

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Resolution 204 (2005)¹ on youth education for sustainable development: the role of the regions

The Congress, bearing in mind the proposal of the Chamber of Regions,

1. Having regard to:

a. the Declaration of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development adopted in Rio de Janeiro on 14 June 1992;

b. Agenda 21, adopted on the same occasion, which highlighted the fact that participation and co-operation by local and regional authorities was essential to achievement of the objectives of the Rio Declaration;

c. the Earth Charter published in March 2000 by the Earth Charter Commission;

d. the “Guiding principles for sustainable spatial development of the European continent”, adopted under Recommendation Rec(2002)1 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, and Recommendation 72 (2000) of the Congress, containing an opinion on the above guiding principles, which could, pursuant to the principles of partnership and subsidiarity, form a basis for regional and national action and help foster sustainable, balanced regional development in Europe;

2. Bearing in mind that the regions have scope for shaping or helping to shape/organise education and training, both in areas directly within their remit and through co-operation with schools and universities, and that their responsibilities in this respect necessitate an ongoing institutional dialogue between the regions, local authorities and central governments, in particular the national education ministries;

3. Recognising that:

a. the Europe of the future must be based on, and be a driving force for, freedom, democracy, peace, solidarity and sustainability, and regions and local authorities must strive to ensure that, through education, the concepts underlying sustainable development become part and parcel of young people’s code of conduct and are reflected in their present and future behaviour;

b. the starting point for efforts to ensure that sustainable development is ever-present in people’s minds must be training that motivates young people to face the challenges of a global, interdisciplinary world, helps them to grasp major development issues and encourages them to lay the

foundations of a future society which is fairer and more sustainable for all;

c. training in sustainable development must combine formal education and informal communication, promote a general climate of learning and foster the conditions necessary for society as a whole to attain ever-higher levels of culture and become a driving force for sustainable forms of development;

d. young people must be made aware of the fact that real sustainability has its basis in each individual’s acts and achievements, which go to make up society as a whole and are passed on to subsequent generations;

e. training must entail communication and the handing down of experience and testimonies from one generation to the next, so that young people can pursue and enhance the sustainable development approach devised by earlier generations, and that the awareness resulting from the learning process is a key component of an inter-generational pact guaranteeing sustainability;

f. it is important that young people consider sustainable development not just as a future need but as a tangible goal that can be achieved today through education and participation and with the adoption of new lifestyles that take account of the environment and social-justice considerations, new forms of enterprise and new production models;

g. it is important to promote education in sustainability as a means of accustoming people to lifelong, evolving forms of learning and of inculcating behaviour habits consistent with the sustainable use of resources;

h. it is necessary to improve access to all levels of education and further training for everyone, regardless of social class, ethnic origin, gender, age and financial resources; free access to training is the foundation of sustainable development, social inclusion, equality of opportunity, integration in the labour market and active participation in democratic processes;

i. it is vital to establish, in both schools and universities, new learning contexts that take account of the importance of sustainable development, and to ensure that those new contexts come about through both syllabus reform and research into best practices in sustainable development;

j. the theme of sustainable development must be an integral part of civics education at all levels of the school system, and curricula in both schools and universities – particularly in the sciences, geography, history, technology, economics and social studies – must include a sustainability-based approach that takes account of the impact on future generations;

k. all parts of the education system must have the resources to enable teaching staff to improve their knowledge and teaching skills in sustainable development matters, so that they can instil in young minds the need to strive to improve the present and future quality of life;

l. it is necessary to promote a culture of environmentally-friendly use of resources, fostering rediscovery, protection and enhancement (also in economic terms) of territories, culture and heritage;

m. sustainable-development practices must provide an opportunity for participatory democracy and use institutional means of active participation to determine the future course of development. Training courses must accordingly be consistent with the requirements of the local contexts in which the educational, civil and political institutions operate;

n. it is important to reinforce the process of children's and young people's identification with the area in which they live, to give them a sense of belonging to their local community and to acquaint them with regional development processes;

o. in rural and mountain areas the specific local social and economic conditions must be taken into consideration when training young people in sustainable development, who must be inculcated with a sense of the value of the local heritage so that they can build their future;

p. specialised agencies and organisations, the voluntary sector and the media must do more to raise public awareness of sustainable development, particularly among young people;

q. economic agents can and must substantially contribute to balanced development by making more use of existing sustainable practices in respect of manufacturing, consumption and consumer information,

