LOGO

The EuroCivic Lab Project:

Strengthening European Identity and Citizenship through SDGs, Social Activism and Living

WP2

Teachers' Training Kit for re-supporting European Identity through innovative training approaches

Civic Engagement Handbook

Project Partners

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Civic Engagement Handbook

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1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose and Target Audience

This handbook is designed to support civic engagement as a foundation of healthy democratic societies. Its purpose is to help individuals—especially young people—understand how taking part in public life, whether by voting, joining local discussions, volunteering, or serving the community, strengthens the connection between personal agency and the common good. Through shared responsibility, people build stronger communities where everyone feels seen, heard, and involved in shaping outcomes. By highlighting how individual actions can make a difference, this handbook also aims to build trust in institutions and inspire meaningful participation.

Aimed at those who shape the civic landscape in education, this guide speaks directly to teachers, school leaders, and policymakers. Teachers do more than convey knowledge—they help form the foundation of active, responsible citizenship. School leaders influence the culture of democratic participation within schools, turning values into lived experience. Policymakers play a crucial role in determining whether civic education is prioritised or overlooked, with long-term consequences. When these key actors invest in civic learning, they empower young people to participate fully in public life—not only within their own countries, but as engaged European citizens who understand and embrace their shared responsibilities.

1.2 Relevance to EU and Global Context

Programmes like Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps give students and young people across Europe the chance to take part in civic life beyond their home countries. These opportunities go beyond travel. They involve real collaboration on social, environmental, and

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educational projects that respond to local needs while drawing on European values. By joining these programmes, young people experience how solidarity and participation work in practice, whether through volunteering, youth exchanges, or joint school initiatives. Schools that take part in such programmes show students that citizenship is not confined by national borders.

Global citizenship education adds another layer. It helps young people think about their role in a wider world where different cultures, beliefs, and life experiences meet. It encourages them to reflect on fairness, human dignity, and cooperation in a way that respects difference but recognises shared responsibilities. When students learn to listen, ask thoughtful questions, and work together across boundaries, they become more aware of how their actions matter—locally, in Europe, and globally.

Teachers can link classroom activities and school-based projects to these larger frameworks. Whether it's a local clean-up, a debate on digital rights, or a school assembly on migration, there is often a way to connect it to broader goals such as the EU Youth Strategy or the Sustainable Development Goals. Doing so adds depth and context. It shows students that what they do at school is part of a wider conversation—one that includes people across Europe and beyond.

1.4 Handbook Structure Overview

This handbook is organised to guide teachers, school leaders, and policymakers from foundational concepts to classroom and community-level practice. The Introduction outlines the purpose, target audience, and how civic engagement connects personal agency with collective well-being, while placing this in a broader European and global context. Chapter 2 presents clear learning objectives and the core competences students are expected to develop—such as communication, ethical reasoning, and the ability to link local actions with EU-wide concerns. Chapter 3 explores the conceptual foundations of civic engagement, including its historical roots, societal relevance, and practical benefits. It also offers school-based examples and digital collaboration tools that support participatory learning across borders.

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Chapter 4 focuses on how to build alliances within and beyond the school through digital and cross-border cooperation, using available EU platforms and partnerships. Chapter 5 centres on embedding civic engagement in the everyday life of the school, showing how long-term projects and partnerships reinforce democratic practices and European belonging. Chapter 6 provides methodological support: teaching strategies, digital tools, and creative approaches for making civic engagement meaningful and accessible. It also addresses how to assess student progress through reflection, peer evaluation, and competence-based tasks. The final chapters—7 to 9—offer a summary of key points, guided reflection questions, practical classroom applications, and a set of self-assessment and knowledge-based exercises to support both students and educators. The annex includes a glossary, abbreviations, further reading, and FAQs for easy reference.

Teachers can use the handbook flexibly, drawing from individual chapters or combining elements across sections. For those designing a new unit, Chapters 2 and 6 offer a strong starting point, connecting learning outcomes to practical methods. If a school wishes to expand its civic culture, Chapters 3 and 5 highlight institutional strategies and case examples. When aligning local projects with EU or global frameworks, Chapters 1 and 4 show how to use existing networks and platforms. Throughout, the handbook supports educators in embedding civic engagement in ways that are practical, adaptable, and connected to the wider European community.

2. Objectives and Learning Outcomes

2.1 Learning Objectives

The learning objectives of this handbook reflect the core ideas behind the European Union's civic engagement policies. Learners will explore how citizens can participate actively in public life, starting with local democracy—where involvement in community decisions through town halls, participatory budgeting, or consultations takes centre stage. They will

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come to understand that civic participation extends far beyond voting; it includes volunteering, campaigning, joining associations, and using digital platforms to influence change. The role of decentralised cooperation will also be examined, showing how schools, local governments, civil society, and individuals can work together to make governance more inclusive and responsive. At the heart of these objectives lies social responsibility: recognising that civic action is motivated not only by personal interest, but by solidarity and commitment to shared values.

To support this kind of engagement, several pillars are required. Civic infrastructure includes the spaces, institutions, and tools that allow participation to happen—community centres, school forums, and youth platforms, for example. Civic literacy refers to the knowledge and skills needed to understand rights, institutions, and how to take part effectively in democratic life. Civic capital involves trust, networks, and the motivation to contribute. Without these elements, engagement tends to be uneven or symbolic. Recognising this, the EU integrates civic engagement into its broader policy frameworks. For instance, Cohesion Policy promotes inclusive development by supporting local participation in shaping regional investment, while the European Pillar of Social Rights links active citizenship to fair access to education, work, and social protection.

Teachers have a distinct opportunity to make these concepts real. When they introduce students to how local councils work, or help them plan a project in cooperation with an NGO, they are building both civic literacy and infrastructure. Their classrooms can act as spaces where civic capital grows—through discussion, shared responsibility, and exposure to real-world issues. This work not only benefits students' personal development, but also strengthens democratic culture. It prepares young people to see themselves as part of a wider European community, with rights and responsibilities that extend beyond the classroom and across borders (Civic Engagement in future European Universities Campuses, 2023).

2.2 Core Competences

Civic engagement involves more than taking action—it relies on a set of competences that shape how individuals understand, relate to, and influence their communities. These

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competences include communication, collaboration, and advocacy skills. Students must learn how to express their views clearly, listen to others, and engage in dialogue where disagreement is approached with respect. Working together to solve problems or build community initiatives develops trust and accountability. Advocacy involves standing up for shared concerns and proposing concrete changes, whether in a classroom setting or at the level of local governance. These skills help young people become active participants in public life, rather than passive observers.

Competences are made up of several dimensions: cognitive (knowledge and skills) and affective (attitudes and values). High civic competence depends on a balanced development across all these areas. For instance, knowing how democratic institutions function is not enough without the willingness to act in line with principles such as justice, sustainability, and human dignity. A composite indicator that combines different elements of civic competence can provide an overview of how well countries are preparing students for civic life. While such indicators are useful for monitoring progress and setting policy goals, they should be used alongside detailed research that explores how and why these competences develop in different contexts. Teachers can reflect on these dimensions when planning activities, ensuring students grow in both understanding and commitment.

Another core competence involves recognising how local action connects with broader European concerns. When students link a school initiative to the Sustainable Development Goals or reflect on climate justice in the context of EU Green Deal policies, they practise thinking across scales. This helps them understand that citizenship in the EU is layered—one can act locally while being part of a continental conversation. Making these links visible strengthens their sense of belonging to the European community. It also gives meaning to civic engagement as not only a local duty but a shared European project (Hoskins, 2008).

