Time for an Intergenerational Social Contract: The Inclusion of the Youth in Urban Processes

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Town Hall Track

POLICY PAPERS

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Submitted by

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Executive Summary

This paper is intended as a key contribution for the Town Hall process that United Cities and Local Governments is promoting as part of its 7th World Congress to take place in Daejeon, South Korea, between 10-14 October 2022. Its contents emerge from a collaborative effort of civil society organizations, academics and United Nations agencies, in consultation with local and regional governments. The forward looking proposals and recommendations are based on lessons learnt and critical reflection from ongoing initiatives in regions around the world. This policy paper is the result of complementary intellectual processes developed by different groups of youth, from within and outside the UCLG Youth Caucus. Young people are vulnerable to many of the world's problems, however, the understanding of them as a transitory process from childhood (protection from dangers) to adulthood (contribution to society) alienates them from participatory processes and from enjoying the same range of opportunities that adults.

During the following papers we develop around the key issues young people are facing at the urban level across the world in different areas and their propositions for change. We start explaining key issues suffered or of high-relevance for young people across the world, and propose a series of policy recommendations and a joint agenda of action to establish an intergenerational pact that can fulfill the needs of all. Municipalities are the first line of government, in charge of the implementation and coordination of the lives of the citizens. It is for these reasons that the provision and collaboration to ensure other levels of governments fulfill the very specific needs of the peoples shall be directed from there. It is not the governments who should decide what the people can have, but the municipalities that should advise on what the people need and coordinately work together to achieve it.

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Preface

*"They are sailors in a sea of uncertainty, negotiating their own way
through the storm, surrounded by opportunities and risks."*

There are different challenges affecting the interrelation between young people and governments at different levels, and these are specifically related to the provision of public services and support systems for the effective self-development and participation of young people in the social and political life. Moreover, the multidimensional crisis and changes that are affecting society have also transformed the perception of young people towards society, economies and governments.

During the last decades, there has been a generally negative view in relation to the participation of young people in politics, generally portrayed as passive or uninterested (Benedicto, 2008). Also, the interpretation of youth as a period of transition between childhood and adulthood, between dependency and independency, has made young people to be seen as a category that requires emancipation instead, but new research and political positions emerging from post-structuralism proposes a new view focused on the integration of young people, instead of their emancipation, and looking forward ways of integrating them in the social and political life before they acquire the characteristics that define adulthood (*ibid)*.

Young people are generally perceived and treated as a challenge. Especially in countries affected by conflict they are seen either as victims or perpetrators (Simpson, 2018). In all cases, policies are made for them, and not with them. The Independent progress study on youth, peace and security mandated by the UNSC states that "in the absence of meaningful opportunities to participate socially, politically and economically, marginalized young people are strikingly creative in forging alternative places of belonging and meaning through which to express themselves." This is true, either in positive and negative terms, however this sentence is limiting in the sense that, young people are inherently creative when they have environments conducive to that, and are their experiences, learnt behaviors, previous knowledge, opportunities and ambitions that shape the outcome of these creative spirits, which adults may label later as good or bad.

Therefore, the development of inclusive, caring and challenging spaces for young people to unleash their full potential is the best way of controlling the outcome of their inherent creativity, need of self-expression and need of social acceptance. It is for this reason that in the following pages we are proposing an overview of the main challenges faced by young people, divided in the topics of the different town halls, policy recommendations for the process of addressing them and a proposition of how could UCLG and its constituency advance towards a renewed intergenerational partnership that meets the needs of all life stages, and ensures their contribution to the development of societies.

Background
This policy paper is made out of different resources. Firstly, background information on the topics based on academic research from across the world. Secondly, the propositions are fundamented on the work of different youth organizations and activists through the facilitation of the Youth Council of Barcelona, Talento para el Futuro, the

Youth Track of the EU-Africa Week at the European Commission, together with the compilation of ideas through the dialogue of the members of the youth caucus with young people, specially across Africa, Europe and Latin America. Some realities might change across the world, however, there are basic needs shared by the citizens - and not only young people - across the world. Therefore, despite the geographical limitation most of the policy recommendations are necessarily applicable across the world. However, and in order to favor a more inclusive dialogue space, part of the way forward proposes the discussion of the principles this document contains with young people and officials from all geographies, conducive to an Intergenerational Social Contract.

