



ACTIVEU “Let’s get active! Incentives for citizens active participation in the democratic life of the European Union”

NATIONAL CITIZENS FORUM

Jesi, 20th of May 2015

**National recommendations for diminishing the obstacles for active participation/
introducing incentives for becoming an active citizen**

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1. Thematic area 1: Main reasons and root causes of not participating in the democratic life of the European Union

/Goal: Deepened understanding of the reasons/ root causes of not participating in the EUs democratic life in respective countries./

The group of citizens pondered the root causes of not participating in the democratic life on different levels: local, national and EU level. They identified a variety of factors which could influence the participation process, defining that the most relevant are: *the personal life experiences, the educational and training opportunities, the environment in which people have grown up.*

The participants analyzed how these factors could affect the individual *skills and attitude* towards participation. They noticed that these aspects are related with the disposition *to dream, to imagine, to have clear goals in personal life, to feel self-confidence* in order to share with other people ideas and project for create „something greater”. Consequently the absence of *communication and relation* between citizens and institutions can affect active citizenship and participation. The group noted that the main reason of not participating in the democratic life, seems to be exactly the *failing and losing faith in Institutions*. This concerns also the participation in EU democratic life because often *EU is perceived as detached*, especially concerning the institutional framework, and as a consequence doesn't benefit from the trust of citizens.

2. Thematic area 2: The possible incentives, that could encourage the citizens to participate in the European Union's policies shaping.

/Goal: Deepened understanding of the possible incentives for the citizens to play a full part in the EU development and policies shaping in respective countries./

The analysis concerning the reasons of not participating in the EU democratic life, became food for thought for the discussion concerning possible incentives for encourage citizens to participate in the European Union's policies shaping. The considerations regarding participation contemplated the substantial factors which could influence the participation process as: *the personal life experiences, the educational and training opportunities, the environment in which people have grown up.*

Initially the participants identified, in order of importance, the *main goals* that Europe should pursue during the *EU development and policies shaping*:

- to ensure peace, security, sustainable and people development, the human rights protection;
- to ensure the development of a highly competitive social market economy, ensuring full employment and the pursuit of social progress, thanks to the fight against social exclusion, discrimination and inequality;
- to promote peace and the well-being of people;
- to provide European citizens an area of freedom, security and justice without borders;
- to protect the environment and promote sustainable development.

Consequently the group underlined that to incentivate participation and to foster grassroots democracy, it is important to *promote meetings between people, gatherings* of dreams and ideas, sharing of objectives and foster *intercultural integration*. Through discussion and democratic process at local level an idea can become a project, a project could involve and activate the community, the community could evolves *from local stages to European ones*.

Incentives to foster communication represent the necessary condition to encourage citizens participation at EU level and therefore linguistic skills hold a basilar tasks.

Moreover the group identified as important means to approach Europe and citizens, the possibility to *move within Europe*, providing *foreign exchange* options for studies and for job, encouraging *EU knowledge and experience*.

Active participation in the European Union's policies shaping could be encouraged by the possibility of *cross-border citizens cooperation* (i.e. Erasmus and Leonardo/Life Long Learning Programme), improving EU experience, educational and training opportunities and skills.

3. Thematic area 3: Recommendations for diminishing the obstacles for active participation (propositions & ideas)

/Within the 4 topics of the on-line research:

- 1) Get involved*
- 2) Get active*
- 3) Elections and participation*
- 4) EU and participation/*

At this point, given the prior elements concerning obstacles and incentives for participation, the crucial question becomes: how do we manage such situation?

The fundamental proposal to diminishing the obstacles for active participation is to *foster trust within EU citizens and institution*, allowing effective knowledge, exchange and relationship. The trust is established through encounters, therefore is needed to *break down economic and linguistic barriers*, starting from youth. The distance with which is perceived EU could be decreased through bodies closer to citizens, who pose as intermediaries.

For this purpose the recommendation is to move on from occasional events/workshops intended to encourage the citizens to active participate in the European Union's policies. The group underlined that to obtain a continuity it is important to support different suitable and effective local initiatives, through the efforts of local associations and NGOs. A feasible proposition is to exploit public places to stimulate ideas and project, starting from the diffusion of information and approaching to the promotion of grassroots initiatives concerning EU topics/matters (i.e. web radio, free radio station, etc.).

4. Thematic area 4: Recommendations for introducing incentives for becoming active citizen (propositions & ideas)

/Within the 4 topics of the on-line research:

- 1) Get involved*
- 2) Get active*
- 3) Elections and participation*
- 4) EU and participation/*

As first step for introducing incentives for active citizenship the group identified the main requirements to promote exchanges and discussion within citizens: the opportunity to be one's self and to freely express personal opinions and thoughts. Referring to European level is required to foster the knowledge of English language.