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3. Civic Engagement

3.1 Theoretical Dimensions

Public life is shaped not only by institutions but by the everyday actions of individuals who contribute to their communities, express concerns, or seek change. These acts — formal or informal, local or transnational — may arise from a desire to solve problems, uphold values, or build relationships that matter. They are rooted in a long tradition of reflection on what it means to be part of a political community.

From antiquity, thinkers have questioned the role and ability of citizens in shaping their societies. In *Crito*, Plato presents Socrates' loyalty to the laws of Athens as a kind of moral duty. Yet in *The Republic*, Plato casts doubt on democratic participation, favouring rule by those with superior knowledge — philosopher-kings. Aristotle, by contrast, viewed the *polis* as an association of citizens who share in deliberation and judgement. In his *Politics*, civic participation involved serving in assemblies, taking part in trials, and bearing arms in defence of the city. These acts were not simply political but part of a life of ethical development and shared responsibility — though his vision excluded many, including women, slaves, and foreigners.

Debates over who should participate — and why — continued into the modern period. Thinkers associated with civic republicanism argued that participation in public life is a necessary part of a just and fulfilling human existence. The citizen, in this view, is not a passive subject but an active shaper of the common good and this view is calling for more education, better institutions, and stronger opportunities for involvement.

Opposed to this stance is the classical liberal tradition, which traces back to Locke and Madison. Here, the goal is not to cultivate the ideal citizen, but to protect freedom by limiting government and ensuring procedural fairness. Participation is one possible path among many — not a duty, and not a measure of worth. Attempts to improve the citizenry are viewed with

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suspicion, either because they might restrict liberty or because they are unlikely to succeed (Levine, 2022).

The work of Jürgen Habermas was especially influential in shifting attention to the conditions of democratic legitimacy. In his theory of deliberative democracy, decisions are legitimate when they arise from reasoned discussion among free and equal participants. For this to occur, a functioning *public sphere* is essential — an open arena in which individuals can discuss matters of common concern without coercion. Habermas also observed a significant shift in democratic energy: the old social movements of the industrial age, organised around class and redistribution, were giving way to new social movements focused on identity, environmental concerns, and the quality of life (Morrow, 2022). Issues such as gender equality, racial justice, and ecological sustainability began to take precedence over traditional economic demands.

Habermas did not limit himself to theoretical work. He is often cited as a model of the engaged public intellectual — someone who acts within the very public sphere he described. Through essays, interviews, and public commentary, Habermas participated in debates about German democracy, the future of Europe, and global justice. His example underscores that civic engagement includes not only collective action or institutional participation, but also critical thought and communication that shape public understanding. (Verovšek, 2021)

This broader view connects to the work of Elinor Ostrom, who examined how communities around the world manage shared resources without relying solely on state structures. Her empirical research demonstrated how local groups could create stable, rule-based forms of cooperation — showing that civic action is not confined to voting or protesting, but often takes place in managing daily life (Levine, 2022).

As these ideas developed, scholars also asked whether civic involvement was in decline. Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone* (2000) argued that traditional forms of association — neighbourhood clubs, sports leagues, volunteer groups — had weakened, especially in the United States. He introduced the term social capital to describe the networks and trust that

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support cooperation. Without such ties, societies may become fragmented, and democratic habits may erode (Robert , 2011).

Others pointed to emerging forms of activism and participation, especially online. These may lack permanence or formal structure, but they reflect new ways of organising — through digital petitions, flash protests, and thematic campaigns. Researchers such as Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) turned their attention to who is able to act politically. They found that access to resources, especially education and income, greatly affects whether people can organise, influence policy, or even be heard.

Definitions of civic engagement are not fixed. Some emphasise institutional politics; others focus on informal cooperation or community initiatives. Related concepts include *civil society*, *public work*, *the commons*, and *deliberation*. Though distinct, these terms all point to the importance of shared public activity — the things people do together, beyond family and market, to shape their world.

Patterns of participation vary. In many countries, education and wealth increase the likelihood of engagement. But this is not a rule. African American communities in the United States have often maintained strong civic traditions through churches and local organising, even in the face of structural inequality. In countries such as India and Brazil, institutional reforms like participatory budgeting or village councils have expanded opportunities for marginalised groups to have a voice in governance (Levine, 2022).

School systems also play a role. Earlier studies were sceptical about whether civic education could influence behaviour. More recent findings suggest that specific educational approaches — including project-based learning, community service, and student councils — can provide lasting civic knowledge and motivation. These are more effective when students are treated not as passive learners but as active participants (Levine, 2022).

The public's involvement in shared affairs has a powerful role in upholding the values that define the European project. Democracy depends not only on institutions but on people

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who take part in shaping collective decisions. Equality is strengthened when participation reflects the diversity of society, ensuring that no group is left unheard. Solidarity emerges when individuals and communities act together across social, cultural, and national lines to pursue common goals. These values, embedded in the EU Treaties, take root through everyday practices — voting, dialogue, volunteering, advocacy — that turn abstract commitments into social habits. Whether organised locally or transnationally, such actions help cultivate trust, social cohesion, and a sense of shared responsibility. When schools support these forms of engagement, they prepare young Europeans not only to understand their rights, but to inhabit them with confidence and care.

Understanding the roots and development of civic engagement helps learners situate their experiences in a broader context. Theories of citizenship are not just abstract ideas; they provide tools to reflect on power, responsibility, and possibility. When students grasp how participation has been understood and practiced across time, they are better prepared to act — not just as future voters, but as informed and thoughtful members of society.

3.2 Benefits of Civic Engagement

Taking part in public decision-making has meaningful effects on individuals and society alike. Through participation, learners develop the understanding, values, and abilities essential for coexisting in a democratic society. It helps people develop confidence, agency, and a sense of shared responsibility. At the same time, it contributes to more legitimate, inclusive, and effective public policy outcomes — particularly when participation is designed thoughtfully and proportionally to the issue at stake (OECD, 2022).

On a personal level, civic engagement can encourage leadership, empathy, and self-efficacy. By voicing opinions, taking initiative, or collaborating with others, young people and adults alike experience the practical dimensions of democracy. Such experiences build critical competences — listening, debating, negotiating, and decision-making — that transfer beyond the classroom or meeting room. They also generate a deeper sense of belonging and responsibility, as individuals realise that their actions can shape public life. This applies to

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everyday acts of participation as well as more formal channels such as voting, student councils, or citizens' assemblies.

The broader social effects are just as significant. Regular, meaningful citizen engagement strengthens social cohesion and builds trust. Public institutions that respond to people's concerns are more likely to be viewed as legitimate. Communities where residents collaborate on projects, volunteer, or engage in collective decision-making tend to be more resilient and better equipped to handle conflict. Participation that bridges differences—across age, income, ethnicity, or political beliefs—fosters mutual understanding and helps reduce polarisation. These benefits are especially evident when those who are often excluded—individuals with limited voice, marginalised backgrounds, or a low sense of political agency—are actively involved.

Inclusive participation processes require thoughtful design and a genuine commitment to diversity. Various barriers—such as time constraints, inaccessible information, complex procedures, or mistrust in institutions—can prevent many people from getting involved. That is why lowering these barriers is essential. Schools, public bodies, and civil society must create accessible, transparent, and inclusive avenues for involvement. This includes not only classic tools like consultations and forums, but also new spaces for initiative-based or evaluation-oriented engagement — such as, youth-led campaigns, participatory budgeting, or citizen monitoring of public services.

