



**Local & Regional
Europe**



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YELAC project

Outcomes of the first project activity

This report is the result of the first phase of the "Young European Leaders for Active Citizenship" project, entitled "World Café debate: Identifying priorities"

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Introduction

The economic crisis that led to unsustainable rates of youth unemployment resulted in a growing dissatisfaction of young people with representative politics at all levels of governance. Young people participate less in public life through traditional channels of participation, contributing to the existing gap between citizens and the decision-making process of representative democracies. In this respect, classic participatory methods seem very far from the young generations of the 21st century.

In cooperation with seven national associations of local and regional governments, other stakeholders and civil society organisations, CEMR launched a project, mainly led by young local and regional elected representatives, in order to contribute to tackling the problems and facing the challenges that young generations face, from a local and regional perspective. The idea is co-funded by the “Europe for Citizens programme” *Network of Towns* sub-strand of the *Democratic participation and civic engagement* strand of such programme. In this respect, the first activity aimed at identifying problems linked to concrete policy fields that young people face around Europe from a local perspective, such as education, employment, integration, housing etc.

The identification of these topics and problems would allow a more in-depth discussion in the following activities of the project, especially those linked to competences of local and regional governments. Besides the first activity, the project also aims at empowering and mobilising young local and regional elected representatives and citizens, with the final objective of raising awareness and improving coordination between them at all levels of governance when addressing youth-related policies.

Through this project, CEMR wants to identify and exchange on innovative methods of young citizens' participation, as well as on best practices at the local and regional levels in those policy fields that are particularly important for European youngsters. To do so, we also intend to encourage young local and regional elected representatives to use new methods of communication and exchange in their everyday work with the younger citizens in their constituencies. The project seeks also to consolidate a platform through which young local and regional elected representatives can deliver better solutions for young Europeans, while improving the coordination of their work with other levels of government and stakeholders working on youth-related policies or policies with a high impact on young Europeans.

Objectives of the first activity

During CEMR's conference on citizenship in Rome in December 2014, a debate in “World Café” style was organised to encourage dynamic dialogues among the participants and to identify and discuss concrete topics and policies of particular interest to young people –such as employment, mobility, education, training, housing or civic participation.

Forming groups around different tables to which specific topics were assigned, all the participants sat at each roundtable for a short period of time. The objective was to identify the most pressing problems for young Europeans at the local level to be discussed individually in future activities of the project and in a more focused way.

Key questions

1. Which concrete topics and European policies are of particular interest of young people today, for instance in the fields of employment, mobility, education and training, housing or civic participation?
2. What challenges do the young generations face today at the local level?
3. How to empower and engage young elected representatives to become the political ambassadors and spokespersons of the younger generations? How can younger citizens be empowered to become engaged in the policy- and decision-making process?

Methodology & Process

The aim of a World Café is to create a collaborative dialogue around one question in order to give participants the opportunity to focus on a specific topic, deepen their knowledge and share ideas. Moreover, as the participants meet different people at every table, new ideas constantly emerge. At the beginning, the participants were asked to spread in six small groups. Six tables were established, whereas two tables discussed the same question. The participants were then welcomed by a facilitator who explained the purpose of the gathering and asked participants to present themselves.

The facilitator was in charge of presenting the questions, taking notes and ensuring the correct functioning of the process. After the introduction, the participants identified and discussed the challenges that young generations face at the local level and drew the conclusions of the session themselves. This allowed the creation of a clear timeline and objectives for the next activity of the project. In order to guarantee a fruitful discussion, the participants focused on the question of their table and expressed their thoughts as clearly as possible. During the discussion, each participant was encouraged to note and draw on sheets of paper the key ideas that emerged, in order to share them with the next participants.

After spending thirty minutes at a table, each participant was asked to move to a different table where a new question was discussed. First, the participants were given a brief summary of the key insights from the previous conversation by the facilitator. Then, they were asked to carry on with these key ideas and questions with the new group conversation. In this way, ideas could be better linked to the previous table conversation, allowing a more rigorous identification of the most repeated themes and topics. At the end of the session, all the participants came together, and a summary of the discussions around each question was given by the facilitator of each table in a short five-minute intervention.

Outcomes of the first activity

As the debates and discussions around the first two questions of the activity resulted in similar conclusions, the main outcomes of the first two questions are grouped together below.

- 1. Which concrete topics and European policies are of particular interest of young people and young local and regional elected representatives today, for instance in the fields of employment, mobility, education and training, housing or civic participation?
What challenges do young generations face today at the local level?**

Despite the broadness of these questions, many of the topics came up several times during the different rounds at each table. This shed some light on the themes perceived as relevant and important to younger generations.

