

YO!Fest

Strasbourg, 1-2 June 2018

organized by the European Youth Forum

Development of youth civic engagement: the role of local and regional authorities

Fostering local level participation and building bridges with local level governance structures

Fostering local level participation and building bridges with local level governance structures could help to regain that lost trust and **reconnect young people with institutional politics.**

It is important to develop trust in **young people's involvement in politics at institutional level.** In this respect LRAs have a key role: they can reach out directly to citizens and to make sure that EU policies are implemented appropriately in the youth field as well.

Furthermore, we need to organize **formal meetings and dialogue.**

LRAs also play a key role in the implementation of **volunteering system.** We can promote the concept and possibilities of volunteering as well as the benefits of volunteering both for the volunteer, his/her community and the receiving community, but for that we need the following actions:

- **to facilitate access to full information** through presentations, an online platform, involving former cross-border volunteers, and emphasizing the skills and competences that one can gain through volunteering;
- **to promote the concept and the benefits of volunteering** in society at large;
- **to support organizations** that are already involved in volunteering;
- **to train and inform all stakeholders** through projects that promote volunteering;

In order to involve young people in civic participation, LRAs need **an adequate legal and institutional framework and financial support** – because we are in constant and direct contact with the youth and we have the best chances to involve them in these fields.

The role of municipalities in this process

LRAs have an important role in fostering active citizenship and youth participation within their communities:

- They **design local and regional youth strategies** that take into account the needs and wants of local youth. For example, Haghita County Council has a Youth Strategy that focuses on engaging the youth in civic and political activities. For example, through advocacy organizations with strong support from local public institutions – such as students' councils.
- They develop **programs and services according to the needs of local youth**.
- They can involve local young people in the decisions that shape the life of our community – **at different political levels and in several policy areas**.

Of course, beyond local effort, LRAs also focus on **developing international networks and partnerships** among youth organizations and volunteering programs.

We also need to consider **lowering the voting age**. This would boost the youth's self-confidence, they would feel that their opinion matters. Today their participation in politics – especially at elections – is quite low compared to that of older generations'. But they are active in their organizations, on social media, in volunteering, so I believe that young people can and need to become voters.

LRAs also **promote good practices** of youth participation. We organize events and aid NGOs, especially in rural areas, who are involved in volunteering and the dissemination of good practices of youth involvement.

We also need to remember that the **youth population is highly complex and diverse**. So we make special efforts to reach and activate those young people who normally do not participate or have limited or no opportunities to get involved – such as marginalized groups, those living in rural or remote areas, different minority groups and so on.

The European Youth Capital's contribution to the development of youth participation

Any project aimed at empowering the youth will lead to a better future. If the community serves the youth well, that youth will be more inclined to serve the community in his turn. Initiatives and projects, as the European Youth Capital, offer the opportunity for the given municipality **to showcase its cultural and professional youth issues**.

Many international young people and young leaders will have the opportunity to visit the youth capital and the local youth have the chance **to get involved and to build relationships with the international visitors**. So it is a forum for **new and creative ideas, of thinking outside the box**. It also provides the opportunity for the local youth to get involved **in solving real problems, work on important projects, build networks, to develop their teamwork and leadership skills**.

It provides **visibility for local youth and their talents and achievements**. It can also lead to long term relations, projects and programs. And of course, **the obtainable funding** is extremely important as well.

Why is it important to foster youth engagement on the local level and how can it contribute to European projects?

Youth who participate in different programs **are more likely to become engaged in the community and to develop a long-lasting sense of civic responsibility**.

We need to create opportunities for the youth to get involved – thus we can contribute to the healthy development of our future and to democracy in practice.

It has also been proven that youth civic engagement:

- **reduces risks of dangerous behavior**, it increases success at school;
- it leads to **greater civic participation** later in life;
- it develops **interpersonal and leadership skills** and it helps young people recognize and achieve their potential;
- through getting involved in real projects and programs, young people feel that they are part of the process, that their opinion matters and that they are contributing to the results, thus **they will also mobilize others and they can become role models**;

LRAs at the local level can actually focus on being inclusive – engaging young people who have not traditionally been included in development opportunities – we recognize and value diversity and create programs and projects, services that fit the specific needs of our own diverse and complex community. In this sense, we also pay special attention **to creating equal chances for everyone** – including overcoming socio-economic differences and focusing on **traditional minority groups**. In this sense the objective of the **Minority Safe Pack** – the citizens’ initiative that has managed to get the support/signature of more than 1

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million EU citizens from more than the minimum 7 EU member states – so the goal is to create the legislative framework for the protection of traditional minority rights – including language rights and the protection of their culture – elements that have a key role in the life of future generations if they want to sustain their culture and identity.