Participation is not one-size-fits-all. The OECD (2022) distinguishes between several types, each with different strengths. Information participation ensures that citizens understand upcoming policies. Decision-making participation — as seen in citizens' assemblies or referenda — allows people to directly shape outcomes. Planning participation brings residents into early policy design stages, while initiative participation highlights bottom-up action from community members. Evaluation participation, often underused, invites reflection on whether policies delivered what they promised. All these forms contribute in distinct ways to better governance.

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Participation improves policy quality. Citizens bring lived experience and contextual knowledge that can enrich the evidence base. In "everyday" policy fields — such as local transport or education planning — engaging stakeholders helps refine decisions and anticipate consequences. In more complex or value-based "fundamental" policies — such as constitutional reform, electoral design, or climate action — participation helps ensure legitimacy. When people understand, debate, and co-decide on difficult trade-offs, the resulting policies are more likely to be accepted, even across disagreement (OECD, Exploring new frontiers of citizen participation in the policy cycle, 2024). Timing is key: early and iterative engagement — rather than last-minute consultations — leads to more trust and impact.

A compelling example comes from France, where the National Commission for Public Debate has institutionalised citizen voice in major environmental projects. The process includes information campaigns, open hearings, and independent oversight, ensuring that residents and stakeholders contribute to planning before decisions are final. A good example is participatory budgeting, now used in many parts of Europe, where communities decide how to spend part of the local budget by proposing and voting on projects—like creating green spaces or organising local festivals. These initiatives meet real needs while also building civic awareness and strengthening trust.

The Case of Helsinki: A Success Story

Helsinki's participatory budgeting initiative, OmaStadi, illustrates how civic engagement can deliver tangible, inclusive, and sustainable results. Through this programme, residents are invited to propose and vote on city-funded projects. One example focused on the circular economy: schools received new recycling bins based on citizen input. Other outcomes include a mobile app for sharing goods and services, and the development of communal spaces for borrowing household tools like power washers.

What makes OmaStadi especially notable is its commitment to inclusion. Helsinki provided voting and promotional materials in several languages, partnered with immigrant organisations, and ensured that both digital and offline methods were easy to access. This approach increased participation across demographic groups and helped build a stronger

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sense of shared responsibility. The success of OmaStadi shows that with thoughtful design, cities can create lasting public value while deepening trust and democratic engagement (The power of citizen participation in circular economy: opportunities, benefits, and challenges, 2025).

Such practices align with the European Union's aim to deepen participatory democracy. EU institutions and Member States have recognised the instrumental and intrinsic value of civic engagement. Instrumentally, it improves the effectiveness, acceptability, and sustainability of policies. Intrinsically, it builds the civic and democratic capacities of individuals and groups, reinforcing the democratic fabric of society. This is especially relevant in times of growing public disillusionment and declining political trust. Giving citizens meaningful roles in shaping the policies that affect them is one way to counter democratic fatigue and increase resilience.

Participation also plays a role in advancing cross-cutting priorities such as climate transition, digital transformation, and circular economy. In these complex fields, policies cannot succeed without public cooperation. Participation helps ensure that plans reflect lived realities, especially for vulnerable groups. It creates room for innovation, strengthens policy legitimacy, and encourages behavioural change — whether in energy use, mobility, or consumption habits.

Civic engagement is not only about policy input. It is about shaping values, identities, and relationships. Taking part teaches people how to disagree respectfully, work across differences, and co-create shared futures. For students and young people, these are not abstract skills but foundations for lifelong learning and democratic life. Schools and youth programmes that promote participation — through school parliaments, social action projects, or collaborative decision-making — contribute to building the next generation of European citizens (Baeck, 2025).

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3.3 Implementing Civic Engagement in School Education

To prepare students for meaningful participation in democratic life, education must go beyond teaching facts about institutions. Schools should become environments where civic engagement is both studied and practised—where young people not only learn about citizenship but experience it firsthand. When civic learning is integrated throughout school life, it reinforces democratic values, promotes inclusion, and nurtures the essential skills needed for the 21st century.

At the heart of civic education lie three interdependent domains that shape how young people understand and act within democratic societies:

- Civic knowledge and skills refer to students' grasp of political systems, ideologies, rights, and responsibilities. This includes learning how governments function, the evolution of democratic institutions, and the historical foundations of civil society.
- Civic values and dispositions relate to students' capacity to engage in respectful dialogue, uphold freedom of expression, and recognise the legitimacy of diverse viewpoints.
- Civic behaviours emerge when students are equipped with the agency and confidence to vote, volunteer, take part in public life, and organise within their communities.

High-quality civic learning addresses all three — through deliberate, participatory methods that link curriculum with action (Winthrop, 2020). Teachers can design tasks to enhance that specific skill set within classroom settings, while promoting active, inclusive, and values-based learning. As an illustration:

Design a classroom constitution

– Students draft a code of conduct based on democratic principles and compare it to national and EU constitutional rights; Conduct a "citizen interview" project – Pupils interview family members or community figures about their views on citizenship, democracy, or identity;

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Participate in school decision-making – Students join real or mock school boards, contribute to school rule discussions, or observe leadership meetings.

Student-led initiatives offer meaningful opportunities for young people to develop self-organisation, negotiation, and leadership skills through structured cooperation with local governments and civil society actors. In several EU member states, youth councils and participatory budgeting schemes enable students to propose and implement projects in partnership with municipal bodies and NGOs. According to the European Commission, these initiatives help young participants experience democratic processes directly, from agenda-setting to advocacy and consensus-building. OECD reports likewise underscore the value of civic youth action, noting that collaboration with public institutions strengthens students' confidence, civic identity, and ability to influence decisions in their communities (Borhan , 2025).

Partnering with local NGOs, students can engage in hands-on community service that connects classroom learning with civic action. To give an example, organising a park restoration volunteer day—planting native trees and revitalising green areas—not only promotes environmental stewardship, but also nurtures teamwork and a sense of belonging. Similarly, coordinating efforts at a local food bank, including donation drives and distribution events, demonstrates compassion and social solidarity while reinforcing logistical planning and organisational skills. These real-world initiatives offer structured reflection opportunities: students can discuss how public institutions and civil society combine efforts to address inequalities—such as access to food and green infrastructure—bridging theory with tangible outcomes in their own communities (Strategists, 2024).

3.4 Digital and Cross-Border Collaboration

Online platforms are essential tools for enhancing youth participation beyond national boundaries. In line with the EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027, young people are encouraged to ENGAGE, CONNECT, and EMPOWER themselves through meaningful civic action, including digital participation. These pillars promote inclusive access to democratic life and aim to ensure that all young people have the resources to help shape society.

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A key feature of this strategy is the EU Youth Dialogue, which offers structured digital participation processes allowing young people to influence policymaking at national and European levels. Through online consultations and discussions, students and youth organisations have co-developed the 11 European Youth Goals, which call for inclusive societies, climate action, and accessible participation opportunities for all.

Schools can support student participation in these processes by using the European Commission's civic portal (citizens.ec.europa.eu), where learners can access public consultations, engage with policy updates, and explore initiatives related to youth rights, digital governance, and sustainability. Educators may also guide students in formulating classroom responses to open EU consultations or simulate structured debates based on posted proposals.

Another exemplary tool is the European Citizens' Initiative (citizens-initiative.europa.eu), a unique EU mechanism that allows citizens to submit legislative proposals to the European Commission. When an initiative gathers one million verified digital signatures across at least seven EU countries, the Commission is obliged to respond. Students can explore existing or historical initiatives, simulate petition writing, or map how democratic representation functions across borders. These exercises help them link civic knowledge with digital behaviour, while reinforcing their sense of agency and belonging in the European democratic space.

