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YOUTH IN A CHANGING SOCIETY

Editorial

The world is changing. Economic instability, environmental challenges and demographic change are having profound consequences at a regional, national and global level. It is crucial that young people play an active role in tackling these challenges – and that they are able to



exploit the opportunities presented by them. With more than two billion under 18-year-olds in the world, AER believes it is important for them to be involved in political life, to play an active part in the democratic process even though they remain under-represented at the ballot box.

Indeed, AER is dedicated to improving the life chances of young Europeans. We are helping politically minded young people fight for the issues that matter to them. It is only right that they have a say in the decisions that affect them – particularly on matters such as education, health and housing – which are often made by national, European and regional governments behind closed doors. And with 1 in 5 young people in Europe unemployed, now is the time to step up to the mark and take concrete action to support them in their efforts to secure jobs. By working together, Europe's regions can contribute to further taking into consideration the opinion of young people – who are too often disenfranchised by bureaucracy and archaic power structures – and to giving them a real stake in society.

The protest movements currently taking place across Europe call for a clear response, without which youth will give up on the civic involvement they have showed during the last months. If we fail to fully engage them, the consequences for society at large could be disastrous. It is up to us – policymakers at every level of government – to give young people a voice and help them to shape a future characterised by opportunity and hope.

Michèle Sabban

AER President
Vice President of the Ile-de-France region (F)

Young ambition

AER Summer Schools 2011 brought 140 young people, politicians and experts together



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Involving young people in today's policy making was one of the key messages to come out of the AER Summer Schools on 'Youth in a changing society', held in August in the Province of Flevoland, in the Netherlands. Some 70 young adults aged 18 to 26 and 70 adult participants, including regional politicians, officers and experts, came together to learn about issues ranging from education to entrepreneurship, climate change to equal opportunities, as well as the processes which inform policymaking in these fields. They took part in debates, workshops and study visits, learning about best practice examples from Europe's regions.

Youth employment

Opening the conference, AER President Michèle Sabban described youth unemployment, which stands at 43% in Spain, as "one of the greatest tragedies of our society. It has never been so difficult for a young person to access employment," she said. Sabban added that it is young people – who are educated, tuned in to

technological advances and keen to get involved – that "hold the key to the future." "You are the source of the dynamism for our regions," she declared. Leen Verbeek, the Queen's Commissioner at the Province of Flevoland, insisted that the high rate of youth unemployment "cannot solely be pinned on the financial crisis. It is also, to a large extent, related to structural problems that remain unresolved due to a lack of political will," he said. Pointing out that youth unemployment in Flevoland stands at only 6% – compared with a Europe-wide average of 21% – Verbeek said his region has, for several years, "conducted a strong policy aiming to integrate young people into the labour market." "The average age of people here is lower than the rest of the country, which is good for the economy," he added. Meanwhile, Hande Özsan Bozlatli, President of AER Committee 3 on Culture, Education, Youth and International Cooperation, said the Summer Schools were a learning opportunity for young and adult participants alike. "It's not just about us teaching you, we also learn from your energy, dreams and enthusiasm," she concluded. |

Empowering youth through subsidiarity

From mobility schemes to competitions, AER has developed a wide range of tools to boost youth involvement in decision making processes



EURODYSSSEY

Eurodysssey was launched by AER in 1985 with the aim of unleashing the potential of young Europeans and helping them integrate into working life. An AER exchange programme which creates partnerships between regional authorities, young people and companies, and offers young people work experience abroad. AER believes that working in other European regions can help young people stand out from the crowd and cope in a competitive global market. Thanks to Eurodysssey, in 2010 more than 580 youngsters from 18 to 30 years-old had the opportunity to learn a language and gain professional skills which would give them the edge in a tough employment market. A rich cultural experience, the programme also helps to foster the intercultural dialogue that is so crucial to a united Europe. |



