

Young People—The Future of Public Transport

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Abstract

Public transport is one of the first tools a youngster uses to discover the world and to gain independence. Their first steps on public transport facilities often make them feel self-empowered. The role of public transport in young people's life is large, as is the presence and trust of youth in public transport organizations. Through its Youth Project, the UITP is committing itself in different ways to promote youth participation as a key to successful programming. The UITP Youth Project involves young people in relevant aspects of programming through the Youth Project Awards, and encourages dialogue between governments and youth groups through the Youth Parliaments. It also supports youth initiatives to build their organizational, advocacy and programming capacities, and provide opportunities for young people to voice their demands through collaboration with international organizations.

The UITP Youth Project

The youths have been one of the top priorities of the UITP General Secretariat since 2005. The UITP Youth Project recognizes the strong mutual links between public transport organizations and young people. It aims to bring public transport organizations to consider young people as essential for public transport, and to prepare young people to think of public transport as a critical component of their lives.

To promote active youth participation and leadership, we must first change the way adults perceive and deal with young people, as their capacities are often unrecognized or undervalued. At the same time, we must take into consideration their age and maturity levels as well as relevant cultural, gender and

economic factors. This is exactly what the UITP has been doing through its Youth Project, committing itself in different ways to promote youth participation as a key to successful programming. The key elements of the Youth Project involve:

- Promoting projects for the youths, through the **Youth Project Awards**;
- Encouraging dialogue between governments and youth groups, through the **Youth Parliament**; and
- Supporting youth initiatives, building their organizational, advocacy and programming capacities, and providing opportunities for young people to voice their demands for education and other services through **Collaborations with International Organizations**.

Since the launch of the UITP Youth Project with the Youth Project Awards in 2005, and the UITP's 57th World Congress 2007 in Helsinki, the emphasis on youth participation has gained ground and acceptance with our members. Our members have been very supportive of all our initiatives through participation, organization of events, concrete proposals and communication. One important result is that more and more of our public transport operators are getting closer to their young customers, educating them to respect and take responsibility in the usage of public transport facilities, offering them cultural and artistic events, and involving them in promoting safety and security, and fighting vandalism.

Youth Project Awards

The first stage of the UITP Youth Project was marked by the creation of the Youth Project Awards.

The first edition of the Awards focused on public transport initiatives in favour of young people, preferably realized in collaboration with young citizens. The projects should contribute, directly or indirectly, to better mobility (including easy and affordable mobility for teenagers) and social integration for all.

Figure 1: Maquette of the Youth Project Award (2nd Edition)



Hence, the projects should combine public transport with values that are important for the young people, such as social interaction, conviviality, freedom, speed, adventure, pleasure and innovations; and with a direct link to core areas in the young people's lifestyles such as culture, education, leisure and first jobs. At the same time, the projects may also help fight road fatalities among young drivers, tomorrow's congestion, social exclusion, generation barriers and unemployment.

UITP received 40 projects covering wide-ranging issues, including educational and vocational training, cultural issues, environmental sustainability, safety and security, and social inclusion matters. The projects were detailed, concrete, modern and innovative. Each project demonstrated very visible results in terms of employment, safety and changing the behaviours of youths and the image of public transport. Projects such as Cuta International Youth Summit on Sustainable Urban Transportation, the Internship Project from Metro Sao Paulo and RATP's marketing campaign on Imagin'R card are just some examples of the incredible variety received. The Singapore Land Transport Authority won the first International UITP Youth Project Award in the category 'Improving Mobility of Young People' with an educational game developed in an immersive 3D environment.

The second edition of the Awards will focus on promoting public transport best practices in favour of youths. The winners will be presented with the Awards at the 58th UITP World Congress in Vienna in June 2009. *Figure 1* is a maquette of the Award.

Through the Youth Project Awards, participants and winners from all over the world have come to recognize UITP as a major actor in promoting changes in their professional lives, as well as the public transport operators, regulators and industry players for their value, efforts and activities in these directions.

Youth Parliament

Young people are heavily dependent on public transport. It is often their only way to reach school, working places, sports facilities and any other locations where they live and build their future. And through their views, we can predict how public transport will evolve.

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The UITP Youth Parliament initiative recognizes the distinctiveness of youth cultures and ideologies and advocates a participatory decision-making process for youth policies. The initiative aims to provide opportunities for young people's full participation in society and plans to set in place long-term strategic instruments that improve their social opportunities.

The idea of a Youth Parliament was first mooted at UITP's 57th World Congress in Helsinki. A small delegation from Helsinki University went on stage to comment on the Youth Project Award winners. From there, we decided to recreate similar sessions where young people were invited to participate in

important UITP events all over the world and present their views on the subjects discussed during the events. After the events, they generally continued to be committed to public transport issues through the respective local UITP members.