Using social media responsibly offers young people powerful tools to unite communities, promote active citizenship, and engage in global exchange. Social media platforms facilitate information sharing, community bond creation, and civic networking, enabling users to co-create and deliberate on public matters. In the educational stage, such platforms also help students and stakeholders to learn about each other's interests and perspectives, creating an important foundation for dialogue and cooperation. As researchers caution, "skipping this phase will most likely be fatal to the process," since mutual understanding is essential for effective engagement. However, communication among different stakeholders — such as students, teachers, civil society actors, and officials — may

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also be controversial. It often requires active mediation and responsiveness from organisers, including educators and public institutions, to ensure respectful and productive exchanges. Through guided use, students learn to verify information, moderate their tone, and support inclusive digital participation — reinforcing civic dispositions such as empathy, fairness, and mutual respect (Lin, 2022).

Community-focused digital platforms also help bridge intergenerational and intercultural divides. Council of Europe research highlights how community media, including local social media groups, amplify underrepresented voices—providing youth and elderly people a shared space for storytelling, debate, and civic engagement. Schools can model responsible social media use by creating moderated online forums for classroom deliberation, joint cultural exchange projects with partner schools, or youth-led campaigns addressing local issues. Such initiatives illustrate how respectful online discourse strengthens civic trust, nurtures participatory values, and promotes digital solidarity in line with European democratic principles (Europe, 2022).

The European Commission emphasises eTwinning's vital role in building inclusive democratic communities through school partnerships. The initiative supports teachers with professional development and national support services, reinforcing their capacity to facilitate cross-border civic projects. By enabling teachers and pupils to plan and evaluate activities collaboratively, eTwinning helps young people see themselves as active European citizens—not only learners, but participants in a shared public sphere spanning multiple nations. Schools gain from this by creating environments of mutual trust and shared responsibility, echoing EU democratic values and strengthening civic cohesion (Licht, Pateraki, & Scimeca, 2019).

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4. Fostering Community Alliances and Digital Collaboration

4.1 Online Platforms and Tools

Social media, digital forums, and e-petitions offer routes for students to express concerns, mobilise peers, and engage beyond the classroom. Teachers can guide learners to EU platforms like the European Citizens' Initiative, where citizens propose policy reforms to the Commission, or the EU Youth Dialogue, which hosts online surveys allowing youth input into policymaking. To support informed participation, classroom instruction should include source analysis tasks: comparing headlines, checking the origin of websites, and identifying persuasive versus manipulative language. Students can practise cross-referencing claims using fact-checking services such as EuvsDisinfo (https://euvsdisinfo.eu/) or EU Fact Check (https://eufactcheck.eu/) and reflect on how emotional framing or repetition can shape opinion. Analysing how different platforms present the same issue helps learners recognise bias, misinformation, and omission. These activities build critical awareness and encourage thoughtful participation in digital civic life.

Digital spaces demand more than participation—they require respect, safety, and empathy. Tools from the European Commission's Better Internet for Kids (BIK+) initiative support classroom units on online behaviour, data privacy, cyberbullying, and respectful communication. BIK+ recommends a whole-school approach to cyberbullying prevention, which includes involving students in drafting anti-bullying guidelines, providing teacher training on digital well-being, and ensuring easy access to reporting mechanisms. Classroom activities can include peer dialogue exercises, analysing case studies of online conflict, and practising constructive responses to digital aggression. BIK+ also encourages empowering bystanders to act safely and responsibly, rather than remaining passive. Jointly developing a class digital code of conduct, inspired by BIK's Youth Panel, gives students the chance to practise inclusive communication and take ownership of their online presence (BIK+, 2025).

Digital tools can support civic engagement in the classroom when they are planned with a clear purpose and connected to the subject matter. Namely, teachers preparing a unit

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on environmental justice might ask students to use Padlet to collect local examples of pollution and crowdsource community ideas for improvement. In a lesson on voting rights, Mentimeter (https://www.mentimeter.com/) can be used to anonymously poll the class on civic attitudes and visualise differences in opinion. During debates, students can collaborate in real time on a shared Google Docs (https://workspace.google.com/products/docs/) to write group arguments or prepare questions. If students are designing a school-wide awareness campaign (e.g. for anti-discrimination), tools like Canvas or ThingLink (https://www.thinglink.com/) allow them to create digital posters or interactive infographics with links, photos, and voice recordings. Lesson plans should include time for students to reflect on their communication choices—what worked, who was included, and how the message could have more impact. ICT becomes effective when students not only use it to present content, but to shape dialogue and participate in civic conversations meaningfully.

4.2 Cross-Border Community Networks

Networks supported by the European Union offer schools valuable opportunities to build meaningful connections beyond national borders. Europe Direct centres, based in regions across the EU, work closely with schools to organise public debates, thematic workshops, and civic simulation games. These activities help students link local concerns with broader European contexts. Through Erasmus+ funded projects, schools and youth organisations can form lasting partnerships to co-design initiatives on topics such as democratic participation, sustainability, or digital citizenship. These collaborations often include virtual planning meetings, shared project outcomes, and student-led dissemination events, allowing learners from different backgrounds to contribute equally and build mutual understanding. By engaging with European priorities in education and civic life, students begin to view their role not only within their community but across the wider EU space.

Working with civil society groups and public institutions in other countries gives students insight into how social challenges are addressed in different contexts. For instance, a classroom in Hungary may co-develop a digital storytelling project with an NGO in Belgium and a school in Croatia, exploring themes like inclusive education or climate adaptation. These

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partnerships are designed in proportion to the capacity of each organisation, and often follow a structured process: project management includes planning, coordination, and communication tasks; implementation covers joint workshops and exchange activities; and sharing involves student-led events and public-facing outputs. These steps ensure smooth collaboration and help all participants see the value of their contribution. Projects are also linked to annual Erasmus+ programme priorities—such as equity, sustainability, digital transformation, and civic engagement—so that local learning feeds into shared European goals. When learners take part in every stage of the process, from planning to promotion, they gain both the knowledge and the confidence to act as active citizens in a democratic Europe (Partnerships for cooperation, 2022).

Coordinating joint activities such as webinars or shared campaigns with partner schools in other countries allows teachers to create authentic civic learning experiences that extend beyond national perspectives. These collaborations expose students to different cultural contexts, policy approaches, and social challenges, encouraging comparison, dialogue, and mutual understanding. Working together on a campaign—whether focused on human rights, climate justice, or democratic participation—gives students a shared purpose and reinforces the idea that civic action is not confined to local settings. Teachers play a key role in planning these projects, aligning them with curricular goals, and ensuring that all students have a meaningful role. Cross-border cooperation also strengthens professional exchange, helping educators adapt new methods, share resources, and reflect on their own teaching through international partnership.

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5. Embedding Civic Engagement to Strengthen European Identity

5.1 Creating School-Wide Civic Culture

Building a culture of civic engagement across an entire school involves more than isolated lessons or occasional events. It requires a shared commitment among teachers, students, and the wider school community to promote participation, dialogue, and responsibility as daily practices. A school-wide approach helps make civic engagement visible, consistent, and meaningful for all learners, regardless of background or academic ability.

One starting point is to embed civic themes across the curriculum, not just in social studies or history. In particular, science lessons can explore the civic implications of environmental policy, while literature classes can analyse narratives of justice, power, or solidarity. Mathematics can be used to interpret data on social issues, and visual arts projects can explore expressions of protest or identity. Topics such as climate change, social inequality, or media bias can be addressed jointly in environmental science and citizenship lessons through debates, data analysis, and collaborative writing. By linking cross-curricular themes—such as ecology and public policy—students learn that civic engagement is not limited to a single subject, but interwoven through many aspects of learning and everyday life.