Main challenges we are facing

Trust and Governance

The relationship between young people and government is complex in different aspects, mostly structural and interrelated. According to the Union of International Associations, "in developed market economies public administration functions are funded by a large tax base. Governmental organization tends to be disproportionate to authority and need and civil servants may often have inadequate managerial backgrounds and their administration of the public services are, by business standards, incompetent. In less developed areas, the country depends on public administrators, but the lack of infrastructure implies a lack in educational and managerial infrastructure as well, with a result of trial-and-error management." The lack of funding, technical resources and, sometimes, knowledge of the local institutions, added to their need to be continuously functioning and solving day-to-day problems, difficult structural transformations conducive to a better functioning. That is the first challenge that conditions the relationship with the whole constituency: the inefficiencies of public administrations.

The second problem is the exclusion of the youth from decision-making consequence from a lack of inclusive, pro-youth platforms for engagement, political participation and advocacy, which is rooted in the social structures and distrust in youth's capacity for meaningful contribution (Speziale, 2021).

The importance of involving young people in decision-making

The Council of Europe shows that "the participation of young people in decision-making processes - be they political, civic, civil society or other - fosters their active citizenship, enhances their inclusion, and strengthens their contribution to the advancement of democracy". As the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe states: "participation in the democratic life of any community is about more than voting or standing for election, although these are important elements. Participation and active citizenship is about having the right, the means, the space and the opportunity and where necessary the support to participate in and influence decisions and engage in actions and activities so as to contribute to building a better society".

Across the past decades, research has shown that inclusion at any level (political, financial, academic,...) brings more innovation and improves the processes. For example, with the inclusion of women in the economic structures, economies become more productive; and by including people of different genders, races, economic backgrounds or sexual orientation in decision-making ladders, increases the capacity to innovate, make profits or mantain social cohesion. It isn't only a matter of social justice, but also of positive peace, economic development and security.

The third problem is a lack of political and civic education which makes it difficult for citizens to understand the administrative, legal and political processes, and thus be active in it. Youth movements are generally composed by people with social science and humanities backgrounds, despite some participation of scientifics or technicians in more specific causes. By providing children with continuous and useful political, legal and civic education, not only can they increase their level of participation, but also to advance on societal development and the construction of well-functioning societies where every person is aware of its rights and duties, and can effectively exercise its rights. Moreover, inclusion at the local level may enhance the sense of community and facilitate the governance of municipalities, with the direct support of its inhabitants in a broad range of specific processes and common needs.

The fourth problem that builds towards a lack of trust in governance is corruption and nepotism. Despite the efforts of governments, civil society and international organizations, these are still part of the dynamics in public (and private) institutions. Specially in contexts of poverty and insecurity, these are drivers of delegitimation of the institutions and the search of alternative means of protection and conflict-resolution, leading to the fragmentation of societies and the increase of social turbulence. Moreover, there is not only a mistrust from the citizens towards different levels of administration but also a mistrust between different levels of administration, difficult effective coordination, subsidiarity mechanisms implementation and have other effects. Also, the big cases of corruption also have an impact in the perception of governance from the youth, increasing their disaffection.

Common Goods

The second challenge is access to adequate public health systems, which also meet the required needs of the youth population: access to family planning services, menstrual health, mental health support, among all other forms of health provision.

Young people and mental health

According to BeyondBlue initiative, over 75% of mental health issues occur before the age of 25,

while suicide continues to cause the largest loss of life of young people in Australia. In Europe, after the lockdown, mental health problems and suicide among young people has been rising and has turned to be the second leading cause of death among people aged between 15 and 29. In North America, there are similar figures. The U.S. suicide rate is the highest among wealthy nations, with 1 in 5 young women and 1 in 10 young men experience a clinical episode of major depression before age 25. In Africa, the data is not exact, and the lack of adequate mental health facilities prevents prevention, diagnosis and treatment.

