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# Thematic ideas 2016

## Living together in culturally diverse societies: respect, dialogue, interaction

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**Cultural diversity, deeply rooted in the European continent,** has been enhanced by the contemporary phenomenon of globalisation. The waves of migration, and intense cross-border mobility, especially increasing in 2015, are integral parts of the rich history of European societies, but they also constitute challenges which need to be addressed. These phenomena may comprise several issues, such as security and identity crises, as well as growing xenophobia along with social exclusion. The latter plays a major role in radicalism and extremism, which leads to terrorism, as proven by the recent attacks in November 2015 in Paris, in other cities of Europe and beyond. The rise of these threats has to be addressed at all political levels in order to build a society in which peaceful “living together” is both possible and long-lasting.

**This increasing diversity is the very source of Europe’s richness.** While numerous studies have demonstrated the added value of diversity for human and social development, economic growth, productivity, creativity and innovation, the current situation far from exploits the full potential of diversity. Building inclusive societies on the bedrock of fundamental rights and freedoms is certainly one of the most appropriate responses to these challenges – a mission that is the equal responsibility of public authorities at all levels, civil society leaders, and ultimately, of citizens. This mission concerns every citizen, regardless of age. However, it must also be stressed at the very beginning of every citizen’s life: early education for democratic citizenship and human rights provides a means for each individual citizen to acquire an understanding of the world’s diversity. It will enable us to move forward together, to deal with our different identities constructively and democratically on the basis of shared universal values.

**The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe** has been upholding this approach, having adopted a [resolution](#) and a [recommendation](#) on 25 March 2015 focusing on the role of local and regional authorities in combating and preventing radicalisation, and drawing up a Congress strategy on this basis. This initiative is in line with the new ‘Council of Europe Action Plan 2015-17 to combat extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism’, and other Council of Europe activities, such as the [Intercultural Cities Programme](#). As part of the strategy on preventing radicalisation, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities will compile an educational toolkit for use by local elected representatives when organising intercultural and inter-faith activities. Furthermore, the promotion of education for democratic citizenship and human rights will be at the heart of the 2016 [World Forum for Democracy](#) organised by the Council of Europe, to which the Congress will make an active contribution.



**In this context, local and regional authorities have an important role** to play in fostering intercultural dialogue, active citizenship and cultural diversity, thereby enabling inhabitants to live better together, and to prevent and overcome ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural divides. In order to achieve this, intercultural competences should be taught and learned, and spaces for intercultural dialogue should be created and widened. Local and regional authorities have to accommodate different cultures, people, nations, religions, ethnicities, and also involve them in democratic decision-making processes. If cultural diversity is well managed – with diversity being understood as enriching and positive – and based on the principles of tolerance and solidarity, a culture of peace, cross-cultural dialogue and civic engagement, democracy becomes more representative, and consequently more stable and consolidated.

On the basis of these considerations, the Congress – responsible for co-ordinating the European Local Democracy Week – decided to once again make *“Living together in culturally diverse societies: respect, dialogue, interaction”*, the theme of the ELDW 2016, focusing on three main aspects:

**RESPECT:** The first step towards living together in culturally diverse societies is mutual respect. Respect for each other’s culture, religion and traditions, on the common basis which unites us all: universal human rights. Respect for each other’s rights and differences.

**DIALOGUE:** The second step is dialogue. People who live together in the same city should have the opportunity to exchange their experiences so that we can make the best possible use of our cultural diversity. Education for human rights and democratic citizenship plays a crucial role in this respect.

**INTERACTION:** The third step is interaction. Local and regional authorities should find common paths and areas of action to involve diverse groups within their communities, in order to build together a more tolerant society. Examples of best practice should be identified and promoted throughout Europe.