Active participation in school governance structures is another key feature of a civic school culture. Student councils, class representatives, and school assemblies allow learners to contribute to real decisions and observe democratic processes first-hand. When students help set rules, plan school events, or give feedback on teaching and learning, they learn the value of voice, accountability, and compromise. Such roles also support the development of leadership and negotiation skills—especially when paired with teacher-led workshops on civic dialogue or decision-making methods (Civic Engagement in Schools: Developing Active and Responsible Citizens , 2024).

Creating connections between the school and the wider community further strengthens civic culture. Collaborating with parents, local associations, or municipal bodies helps students see how civic values extend beyond the classroom. Including a community

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clean-up or charity campaign may be linked to class discussion on social justice or environmental responsibility. Family workshops on democratic parenting or local governance can reinforce shared values at home and in school. Involving external stakeholders shows that civic life is not abstract but built through cooperation among diverse actors.

To support these activities, teacher training and staff collaboration are essential. Schools can organise internal workshops on topics such as participatory methods, inclusive classroom dialogue, or planning whole-school campaigns. Peer exchange sessions among staff help share ideas across departments and align civic goals with broader school development plans. A strong civic culture depends on consistent practice—not just what is taught, but how it is taught and lived daily in the school environment.

5.2 Long-Term Impact and Community Partnerships

Schools can play a lasting role in shaping civic life when they establish strong, enduring relationships with institutions beyond the classroom. Cooperation with municipal bodies, EU information centres, and non-governmental organisations offers learners concrete ways to participate in community development. These partnerships encourage shared responsibility and allow students to engage with real issues—from sustainability to inclusion—through practical work.

A compelling example of this approach comes from Poland's Upper Silesian and Zagłębie Metropolis (GZM), which in 2024 launched a city-region-wide public consultation on transport reform. Supported by the European Commission and OECD, and developed in partnership with disability inclusion advocates and university students, the initiative combined surveys, research walks, and workshops to address outdated infrastructure and accessibility challenges. Students and civic actors worked side by side to develop recommendations, demonstrating how structured cooperation and shared ownership can lead to informed, inclusive decisions. Such processes are not limited to metropolitan planning; schools can adapt similar models by inviting students to investigate local challenges—such as public spaces, health services, or youth safety—and propose improvements over the course

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of a term or school year (Updates on the Innovative Implementation of the Partnership Principle in Cohesion Policy, 2025).

Sustained engagement requires continuity. When learners follow a project over several months—such as mentoring younger pupils, curating a local history archive, or coordinating a campaign on healthy food—they see how civic work evolves and why persistence matters. This approach allows them to track progress, reflect on outcomes, and experience the value of commitment. In some schools, these activities become part of regular class responsibilities, supported by weekly planning time and visible within school-wide assemblies or displays. Teachers guide the process, but students shape the rhythm and content.

Partnerships can also extend across regions and national borders. Educators involved in Erasmus+ cooperation initiatives often exchange lesson plans or develop parallel student projects with colleagues abroad. These shared efforts—on topics like media bias, democratic memory, or community resilience—allow students to connect their local experiences with those of others in different European contexts. These exchanges build not only comparative insight but also solidarity and curiosity, especially when learners reflect on differences in approach or outcome.

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6. Educational and Methodological Recommendations

6.1 Teaching Strategies

Effective civic learning relies on more than factual instruction—it requires classroom practices that mirror democratic life. While lectures and readings provide students with essential knowledge of governance, rights, and institutions, the development of civic attitudes and behaviours depends on active learning. Methods such as structured discussions, project-based tasks, and deliberative classroom formats allow students to practise listening, speaking, and negotiating with others. These approaches help students internalise civic values such as fairness, respect, and cooperation, while also strengthening their confidence in public reasoning.

One highly effective strategy is to engage students in simulated civic processes, where they take on roles in mock parliaments, city councils, or school boards. In these settings, learners can explore real-world dilemmas, draft proposals, and defend arguments as elected officials, citizen groups, or journalists. Such as, a class might simulate a local council meeting to debate the construction of a youth centre, requiring students to consider competing interests, read regulations, and produce consensus-based recommendations. Such exercises help students understand how institutions function, how decisions are made, and what trade-offs are involved. They also make governance tangible, showing that laws and policies emerge from structured debate and often imperfect compromise.

Simulations can be adapted to different age groups and levels of complexity. Younger students might prepare role-plays on school rules or recycling campaigns, while older learners can analyse real legislative proposals or conduct mock public hearings. Teachers can support these activities by assigning preparatory readings, organising guest speakers, or creating digital resources (e.g. agendas, fact sheets, or minutes templates). Following the simulation, students benefit from debriefing sessions that encourage reflection: What arguments were most persuasive? How were decisions reached? What might be done differently in real life? These moments of analysis deepen understanding and reinforce the idea that democracy is

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not just a subject, but a practice that involves careful listening, reasoning, and shared responsibility.

6.2 Digital Tools & Resources

Digital platforms can significantly enrich civic education by providing students with access to structured learning materials, interactive content, and opportunities for real participation. Tools such as the EU Youth Portal (https://youth.europa.eu/home_en) and EU Learning (https://eu-learning.net/) offer accessible modules on topics ranging from voting rights and European values to civic duties and institutional structures. These resources allow students to explore the principles of democracy at their own pace, often through quizzes, real-life case studies, or scenario-based activities. Another example is the European Parliament's "Together.eu" platform (https://together.eu/), which encourages young people to engage in elections and local campaigns. For younger learners or introductory lessons "Learning Corner" (https://learning-corner.learning.europa.eu/index_en) presents simplified simulations, educational games, and videos about how EU decision-making works and for teachers some learning materials (https://learning-corner.learning.europa.eu/learning-materials_en).

Virtual simulations help make abstract governance structures more concrete. Online tools such as democracy simulation game (https://learning-corner.learning.europa.eu/learning-materials/council-simulation-game_en), developed by various EU-funded projects, enable students to participate in digital versions of town hall meetings or parliamentary debates. These simulations can be integrated into classroom projects, particularly when complemented with pre-task briefings and follow-up reflections. Teachers can also use resources from the Council of Europe's Democratic Schools Network (https://www.coe.int/en/web/campaign-free-to-speak-safe-to-learn/democratic-schools-network), which includes guidelines for using ICT to promote democratic participation within school settings (https://www.coe.int/en/web/campaign-free-to-speak-safe-to-learn/making-children-and-students-voices-heard).

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6.3 Innovative Learning Approaches

New approaches to civic education increasingly draw on gamification and experiential learning to make abstract concepts accessible and engaging. Gamification applies selected game elements—like point systems, role cards, or interactive challenges—to non-game environments such as the classroom. Unlike full-scale games, gamified learning is designed to reinforce specific behaviours and values, such as cooperation, responsibility, or critical thinking. For instance, a points-based group activity simulating budget negotiations in a local council can help students understand economic trade-offs while encouraging collaboration and shared decision-making. However, these methods require thoughtful planning and clear educational intent. As experts caution, gamification is not a shortcut to engagement; without a sound pedagogical framework, game mechanics alone will not improve learning outcomes. Still, when used strategically, they can support students' natural motivation to achieve, socialise, and problem-solve—desires that align well with democratic learning goals (Gamification in non-formal education and youth work, 2021).