Accordingly, the outcomes of the discussion of the first two questions are divided in two parts. The first part compiles the particular problems identified by young people and which affect them as a group. The second part gathers themes and outcomes related to their views on the biggest societal problems of European communities.

1.1. Particular problems and topics identified by young people and young local and regional elected representatives, which affect and worry young European as a group

Housing

This was one of the recurring themes in all tables addressing the first two questions. Young people are afraid to be unable to find an affordable place to live. In many countries, there are waiting lists for social housing access, as prices have skyrocketed in the last 10 years, especially in countries which suffered strong credit bubbles. Moreover, this is a purely urban problem, as increasing urbanisation trends in cities result in higher real state and renting prices for many EU young citizens. Contrastingly, in rural areas where there are less job opportunities, prices are more affordable and it is easier to find a place to live.

Accordingly, the importance of social housing as a way to guarantee the right to a decent home to young people should be approached in a more in-depth manner in the next activities of the project. A comparative analysis between the most advanced models of social housing is envisaged in the next activity of the project. This study, carried on with the European Federation of Public, Cooperative & Social Housing (CECODHAS) and other institutions and research institutes working in this field, will put a particular emphasis on the youth dimension of social housing in Europe.

The idea is to exchange on those models which better fit the needs of young generations in terms of housing, as well as to provide local and regional governments with the necessary tools and knowledge, keeping in mind their competences, in order to deliver better policies for young generations in this field.

Unemployment

Despite the fact that rates of youth unemployment vary significantly across EU countries, it seems clear, that this is one of the biggest problems that young Europeans face in the peripheral countries of the EU. Even if tackling youth unemployment is not directly linked to the competences of local and regional governments, interesting and successful practices to fight youth unemployment exist at the local level and the next activity of the project will pool and present some of them.

CEMR report on how to tackle youth unemployment from the local and regional levels is a good starting point to deepen exchanges about this issue in the next activity of the project¹. In addition, the idea is also to discuss how to improve coordination and governance between different levels when it comes to addressing this problem. The improvement of the implementation of the youth guarantee at the local level, in partnership with local and regional governments is another objective of the next activity of the project.

¹ www.ccre.org/img/uploads/piecesjointe/filename/CEMR_Study_Youth_Unemployment_EN.pdf

Specific definitions for the terms “internship”, “traineeship” and “voluntary work” should also be established. These definitions should take into account the duration, remuneration, daily-expenses and learning opportunities.

An internship programme for young low-skilled people with basic-level or no education could be also envisaged. It could consist of an internship and training with a scholarship to finish or continue studying. All these ideas and some others will be further discussed in the next activity of the project.

Education

Education is generally perceived as the most important means to achieve professional and personal ambitions. Depending on the country where young citizens live and on the resources allocated to education and their social position within society, it seems clear that certain young European citizens have more opportunities than others.

Despite education being a competence of local and regional authorities only in a few countries in the EU, there are more and more good practices at the local level that can be shared among stakeholders, decision-makers and citizens in order to establish more efficient, tailor-made and successful education systems all over Europe.

Internship quality standards, access to scholarships, equal opportunities, tailor-made educational programmes, the reinforcement of the Erasmus programme or the homologation of titles all around Europe are just some of the topics that can be further assessed in the next activity of the project. A pan-European programme on civic education could be set up in all schools while educational systems could adapt themselves to the needs of each student, exploring more students’ creativity and individual skills through flexible study programmes. If Europe wants to be competitive in a highly integrated world, it needs to invest more in human capital. Indeed this is the only way to strengthen an economic structure of high added-value, considering that it is no longer possible for the EU to compete through prices with developing countries.

1.2. What about the outcomes related to the views of young local and regional elected representatives with regards to the biggest societal problems in general?

Migration & EU internal mobility

Migration was identified as one of the most worrying topics at the local level for young local and regional elected representatives; with respect to migratory flows from non-EU countries and their integration in municipalities on the one hand, and with regards to internal mobility of EU citizens within the EU and between urban and rural areas on the other hand.

Youth unemployment rates in peripheral countries and the recent threats to internal mobility in certain EU countries raise the question of how to protect young mobile EU citizens living in a Member State other than their own beyond the conditions of the *Directive 2004/38/EC*.