MYFER AWARD

Now in its 11th year, the biennial Most Youth-Friendly European Region Award (MYFER) offers European regions the chance to show what they are doing to deal with the issues that matter the most to young people. The 2011 theme is 'social inclusion of youth with disabilities'. Members of the AER's Youth Regional Network (YRN) chose the theme to focus on how to tackle the obstacles facing young people with disabilities, who are more likely to drop out of school, face unemployment and live in poverty as a result. The YRN will work with the AER's Social Policy and Public Health Committee to identify projects which promote the inclusion of youth with disabilities in 3 key areas: those which bring education systems closer to the needs of youth with disabilities; those which engage young disabled people in the employment market; and those which promote civic engagement of youth with disabilities in the decision making process at regional level. |



PYE PROJECT

With record high youth unemployment rates across Europe, AER is taking concrete action to help young people gain access to work. The 'Promoting Youth Employment' (PYE) project aims to foster best practice and facilitate youth employment through the exchange of best practice at regional level. PYE brings together four regions – Azores (P), Hampshire (UK), Krapina Zagorje (HR) and Vojvodina (SRB) – to look at tried and tested methods which can boost employment prospects for young people at regional, local and national level. The AER peer review methodology has already been used successfully in fields including renewable energy, tourism and economic growth. |



YES PROJECT

YES brings together six regional governments, a national youth entrepreneurship organisation and AER to increase the number of entrepreneurs in Europe. Recognising the link between education and entrepreneurship, as highlighted in the EU Small Business Act and the Oslo agenda, the project is based on pooling and sharing experiences. It seeks to share lessons learned and facilitate the exchange of best practice by mapping and analysing different strategies in the partner regions. YES promotes youth entrepreneurship in regional development policies, growth and innovation plans and the education system. It aims to put youth entrepreneurship on the agenda as regions look to boost growth and innovation and develop education plans. The end result will be one national and six regional action plans to help boost the number of entrepreneurs and small and medium-sized enterprises in each region, as well as the production of a best practice guide. |

NEW MEDIA

Michèle Sabban described the young participants in the AER Summer Schools as "digital natives". This certainly rang true at the Almere conference, where they made the most of all that web 2.0 has to offer. Olov Oskarsson, who took part in a 'twinterview' ahead of the conference via twitter, even tweeted photos of the audience in his opening address. There were Facebook forums, YouTube clips and interactions via Twitter. |

Making a difference

The AER Youth Regional Network brings young people from across Europe together to fight for the issues that matter to them

AER's Youth Regional Network (YRN) brings together almost 100 young people involved in decision making at regional level. With the participation of members from 25 countries and more than 50 regions, the YRN acts as a forum for 18- to 30-year-olds who represent regional youth parliaments, councils and organisations.

YRN president Olov Oskarsson explains the thinking behind the YRN, which was set up in 2008 with the aim of providing young people with a platform on the European stage. Oskarsson says, "We are based on the same concept as AER, but our members are regional young people rather than politicians. We meet to discuss different topics, such as youth employment or mobility. Like AER, we have different committees working on given topics." He says that the organisation aims to influence policymaking at European level and politicians from different parts of Europe, but also to give tools to young people to make a difference on a local level. "It is important for young people to be involved in political life for many reasons," Oskarsson adds. "If young people are involved in political life, the decisions made will be even better." |

YRN = **100** members from **25** countries and more than **50** regions



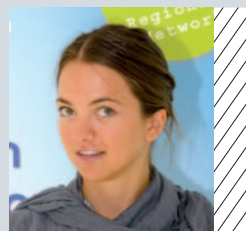
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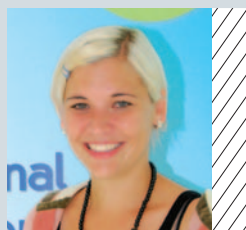
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Head of Committee 2 'Professional Life and Entrepreneurship'
Jelena Orlic
Primorje-Gorski kotar (HR)



Head of Committee 3 'Education and Culture'
Jonathan Guillaume
Limousin (F)



Committee 4 'Health and Social Affairs' co-chaired by
Doris Leichtfried
Salzburg (A)



Maria Martinsson
Dalarna (S)