Peer-led initiatives also play a vital role in creating active and inclusive learning environments. Student-led clubs, such as debate teams, environmental groups, or human rights collectives, offer learners the chance to organise autonomously around issues they care about. These clubs not only give voice to students' ideas but build essential leadership skills such as coordination, delegation, conflict resolution, and goal-setting. Members often take responsibility for planning events, communicating with external partners, managing group discussions, and evaluating outcomes—tasks that mirror civic responsibilities in wider society. Campaigns led by such groups—whether for school sustainability plans or local volunteering drives—are often more meaningful to participants because they stem from student interests. Teachers may act as facilitators, but responsibility and momentum come from the students themselves. These spaces are especially valuable for fostering civic agency and cultivating a sense of purpose and belonging within the school community.

Lastly, linking civic engagement to a multidisciplinary perspective reinforces its relevance across all aspects of society. Initiatives that combine civic themes with art, history,

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or digital technology help students see that democratic values are embedded in culture, creativity, and everyday experience. To illustrate, learners might design digital storytelling projects exploring freedom of expression or analyse visual propaganda from different historical contexts. The European Commission recognises the role of games and creative media in shaping identity and public discourse, and supports projects that examine how play-based innovation can strengthen democratic participation. By integrating these cultural dimensions into civic learning, schools equip students to recognise how shared values are negotiated not only through formal politics, but through narratives, media, and cultural expression (Khattari, 2021).

6.4 Assessment Methods

Measuring civic learning requires approaches that reflect its complexity. Traditional tests can assess factual knowledge—such as understanding the structure of the European Union or the content of the Charter of Fundamental Rights—but they do not capture how students apply civic values in real-life settings. A combined use of formative and summative assessment methods allows teachers to track both progress and outcomes. Competency-based rubrics can be used to assess leadership, collaboration, ethical reasoning, or problem-solving during debates, community projects, or simulations. Such as, a mock EU Council role-play might be evaluated not only on factual accuracy but also on teamwork, constructive dialogue, and adaptability to diverse perspectives.

Reflection portfolios are a great way to assess students' civic learning. Using journals, logbooks, or digital platforms, students record their civic experiences, set personal goals, and reflect on the attitudes and challenges they encounter. These tools promote deeper learning by encouraging students to express how their values develop, how they handle disagreement, and how their actions connect to wider community issues. To illustrate, a student participating in a campaign on sustainable food might explore how their view of EU agricultural policy changed or how they contributed to group decision-making. Teachers can support this process with guided prompts and regular reflection points that foster continuity and growth.

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A key element of democratic learning is the ability to assess one's own and others' contributions fairly. Peer review and student-led evaluation can support this by encouraging learners to co-develop assessment criteria and give constructive feedback on group tasks. This practice helps students build accountability and respect while developing critical communication skills. Whether assessing a group campaign, a civic pitch, or a collaborative research task, peer review helps students become more aware of process, not just product. It also reinforces the idea that civic participation involves responsibility—not only for expressing views, but for listening, adjusting, and contributing to shared goals.

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7. Summary and Key Takeaways

7.1 Recap of Key Concepts

This handbook presents civic engagement as an everyday practice through which democracy is built and renewed. Several key ideas run through its pages, connecting school life, democratic participation, and the wider European project.

Active participation includes voicing opinions, joining discussions, planning initiatives, using digital tools, and building connections with others. These actions link personal experience to collective responsibility. Shared values such as human dignity, freedom, and solidarity take shape not through slogans but through lived effort. In the European context, these actions contribute to a sense of belonging that extends beyond borders and reflects common goals.

Young people need a broad set of competences to take part effectively in public life. Knowledge of institutions and rights is only the beginning. Just as important are skills like communication, teamwork, and critical thinking, along with values such as fairness, openness, and a willingness to act. Structured opportunities—including projects supported by Erasmus+ or the European Solidarity Corps—allow students to experience citizenship in real settings and to develop habits that carry into adult life.

Ideas about what it means to participate have changed over time. From ancient city-states to contemporary movements, the role of the citizen has been debated and reimagined. Participation today might take the form of voting, joining a school council, organising a digital campaign, or working with local associations. These different paths all contribute to a more responsive and inclusive democratic culture.

When people contribute regularly to shared decisions, trust grows and communities become more resilient. This is especially true for schools, where the chance to take part—whether in decision-making, projects, or debate—helps students develop a strong sense of

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belonging and purpose. They begin to understand that their views matter, that action is possible, and that working with others is part of being a citizen.

Schools also act as gateways to the wider world. Through partnerships with civil society, municipalities, and European networks, students gain insight into how change happens and how different sectors contribute. These experiences help them see themselves as part of something larger, grounded in cooperation, shared values, and a commitment to the common good.

Teachers support this development by choosing methods that match democratic aims. Simulations, debates, group projects, and structured reflection create spaces for dialogue, compromise, and shared responsibility. Online platforms and EU participation tools bring current issues into the classroom and show how policies are shaped. Student-led activities and campaigns reinforce motivation and allow learners to take initiative on matters that concern them.

How students are assessed also matters. Learning to participate involves growth over time, not just factual recall. Portfolios, group feedback, and peer reviews allow students to reflect on what they've done, how they worked with others, and how their thinking has changed. These approaches highlight the personal and social dimensions of civic learning—making visible the choices, values, and collaboration behind each task.

Civic engagement, when woven into school life, prepares students not just to understand democracy but to practise it. The knowledge they gain, the values they reflect on, and the actions they take contribute to a culture where participation becomes natural. When they see that their efforts matter—not only in their classroom, but across a shared European space—they begin to carry that sense of purpose with them into society.

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7.2 Reflection Questions

These questions are here to get you thinking about what civic engagement looks like in everyday life. They're for anyone—students, teachers, or school teams—who wants to reflect on how people get involved in public life, whether that's at school, in the local community, or across Europe.

They invite open discussion, personal insight, and connection to real experiences—both within and beyond the classroom.

- How can small, local actions—like organising a school project or joining a youth group—contribute to wider social or political change?
- In what ways do you feel connected to democratic processes in your school, community, or country? What helps you feel included, and what gets in the way?
- Think about a time when you saw someone stand up for an idea or group. What made their action meaningful? What risks or responsibilities did they take on?
- What does it mean to be a citizen of the European Union in everyday life? How is that different from or similar to being a citizen of your town or country?
- When have you experienced disagreement in a group setting? How was it handled, and what could have made the dialogue more constructive?
- What values do you think are most important for living together in a democratic society? Where do these values show up in your school or community?
- If you had the chance to propose a law or policy at local or EU level, what would it be, and why? Who would it affect, and how?
- How does digital participation—such as social media campaigns, online petitions, or e-consultations—compare to traditional forms of engagement?

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- What responsibilities come with having a voice in society? How do people learn to use their voice in a way that includes and respects others?
- What would a more democratic school look like to you? What changes—big or small—would make student participation more meaningful?

These prompts can be used as discussion starters, journal entries, or group project themes. They are not about right or wrong answers, but about encouraging critical thinking, dialogue, and reflection on one's place in society.

7.3 Practical Applications

Turning civic engagement into something real and concrete starts with small steps. Schools are well placed to connect classroom learning with everyday life by offering students a chance to take part in decisions, contribute to projects, and respond to the issues around them. The examples and tools below show how civic values can move from theory to action.

Sharing civic initiatives from across Europe helps students see how others act on shared challenges. Teachers can present case studies as discussion topics, role-play material, or project inspiration.

In the Netherlands, the organisation Dona Daria works with intersectional communities to highlight how race, gender, and migration shape civic life. One classroom activity might include analysing interviews with activists from Trans United Netherlands (or any other civic activists), then discussing what civic leadership looks like when it comes from people with lived experience of exclusion.

