



9th Conference of the International Observatory on Participatory Democracy Reggio Emilia, 18th, 19th, 20th November 2009

Final Declaration

Today, the 9th Conference of the International Observatory on Participatory Democracy, in which politicians, technicians, representatives of associations and, above all, with many young people have participated, would particularly like to acknowledge the participation of the young people throughout the Conference and to thank them for their sincere contribution and all that we have been able to learn as a result of their presence.

We would also like to summarise the following concluding considerations, drawn up on the basis of the voices of the numerous young people taking part in this Conference:

- 1- The young people, from different countries, who have met and discovered how to get to know each other on the occasion of the 9th OIPD International Conference, have underlined that they do not wish to be considered as either objects or mere extras in processes of participation that are centred in the paternalistic mediation of adults, but rather to be acknowledged as playing a leading role due to their condition as young people.
- 2- Participation, in order for a specific process of involving young people to be undertaken, has to be framed within the scope of universal citizenship: making up and recasting places of belonging; inventing and forging, together and in union with other participants, the instruments and the rules that will guarantee equality of opportunities and access for all.
- 3- The participation of new generations provides a **value**, in terms of **education** and **social integration**, which allows young people to become fully entitled protagonists of the community to which they belong.
- 4- The participation of young people serves to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of public policies, whether they be addressed specifically to new generations or are inherent to the development of the local community in which they live, from the point of view of growth in social capital.

Young people, in order to enter into participatory processes, need to know in a transparent way, how much their **voice** is going to count when it comes to making final decisions that affect them.

- 5- When defining actions of participation taken by the new generations, special emphasis must be placed on the social, cultural, territorial and technological context in which the participation process takes place. The context is the element that determines good actions: there are no preconceived or easily transferable “recipes”, just the necessary work of interpretation of the setting in which any action is to be taken.
- 6- In this phase of the crisis of the institutions of political representation, setting up participatory opportunities for young people, whether such be associated with specific decisions or with much more transversal themes, generates trust and allows for the political status of young people to be reinforced. Through participating young people develop a sense of belonging to the territory in which they live, exchanging competences and reinforcing their role. A more important position and greater political weight reaches them through active participation, taking both a leading role and a share in the responsibility.



Participatory democracy, insofar as it increases knowledge of the mechanisms and opportunities of Representative Democracy, as well as the trust of those get to play a role, also contributes to the reinforcement of elective institutions.

- 7- In this period of strong individualisation and the segmentation of needs, young people may encounter difficulties in being able to tell the difference between references and shared social norms. This is why it is necessary to pass from youth policies, which centre on individual wellbeing, to those that centre on the participation of young people in the growth and development of the community in which they live.
- 8- The participatory processes that young people are involved in must increasingly be aimed at the drafting of public policies of general interest from a standpoint capable of evaluating the enrichment provided by perspectives that are attentive to intergenerational dialogue, sexual diversities and the origin, age of each one. Institutions will promote the participatory processes addressed to young people and support processes of participation that are created and managed by young people themselves. In this sense respect for the specific languages of those that participate must be guaranteed, along with respect for conflict as a permanent element of growth and the mobilisation of the subjects involved. Young people want to participate, not merely as prospective adults, but as persons with an important role in the present, and they need their participation to have immediate effects.
- 9- Training agencies and educational institutions must turn the active participation of young people into a policy option associated with criteria of the professional ethics of educators as a group, and must promote the recognition of the multidisciplinary languages that are closest to the new generations, adapted to the different age bands and the different cultural contexts in which they act.
- 10- Consequently, the school must develop from being merely a place of cultural transmission, highly evaluative and based exclusively on disciplinary intelligence, to become a place of **cultural production**, that specifically evaluates the respectful and ethical dimension of young people's knowledge.

Young people cannot be made to participate by decree. On occasions we have seen this at the ODP Conference itself, with the desire to hand the floor over to them. This requires that both public policy and young people continue to invent forms of dialogue and participation.

Consequently, we need to commit ourselves now to the forging of participatory routes that are coherent with all of the principles that have been stressed here, in order to indicate new channels that are capable of renovating the modes and forms of our democracies.

With the participation of young people another world and another city are created.

Reggio Emilia, 20th November 2009, 20th Anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.