



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

NATIONAL CITIZENS FORUM

Bielsko-Biała, 9th of June 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 Forum participants defined 3 main thematic areas here:

1. Personal reasons;
2. Mental barriers;
3. External problems.

Among the “personal reasons” were named issues such as: being busy, being ashamed/shy, being lazy and – in general – searching for excuses. The other aspect named was that some people do not know how to vote (they don’t know the procedures), are uninterested in voting or any other democratic activity. It was also mentioned that some people come from environments with no voting/ being active traditions (for example have parents who have never voted/ been active).

Among the so called “mental barriers” were named: being convinced that nobody is listening to me, that being active and involved doesn’t really work (for example the civic activities are not effective, the petitions are not considered/ processed) and the lack of trust towards authorities – in general – being disappointed with democracy. Other issues mentioned were lack of motivation, ignorance, having [unchanged] mentality shaped by the previous system [*the communism – when being active = serving the oppressive power*] and low self-esteem of some people, especially those living on the rural areas. The possible reason named was also the fear of social ostracism due to low anonymity when it comes to our political preferences. Excluding the youth (below 18 years old) from the decisive process was also mentioned.

With reference to the “external problems” area, the aspects mentioned were: unawareness of the procedures and/or complicated procedures; the lack of relevant and systematic debates about democratic issues; low use of the new media (for example voting through Internet). The democratic procedures are often not adjusted to the needs of the disabled people. The candidates for authorities are not being perceived as good ones; and when elected - ignore the voters. The other problems named were also legal and institutional barriers (the conviction that you have to ‘know certain people’ to do something/ act effectively); anonymity of the EU Parliament members (‘so who is the EU Parliament member?’ ‘Who is it?’) and their work (‘what are they working on?’, ‘How does their work look like?’, ‘What are they actually doing in the EU Parliament?’). In this context also low command of English – the language barrier – was named [since many documents and live-presentations from the EU Parliament you could watch would be in English]. Last but not least – the role of the media was named as inappropriate: low interest of the media in both the local level events and the European level events and the lack of promoting good, valuable outcomes of various activities (on the local and European level). Instead the media are mostly interested in what happens on the national levels.

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 Forum participants named 5 main thematic areas here, which were called:

1. Education;
2. Politics;
3. Innovations;
4. Benefits;
5. Others.

In the field of "education", the possible incentives could be:

At schools: better quality of language teaching; better communicating/teaching of knowledge concerning civic activity possibilities and the knowledge about society and civil society; organizing more trips to learn other regions and the local communities. Also in connection with education: more scholarships/ traineeships for the youth in the EU; better recognition of the non-formal education (the employers recognizing also competences acquired during non-formal education); more study visits to learn the practical solutions. Other ideas named were also: Some informative meetings on "how to get active" organizing; founding 'citizens information centres' which would be easily available, working flexible hours, having competent staff; increased activity of non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

The other aspect is showing/promoting positive, good practices and showing the benefits of being actively involved in the democratic life of the society.

The second thematic area named was "politics".

Here expectations towards politicians/ authorities/ civil servants were named, such as: Satisfying the local community needs better, so the real, grassroots needs would be realized; limiting the empty promises, less aggression in politics and the local community life; better, more clear information transfer from the authorities to the society; more/ better dialogue between politicians and the local community (for example organizing some picnics when the civil servants talk about their work); partnership relations with authorities. On some more general level the incentives could be: Visible development of the country; rebuilding trust between the citizen and the authorities; better institutional (offered by the state) support for those, who would like to be democratically involved (tax allowances for example); clearer, more comprehensible information and encouraging to cooperation; more transparency in the public grants (subsidies) mechanisms and procedures and simplifying the grants mechanisms and other procedures – so the active citizen could have the feeling that he/she is not wasting his/her energy being active.

In the „innovation” area were named, from one side, introducing some innovative solutions making being active easier for the citizens (for example the possibility to vote via Internet). From the other side - offering a full access to the public information and public data with the use of new technologies (open source).