The initiative Samen Hier rethinks migrant integration by treating newcomers as equal partners, not just recipients of help. Students can reflect on what it means to be both host and participant in a shared society, then design welcome plans for new students or families in their own school.

The project Pressure Line focused on civic themes like climate and mental health. One featured initiative involved turning Rotterdam's billboards into open-air galleries during the

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pandemic. In class, students could design a public art campaign linked to a local issue and plan how to present it in their town or school corridors.

Other case studies offer ideas for student-led or school-wide initiatives. In Rotterdam, local residents created urban gardens to support food access and community well-being. A class could map unused green areas in their own neighbourhood and propose plans for shared gardening or green corners. In Bulgaria, the "Donate a Lesson" campaign encouraged people to share knowledge and time with those who lacked educational access. This could inspire students to offer peer tutoring or coordinate with older students to mentor younger pupils.

In Ireland, the cultural organisation Smashing Times connected arts and civic values through performance, storytelling, and public remembrance. Teachers might adapt this model by encouraging students to write and perform short scenes about democracy, protest, or human rights.

Many of the initiatives began with interviews, media searches, and local observation. Students can follow the same process in their own area. They might choose a local initiative, interview someone involved in the work, and present their story to the class. In Romania, SEC identified regional civic efforts through local networking and EU project databases. Students might replicate this by contacting town councillors, cultural groups, or school alumni to learn how different people contribute to civic life (Heritage).

Though the contexts vary—from Italy's neighbourhood projects to Iceland's institutional models—common values emerge: inclusion, cooperation, social justice, and sustainability. Teachers can organise thematic weeks where different classes explore equity in education, well-being, or climate response. Each group might choose one country's initiative to present and then create a small-scale version suited to the local context.

Teachers can use real-life initiatives as entry points for understanding how local needs are translated into policy responses. For instance, students might study the urban gardening efforts in Rotterdam or the Donate a Lesson campaign in Bulgaria, then identify similar needs in their own community—such as access to green spaces or education support. They could

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investigate which municipal departments handle these areas, explore how decisions are made, and prepare short proposals to present to a local council, school board, or community forum. This turns learning into structured action and helps students grasp how civic ideas can influence policy.

The Trans United Netherlands initiative and the Samen Hier model offer opportunities to discuss how local policies can reflect inclusion, migration, and equal participation. After studying these cases, students can research local integration or anti-discrimination plans, review public documents or policy briefs, and assess whether similar community voices are being heard. Classroom debates or position papers can be based on actual local strategies, and students may be encouraged to write public letters or share feedback with relevant bodies. In doing so, they practise civic reasoning while contributing to real conversations in their own towns or regions.

8. Self-Assessment and Test Questions

8.1 Self-Check Questions

1. What does civic engagement mean to you, and where have you seen it in action in your everyday life?
2. How confident do you feel speaking up about an issue that affects your school or community?
3. Can you name a time when you felt part of a group working towards a shared goal? What helped you feel included?
4. Which values—like fairness, respect, or responsibility—do you think are most important in civic life, and why?
5. In what ways do you think young people can influence decisions in their town, school, or region?

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6. Have your views on democracy or participation changed as a result of learning about different civic initiatives?

7. What makes some people more likely to participate in civic activities than others? What could make it easier for more people to take part?

8. How do you see your role as a citizen—not just of your country, but as part of the European Union?

9. What kind of civic project would you start if you had support from your school and local authorities?

10. When you look at current public issues—locally or across Europe—what responsibility do you think you have, if any?

8.2 Knowledge-Based Questions

Multiple Choice (Choose one answer):

1. What is the primary purpose of civic engagement in democratic societies?

    a) To promote competition between political parties

    b) To prepare individuals for political careers

    c) To involve people in shaping decisions that affect their lives

    d) To replace elected representatives with direct votes

2. Which of the following best illustrates initiative-based participation?

    a) Citizens responding to a government survey

    b) Youth submitting proposals to improve public transport

    c) A school organising a lecture on the European Parliament

    d) People voting in a local election

3. What is civic literacy?

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a) The ability to read and write about national history

b) Knowledge of how to access and engage with democratic institutions

c) A course on public administration

d) Reading political theory in school

4. Which of these competences is most relevant to democratic participation?

a) Memorisation

b) Compliance

c) Dialogue and collaboration

d) Speed and efficiency

5. What type of participation involves contributing during the early stages of policy-making?

a) Planning participation

b) Informative participation

c) Referendum voting

d) Evaluation participation

6. Which of these actions reflects evaluation participation?

a) Reviewing the impact of a school's environmental campaign

b) Attending a local government open day

c) Participating in an awareness walk

d) Voting in a student council election

7. What does the concept of public sphere refer to in democratic theory?

a) A private space for political leaders to meet

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b) A formal classroom environment

c) An open space where citizens discuss matters of shared concern

d) The area around government buildings

8. How does the European Citizens' Initiative function?

a) It registers local complaints

b) It allows EU citizens to propose new legislation with 1 million signatures

c) It monitors elections across Member States

d) It provides political training for young leaders

9. What distinguishes deliberative democracy from other models?

a) It limits citizen participation to elections

b) It relies on expert decisions only

c) It is based on reasoned discussion among free and equal participants

d) It prioritises efficiency over fairness

10. Which of the following is most likely to build civic capital?

a) Individual competition

b) Trust, networks, and motivation to participate

c) Strict legal enforcement

d) Automated decision-making systems

Answer Key (for teacher use):

1. c 2. b 3. b 4. c 5. a 6. a 7. c 8. b 9. c 10. b

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Matching Task 1 – Concepts and Definitions

Instructions: Match each civic concept with its correct definition.

Column A	Column B
A. Civic literacy	i. Working with others to achieve shared goals in public life
B. Deliberation	ii. The ability to understand rights, duties, and institutions
C. Civic action	iii. Reasoned discussion to explore and evaluate decisions
D. Public participation	iv. Taking part in decision-making at school, local, or EU level

Answer Key:

A – ii

B – iii

C – i

D – iv

Matching Task 2 – Participation Types

Instructions: Match each type of citizen participation with its description.

Column A	Column B
A. Informative participation	i. Citizens help decide how public money is spent
B. Planning participation	ii. Citizens receive policy details but do not directly shape them
C. Initiative participation	iii. Citizens take action independently, often bottom-up
D. Participatory budgeting	iv. Citizens contribute ideas during early stages of policy development

Answer Key:

A – ii

B – iv

C – iii

D – i

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8.3 Application-Based Exercises

1. Design a School-Wide Civic Campaign

Identify a topic students care about—such as digital wellbeing, inclusion, or local transport—and support them in designing a campaign to raise awareness or suggest change. This can include posters, short videos, policy proposals, or a student petition. The project should involve clear roles, teamwork, and a reflection phase. Teachers can help students link their topic to relevant EU priorities or local policies.

2. Simulate a Citizens' Assembly

Split the class into groups representing citizens, facilitators, and observers. Provide a topic (e.g. "Should schools reduce their environmental footprint?") and basic background material. Students discuss the issue, hear different viewpoints, and try to reach a shared recommendation. Observers report on participation styles, argument quality, and inclusion. This exercise supports civic reasoning and deliberation.

3. Investigate Local Civic Structures

Ask students to research how decision-making works in their town or region. Who is responsible for youth services? How are local budgets decided? Which policies are open to public input? Students prepare a presentation, short report, or infographic showing their findings and identifying one area where youth could be more involved. If possible, arrange a Q&A with a local councillor or civil servant.

