

**Conference “Europe goes local, supporting youth work at the municipal level”  
Brussels, Belgium, 6 June 2019**

**Session „Embracing change at the local level”**

**Speech by Thomas ANDERSSON, Sweden, Congress  
Spokesperson on Youth**

Dear colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to be in Brussels at the occasion of the 3<sup>rd</sup> European event of Europe Goes Local.

As the spokesperson on Youth of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, I firmly believe young people are key actors in our societies. They are drivers of change. They just need help to unleash their full potential.

This is why we have youth delegates in the Congress from all our members States who take part in our sessions, learn to interact with politicians and to develop ideas and projects from their perspective. This learning process is not one-sided. Since 2014 when they first came to work with us, we as mayors and councillors have learned a lot from them.

As the President of the Regional Council of Jämtland and Härjedalen, I have responsibilities with regard to the youth of my region. Part of our duties is to safeguard the rights and security of the people we represent. By virtue of our competence in the social field, we play an essential role in facilitating the access and effective exercise of social rights by young people. Another goal for us is to achieve social cohesion. But to be fully cohesive, we need to include all our citizens. No one should be left behind.

As an elected representative I am very much aware that empowering young people and enhancing their personal and social development are at the heart of what is called “youth work”.

It is our responsibility and within our competence to help them obtain access to services, to facilitate their interaction with other young people coming from different backgrounds and promote their contacts with NGOs and youth associations.

Young people are at a crossroads. The transition to adulthood is crucial in everybody's life since it is a time where you have to make life changing decisions which will draw the lines of your future career and personal life.

This transition is not easy, I think we can all attest to that. Some young people will jump into adulthood with self-confidence because they have a solid educational background, or economic resources, or simply relatives they can rely on. But for some less fortunate, the transition to adulthood is a jump into the unknown.

How many young people drop-out school and do not complete upper secondary education? How many struggle to find an employment because the competition is too rough? How many live in unsanitary accommodation- when they can find one? Socio-economic inequalities will, unfortunately, always be part of the picture. But if young people believe in themselves, and in their capacities, I am convinced they can accomplish what they set out to do.

Local authorities are in a pivotal position in their exchange with young people. They represent the first level of public authority in direct contact with young people. They are directly impacted by their action, attitudes and behavior. They are also the first level of public authority capable of having an impact on those attitudes through quality youth work.

This situation allows for development of regular exchange opportunities with young people at municipal level and also for contact between elected representatives and youth workers.

To do this, local councils must invest in improving public access to information technologies through existing public services such as youth centres, public libraries, media libraries, youth information and guidance centres.

They must adopt a policy approach where giving young people access to their social rights is a priority. They must develop concrete activities relating to the exercise of certain rights by young people such as active employment support measures, health education measures, prevention of gender violence among young people, etc.

Speaking of social rights, I would like to give an example of how the presence of young people in a political body can change its outlook and activities. During the last session of the Congress of local and regional authorities, we adopted a report on the role of local and regional authorities regarding social rights of young people.

Encouraged by the interest of our Youth Delegates, we also agreed on a concrete follow-up. The current and previous youth delegates of the Congress (and there are some 200 of them now) will be provided with a questionnaire; they will go to their municipalities and check out the kind of social services provided for young people and in what form, in particular they will look at how accessible the information is both online and in municipal offices.

The aim of this project is to have a clear idea of what local and regional authorities do in practice to provide young people with access to their rights. We will go back to our members who represent 47 member States of the Council of Europe with the results from these cities and inform them about both good and bad practices. This project has been possible thanks to the interaction with youth delegates.

I cannot underline enough how important it is to physically have young people in our meetings, giving us their point of view on all subjects. I think local authorities would also find it useful to have young people in their councils, if not as elected people, at least in an advisory capacity.

Finally, I want to say a few words about the European Charter on Local Youth Work and the Council of Europe Recommendation on Youth Work (2017) which provides recommended actions for governments to support it.

The Charter for local youth work proposes concrete guidelines in order to establish and maintain quality youth work at the local level. It has been put in a very easy-to-read form so that everyone engaged in youth work, being policy makers, youth workers, or young people, can actually use it.

I welcome such an initiative. Using the check-list, communities and other stakeholders can evaluate what needs to be done and divide the workload.

The Charter also clearly states what the quality development of social youth work needs. One important point made in the Charter and which is very relevant for local authorities is, I believe, the need to have an up-to-date mapping of local realities and needs. Because each community is different, each community will have its own strategy.

But to be effective, a strategy must reply to the demands of the people it targets. This is why young people have to be involved in the planning, delivery and evaluation of local youth work initiatives. The creation of local youth councils is one of them. In the UK, for instance, there are 620 youth councils run by young people. Through these forums, they can express their views and participate to the decision-making process

Each country has a different approach to this type of work. It can take various forms since there are multiple actors involved in it.

In my country, Sweden, there are neither legislation frameworks nor national policy documents regarding youth work. It is up to Swedish municipalities to fund local youth work. They are also responsible, to some extent, for youth policy issues such as school, health care and leisure activities<sup>1</sup>.

Let me share some examples of good practice

- In our region and municipalities, we support the regional and local NGOs with financial support. Sport club activities for youth are given subsidies calculated per hour of activity. Culture clubs can get funds for arranging music or other culture activities in our small villages. Political parties get financial support if they have seats in the council of the town or region. This is a way of supporting democratic participation, inclusion and health by making it easier for NGO's to operate.
- A recent example is how we supported youth driven NGOs to take care of refugees coming to our region. This allowed citizens to participate in the reception of the large amount of people who came to our region: 5000 persons in one year and we have a population of 130 000.
- The last example is a democracy project by the municipality of Östersund during the elections in Autumn 2018. The municipality engaged six democracy ambassadors to increase the participation of youth in the

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<sup>1</sup> Country sheet on Youth work in Sweden (January 2018). Retrieved from <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/sweden>

elections which resulted in increasing the number of first time voters in the local elections.

It has been proven by many good practice examples that youth work can change young people's life. Thanks to youth work, young people can experience and learn things they would never find at school or in a textbook. For example, the region of Drechsteden in Germany implemented a regional action plan called "Drechsteden utilize talent". This latter provides help young people in their transition from school to employment.

Youth work provides non-formal quality education so that young people can improve their competences, but also become more autonomous, engaged and active in their communities. For instance, the municipality of Giraltovce in the Slovak Republic, implemented the project "Young people too- from now". Its aim is to involve young citizens in local youth politics. The young people selected to be part of this project will be trained in local legislation, communication and negotiation.

There are also projects targeting young people with fewer opportunities. In Italy, the Councilor's office for youth policies of the Marches region developed the project "Re-searchers of sense, tests for democracy". The goal is to enhance the participation of young people living in disadvantage rural areas in political life.

I would like to conclude with a reminder to us all: Quality youth work can bring change at the local level for everyone involved.

Thank you.