

Current Affairs Committee Meeting, 39th Session of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities – Remote meeting, 16 September 2020

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Debate on “Youth Work: the Role of Local and Regional Authorities”

Dear Colleagues,

Today, young people engage increasingly in actions and activities that contribute to building a better society. By seeking more and more information about their rights and their opportunities, they have become major drivers for change. They participate in, and influence decisions. The impact they have in shaping the future of our modern democracies is undeniable.

As our youth delegates illustrate, youth work can take young people to the international level, but it has its roots at the local level.

However, quality youth work does not happen by itself: participation needs the right soil to flourish. As elected officials, we have the responsibility to continuously water this soil. We need to create spaces for and invest in youth work, allow young people to develop their interest, share their experiences and execute their ideas.

Now, what is youth work? Although defining it has been a major challenge due to its varying features, the report gives a definition of youth work. In short, it is young people being included in the creation of activities relating to their needs, ideas and experiences; strengthening their knowledge, skills and values; helping them to be active citizens and gain autonomy.

With this in mind, today we would like to present our work on the role of local and regional authorities regarding youth work. This report shows the need to acknowledge youth workers as full-fledged citizens who contribute to shaping our societies.

Before we begin, I would like to thank the Advisory Council on Youth for proposing the report; the Council's Youth Department for their collaboration, our Youth Delegates for their substantial contributions to the report, and our expert Jonas ADGUR for his excellent work.

Now, let's remember the history behind this document.

The Congress has long been vocal on the importance of empowering youth. In 2003, the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life was adopted. Within the past decade, the Congress adopted several texts on the matter. Recently, the Congress adopted resolution 442, in 2019, concerning the social rights of young people. This stresses the essential role local and regional authorities play in facilitating the access and effective exercise of social rights by young people.

Moreover, the Congress priorities for 2017-2020 include a chapter on youth empowerment to help youth delegates become more involved.

In 2019, the Council's Advisory Council on Youth invited our Committee to cooperate on a report on youth work. The aim is to create common spaces for young people outside their school environment, where they can learn and develop together.

I am proud to present an example of this from my own city. This summer, we have opened the URAM Extreme Park in Kazan. It is a new spot for young people with indoor and outdoor facilities. It is suitable for popular extreme sports. It is the largest extreme park in Russia and one of the largest in Europe with a total area of 1.9 hectares. The idea was to create a multifunctional space for professional athletes as well as amateurs to come together for sports and cultural events. URAM is a unique project that unites various youth subcultures and allows thousands of young people to have their own space. At URAM, they can improve their skills, share ideas and experiences.

In doing all this we have one very important goal in mind: the meaningful and active participation of young people. Young people are increasingly active and visible in dealing with the issues our societies face today.

They help integrate refugees in their communities and participate actively in public life. They have a strong social and environmental awareness and share this knowledge with the rest of our societies. They are among the most active in global responses to the COVID-19 crisis, either on the frontlines as health workers or as researchers, activities, innovators, and communicators.

In this report our main point is that, as local and regional authorities, we have a responsibility to work with young people so they can achieve their full potential as autonomous members of society. We must do this not only by providing services but also by co-ordinating relevant activities at local and regional levels.

I leave the floor to my colleague Thomas Andersson for the presentation of our resolution and recommendation.

Thank you.