While talking about „benefits”, the ideas for incentives named were: Literally benefits, such as for example free vouchers for food, cinema ticket or match or other gifts from one side, and personal benefits, such as satisfaction from one’s own activities, broadening one’s horizons and widening the group of acquaintances or nice, active ways of spending free time – from the other side.

Finally, within the „other” thematic area, two ideas were named: One was the role of parents, encouraging to democratic activity. The other - important for a group of the Forum participants – was awareness of avoiding stereotyping certain groups, perceiving all their members the way we usually see a narrow, but most visible/loud faction of them – with the football fans as an example (the most visible group are the stadium hooligans – which doesn’t mean that all the football fans are hooligans).

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/*

There were 5 thematic areas distinguished here:

1. What could (should) the authorities change [how could the authorities contribute to diminishing the obstacles/barriers]?
2. What could the society (community) change?
3. How could the initiative - groups work/act?
4. Cooperation and dialogue [for diminishing the tensions appearing, for fast handling the conflict situations and fast resolving of the disputable issues between the public authorities and the citizens].
5. Inter – sectorial approach: what could the public authorities, the initiative - groups and the citizens have use of - and also – what should be the subject of cooperation and dialogue.

In more detail, the propositions and ideas for how to diminish barriers for active, democratic involvement, were:

With regard to 1. “What could (should) the authorities change” the ideas named were:

- Increasing respecting the human rights;
- increasing the freedom of speech, the possibility to express one’s opinion for every person;
- diminishing the aggression, oppressiveness of the authorities towards the citizens (caused, among others, by the increasing scope of surveillance over citizens);
- enabling the citizens to fully realize their civil rights;
- increasing the general level of competence among the civil servants (for example by changing rules for recruiting the civil servants, higher demand regarding the candidates’ competences);
- introducing clear rules concerning public hearing of the citizen in front of the authorities;
- increasing the mobility of the ‘activation points’. There is a lack of ‘citizens activity centres’, and even if present – are created in large cities and have no branches in smaller cities. The idea is so these centres would be mobile, present also in smaller town/villages, organizing various activities there);

- introducing changes in the 'civic initiative' structure, the way the 'civic initiative' procedure works (introducing solutions thanks to which the 'civic initiative' would really work, would have influence on reality; the authorities are listening to the citizens and taking seriously into consideration the ideas/needs of the society/ community, taking care of them);
- assigning additional, separate part of money, out of the 'European sources', and devoting them, solely, for the civic activation;
- increasing the level of the feeling of security (including increasing the economic status of the citizens. It was explained by the Forum participants that the financial condition of a person influences the amount of time that could be spent for being involved in social matters/activity);
- increasing the local groups competences in the field of local problems resolving (for example the housing estates' councils deciding about the local matters; moving part of the decisive competences downwards);
- increasing the amounts of money assigned for the participative budget initiatives for a certain community (so it would be really [financially] possible to introduce needed solutions);
- more meetings, making the people more acquainted with legal issues, safety issues, knowledge;
- fulfilling the promises made by the persons applying for and/ or holding public functions (it is better to promise less and be then able to introduce the solutions promised, within one's mandate);
- increasing the commitment of the national parliament/ EU parliament members in doing their duties, that needs to be connected with increasing their accessibility and their increased openness for the citizens' postulates;
- increasing the decision – makers openness;
- civil education introducing on all levels of the formal education system;
- diminishing legal inequalities and, simultaneously, introducing activities aiming at better understanding and knowledge of the legal issues among citizens (since the legal regulations are becoming more and more difficult to comprehend and apply, without professional help, in practice, by an average person);
- counteracting the diffusion of responsibility and being truly responsible for actions undertaken;
- limiting the expenditures connected with the EU Parliament members and make these expenditures dependent on the real effect of their activities;
- rewarding active citizens and the organisations acting on the behalf of the active citizens (both on the regional, national and European level) and facilitating the activities of such organisations by increasing the amount of public grants accessible for NGOs.

In sum - the Forum participants want their authorities and representatives to be competent, open and listening to the citizens' needs, cooperative, accessible, effective and being hold accountable for the promises they made and the activities they undertake. Support for civil society organisations and 'civic activation initiatives' is also expected.

