



## Chapter 2:

# ACTIVISM AND ADVOCACY

## | In the Context of the European Common values and the EU citizenship

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# Defining the concepts and the legal framework

The concept of citizenship dates back to the ancient Greece. At that time, a 'citizen' was the one who had the right to actively participate in the life of the state. Although it seems unusual to us right now, slaves, women, the poor, and the resident foreigners did not benefit from this right. Being a citizen was not to be considered only a right but first of all it was a duty.

Over the years, the concept of citizenship has evolved along with society. Today, one can be a citizen of one or more states. This imposes a certain relationship between the person and the state. The citizen has certain duties (e.g. paying taxes), while the state must guarantee the protection of rights and vital interests. Being a citizen today means not only being a legally protected bearer of rights and interests, but also being part of a community with a shared moral code and a common identity.

We can recognize four subsystems that are essential for the relationship between individual and society<sup>1</sup>:

- The political dimension of citizenship refers to political rights and responsibilities vis à vis the political system. The development of this dimension should come through knowledge of the political system and the promotion of democratic attitudes and participatory skills.
- The social dimension of citizenship has to do with the behavior between individuals in a society and requires some measure of loyalty and solidarity. Social skills and the knowledge of social relations in society are necessary for the development of this dimension.
- The cultural dimension of citizenship refers to the consciousness of a common cultural heritage. The cultural dimension should be developed through the knowledge of cultural heritage, and of history and basic skills (language competence, reading and writing).
- The economic dimension of citizenship concerns the relationship between an individual and the labor and consumer market. It implies the right to work and to a minimum subsistence level. Economic skills (for job-related and other economic activities) and vocational training play a key role in the fulfilment of this economic dimension.

We can say that these are the pillars on which citizenship is built.

Citizenship gives us the possibility and the responsibility to influence the society and being an active citizen. An active citizen plays a key role in improving the well-being of the community of which he or she is a part. The democratic citizenship of which we are part requires that our participation is based on three key concepts: pluralism, respect for human dignity and the rule of law.

Article 15 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* states as it follows:

1. Everyone has the right to a nationality.
2. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality.

This article is confirmed in the European Convention on Nationality of the Council of Europe (1997)<sup>2</sup>:

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1 <https://www.coe.int/en/web/compass/citizenship-and-participation#>

2 Explanatory Report to the European Convention on Nationality, Article 2 (a) and (b), <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list?module=treaty-detail&treaty-num=166#FN2>

1. Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.
2. Everyone has the right of equal access to public service in his country.
3. The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.

Article 22 of the same Declaration states also:

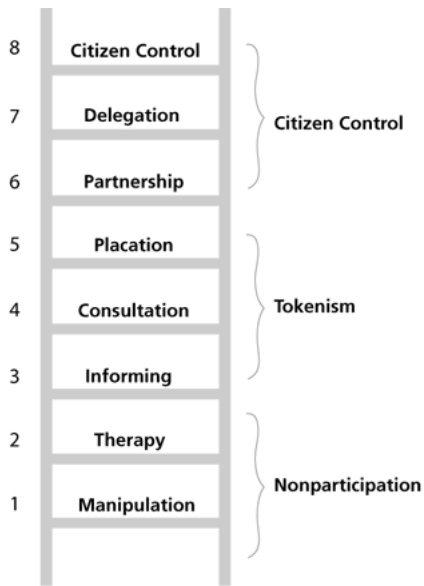
*Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social, and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.*

This means that, even if each state can determine its own laws, human rights and human dignity are absolute limits to the exercise of their sovereignty.

Human rights and the fully exercised nationality are closely linked: limitations to the right of expression, poor education or economic problems can effectively restrict democratic and active participation.

Participation can thus be seen as a virtuous circle: on one side democratic participation influences the improvement of our society, on the other side our society must enable us to condition it.