The third challenge is providing adequate access to water and sanitation. Water is a global good, however, 2 billion people worldwide lack access to safely managed drinking water at home. 3.6 billion people, nearly half of the world population's neither has access to safely managed sanitation in their home, and 2.3 billion people lack basic hygiene services.

The fourth challenge is the facilitation of public spaces for youth organizations and for their effective participation in local and regional life. Ensuring appropriate and affordable access to common spaces that can be used either for political, social or academic activities, together with leisure is a must localities shall aim to meet.

The fifth challenge is the lack of access to adequate public transportation or private subsidies for facilitating the acquisition of transportation means. Young people need to be connected with the surrounding areas and be able to move from one place to another, facilitating an appropriate interdependency with the nearby areas, together with easy access to their academic, leisure and professional spaces outside the municipality.

Caring Systems

The first challenge we are facing under the caring system is difficulty in finding decent job opportunities for young people and housing. More people find structural challenges in identifying and accessing adequate employment opportunities globally. During the covid-19 pandemic period, youth and women were especially affected, with employment losses of 8.7 per cent and 5.0 per cent, respectively, in 2020, compared with 3.7 per cent for adults and 3.9 per cent for men. Before the pandemic, the unemployment rate of youth was already three times that of adults, according to the UN. Facilitating and stimulating an inclusive local economy is a cornerstone for the development of all other aspects of social life.

The second challenge faced by young people are armed conflicts and radicalisation. Structural deficiencies difficult the access to appropriate opportunities, vulnerabilities that can be exploited by armed groups and rebels. Moreover, young people are at the frontlines of battlefields during wars, and young women are specially affected, not only by the consequences of devastation and also their own participation in conflicts, but

also by sexual abuse. Also, aside from full-scale war contexts, conflicts are also part of the social dynamics, either due to economic, legal or social reasons. There is a need for facilitating adequate mechanisms for conflict prevention, management and resolution at the local level, which also includes intergenerational and intercultural conflicts, is the fifth problem.

The third problem being faced by youth globally is lack of equal opportunities through access to education. According to the United Nations, in 2019, more than 260 million children did not go to school in conflict-affected areas particularly hard-hit: and about 50 percent of out-of-school children of primary school age live in such areas. *"Young people should have equal access to education irrespective of their differences in gender, and the municipalities have a role to play in helping children and youth have access to quality education by prioritizing it above every other element of governance."*

Despite internal and international migration being a natural human dynamic, it has been increasingly securitised becoming a source of polarization and human rights violations. Young migrants make up more than 10 percent of the overall 232 million international migrants, according to the International Labor Organization. But also, intra-national migration. Local authorities have a key role in ensuring their protection, integration and access to services, and cross-municipal platforms can serve to facilitate adequate responses to human needs. This is the fourth challenge.

Discrimination, xenophobia and lack of recognition of diversity in culture are some other issues faced by youth globally. According to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights; Michelle Bachelet. " From the Soweto Uprising in South Africa 45 years ago, to the Black Lives Matter protests worldwide today, young people have been at the forefront of the fight against racial discrimination, xenophobia and intolerance". In addition to that, we can see from the End Sars protest that happened in Nigeria recently, how the lives of youth aren't important to people in government, and how they are continually being discriminated against, and profiled by all kinds of atrocities.

Climate and Culture

Climate Change threatens people with food and water scarcity, increased flooding, extreme heat, more diseases, and economic losses. Tackling climate change requires coordinated government actions and informed efforts by individuals. If the climate is changing, there's therefore a need for young people to also change their culture, behavior and their day-to-day activities, by acting more consciously about the environment. Municipalities and urban areas are the space of execution of any international, national and regional law. Therefore, their understanding of the problematic dynamics, needs and involvement in the solutions, in collaboration with the citizens, is fundamental.

Another identified problem is continuous rural exodus of young people, with two key effects: depopulation and abandonment of the rural space, and the overpopulation in urban environments. According to the United Nations, 55% of the world's population lives in urban areas, a proportion that is expected to increase to 68% by 2050. As a result of climate change, more people are moving from rural communities to urban communities in search of better life and a healthy environment thereby leading to overpopulation in the urban environment.