Other recommendations concerned to:

- Support intermediary organizations/bodies within EU and citizens in order to promote proximity and encouraging grassroots participation;
- Promote established meetings between citizens in order to promote information and active participation (maybe through the method of " Reciprocal Maieutic Approach" by Danilo Dolci);
- Foster awareness of citizens concerning EU topics and cultures within schools and media communication;
- Encourage local information and support actions about training and job opportunities at European level;
- Promote positive competition, as incentives for citizens to improve and activate themselves.

5. Thematic area –5: What role the Non-governmental organizations could/ should play in fostering democratic participation of the citizens on the EU level (ideas & recommendations)?

The opinions/ experiences/ideas regarding using the direct democracy tools, especially on the European Unions' level: Petition to the European Parliament; European Citizens' Initiative (ECI); Complain to the European Ombudsman; Referendum on the European level; Others

/For some reasons – most of the EU citizens do not engage themselves in the process of shaping the EU politics. The question is “ why”? Because they do not feel the need to be involved? Would like to be involved, but don't know how they could do that? Are not aware of the existing direct democracy tools? Are aware of the tools but don't know how to use them? Or think there's no use to use them since the tools don't work?.../

Starting from the Forum's discussion and propositions, the mediator and the tutors read between the lines that citizens need intermediaries to be active involved and to reconquer trust in EU institution and policies. NGOs can in this sense make a contribution in fostering a more participatory democracy both within the local and European community. NGOs are recognised as a significant component of civil society and can foster the knowledge about EU institution, policies and democratic tools. They can contribute and mediate to policy discussions with specific local and EU expertise. Therefore NGOs can work as intermediaries to reduce the distance with which is perceived EU and local institution, fostering trust and incentivizing interest and participation in policies shaping. Thanks to their links at local, regional, national and European level, NGOs could represent the key actors in promoting active participation from local to European level, providing information, guidance, mediation and connections.

Activity 3. The National Citizens' Forums designing, conducting and summing-up

The summary of the event

Participation

The event involved 30 citizens, including 2 participants from the city of **Castellinno** (IT), 1 participant from the city of **Chiaravalle** (IT), 2 participants from the city of **Montecarotto** (IT), 1 participant from the city of **Angeli di Rosora** (IT), 1 participant from the city of **Cupramontana** (IT), 13 participants from the city of **Jesi** (IT), 1 participant from the city of **Porto San Giorgio** (IT), 1 participant from the city of **Castelplanio** (IT), 1 participant from the city of **Monteroberto** (IT), 1 participant from the city of **Monte San Vito** (IT), 2 participants from the city of **Montecarotto** (IT), 1 participant from the city of **San Paolo di Jesi** (IT), 1 participant from the city of **Morro D'Alba** (IT), 1 participant from the city of **Serra San Quirico** (IT), 2 participants from the city of **Moie** (IT), 1 participant from the city of **Falconara** (IT).

Location/ Dates

The event took place in **Jesi - Italy**, on the 20th of May 2015.

Short description

The aim of the event was to discuss with citizens about the project topics and the first results of the open on-line research. The citizens involved, as on-line research participants, represent the different population age groups, including youth, adults and some people around 60 years old.

The NCF was realized in cooperation with the „Festival dell'educazione (Festival of Education)”¹, in the auditorium of a High School in Jesi. The NCF was lead by experienced moderators: 2 tutors (COOSS project staff), 1 conductor - expert trainer in Reciprocal Maieutic Approach (RMA). The RMA is a popular dialectic methodology of research and self-analysis tested by Danilo Dolci starting from the 50s and by the present Centre for the Creative Development within the educational and sociological field nowadays. This approach promotes a sense of responsibility in the communities and individuals and can be defined as a “collective exploration process that considers individuals' experience and intuition as a reference point” (Dolci, 1996)². The event started with a brief participant introductions and the presentation of the Project „Let's get Active!”. The NCF was conducted as a maieutic workshop, the participants questioned and uncovered themselves in front of the others, and with the others started a common research path of analysis, testing and creative co-education. The NCF results are based on the sharing process of answering, exploring and creating, they arise from participants' experience and its sharing, and required reciprocity in communication. At the beginning the conductor started asking some questions about the project topics as explained, considering the 5 different thematic areas. Participants searched for the answers together and make other close examinations. The NCF was an intense dialogue about active participation in EU democratic life, that allowed the freely expression of citizens' reflections basing both on their local experiences and their personal EU discovers and on the choral verification of the proposals.

¹ <https://www.facebook.com/FestivalEducazioneJesi>

² <http://en.danilodolci.org/reciprocalmaieutic/>



Attachments

1. List of the participants
2. Promotion & impact information