Head of Committee 5 'Media and Communication'
Anton Kuzmin
Olomouc (CZ)

On the market

Europe's regions must work together to support young people in education, employment and beyond

The Alsace example

The region of Alsace is continental France's smallest region and its third youngest. This, according to Lilla Merabet, the Alsace Regional Councillor in charge of youth and social economy, means it has "specific responsibility when it comes to youth." "So we need to look at what we can do for young people and how young people can work with us," she told participants in the AER Summer Schools on youth in a changing society. Merabet said that the region was "concerned" about the state of its young people - who do not enjoy autonomy until 28, yet are legally responsible a decade earlier. "Young people are endangered, particularly on an economic level," she warned.



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The region conducted research to identify the major issues facing young people in Alsace, and it showed the need to increase skill levels, professional and social inclusion, and to address regional inequalities. It also developed the 'Youth Priority Project' aimed at supporting the autonomy of young people outside the classical age threshold, to enable them to lead their lives, take decisions, and also to make mistakes. Merabet said, "The main point of the Youth Priority Project is to see young people as the main actors of the future. Young people must be mobilised towards greater inclusion."

There is also the 'Youth Oriented Project', which involves 130 professionals and provides 15 work placements per year based on training progression, and 'Youth Experience' which involves promoting courses, support and mentoring for young people. "The goal of youth experience is to get young people to develop or experience their own projects for the future. It is sometimes difficult to know if you have the means to carry a project through, so this helps fund people who start at an early stage."

The French region also works to reduce the number of young people who drop out of school, and provides some financial incentives to employers who give young people a chance.

—Interview

Marília Simões

Project Manager, Regional Office for Youth
- Açores (P)

AER: How can the Promoting Youth Employment project help tackle youth unemployment?

MS: We work at a regional level to develop programmes that promote youth employment. We want to share some programmes from our region, and learn from other regions about how to implement them. In November, the team will go to the Açores and meet with experts on youth employment there. We also have some programmes to support youth entrepreneurship.

AER: Why is the project important and how can it help young people on a practical level?

MS: By working together, we can explore ways to change experiences for young people. Through the project, participants can learn best practice examples of projects from other regions. |

Mariette Korsrud

President of Nordland County Council - Nordland (N)

AER: What are the key issues facing young people in your region?

MK: The key issues facing our young people relate to education and the need to create work opportunities in Nordland. Too many high school pupils drop out of school, and at the same time many young people leave the region to find work and never come back, resulting in a decrease in the population.

AER: What is your region doing to help young people in the employment market, or to support budding entrepreneurs?

MK: We are fortunate to have a low unemployment rate in Nordland. Last year, we initiated the 'Project 300', with the aim of giving young unemployed people help in finishing their high school education. The region has had a solid entrepreneurship strategy since 2005, focused on strengthening the entrepreneurial spirit. Some 25,000 youngsters have been part of the entrepreneurship programmes in the last three years. |

Guri Gjerde

Advisor, Department for Secondary Education
and Training - Akershus (N)

AER: Why is the Eurodysey programme important?

GG: Because of the economic situation, mobility and employment is a big issue. We have young people working in Akershus through Eurodysey, in fields such as archaeology. These people see it as a bridge to get employment in another country, and it can help young people in entering the market.

AER: What skills do young people learn from the project?

GG: They get experience of life in another country, and in their professional field. It also helps them to build language skills and learn about working life in another country. These are all experiences that can help them get a job in Norway, in their home country, or gain experience which helps them find work in another country afterwards. |

—Interview

Anne Blik-De Jong

Deputy Queen's Commissioner - Flevoland (NL)

AER: What does it mean to Flevoland to host the AER Summer Schools?

AB: It was a great honour to host this year's Summer Schools because we got to share the joyous celebration of the 25th anniversary of Flevoland, and be part of the exchange of knowledge, enthusiasm and energy between young people and politicians.

AER: Why is the theme of 'youth in a changing society' important to your region?