In regard to 2. "What could the society (community) change?", the ideas named were:

- promoting civic activity through showing benefits from being active;
- combining the charity activities with other kinds of civil activity (since the charity is the most recognizable form of civil/social activity – but still not the only one; it's worth talking aloud also about other kinds of civil activity; charity is not the only way to be democratically active);
- running an Internet forum (as a space for substantive, serious discussion on the subject of civic activity and the possibilities to introduce changes – in one place);
- promoting and increasing other kinds of being active than charity; the civil activity may be also something

more/ different that charity and helping people in difficult condition; in connection to this - differentiating and strengthening voluntary initiatives;

- counteracting dispersing of the responsibility;

- more promotion of the civic activity through showing benefits, successful initiatives,

changes introduced...;

- for an individual: shaping an attitude of being more open for what's happening "outside", being aware of the matters important to the people living next to me;

In regard to 3. "How could the initiative - groups work/act?" , the ideas named were:

- introducing some kind of "lessons of optimism" at schools, combining some knowledge with some practice on how to be active for the benefit of the society/ community;

- activation of the seniors, trying to influence their attitudes [shaped in the previous, communistic system]; equalizing knowledge and practical skills needed for active participation in the 21st century's community/society life;

- increasing (promoting) dialogue as a method of disputes resolving;

- widening the voluntary work understanding – voluntary work is not only helping persons living in difficult conditions or sick children – voluntary work can be realized on many other fields (a volunteer doesn't equal a person who "sacrifices" herself/himself for others).

In regard to 4. "Cooperation and dialogue", the ideas named were:

- Devoting more financial resources for the NGOs activities;

- increasing the participation of citizens in taking decisions affecting them; changing rules and regulations with the participation of the citizens (less technocracy);

- increasing the European Parliament authorization, decisive power (not only technocrats and The European Commission should rule, but also the EU Parliament – the representatives chosen by the citizens. The EU Parliament should have more decisive power, at least to the scope of the decisive power the national parliaments have);

- counteracting 'language exclusion'; translating the new concepts and documents/regulations, especially on the EU level, using simple language, everyday language; in connection to this – disapproving, condemning the 'gobbledygook' (incomprehensible or pompous jargon of specialists, impossible to understand for an average citizen);

- making use of the 'common wisdom' of the society when it comes to possible problem solutions instead of asking for the opinions of the 'specialists' only (crowdfunding of ideas);

- increasing the transparency and increased access to the public data and the public information for the society;

- wider introducing new technologies – the e-public services;

- shortening the time for response of the authority for the citizen's claim/ inquiry;

- clearer presentation of the statistical data; less 'manipulation' and 'biased interpretation' of the statistical data;

- involving through 'YOU WANT' instead of 'YOU MUST';

- diminishing the barrier: 'I won't express my opinion because nobody listens to me';

- equalizing chances connected with the lack of life-experience in certain area;

- increasing/ building citizens' trust in NGOs as a vital element of building active society;

- better quality of language teaching – since the knowledge of the language on the level enabling to understand the EU document is very low;

- diminishing the concern that 'I won't be listened to' / 'I will be ignored' when I will present my claim or need. What is needed are effective tools for public hearing at certain authorities level (local, national, European);
- showing and promoting good practices for civic activation and promoting the benefits of being active.

In regard to 5. "Inter – sectorial approach...", the ideas named were:

- Insufficient [democratic] education – and as an effect – insufficient activation of the youth;
- creating the 'civic activity centres' (dedicated to promoting/increasing this kind of activity);
- using the SMS actions to promote civic activity – on the same basis as the 'rescue actions' work ('there is a need to do this/that – come and help' type);
- support dedicated to specific need of specific persons;
- equal treatment, not stereotyping and unequal treatment for certain, privileged or unprivileged groups (for example 'football fan = hooligan, so I won't help you if you are a football fan' or the privileged pension groups);
- diminishing the language barriers – facilitating communication between people;
- promoting good examples, good practices, showing benefits HERE and NOW;
- more social control/influence on politicians – for example once a year all the politicians, authorities and other bodies using the public funds report their activities to the public and the citizens have (and use) the opportunity to give them their feedback regarding their work;
- making use of the 'friends effect' – involve in social/ civil activities by colleagues and friends;
- increasing the role of referendums, the use of referendums – as a way of increasing civic activity.