In view of this special context and the theme *“Living together in culturally diverse societies: respect, dialogue, interaction”*, local and regional authorities and their associations are invited to organise various events for the European Local Democracy Week 2016, in line with the following objectives:

- Empower citizens with intercultural knowledge to combat stereotypes and ensure mutual respect;
- Create opportunities for citizens from all cultures to gather together, exchange and dialogue, with the aim of achieving a more deeply-rooted sense of solidarity;
- Educate inhabitants about democratic citizenship and fundamental rights, and the importance of equal enjoyment of those rights;



- Raise citizens' awareness, through formal and informal activities, of the advantages and opportunities a culturally diverse and inclusive society can offer;
- Address the challenges of integrating migrants in society by creating forums offering the possibility of mutual exchanges with the inhabitants.

The ELDW 2016 focuses especially on the promotion and development of **education for democratic citizenship and human rights**.

Education has a specific relationship with citizenship and democracy. It plays a crucial role in the promotion and development of many aspects of democracy and human rights, such as the active participation of citizens in the decision-making process and raising awareness of citizens' rights and responsibilities.

Human rights are often considered as a given, though this is not the case in many areas. It is essential that the whole population, but particularly children and young people, be made more aware of human rights and the right to enjoy them in a fair and equal way. Human rights are the common value on which our societies are built, enabling us to live in a peaceful and fair way. But what exactly does "human rights" mean? What are these human rights and how can they be implemented and guaranteed in our societies, especially at local and regional level? These are the questions which municipalities could tackle during the ELDW 2016.

Along with the [relevant legal instruments](#) of the Council of Europe and its Congress to be promoted at grassroots level, the thematic ideas listed below may help and inspire the participating local and authorities, their associations and civil society organisations in implementing their activities in the ELDW 2016.

To help achieve the above-mentioned goals, this document provides examples of different types of activities which could be organised during the European Local Democracy Week 2016.



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### 1. Ensure mutual respect by providing intercultural knowledge and combating prejudices

*“Ignorance leads to fear, fear leads to hate, and hate leads to violence.” Averroes*

Discrimination usually comes from the fear all individuals have of people who are different from themselves. An effective way to avoid violence and to fight both fear and the resulting discrimination is to establish trust, for instance by organising campaigns which reveal the reality of the situation.



*“But women can’t do maths...must be because you’re an Indian...” or “You don’t sound black...You sound smart” are examples of the many things frequently said to students.*

<http://wetooarecambridge.tumblr.com/>

In the UK, the **“I, Too, Am Cambridge”** campaign follows the **“I, Too, Am Harvard”** initiative, a photo campaign created from interviews with students from various ethnicities exploring their diverse experiences of being denigrated on account of their culture or beliefs. The British campaign puts the spotlight on these unheard or devalued voices, and on the prejudices they suffer every day within Cambridge University, in order to provoke wider discussion and bring about the necessary changes.

The many pre-conceived ideas on migrants and on other religious or ethnic groups in a society can, eventually, lead to their being excluded or portrayed as a threat to the security and balance of society. The most common prejudices on migrants, such as taking advantage of social and

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health care services on tax payers' money, displaying anti-social and hostile behaviour in public spaces and stealing jobs from locals, can seriously damage the conditions for cohesion and "living together" in our community. When organising their own European Local Democracy Week, municipalities could prepare events intended to combat these false ideas at grassroots level.

 In this respect, the "12-Star" city **Katowice** (Poland), which has been actively organising its ELDW since 2009, focused, in 2015, on the education of children and young people, on the basis that democracy must be taught at a very early age, in order to achieve positive effects in the future. For example, **workshops on the consequences of intolerance and stereotypes** were organised with children.

Understanding the culture of others from a very young age is also a way to foster tolerance.

 In 2015, the city of **Chania** (Greece) organised activities in primary schools on the theme "I'm from...and I want to tell you". In this activity, local authority representatives visited primary schools, which had pupils from various ethnic backgrounds. The pupils presented songs, fairy tales and legends from their country of origin. Some of them cooked and brought a typical delicacy to class.