Sherry Arnstein, in 1969, compared the participation levels to a ladder:



Arnstein's Ladder (1969)  
Degrees of Citizen Participation

#### 1. MANIPULATION

The presence of citizens is used to achieve some other goals such as improving the image of institutions or winning elections

#### 2. THERAPY

Citizens are put in a visible position but have no role. They are used to gain consensus and often do not understand the meaning of what they are being exploited for

#### 3. INFORMING

Citizens are given some information but have no opportunity to have an influence as there is no feedback channel

#### 4. CONSULTATION

Citizens are given some active roles such as neighborhood meetings or public enquiries, but they still do not have the opportunity to have an impact

#### 5. PLACATION

Citizens have the opportunity to make suggestions and put proposals forward, but the decision-makers always have the final say

#### 6. PARTNERSHIP

Power is shared between citizens and power holders on the basis of a social pact

#### 7. DELEGATION

Citizens gain more power in the partnership with power holders and they can assure accountability

#### 8. CITIZEN CONTROL

The entire decision-making process belongs to the citizens without intermediaries or limitations



## The role of the NGOs in promoting active citizenship

NGOs stand exactly in the middle between politics and society. Like trade unions and other intermediate bodies, their task is to make decisions as shared as possible. In order to do this, NGOs have the task of accompanying citizens, providing them with the necessary tools to create responsible and sustainable paths of empowerment and activism. NGOs are also an important information tool for citizens. Over the years, especially since the end of the Cold War, their influence has grown, and many institutions have had to open their doors to NGO control. Thanks to the influence of NGOs, most government documents are freely available online. For example, summaries of meetings prepared by the Department of Public Information are available on the UN website. As Catinat and Vedel write:

*The open exchange and free flow of information is the main instrument of citizen participation in a democratic system; since democracy is a structure in which people make decisions on fundamental public policy issues, citizens, as decision-makers, need all or at least most of the information to make intelligent political choices.*

The function of NGOs is guaranteed by official EU documents:

- **THE EUROPEAN CONSENSUS<sup>3</sup>**  
The EU supports the broad participation of all stakeholders in countries' development and encourages all parts of society to take part. Civil society, including economic and social partners such as trade unions, employers' organizations and the private sector, NGOs and other non-state actors of partner countries in particular play a vital role as promoters of democracy, social justice and human rights. The EU will enhance its support for building capacity

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3 [https://unipd-centrodirittiumani.it/public/docs/EUparl\\_comm\(2006C\\_4601\).pdf](https://unipd-centrodirittiumani.it/public/docs/EUparl_comm(2006C_4601).pdf)

of non-state actors in order to strengthen their voice in the development process and to advance political, social and economic dialogue. The important role of European civil society will be recognised as well; to that end, the EU will pay particular attention to development education and raising awareness among EU citizens.

- **THE EUROPEAN INSTRUMENT FOR DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS, EIDHR**  
The origins of this project go back to 1994, with the creation of a special budget item by the European Parliament. It finances actions for the protection of human rights. Within the framework of the financial perspectives 2007-2013, Parliament and Council in December 2006 adopted a new legal basis for the EIDHR. The specific objectives place special emphasis on the role of civil society:
  - respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms, as proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international and regional human rights instruments, by promoting and consolidating democracy and democratic reforms in third countries, primarily through support for civil society organizations, to provide support and solidarity to human rights defenders and victims of repression and abuse, and to strengthen civil society active in the field of human rights and democracy promotion
  - supporting and strengthening the international and regional framework for the protection, promotion and monitoring of human rights, to promote democracy and the rule of law and to enhance the active role of civil society in these contexts
  - promoting confidence in and enhancing the reliability of electoral processes, in particular through election observation missions and through support for local civil society organizations involved in these processes
- **COTONOU AGREEMENT (2000)**  
It regulates the EU's relations with ACP (African, Caribbean, and Pacific) countries. It indicates among the objectives of the partnership the development of an active and organized civil society and among its principles the participation of civil society organizations. The Agreement also stipulates that non-state actors must be informed and consulted on cooperation policies and strategies, involved in the implementation of cooperation projects and programs, supported in the development of their capacities, and involved in political dialogue. Cotonou Agreement emphasizes the importance of civil society in peacebuilding and conflict prevention and resolution processes, and on activities that 'aim in particular to ensure a fair distribution of political, economic, social and cultural opportunities among all sectors of society, the strengthening of the democratic legitimacy and efficiency of governmental systems, the creation of effective mechanisms for the peaceful conciliation of group interests, the bridging of divides between different sectors of society and the promotion of an active and organized civil society.