AB: Flevoland is not only young, it is also dynamic and has a fast growing population. Being the youngest Dutch province, we recognise the importance of youth in building and shaping the future. Flevoland shares the energy of young people who dare to give a community new ideas with a fresh perspective.

AER: Why is it important to involve young people in decision making at a regional level?

AB: Young people hold our future in their hands. In order to make our future prosperous, we should trust them and give them an opportunity to participate in decision making. |

Jelena Orlić

Youth participant - Primorje-Gorski kotar (HR)

AER: Why did you choose to attend the AER Summer Schools?

JO: Society is changing day by day. AER Summer Schools 2011 were an opportunity to act and to influence our changing society. We often hear of a lack of opportunities for young people to act and participate in their communities. The Summer Schools were a step towards changing the way young people participate.

AER: What was the most helpful thing you learned?

JO: There were many interesting lectures and workshops, but the one which made it to my "memory book" was the summer entrepreneurship workshop. With a youth unemployment rate in Europe reaching 21%, it is important to create new opportunities. This workshop taught me how to work towards creating my own "job advertisement", suited to my education and background. This helps us to be proactive in our search, instead of waiting for opportunities to come to us. |

Hande Özsan Bozatli

President of AER Committee on Culture, Education, Youth and International Cooperation, member of the Provincial Council of Istanbul (TR)

AER: Why are the Summer Schools important?

HB: They enable us to share information and experiences with European members. I have a slightly different perspective, because the economic crisis hit Turkey less hard. Moreover, in Istanbul the unemployment rate among young people is the same as adults. We have youth policies in place because the future of the world depends on a knowledge and innovation-based economy, a greener and resource efficient economy. The recent riots in the UK show that we need to establish an economy that will include young people socially and fight poverty and exclusion.

AER: What is the value of adults and young people working together in the Summer Schools?

HB: Usually we, the adult politicians, don't have that much cooperation with young people. This is a good opportunity to discuss important issues together and for young people with different religious and social backgrounds to get together. |

Lambert van Nistelrooij

Dutch MEP, member of the European Parliament's Regional Development Committee

AER: What can be done to involve young people in decision making at European level?

LvN: Brussels can only help people to take responsibility for themselves. The EU 2020 strategy is about bringing smarter growth to European regions in a more inclusive way. For that to happen, we must combine social programmes with those for higher education. At the start, Europe was about the free movement of goods, but now it's about knowledge and people who are well educated. If we want to compete, we need young people. If we want to change things, young people have to be involved. |

Daniel Zawarczynski

Youth participant - Kärnten (A)

