2007)¹ Intergenerational co-operation and participatory democracy

1. European societies are currently in the grip of changes which are having a major impact on relations between the generations of which they are composed. The difficulty of distributing resources and responsibilities fairly between the age groups is compounded by the growing divergences between young people and older people as regards their cultural frames of reference and their consumer habits as well as by difficulties specific to each generation;

2. For young people, entering employment and involving themselves in political life are beset by problems such as longer studies, competition and scarcity of jobs and housing, making them more dependent on their parents, placing them at a disadvantage when electoral registers are drawn up and causing them to lose interest in politics;

3. Elderly people, on the other hand, reacting to increasing life expectancy and its impact on pensions systems, often attempt, by necessity or by choice, to carry on working longer, but then find themselves isolated to an alarming extent, as illustrated by the disastrous summer of 2003 when abrupt climate changes affected several European countries and caused many deaths, particularly among the isolated elderly;

4. The problems faced by the different age groups thus give rise to conflicts between the generations which undermine social cohesion and in some cases result in violence that disrupts law and order;

5. This state of affairs would seem to call for **concrete measures** to prevent each generation from focusing solely on its own problems and promote co-operation and solidarity between the generations based on dialogue, mediation, an attempt to build the broadest possible consensus and the all-important participation by people of all ages in the decisions affecting them;

6. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities is aware of the responsibilities that towns, cities and regions have in this connection as a result of the closeness they are able to develop with the public, and it further points out that at its 11th Plenary Session (25-27 May 2004) a motion was tabled for a resolution on participatory democracy and the promotion and development of co-operation between the generations in Europe. **The motion for a resolution put particular emphasis on the benefits of setting up a highly participatory European body to monitor co-operation between the generations and train managers and co-ordinators;**

7. Wishing to continue its efforts in this area, the Congress has drawn up a Manifesto on Intergenerational Co-operation as appended hereto whose seven paragraphs outline the principles and activities to which towns, cities and regions committed to action in this area are invited to subscribe;

8. In view of the foregoing, the Congress recommends:

a. that the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe:

i. give its backing to setting up an intergenerational centre, which – supported where necessary by existing European bodies such as the European youth centres – would promote co-operation between the generations, exchange of good practices and training for people working in this field;

ii. incorporate the principle of intergenerational co-operation into the work of the European youth centres and the Forum for the Future of Democracy as a means of boosting participation and understanding between age groups;

iii. consider how the principles set out in the Manifesto on Intergenerational Co-operation can be given effect in the work of the relevant intergovernmental committees;

b. that the Council of Europe member states:

i. set up a voluntary public service for intergenerational solidarity, working mostly for the benefit of elderly people and young people in extremely vulnerable situations;

ii. set up national participatory bodies representing the different generations to stimulate intergenerational co-operation through mutual understanding and solidarity;

iii. at schools and universities, introduce and regularly assess a new educational approach and code of ethics based on mutual aid, tolerance and understanding between the generations;

iv. take all possible measures to encourage intergenerational housing, particularly tax reductions for families housing relatives with low incomes;

v. establish a legislative and regulatory framework to improve social assistance for anyone providing home care to a relative, spouse or child not fully able to look after themselves.

Appendix

Draft Manifesto on Intergenerational Co-operation and Participatory Democracy

The local authorities and people of the town/city of, the region of

Being resolved to foster social cohesion and economic development by means of an intergenerational approach in a context of solidarity and respect for the individual, regardless of age or status;

Being resolved to combat the exclusion and marginalisation of any section of the population and promote understanding and reconciliation between the generations,

undertake to:

1. promote the participation and integration of all generations and for that purpose:

– establish or promote participatory bodies representing various age groups (youth councils, senior citizens' councils, joint councils) so as to develop intergenerational co-operation through mutual understanding and solidarity;

– guarantee fair representation of citizens in local and regional decision-making bodies by ensuring that democratic rules are observed, particularly those on equal opportunities;

2. ensure that everyone receives social recognition in accordance with Section III of Resolution (76) 32 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, the relevant provisions of the European Code of Social Security and its protocol and the European Social Charter and for that purpose:

– draw up rules conferring special status on bodies engaged in non-profit action to improve citizens' quality of life and social and health protection;

– recognise the economic value of voluntary work, putting it forward as an alternative and laying down measures to protect those who perform work of this kind as part of approved or recognised projects;

3. disseminate the principles of intergenerational dialogue and mediation throughout the education system and the voluntary sector and for that purpose:

– introduce intergenerational co-operation courses (in formal school education and classes offered by the voluntary sector) in areas for which local authorities are directly or indirectly responsible;

4. promote training of intergenerational co-operation specialists and for that purpose:

– train both public-sector and volunteer workers in community and social work or activities based on an intergenerational approach;

– negotiate agreements between public and private bodies so that staff with social work, health, culture and education expertise can be made available on temporary contracts or secondments (which may be part-time);

– encourage the establishment of a voluntary public service to promote intergenerational solidarity and which, as in experiments already conducted in certain towns and cities, would in particular be for the benefit of elderly people;

5. promote better communication between the generations and for that purpose:

– create opportunities for intergenerational communication (restaurants, bars, homes) based on past experience;

– make preferential aid available to civil society organisations which put forward intergenerational projects;

6. support international intergenerational projects or activities and for that purpose:

– establish local, regional and international advice centres to help people or bodies planning intergenerational projects deal with administrative formalities;

– co-operate with other towns, cities or regions in states members of the Council of Europe Congress of Local and Regional Authorities which have entered into the commitments set out in this manifesto;

– support the scheme for an intergenerational centre to take stock of activities run by local and regional authorities, assess the results achieved and foster useful exchange of good practices;

7. regularly assess whether authorities are honouring their commitments under the manifesto and for that purpose:

– promote the setting up of local and regional bodies representing civil society to jointly assess whether commitments entered into under this manifesto are being honoured.

1. Debated and adopted by the Standing Committee of the Congress on 27 March 2007 (see Document CG(13)40, draft recommendation presented by J.-M. Bourjac (France, R, SOC), rapporteur).