The next activity of the project will also address the challenges of EU internal mobility from a youth perspective. In certain countries, EU citizens are not granted with residence (and they can be even expelled) if “*they pose an excessive charge for the social system of the receiving country*” or if they do not fulfil the conditions of the *Directive 2004/38/EC*. Many young Europeans who have moved from one country to another need to feel protected, beyond the requirements of the Directive, especially those with a lack of resources.

Living standards and precariousness

This needs to be understood very broadly, as referring to better ways of approaching problems and challenges related to mobility, security, the right to the city, infrastructures, precariousness, etc.

2. How to empower and engage young elected representatives to become the political ambassadors and spokespersons of the younger generations? How can younger citizens be better empowered to become engaged in the decision-making processes?

As far as **youth participation is concerned** –in the second question of the World Café– young local and regional elected representatives identified a few topics to be addressed more in-depth in the third activity of the project (October 2015) which will concentrate on the improvement of the youth participation in all levels.

In this respect, there are already some proposals in order to improve youth participation at the local level and at the other levels of government. A series of proposals and initiatives that would be polled and collected, in order to be discussed during the third activity of the project. To do so however, it has to be determined what “to be young” means, as it varies from country to country, even if normally, “young people” are people aged between 16 and 30. The problem here is how to come up with tailor-made approaches to deliver better solutions, as problems within this group, are very different and mainly depend on the age at which young people emancipate and live on their own in every way.

Furthermore, meeting the demands of younger generations requires some structure at the local level, such as a department for this purpose and a space for the young to convey their demands in a structured manner with the city council, such as Local Youth Councils.

Involving young people implies using their own codes and channels of communication. A good guideline to reduce the gap between youth and institutions in the mid-term could be the implementation of awareness programmes in educational institutions through social networks and the internet in general. Despite some disagreement about the necessity to reduce voting age to 16, this is seen as a way to encourage participation and active citizenship.

The problem for young local and regional elected representatives to be real ambassadors of youth participation at the local level is their limited influence on decision-making in certain cases. This is normally attributed to the lack of experience to act as spokespersons. One solution to this could be the establishment of positive discrimination at the local level in order to be in a higher position in the municipal lists when elections take place (like in the Netherlands).

Representative democracy needs to be complemented with new forms of active and direct participation, since citizens demand more and more mechanisms to participate more often in the decision-making process. Accordingly, referendums, consultations, participative processes (participatory budgeting, etc.) need to be further developed and strengthened.

The European dimension of active participation could be strengthened through the establishment of a pan-European mobility programme for students aged between 10 and 18, while more political education should also be put in place at all levels. In addition, more funding on education on democracy from a European perspective could be envisaged, through pan-European elections simulations for example.

Proposals gathered in the conclusions of the “YFactor: where is [y]our future? Putting youth on the EU agenda” conference can serve as a starting point to deliver better solutions at the European level in close partnership with local and regional authorities².

The improvement of the functioning of existing working structures on youth issues, such as the European Youth Forum and Youth National Councils, can be considered as a way to improve coordination between levels of government in order to better involve citizens at the local level in the decision-making process. In terms of communication, the development of tools –such as European Direct or tailor-made Citizens Dialogues at the local level– could also be further improved.

Further Steps

The second activity of the project will gather again young local and regional elected representatives of the project partners, and other relevant stakeholders and practitioners in order to discuss more in detail the topics identified during the first activity. The second activity will concentrate only on the five topics identified by the participants in the first two questions of the first activity, whereas the third activity will focus on how to strengthen participation at the local level and coordination between levels (the third question of the first activity). The objective is to deliver a more comprehensive response to challenges and deliver better policies for young generations at all levels.

Accordingly, in the second activity, more in-depth thematic debates in the fields of education, unemployment, housing, as well as migration, internal mobility and living standards will be held with the academic support of *Eurofund* and other institutions. The activity will also target young members of the European Parliament, members of the Committee of the Regions and other stakeholders working on youth-related issues in order to provide a link between the local, regional and European levels of governance.

² YFactor: where is [y]our future? Putting youth on the EU agenda:
http://cor.europa.eu/en/events/Documents/recommendations_yfactor_2015.pdf

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About CEMR

The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) is the broadest organisation of local and regional authorities in Europe. Its members are over 50 national associations of municipalities and regions from 41 European countries. Together these associations represent some 150 000 local and regional authorities.

CEMR's objectives are twofold: to influence European legislation on behalf of local and regional authorities and to provide a platform for exchange between its member associations and their elected officials and experts.

Moreover, CEMR is the European section of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), the worldwide organisation of local government.

www.ccre.org