The "**No hate speech movement**" is a campaign launched and run by the **Council of Europe** in 2012. The objectives of this Europe-wide movement are the following: **to raise awareness** about online hate speech and its risks for democracy and for individual young people, and to promote media and Internet literacy; **to support young people** in standing up for human rights, online and offline; **to map online hate speech** and develop tools for constructive responses; **to advocate** for the development of and a consensus on European policy instruments combating hate speech; **to develop youth participation** and **citizenship** online.



**NO HATE  
SPEECH  
MOVEMENT**



## 2. Create spaces for intercultural dialogue, exchange and information

*“ Intercultural dialogue is the best guarantee of a more peaceful, just and sustainable world ” Robert Alan*

Societies have changed considerably in recent decades: today's diversity is a fact that can no longer be contested. In order to build more inclusive societies, diversity has to be seen and used as a positive instrument for further development and growth. Doing so means trying to integrate everyone's point of view and to recognise that everyone, whatever his/her religious or cultural background might be, should have the same right and opportunity to express his/her opinion.

Opinions are obviously influenced by the culture one belongs to, which possibly leads to misunderstanding and confusion. The best way to remedy this is to have a general forum or space to share information, to present the different cultures constituting a society and to enable dialogue to be established among different communities within society.



**“Coexister”** is a French youth movement that has been advocating **active co-existence** since 2009 through a method of peer education aimed at experiencing the diversity of religions and beliefs, and using this as a means of fostering unity and **social cohesion**. To this end, different activities to promote dialogue are carried out each day by members in order to dismantle prejudices. Furthermore, entering into dialogue is not an end in itself: it is the first step to achieving awareness, solidarity and respect. With these aims in mind, each local group organises many activities: debates, exhibitions, collections of clothes and toys, blood donations, and activities with orphans or homeless people.

 In 2012, the 12-Star City of **Amadora (Portugal)**, took part in the ELDW by organising a **forum** on **“Intercultural mediation as a tool for the construction of intercultural cities”** to bring together social workers, local associations, NGOs and the general public in order to present different initiatives aimed at promoting social cohesion. This forum provided an opportunity for 160 participants to reflect, discuss and exchange experiences, fundamental in this time of crisis when it is imperative to ensure social cohesion and conflict prevention.



The “Guest Theatres Project” was launched during the ELDW 2015 by **Antalya Metropolitan Municipality (Turkey)**. The project was aimed at opening a space of **intercultural dialogue based on the power of theatre** to provide artistic and cultural exchanges between countries, and to share mutual experiences and ideas. By inviting theatre groups from abroad to the city, Antalya Metropolitan Municipality Theatre brought people together. The success of these theatre activities is even planned to be extended to the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, Azerbaijan and Germany.



European Local Democracy Week





This commitment to bringing people together may be the first step towards integration in an inclusive society.

#### 4. Find common areas to integrate all groups of society

*“The deepest level of communication is not communication, but communion. It is wordless ... beyond speech ... beyond concept.” Thomas Merton*

It is vital to find common areas, of interest to everyone, in which people have a real desire to become involved to reach a mutual goal. Where there is no common tradition or even no common language, many approaches can be adopted in order to promote and foster inclusion and dialogue between different groups within society. Sport, for instance, is a very useful means. Volunteering and solidarity fairs are also excellent opportunities to bring citizens together.

As they are the future of society, students should be motivated to experience community activism beyond school, or even within the university context. In December 2015, as part of the National Day of Persons with Disabilities, the Disability Support Centre of the University of **Avignon** (France) hosted a coffee-debate, organised by the **Association for the social and professional integration of people with disabilities (ADAPT)**, to discuss and address the prejudices about disability in career development and in the job market. At the same time, there was an exhibition of photographs to pay tribute to people with disabilities, educate and raise awareness.

Every citizen needs to be motivated to strengthen relationships between all groups of society, especially at an **intergenerational** level.