Through the Youth Parliament, UITP reaches out to both organized and informal youth groups at private and public schools and universities, and young interns dealing with urban, environmental and public transport issues. It helps to create and improve spaces where ideas and experiences are shared, to tap on young people's creative potential and recognize its uniqueness. Youth participation is also essential to the development of successful programming.

With energy, ambition and belief in their own capabilities, young people can be powerful agents of positive changes. Including young people in issues that directly affect them contributes to their self-confidence while collaboration with adults who share some of their views reinforces their ideas and values. The experience of contributing to a cause, a decision or a group can play a crucial part in developing a sense of responsibility, purpose and self-worth in the young people. This can help prepare young people to exercise the rights and responsibilities of adulthood

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and citizenship, and develop their sense of identity too.

Young people, aged 15 to 24, have been invited to join Youth Parliaments in the following cities from the UITP Regions: Helsinki, Karlsruhe, Guadalajara, Johannesburg, Vancouver, Milan, Istanbul, Taipei and Vienna. Each Parliament produced a report at the end of their sessions. These reports have been presented at the closing sessions of UITP events in these cities. *Figure 2* shows such a presentation by the Youth Parliament at the UITP Sustainable Development Conference in Milan.

Figure 2: Presentation by the Youth Parliament in Milan



At the World Congress, a global Youth Advisory Parliament comprising representatives from the nine Parliaments will give feedback on their UITP experience, and advise on the needs and wants of the youths for public transport. For the first time, they will share their ideas and communicate their common vision for the future. The Youth Advisory Parliament will also deliver the Final Worldwide Report, a comprehensive set of recommendations on public transport planning, policy-making and programming to decision makers at the Congress to secure

the commitment of politicians on youth and public transport policies.

Collaboration with International Organizations

Today, half of the world's population is under the age of 25. This includes the largest ever generation of adolescents who are approaching adulthood in a rapidly changing world. And the number and proportion of urban young people is increasing dramatically. That is why one of the focus areas of the UITP Youth Project is to work in collaboration with international organizations and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) worldwide, such as UNESCO and Youth Forums in Latin America and Canada.

The UITP Youth Project aims to valorize public spaces which shape youth cultures and identities.

Young people are the main creative force shaping our culture and the UITP Youth Project aims to valorize public spaces which shape youth cultures and identities. Public spaces have an intrinsic role in the development of our societies. They allow young people to exchange ideas and trigger their creative potential. They make it possible for youth cultures to express themselves outside the framework of the dominant culture. Public areas foster the generation of symbols, rituals and practices that form the foundation of our culture. Improving existing public areas and creating new ones allow young people to build their identity as they reconcile their personal ideas with those shared by their peers.

We must therefore recognize the need for youths to access democratic arenas. Substituting public spaces with private and commercial areas will reduce places where people can meet without any commercial purpose.

The UITP, in partnership with UNESCO, will launch a project in 2009 to respond to the needs of young people in relation to the availability and quality of public spaces, and to understand the role of public transport in providing and improving public spaces for the young people. Together with UITP members, the project has planned a series of activities to highlight places like underground stations and bus stop areas as places where young people can feel free to gather spontaneously, to exchange ideas and socialize openly in a safe and secure environment, not places where people aggregate for anti-social behaviour. Through these activities, we aim to keep public spaces alive for our young people.

Online Public Transport and Youth Guide

There are thousands and thousands of publications available today on the topic of youths, but not many of them are really useful for public transport operators, industry players and authorities. Moreover, the number of these publications is so huge that it would be difficult to choose the right one. Hence UITP will be publishing an online Public Transport and Youth Guide which will consolidate its

past initiatives and future plans. This online guide will serve as a key resource for all the public transport actors who want to know more on the subject.

The online Public Transport and Youth Guide will be launched at UITP's 58th World Congress in June 2009 and will be available on the UITP website thereafter. It will contain all the reports from the Regional Youth Parliaments, and all winning projects from the two editions of the Youth Project Awards. In addition, ongoing activities with UNESCO and other NGOs and all the principal youth forums and organizations in the world will also be included.

Through this guide, UITP aims to let the public transport industry have a better view of youth issues, suggest ways to penetrate youth spaces to interact more with them and tap on their energy to provoke changes.

Conclusion

The UITP Youth Project is fundamental to building interventions and spreading the message to promote public transport, to broaden and raise awareness, stimulate interest and encourage the growth of new initiatives. More than that, it has an active role in youth's development. The young people are not only the future, they are already the present. We have to act decisively to influence their educational paths as only by doing this will we change their attitude towards public transport.



Alessandra Gorini was born in Rome where she took a PhD in Biology and became a scientific journalist for the Italian Broadcasting Channel (RAI). She has been responsible for the communication sector in scientific organizations such as World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and Greenpeace. Ms Gorini entered the world of public transport in 1997, and was seconded from the Public Transport Company of Rome, ATAC, to the European UITP department as expert of events and communication. After a few years there, she joined UITP as International Relations and President Programme Manager. She is managing and coordinating

the UITP Youth Project and dealing with Advocacy at UITP.