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/*

The Forum participants named 7 main thematic areas here:

1. The way of informing/ encouraging [the means];
2. Who? [Who might encourage to become/ be active];
3. Information [what should it be? Where presented?];
4. The youth [how to encourage the youth to be active];
5. Benefits [how to present them];
6. The politicians, the decision makers [how should they act/work];
7. Space and infrastructure [for being active].

Within 1. "The way of informing/ encouraging [the means]", the ideas named were:

- to distribute information and promotion materials, financed by the sponsors, for example leaflets;
- to use the media: Internet, TV, for a, the press (articles, press information);

- a car with a megaphone installed driving around in the neighbourhood;
- some advertisement spots showing that being active is not only a work, but also fun;
- cooperation between schools and the parents (the school is teaching how to be active, with the parents' support);
- local leaders (the persons recognizable in a community; well known in the region, for example youtubers or volunteers);
- the "motivating" and "clipping – together" persons – leaders who have ability to invite people to various activities, organizing things, encouraging, motivating;
- introducing a distinguished, additional course to schools – "the civic education" (it should be a separate course, dedicated to this subject, instead of trying to include various elements of "civic" education into some other courses' programmes)
- passing information/ informing [about possibilities of being active] in a form of amusement/ entertainment, and in a place of amusement/ entertainment (during outdoor parties, festivals, picnics etc.);
- fast processing of the citizens' claims and petitions – instead of 'shutting them inside a bureaucratic freezer';
- [facilitating] an access to people, who would like to be involved and would be able/ willing to help to realise an idea (who knows how to help and who will help);
- teaching skills of creating information and disseminating information (for example skills of building web pages);
- massive and interactive social campaigns (the type: 'I can not only watch spots and/or read some materials, but also be involved', for example, playing games).

Within 2. „Who? [Who might encourage to become/ be active]”, the ideas named were:

- the local leaders (persons recognizable in certain environment, for example youtubers or volunteers);
- the "motivating" and "clipping – together" persons – leaders who have ability to invite people to various activities, organizing things, encouraging, motivating;
- politicians (who would take part in various activity promoting projects in person, the bicycle trip for example);
- the parents and the family members;
- volunteers;
- the project implementers, project organizers;
- those already active, dragging those yet inactive into various activities.

Within 3." Information [what should it be? Where presented?]", the ideas named were:

- on billboards;
- left there, where people are (for example in clubs, swimming-pools, outdoor events, in art galleries etc.);
- to associate the [democratic] activity also with the free time, with some fun, entertainment, and not only with 'work';
- information more clear, more accessible, expressed with simple, common sense words, straight to the point;
- it should be clear where from – and how – is it possible to acquire funds/ grants for realizing the 'rank – and – file' type (the ordinary people's) initiatives;
- it should be also promoted, who have acquired funds/ grants 'from the EU' for various initiatives, and not only that 'the funds were acquired from the EU funds'.

Within 4. “The youth [how to encourage the youth to be active]”, the ideas named were:

- youth groups as an information transmitter (invitations, information goes through them);
- realizing projects concerning EU subjects, the civic activity subjects – at schools;
- as soon as possible - encouraging the young people to express their opinions, to take part in social consultations – long before they will acquire the voting rights;
- encouraging those inactive by those already active;
- the youth – elderly integration, communication (the elderly as those more experienced, who could advise ‘how’); the dialogue, the generations are on speaking terms, talking to each other;
- promoting positive examples, good practices of what was achieved, successful (for example youth exchanges, traineeships within Erasmus Plus programme etc.);
- promoting the youth initiatives, encouraging the youth by showing effect of already realized initiatives – ‘it’s cool!’;
- emphasizing: I participate = I acquire new skills, competences, I gain new experience...;
- effective and listened to youth city councils, having a real influence on what is happening in their environment;
- more young people in the ‘adult’ city councils;
- the 3rd sector activity – encouraging to being active;
- practice; learning in practice (and not only in theory), for example simulations, participating in the city council sessions etc.;
- investing in the opinion leaders.