The third point is ineffective residue management in some municipalities. Some municipalities are not having the capacity to put in place effective residual materials management systems leading to wastage in society. The collaboration between municipalities and young people could generate public employment, increase the tax collection for different areas and improve the livelihoods of citizens.

Science shows clearly that in order to avert the worst impacts of climate change and preserve a livable planet, global temperature increase needs to be limited to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. Currently, the Earth is already about 1.1°C warmer than it was in the late 1800s, and emissions continue to rise. To keep global warming to no more than 1.5°C – as called for in the Paris Agreement – emissions need to be reduced by 45% by 2030 and reach net zero by 2050. To this end, municipalities in their little ways need to join hands in order to collectively reduce emissions gradually till there's no more.

Policy Recommendations: An Intergenerational Social Contract to Include Youth in the Social and Political Life of the City

1. To ensure that young people have access to rights to ensure their effective inclusion in the social life of the city, together with the capacity to be involved in more processes, specially:
    a. the right to have achieve decent work, through access to education, skilling opportunities, protected and fair wages, and humane working conditions;
    b. the right to appropriate, safe and affordable housing;
    c. the right to access public goods and social services, including health services;
    d. the right to safety in the private, public and professional right; and
    e. the right to quality and affordable transportation.
    f. the right to information.

2. To ensure the effective participation of young persons to all stages of policy development, budgeting, execution and evaluation, in order to mainstream their needs and innovate with their ideas. They should also be considered as important stakeholders in the implementation and execution of these policies.

3. To ensure the political and civic education for children and young persons, in order to prepare them for an effective engagement in urban life.

4. To ensure the communications about youth within the public institutions and towards other actors are always positive, breaking prejudices and de-criminalising young persons. To identify and address the sources of youth non-civic behaviors focused on the access to rights, capacity of self-development, lack of quality leisure, and a caring environment, and to facilitate solutions to the root of the problems, not focused on criminalizing young persons.

5. To identify the best channels to enhance a two-way communication between institutions, authorities and citizens, especially young persons. Young people need to grow with knowledge of the governmental processes, understand the communication channels, and know the work of public institutions to ensure trust between people and governments.

6. To generate effective and simple mechanisms for young persons to successfully complete with public requirements and formalities, and ensure directions and support can be provided from public administrations.

7. To facilitate the bureaucratic processes related to the acquisition of permits for public events and to have access to appropriate spaces to develop them.

8. To enable transparency web-sites with detailed use of public budgets, assignments and public wages.

9. To establish urban networks devoted to the good practices, policy-development and inter-urban cooperation to facilitate the management of the reality of migration, and advance on the development of sustainable and inclusive migration and refugeedom management systems, thus ensuring the right to move freely and that the place of birth and/or the nationality are not burdens for the development of all youth.

10. To ensure the adequate access to public health for young people regardless of their legal and socio-economic status, sexual orientation and gender identity, including family planning, sexual and reproductive health and mental health services and prevention against ESTs, FGM and drug abuse prevention.

11. To ensure access to sport facilities for young people, as part of healthcare. Government needs to help build the capacity of youth in order to improve their sources of livelihood, they also need to Invest in green jobs.

12. Access to water and sanitation for all young people through a public network of safe water fountains..

13. Access to clean and accessible toilets with diaper changing stations and breastfeeding rooms

14. To facilitate the space and resources for the development of civil society organizations, specially youth organizations, that can give solutions to the most pressing challenges, and that can contribute to the advancement of society and generate an enabling environment for their growth through partnerships, search and mobilization of resources, technical support and training.

15. To ensure the availability of public spaces at the local level, at least one per neighborhood but with the objective to have an adequate number in relation to the population that can be used by youth organizations in order to develop volunteering projects, enjoy spare time and safely associate for the advancement of the common good. For its sustainability, ensure the development of a self-organizational model which can facilitate its growth and not depend, exclusively, from public authorities.