This brief theoretical analysis of the topic has allowed us to highlight the centrality of active citizenship within European society and institutions. The protagonism of citizens, both individual and associated, is protected and promoted at all levels by the institutions.



## What is Citizen Science?

In the collective imagination, the scientific community is often seen as impenetrable, an 'ivory tower' into which only researchers and university professors are admitted. Reality does not match with this stereotypical view: more and more often, scientists are enlisting the help of voluntary citizens in their work bringing the public (i.e. non-professional scientists) into the heart of scientific research. This interesting phenomenon in which non-specialized volunteers step into the shoes of researchers, is called the Citizen Science. The term is used to refer to activities that involve citizens in research and in which they can make a significant contribution to an experiment or project. During these activities, institutions - research organizations, museums, or universities - and people - students, teachers or private individuals - who do not necessarily have a scientific background cooperate together towards a common goal.

This brings advantages for both sides:

- on the one hand, scientists can count on the collaboration of volunteers, perhaps spread over a large area, to develop large-scale monitoring and obtain a large amount of data that is difficult to obtain with traditional methods
- on the other hand, citizens feel that they are the key players in a relevant project, become more aware of scientific research, its importance as well as its limitations, and approach issues of social concern, such as climate change, biodiversity loss or pollution, with a more open attitude

In this way, an attempt is made to change the perception of citizens towards the world of research and to make science the heritage of all.

Thanks to Citizen Science, local groups of citizens can be mobilized and involved in the interest of the community. The citizen is no longer the passive subject of data collection, but is the main actor in all the stages of knowledge production: from the identification of the problem, to the identification of methodologies to analyze it, to the construction of communication and advocacy strategies that look at policy planning with a view to change, up to the possibility that the knowledge generated may represent, for example, the basis of legal processes aimed at re-establishing a principle of social and environmental justice. Citizen Science is also a tool to empower local communities, providing them with activation tools, advocacy, and skills to activate legal campaigns and actions to defend their territory and rights. Indeed, citizen participation can increase the effectiveness of administrative action and improve the quality of decisions. Over the years, precisely for these purposes the main public institutions at national, regional, and local level have in fact launched important initiatives on Open Data and civic monitoring, enabling a growing number of citizens and associations to become active in using this information to launch opinion campaigns, put issues on the political agenda and better understand the effectiveness of public action. All innovative processes, including the management of Open Data and civic monitoring, must therefore be placed in the context of overcoming the vision that pits citizens and the Public Administration against each other, encouraging the beginning of an equal relationship in which citizen and Administration work with the same purpose and walk in the same direction.