Within 5. “Benefits [how to present them]”, the ideas named were;

- practice; learning in practice (and not only in theory), for example simulations, participating in the city council sessions etc.;
- showing positive examples (‘it worked!’);
- showing good practices: a leader, who achieved something; a person who have experienced something important – ‘a man/woman and his/her achievements’ type;
- inspiring rewards for being active (the kind of rewards that could be useful in the future, for example a project management handbook);
- invitations to being active [issued] in an attractive form, clearly stating ‘what’s in it for me’;
- showing how a specific activity could produce change (a change for the better);
- satisfaction. Being active – I have get satisfaction, since I’ve done something, I’ve encourage someone etc.;
- showing benefits, for example: ‘what will you gain by participating in this debate’.

Within 6. “The politicians, the decision makers [how should they act/work]” the ideas named were:

- the politicians/ decision-makers give their name for some local initiatives initiated by ordinary people;
- the parliament members are accessible to people, are present in their offices during their duties; their offices are open for everyone; they do report back to the electors;
- the ‘feedback information walls’ for politicians – every year [feedback from their electors];
- the tools: more public – private partnerships; inter – sectoral partnerships;
- the tools: more entrusting the public duties to the civil society organisations;
- the tools: more re-granting (the funds for activities are sent ‘downwards’, to the organisations knowing

local needs – that, in turn - distribute the funds between various public duties implementers – instead of the central distribution of funds.

Within 7.” Space and infrastructure [for being active]” the ideas named were:

- more so called ‘hard infrastructure’: sports halls, offices available for NGOs, local community centres etc.;
- more so called ‘soft infrastructure’: grant competitions for NGOs and non-formal civic groups and other forms of support for civil society organisations; widening access to new technologies, more/ more effectively applied/ better working direct democracy tools (allowing to ask people for their opinion), also on the local level.

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

The Forum participants named 7 main areas under this subject:

1. Communicating up-to date information concerning the (possible) ways of getting involved in public matters;
2. The non-formal education – which should be a tool for promoting the active democratic involvement idea, since the non-formal education is the source of all the possible tools for activity: practice, being active, learning through experience, participation, the group etc.;
3. The use of the direct democracy tools and monitoring (to exert pressure on the authorities + cooperation);
4. Cooperation between the NGOs and the authorities;
5. Offering support for the citizens;
6. Contributing to public trust building through showing that ‘it’s possible act honestly. The trust towards NGOs cooperating with the authorities should affect a general public trust, that may, in turn, increase the feeling of being [democratically] competent among the citizens;
7. The NGOs offer should be ‘a bait’ for social and political activity of the citizens: a companionship, socialization, gaining experiences, contacts etc.

In regard to 1. “Communicating up-to date information concerning the (possible) ways of getting involved in public matters”, the participants stated, that:

Various forms of communication channels should be used (Internet, face-to-face meetings, workshops, conferences, campaigns etc.). Disseminating knowledge should be combined with showing the possible application of the knowledge, showing possibilities, delivering tools to use the knowledge [in practice]. Every information set should include a practical component, answering the questions ‘who exactly to turn to?’, ‘who is who?’, ‘what exactly is he/she able to do’ etc.

The information should be equally accessible for all the citizens, on equal rules; NGOs should especially take care of disseminating the information among those endangered with social exclusion and discrimination. The role of the NGOs was also perceived as the actors translating the official language into a simple, understandable language.

In regard to 2. “The non-formal education...”, the role of the NGOs was perceived as those that organise active learning, [facilitate] acquiring competences needed to be active, ‘infecting with’ activity. The NGOs should also organize volunteerism as a way of not only building competences, but also a direct help/ support for those excluded from the public life. NGOs should also cooperate with schools, introducing the non-formal education to schools, supporting at building the ‘culture of participation’ among the youth. Important



role is also the support at disseminating the knowledge and the tools to the citizens, building the self-confidence of the persons as citizens. As the factors that could be an obstacle for fulfilling the above described role by the NGOs were named 2 problems: the non-governmental organisations' political indifference and [low] recognition of the non-formal education.