16. To support the initiatives of the social and solidarity economy and to promote responsible consumption, especially among the youth. To promote urban agriculture, urban gardens and a relation of proximity to food production.

17. From the identification of polarization and social turbulence, and specially in the existence of social conflict or war in the municipality, region or country, implement

dialogue platforms to debate and address key worries of the peoples preventing violent resolution of conflicts.

18. To establish local peace & justice bureaus where the populations can denounce human and civil rights violations and receive the appropriate support for the use of official justice channels.

19. To reinforce the role of the local police in the protection of minorities or vulnerable groups such as women, migrants, disabled persons, aged persons, ethnicities, and people from different genders and sexual orientations.

20. Within their capacity, to ensure the adequate existence of education and sport facilities, silent working spaces such as libraries or study rooms, and materials for the educational development of young people. And lobby regional and national governments, while ensuring public-private partnerships to ensure this is developed adequately.

21. To apply the lens of feminism, ecologism, intergenerational collaboration and antirracism in local public policy planning, budgeting, execution, implementation and avaluation both through intellectual efforts and the inclusion of persons of different backgrounds on its processes.

22. To protect and facilitate the cultural development of minorities within their own reality, and to promote exchanges between young persons of different ethnic, social and economic backgrounds.

23. To ensure local activities for climate action which strengthen the resilience of the local communities to the effects of climate change. Also, the provision of social services and public spaces for the mitigation and adaptation of its consequences and to reduce loss and damage, such as:
    a. identification, development and communication of climate refugees intended to give spaces to the citizenship during events of:
        i.   floods, tornadoes and other events of similar characteristics.
        ii.   fires;
        iii. heat waves and cold spells;
        iv.   any other specific extreme climate events typical to the different parts of the world.

24. To provide an enabling environment for the socio-ecological transition facilitating training hubs to advance on sensibilisation on climate issues, alternatives for an ecological existence and support on transition.

25. To promote and find partnerships for the installation of renewable energy projects making use of the potentialities of every locality (wind, rain, sun,...) and involve young persons into these projects.

26. To partner with small cities for service decentralization and exchange of good practices and technical support for urban development, so the impact of the rural exodus is distributed among urban areas and intermediary cities.

27. To ensure residue management and develop it as a public service where to hire young people from vulnerable backgrounds.

28. There's a need to channel more resources to reach young people in underserved communities in our municipalities. Most times when we develop advocacy strategies, we leave out people without access to technology or social media, forgetting that these people are more in number than the literates.

29. There is a need to transform the way we relate with the environment and among ourselves. That is, to create another culture, which is highly interrelated with developing a caring system. We need to acknowledge our belonging to nature and start acting accordingly.

Joint way forward

Going forward, we expect to engage, discuss and partner with local governments across the world to share in the implementation of the above recommendations. We also hope to discuss with local councils that understand the capacities and limitations of different municipalities, include their perspectives and draft general strategies applicable to the concrete cases of different cities. For doing so we propose the following steps:

1. To develop a youth consultation with activists, youth organizations and urban youth from across the world in order to agree with the priorities and concrete steps forward.

2. To develop two rounds of discussions between Local Governments and Young persons to agree on an Intergenerational Social Contract.

   a. This will be a simple, short declaration incorporating the vision for youth inclusion and youth rights in 10 years view.
   b. This will incorporate agreed goals for ensuring effective youth development, participation in the social and political life, and the responsibilities of all parties.

3. To work with key city networks, youth organizations and international institutions in coding an International Charter of Youth Municipal Rights.

4. To establish a recognition programme for municipalities achieving the aims of the Intergenerational Social Contract and the International Charter on Youth Municipal Rights; and for effective intergenerational dialogue and collaboration.

5. To support research on evaluating and disseminating best practices exemplifying the implementation of the Intergenerational Social Contract and the International Charter on Youth Municipal Rights.

6. To find support for establishing a Youth Participation Fund aimed at supporting effective solutions to the challenges of young persons at the local level, strengthen youth participation and partnerships between municipalities and/or city networks and youth-led organizations.

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