## Best practices

- SciStarter – [scistarter.org](https://scistarter.org)  
Probably the most important Citizen Science portal in the world. It allows citizens who want to get involved with researchers, communities, institutions, and organizations in various projects in various parts of the planet. There are over 150,000 registered users and the portal is used to support thousands of projects. Each user can search among the many projects by location, topic, age level, etc. We quote the objectives of SciStarter, which can be found at <https://scistarter.org/about> :
  - Enabling and encouraging people to learn about, participate in, and contribute to real science through both informal recreational activities and formal research efforts
  - Creating a shared space where scientists and project leaders can collaborate with people interested in working on or learning about their research projects
  - Satisfying the popular urge to tinker, build, and explore by making it simple and fun for everyone from all walks of life to turn their curiosities and concerns into real impact
- aSud Campaign “ReAttivi” – [asud.net](https://asud.net)  
ReATTIVI is in an awareness-raising and activation campaign with three projects in and around Rome to give citizens tools to control the quality of water, soil, and air in the city. It is an Extreme Citizen Science project: the aim is to channel active citizenship towards scientific research activities that aim to protect the environment. The Campaign is split into several projects, depending on the areas involved:
  - RomaUp – a project concerning the environmental protection of the Rome area. Core of the initiative is the pilot participatory monitoring project to analyze the water quality of the Tiber river, with 12 sampling campaigns, on a monthly basis, to be followed by an articulated and complex communication and advocacy action
  - ComunitAria - supported with the contribution of the Waldensian church, studies the air quality in the Colleferro area. It has trained 30 citizens to become Citizen Scientists. Thanks to the collaboration with La Sapienza, samplers have been installed to monitor particulate matter and identify the incidence of pollutant sources in the city. The results will help citizens to build an advocacy action towards the public institutions oriented towards the mitigation



of emissions, sources of atmospheric pollution

- Walk Up Aniene - financed thanks to the European ACTION project, was implemented in the Aniene nature reserve in the city of Rome covering 630 hectares for 15 km along the Aniene river. Walk Up Aniene channelled attention to the impacts of urbanisation and air and water contamination by monitoring the quality of biodiversity and river functionality of the Aniene along the lower reaches of the river. The project involved about 80 visitors to the reserve and made it possible to collect data to create a map of the environmental state of the river stretch and to systematise bottom-up proposals for the management of the nature reserve
- Outright International  
Outright International was one of the first the first NGOs to take action after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. From the earliest stages of the drama that Kyiv is experiencing, it has provided support to the LGBTQI+ community. Outright International works with various partners around the world and exposes human rights violations that LGBTQI+ people suffer. Their website reads - We support innovative advocacy and use our collective might to carry the voices of activists to advance equality and end violence and discrimination. We drive change, power, and meaningful progress across governments, institutions, businesses, and communities.

## Task 1: Civic Monitoring

As we have seen, Civic Monitoring is an important tool for citizen empowerment. Try to start a monitoring experience by following these simple 6 steps:

1. Choose an EU funded project from your Country open data platform. Search for projects in your city or region.
2. Involve relevant stakeholders and experts for the particular project selected, including schools, NGOs, public institutions.
3. Learn everything you need about administrative procedures, news, contextual data.
4. Inspect the project site, make photos and videos; identify key people involved in the policy programming and project implementation; plan interviews.
5. Create the civic monitoring report: describe the project, evaluate its progress and if finished its effectiveness.
6. Share results with policymakers, journalists, and interested citizens or make suggestions on how to improve the project.

## Task 2: Research on active citizenship

Your task is to take your cue from the experiences around you and assess what you can do to facilitate the progress of your community.

- Week 1: Research and explore Active Citizenship experiences in the community where you live and in neighboring areas. You can also make a journal with all the news and information you can find.
- Week 2: Repeat the exercise from Week 1, focusing this time on a broader field: that of your country.

- Week 3: What about Europe? There are so many examples of active citizenship in our Union!
- Week 4: Building on what you have learnt, reflect on what you would like to change and think of a way to become an Active Citizen.

## Task 3: Improving the local community

Building on the experiences of the previous exercise, try to plan an action in your local community.