In regard to 4. "Cooperation between the NGOs and authorities", the role of the NGOs was characterized as the organisations realizing public duties and other common initiatives involving and activating the citizens. NGOs should be also involved in building partnerships with the authorities, building a bridge between the society and the authorities; social needs analysis and should be those ensuring a direct contact with the authorities for the citizens. NGOs should also be organizing civic advisory bodies such as councils, forums, and other initiatives - increasing the NGOs role in the public life.

In regard to 5. "Offering support for the citizens", the ideas named were: Making the space, the infrastructure, the know-how accessible for the citizens; delivering advisory at using the direct democracy tools, for example consulting petitions; supporting the ordinary peoples' initiatives, [all] the citizens wishing to organise something – the infrastructural and merits support. NGOs should also be directly involving the citizens into third sector activities. They should also take care of inclusion matters – taking care of involving all the citizens into public life/ matters and activation of those endangered with social exclusion.

In regard to 6. "Contributing to public trust building through showing that 'it's possible act honestly..." the Forum participants defined that the trust towards NGOs cooperating with the authorities should affect a general public trust, that may, in turn, increase the feeling of being competent among the citizens. NGOs should be building a 'cooperation model' between the NGOs – building networks, cooperation, alliances... They should also work for the benefit of increasing transparency and intensifying the information flow between NGOs. Some kind of 'auto – control' among the NGOs should be also introduces – in order to keep high standards and high quality of cooperation, for example 'an active NGOs in the region' lists should be updated, to exclude the inactive NGOs.

Last but not least, the NGOs offer should constitute 'a bait' for social and political activity of the citizens, [promoting] companionship, socialization, gaining experiences, [building and developing] contacts etc.



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

The summary of the event

The National Citizens' Forum "About Europe – creatively", Bielsko-Biała, Poland, 9th of June 2015 (Activity 3)

Participation: The event involved **38** citizens, including: 12 participants from the city of Bielsko-Biała (PL), 5 participants from the city of Chorzów (PL), 3 participants from the city of Tarnów, 3 participants from the city of Siemianowice Śląskie (PL), 3 participants from the city of Bytom (PL), 2 participants from the city of Kraków (PL), 2 participants from the city of Warszawa (PL), 1 participant from the city of Kęty (PL), 1 participant from the city of Węgierska Górka (PL), 1 participant from the city of Żory (PL), 1 participant from the city of Katowice (PL), 1 participant from the city of Piekary Śląskie (PL), 1 participant from the city of Czeladź (PL), 1 participant from the city of Rogoźnik, 1 participant from the city of Jaworzno (PL).

Location / Dates: The event took place in Bielsko-Biała, Poland from 09/06/2015 to 09/06/2015

Short description:

The aims of the event were:

1. To sum-up and discuss the results of the open on-line research;
2. To group these results into the main thematic areas;
3. To develop national recommendations for diminishing the obstacles for active participation/ introducing incentives for becoming an active citizen.

The citizens involved, as on-line research participants, represented various population age groups, including youth (< 30 years old; 23 persons), adults (30 – 65 years old; 12 persons) and some seniors (> 65 years old; 3 persons).

The event, under the name "About Europe – creatively" took place in the Bielsko-Biała Modern Art Gallery and was moderated by an experienced moderator. The Forum began with a short presentation of the "Let's get active" project followed by presentation of the first results of the open on-line research. Next, during the creative workshop – the Forum Café – the participants divided into 5 groups discussed and debated the 5 topics of the Forum. Each group had the possibility to express their opinions, ideas and recommendations on all the 5 subjects. The results were then presented to the public and further discussed. The Forum ended with a short, interactive presentation entitled "Direct democracy tools on the European level. Do they work and how they work".

Attachments:

1. List of the participants,
2. Promotion & impact information + Links to some publications/printscreens/scans; including leaflets, posters, press releases etc.