4. Calls on the regions of Europe to:

a. commit themselves to regarding training as a fundamental means of promoting development, for if the social, economic and environmental changes are to take place, it is necessary to bring knowledge, training, research and technology into line with the demands of sustainable development;

b. promote opportunities for dialogue with the public whenever the issue of sustainability is raised in the regional planning process, so as to enhance the public's – and above all young people's – knowledge, awareness and responsibility;

c. help promote sustainable development by providing the financial resources necessary to develop and run training programmes for both teachers and students, bearing in mind that such training should entail participatory learning, collective debate, inventiveness, a capacity for ethical judgment, social skills and an aptitude to participate in an interdisciplinary approach to problem-solving;

d. experiment with teaching and communication models, methodologies and strategies designed to inculcate knowledge and attitudes essential to the proper use and management of local resources with a view to sustainable local development;

e. introduce innovative, “informal” models for learning sustainability concepts, capable of reaching diverse groups of young people, not least through action outside the traditional education system;

f. spread awareness of what the landscape has to teach us – representing as it does a historical record of events that bears the visible traces of human interaction with the environment – and of its impact in shaping local people's identity;

g. promote schemes and projects designed to safeguard and enhance regional development and the environment, fostering dialogue between teachers, pupils and parents – not least through associations – and facilitating intercultural contacts between local communities in Europe and elsewhere;

h. foster debate on the new branches of knowledge relating to sustainable development and promote the reinforcement of existing specialist occupations and the emergence of new skills and operational roles for young people;

i. engender opportunities for young people to be actively involved in drawing up plans based on a sustainable development approach, for example plans for the environmental rehabilitation of areas set aside for youth activities;

j. introduce in schools of all kinds and all levels and in public institutions a “sustainable development day”, during which everyone is encouraged to give thought to this concept, improve his or her awareness and knowledge of it and take an active role in tangible schemes to safeguard the well-being of future generations;

k. promote academic and technical institutes' research role and ensure that a culture of interdisciplinary, participatory research geared to sustainable development is disseminated within them;

l. promote participatory schemes (such as children's or young people's parliaments or councils) fostering dialogue between young people and the authorities, as a key means of promoting innovative sustainable development;

m. encourage the establishment of multi-purpose centres (open cultural fora, places serving as testing grounds for aspects of a “back-to-nature” lifestyle and workshops providing scope for experimentation) to foster public participation in the efforts to translate sustainable development principles into practice; promote, in particular, the establishment of places where young people can present and carry out studies and research and hold debates on the theme of sustainability;

n. promote refresher courses for teachers to give them the skills needed to address the sustainability concept in specific subject courses, and develop research into teaching methods based on lively exchanges with other schools and other teachers;

o. to this end, establish interregional solidarity networks involving schools and cultural institutions, to give young people a greater sense of the values of peace and solidarity as the foundations of a sustainable future; such networks could in fact foster schools' development, bringing constant improvements to the quality of teaching;

p. form a working group to draw up, on the basis of practical experience and the provisions of this resolution, guiding principles for training courses in sustainable development and determine the content of such courses and devise activities for them;

q. establish a standing conference on training in sustainable development to devise course content, put forward proposals, serve as a forum for debate and the pooling of experience, act as a think tank and provide a development opportunity for all the regions of Council of Europe member states.

1. Debated and adopted by the Chamber of Regions on 1 June 2005, and adopted by the Standing Committee of the Congress on 2 June 2005 (see Document CPR (12) 3, draft resolution presented by L. N. Dragnea (Romania, R, SOC), rapporteur).