 In this regard, during the ELDW 2014, **Ialoveni** (Republic of Moldova) organised a workshop **“We live in a democratic country, we help elderly persons”**, attended by members of the Organisation of Veterans and Pensioners of Ialoveni. An open dialogue with the mayor’s team focused on transparency of decision making, the daily problems of the elderly, local funds and collection points to support vulnerable groups among the inhabitants, as well as co-operation and collaboration with local social workers in organising cultural and benevolent operations.

 In 2012, the municipality of the “12-Star” City of **Festos** (Greece) organised a number of initiatives aimed at **increasing awareness about volunteering among young people**. To this end, a meeting was organised with youngsters to discuss volunteering opportunities and develop a joint action plan for future activities in the municipality in this field. The organisation of the meeting required the voluntary participation of trainers who had implemented lifelong learning programmes in the municipality of Festos.



## 5. Facilitate migrants' integration and combat radicalisation

*"Isn't it a characteristic of the age we live in that it has made everyone in a way a migrant and a member of a minority?" Amin Maalouf*

There can be no inclusive society as long as part of it is left outside. Promoting migrants' integration is a multi-faceted goal: apart from building an equal and more democratic society, this strategy enables everyone to benefit fairly from the added value of diversity for the social, cultural and economic development of society. In addition, the inclusion of migrants in society is the best way to prevent and fight radicalisation and extremism which both surface and grow when people are excluded or isolated.

There are many ways of making this integration possible. Creating a database to foster education and to implement good behaviour at school, for instance, can be a promising start.

"Aula intercultural", (intercultural classroom), the Spanish web-portal of intercultural education, is an **educational project** of the UGT (General Union of Workers), funded by the EU (European Integration Fund) and Spain. Every year, on International Migrants Day (18 December), Aula

Intercultural takes the opportunity to address this issue with children and to continue the fight against racism. The portal provides teaching tools, available for free to everybody: games, stories or even songs can be found which can help to get children acquainted with cultural expressions relating to people from other cultures, and thereby foster peaceful living together.

<http://aulaintercultural.org/materiales/materiales-didacticos/>

 However, understanding the situation of migrants must not be restricted to children alone. Everyone should have the opportunity to exchange experiences in order to make the best possible use of cultural diversity. During the ELDW 2012, the city of **Örebro** (Sweden) held its annual **Democracy and Tolerance Week**. Participating associations and organisations arranged theme nights, lunches and evening seminars, lectures, meetings and exhibitions focusing on three topic areas: Roma communities in Örebro and in Europe, honour-related issues, and the situation of children in low-income families. The Democracy and Tolerance Week was concluded with a national seminar on "The role of religion in community planning". This highlighted the fact that religion is a key factor in the integration of refugees and other immigrants and that understanding and co-operation are necessary in a multicultural society.



In pursuit of these objectives, in February 2016 the **Quilliam Foundation** (United Kingdom), a counter-extremism think-tank set up for combating extremism, promoting pluralism and inspiring changes, organised an event entitled “Conversations for curious minds”. The debate dealt with the theme “**Radicalisation and Extremism: The key challenges of our time?**”, with a focus on how women and young people can counter extremism. The debate was attended by Hazel Blears, Former UK Minister with responsibility for counter-terrorism.



Finally, an important aspect of the successful integration of migrants is helping them to become familiar with the society they will live in.

 The city council of **Metz** (France) has taken part on many occasions in the ELDW, and makes considerable efforts to assist the many immigrants who arrive in the city and offer them coaching to help them achieve their personal goals. The association “Inter Service Migrants / Est” was created in 1981, with the aim of fostering relations and communication between French nationals and foreigners in France and facilitating the cultural expression of foreigners. In this regard, between 2011 and 2013, the association implemented the “**I, you, he integrates, we integrate**” project, comprising three information sessions (over five days) for immigrants to offer them an interactive way of learning about the society they want to live in. Nearly 200 people took part in this project designated by the European Integration Fund of the EU as an example of good practice in terms of the reception of immigrants.