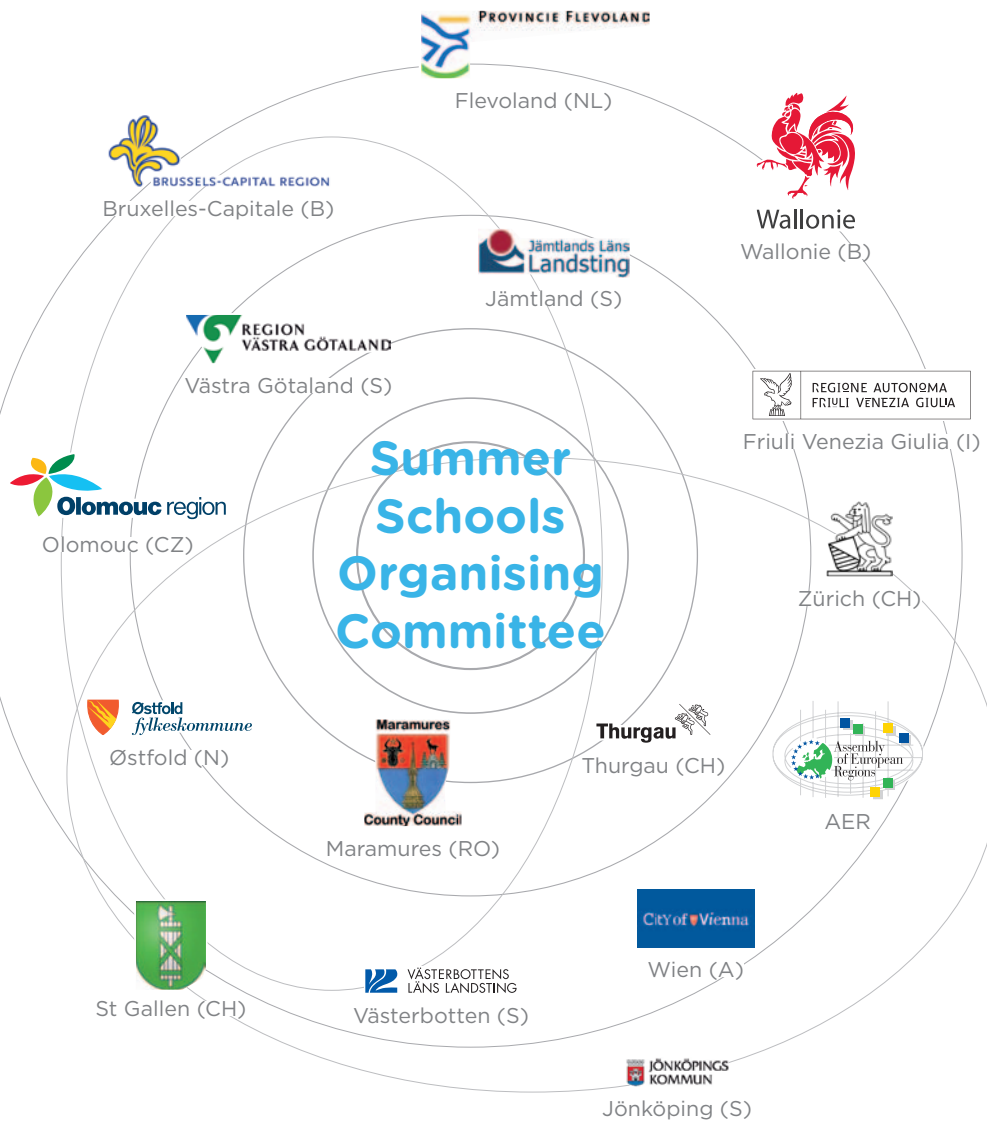
AER: What do the AER Summer Schools mean to you?

DZ: It's all about diversity and harmony, hard work and great fun, the sharing and receiving of information, experience and ideas. Young people in Kärnten, like in many regions, are not given enough possibilities to express themselves, so the theme of this year's Summer Schools fits perfectly.

AER: What did you learn from this year's Summer Schools?

DZ: In one sentence, that nothing is impossible. That is what the region of Flevoland, the visit to Creative Campus and many talks with other participants made me understand. It is up to us to promote and share it. |





Agenda 2011-2012

YRN Autumn Plenary Session and AER Seminar on Eastern Partnership "Youth mobility - going East!"

27-28 October 2011

Wroclaw, Dolny Slask (PL)

PYE project 2nd Peer Review

21-25 November 2011

Açores (P)

PYE project 3rd Peer Review

30 January - 3 February 2012

Krapina Zagorje (HR)

PYE project 4th Peer Review

26-30 March 2012

Hampshire (UK)

PYE project Closing Conference

23 May 2012

Brussels, Bruxelles-Capitale (B)

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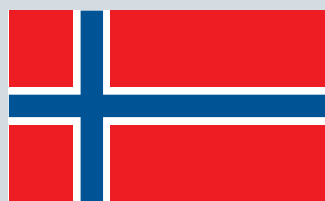
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Minute of silence for victims of Norwegian massacre

Participants in the AER Summer Schools took part in a minute's silence to pay tribute to the victims of the recent terror attacks in Norway. Michèle Sabban was joined on the podium by Mariette Korsrud, the President of Norway's Nordland County

Council, and young Norwegians to pay tribute to the 69 people killed at the Utøya island youth camp, and the 10 who lost their lives as a result of the Oslo bomb attack. "Many people here are from Norway, and some have lost friends or colleagues," Sabban said. "Let us pay homage to the young people assassinated for supporting democracy."



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