Step by step instructions:

1. Identify an issue:  
What is wrong in my community? Is there a problem I can help solving?
2. Set a goal:  
What could be changed for the chosen problem to be solved?
3. Find information:  
What do I know about the problem? Has anyone else dealt with it in the past? How? Can I improve on your experience, or do I need a new approach? Are there similar experiences in other parts of my country or in Europe?
4. Involve your community:  
You can organize public meetings, write newspaper articles, or simply have a talk to raise awareness among as many people as possible. You work better as a team!
5. From issue to result:  
Using the tools at your disposal, pose the issue to political authorities, schools, citizens and stakeholders. Involve citizens who have decided to join your campaign in a brainstorming session and propose your solution to the community. Use what you have learnt in the previous paragraphs and be inspired by the experiences of other actors.

## Workshop plan: Activism and Advocacy in the EU

Objectives:

- Recognizing the importance of Activism and advocacy in EU
- Identifying alternative methods of Activism and advocacy in EU
- Developing strategies for promoting Activism and advocacy in EU

Materials

needed:

- Handouts with definitions and examples of activism
- Pens and papers
- Flipcharts or a white board

Step by step instructions:

1. Introduction (20 min)  
Begin the workshop by introducing the topic of Activism and advocacy in EU. Provide handouts that define the concept (see Handout 1) and explain EU promotes activism and advo-

cacy. Also explain why activism and advocacy is a fundamental behavior in our society. Ask learners to share any prior knowledge or experiences they have with these concepts.

2. Discussion (30 min)

Divide the class into small groups and provide each group with examples of activism and advocacy in the EU (see Handout 2). Encourage learners to discuss the examples and to identify the impact of activism and advocacy on individuals and communities.

3. Personal Reflection (30 min)

Ask learners to reflect on their own lives and identify examples of activism and advocacy that they have experienced or they know. Encourage them to share their reflections with the class.

4. Conclusion (20 min)

Summarize the main points of the workshop and invite learners to share their takeaways. Encourage them to think about ways they can promote activism and advocacy in their personal and professional lives, to become an activist, and provide them with resources that they can use to continue learning about these topics.

## Handout 1: Activism definitions

Activism is a social or political action that seeks to bring about change in society. It involves the active engagement of individuals or groups in challenging established power structures or institutions in order to promote social justice, equality, and human rights. Activism can take many forms, including protest, civil disobedience, direct action, community organizing, advocacy, and education.

At its core, activism is about using collective power to challenge systems of oppression, discrimination, and inequality. Activists aim to bring about structural changes that will improve the lives of marginalized groups and challenge the status quo. Activists may focus on a variety of issues, including environmental justice, economic inequality, racial justice, gender equality, LGBTQ+ rights, disability rights, and more.

Activism is often driven by a strong sense of passion and urgency, and may involve personal risk, sacrifice, and dedication. Activists may face opposition from those who benefit from the current power structures and may encounter resistance from those who are apathetic or uninformed about the issues at hand. Nonetheless, activism has played a vital role in many social and political movements throughout history and continues to be an important tool for creating positive change in society.

## Handout 2: Examples of youth-led activism in the EU

- **Fridays For Future**  
Started by Swedish activist Greta Thunberg, Fridays For Future is a global movement of young people who skip school on Fridays to demand action on climate change. The movement has spread across Europe and has inspired numerous youth-led protests and campaigns calling for greater climate action.
- **Youth For Climate Justice**  
Youth For Climate Justice is a youth-led network of climate activists from across Europe. The group advocates for a just transition to a low carbon economy, and organizes protests and direct actions to raise awareness about climate change.
- **Students Against TTIP**

Students Against TTIP is a network of young people from across Europe who oppose the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). The group argues that TTIP will undermine environmental and labor protections and increase corporate power at the expense of ordinary citizens.

- **European Youth Forum**  
The European Youth Forum is an umbrella organization for youth-led groups and movements across Europe. The Forum advocates for youth rights and participation in decision-making and provides a platform for young people to voice their opinions and concerns.
- **Youth4Peace**  
Youth4Peace is a network of young people from across Europe who are working to promote peace and prevent conflict. The group advocates for greater investment in youth-led peacebuilding initiatives and provides training and support to young people who want to get involved in peacebuilding efforts.