4. Host a Mini-Debate on EU Citizenship Rights

Present students with scenarios that test EU rights in everyday life—for example, moving to another country for study, accessing healthcare while abroad, or joining a cross-border youth initiative. In pairs or small groups, students argue how the EU supports or limits each scenario, using real sources (such as the EU Youth Portal or Citizens' Rights documents). Close with a class discussion.

5. Create a Civic Participation Toolkit

In groups, students design a "toolkit" for younger peers who want to get involved in their school or community. It could be a poster, booklet, or short video guide. It should explain what civic participation is, why it matters, and how to start. Include tips on communication, planning, and working with others. This task reinforces agency and practical competences.

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9. Annexes

9.1 Glossary

Active citizenship

Taking part in the life of a community through volunteering, voting, public discussion, or organising projects to address shared concerns.

Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union

A document that outlines the basic rights and freedoms of everyone living in the EU, including dignity, equality, justice, and education.

Citizen participation

Ways in which individuals or groups can influence decisions, policies, and public life—this includes voting, giving feedback, joining discussions, or proposing changes.

Civic capital

The motivation, trust, and social connections that make it easier for people to work together for the common good.

Civic competence

A combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that help individuals take part effectively and responsibly in democratic life.

Civic engagement

Any action that helps improve community life, from local volunteering to participating in democratic processes and public decision-making.

Civic literacy

Understanding how democratic systems work and knowing how to access, interpret, and use information to take part in civic life.

Deliberation

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A process of thoughtful discussion in which people exchange views, consider arguments, and try to reach a fair and informed decision.

Democracy

A system of government where power comes from the people, usually through voting, open debate, and shared rules.

Digital participation

Taking part in civic life using digital tools—such as e-consultations, online petitions, or social media campaigns—to share opinions or influence decisions.

European Citizens' Initiative (ECI)

A tool that allows EU citizens to propose new EU laws by collecting at least one million signatures from across seven Member States.

European Solidarity Corps

An EU programme that funds volunteering and solidarity projects for young people to support communities and learn civic skills.

Evaluation participation

A form of engagement where citizens reflect on and assess public policies, programmes, or services to see whether they delivered results.

Intersectionality

The idea that people may face different experiences of discrimination or exclusion depending on the combination of their identities, such as gender, race, or background.

Participatory budgeting

A democratic process where citizens help decide how to spend part of a public budget, often at the local level.

Planning participation

Involving citizens early in the policy process—before decisions are made—to share ideas, set priorities, and help shape proposals.

Public sphere

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A space—physical or digital—where people can come together to discuss issues that affect society and contribute to public debate.

Reflection portfolio

A personal record of learning and experience in civic projects, including thoughts, goals, and feedback on one's participation.

Social cohesion

The sense of connection, trust, and shared responsibility that holds a community or society together.

Youth Dialogue (EU Youth Dialogue)

A process supported by the EU that allows young people to speak directly with policymakers and help shape youth-related decisions.

9.2 List of Abbreviations

BIK+ – Better Internet for Kids Plus

An EU initiative promoting safe, responsible, and positive use of digital technologies among children and young people.

CEC – Citizens' Engagement and Consultation

Refers broadly to methods used to involve citizens in decision-making processes.

ECI – European Citizens' Initiative

A tool that allows EU citizens to propose new legislation to the European Commission by gathering at least one million signatures.

EESC – European Economic and Social Committee

An EU advisory body that gives civil society organisations a formal role in shaping EU policies and legislation.

EPA – European Parents' Association

An umbrella organisation representing parents in Europe, promoting cooperation between families and schools.

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EP – European Parliament

The directly elected legislative body of the EU that represents EU citizens and participates in shaping European laws and policies.

EU – European Union

A political and economic union of 27 European countries that share common institutions, laws, and values.

EUYO – European Union Youth Orchestra

An ensemble that brings together young musicians from across the EU, often linked to cultural diplomacy and youth programmes.

NEET – Not in Education, Employment, or Training

A term used to describe young people who are currently outside of formal learning or work systems.

OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

An international organisation that publishes research and policy recommendations, including on education and civic engagement.

SDGs – Sustainable Development Goals

A set of 17 global goals adopted by the United Nations to address environmental, social, and economic challenges by 2030.

SEC – Soros Educational Center (Romania)

An educational institution involved in adult learning and civic engagement initiatives, referenced in case study research.

UN – United Nations

An international organisation that promotes peace, human rights, and development around the world.

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

A UN body supporting international cooperation in education, culture, science, and communication.

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YS – Youth Strategy (EU Youth Strategy)

The EU's framework for youth policy, focused on engagement, empowerment, and participation from 2019 to 2027.

9.3 Further Reading

- SALTO Participation and Information Resource Centre

https://participationpool.eu

A curated collection of methods, articles, and training tools to support youth participation in democratic life.

- Democracy Reporting International

https://democracy-reporting.org

Provides accessible reports and toolkits on democratic governance, citizen monitoring, and civic resilience.

- The Good Lobby

https://www.thegoodlobby.eu

A non-profit platform teaching citizens and organisations how to influence public decisions through ethical lobbying.

- EU Academy

https://academy.europa.eu

Offers free, self-paced courses on EU governance, citizen rights, climate policy, and civic topics—with certificates.

European Wergeland Centre (EWC)

https://theewc.org

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An expert centre on education for democratic citizenship, based in Norway. Includes classroom materials and teacher training resources.

- Civicus Monitor

https://monitor.civicus.org

Tracks civic space around the world. Can be used in upper secondary classrooms to compare levels of freedom and participation.

- Participedia

https://participedia.net

A global database of participatory projects and democratic innovations, searchable by country, theme, or method.

- Eurobarometer – Civic Engagement Reports

https://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/en/be-heard/eurobarometer/civic-engagement

Regular surveys conducted across EU Member States exploring citizens' views on participation, trust in institutions, voting, and social activism. Useful for classroom discussions and comparing trends in democratic engagement.

- Data.europa.eu – Civic Engagement Dataset Collection

https://data.europa.eu/data/datasets/civic-engagement?locale=en

An open-access collection of datasets related to civic engagement, volunteering, digital participation, and public opinion. Ideal for student projects using real data or for research-based learning activities.

- EPR – Citizens' Engagement Platform (European Commission)

https://www.epr.eu/the-european-commission-launches-citizens-engagement-platform

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A gateway to the Commission's centralised platform for citizen consultations, feedback tools, and participatory processes. Helps learners understand how everyday voices can shape EU policy.

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9.4 Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

1. What is the difference between civic engagement and political participation?

Civic engagement includes all actions that improve community life, from volunteering and school projects to discussions on local issues. Political participation is a specific type of civic engagement focused on influencing formal political processes, like voting, petitioning, or contacting elected officials.

2. Can students who are not old enough to vote still engage civically?

Yes. Civic engagement begins long before voting age. Students can join school councils, start projects, voice opinions in youth consultations, or take part in community improvement efforts.

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3. What are civic competences, and how do they relate to school learning?

Civic competences include knowledge (e.g., understanding how democracy works), skills (e.g., collaboration), values (e.g., fairness), and attitudes (e.g., openness). Schools play a key role in developing these by connecting lessons to real-life civic issues.

4. How can I assess civic learning in the classroom?

Through a mix of methods: self-reflection portfolios, peer reviews, group projects, and rubrics that measure skills like problem-solving, cooperation, and communication. Both formative and summative tools are valuable.

5. Is civic engagement only about taking action in one's own country?

No. It includes local, national, and European or global dimensions. Young people can engage in EU-level consultations, cross-border school projects, and solidarity actions that go beyond national borders.

6. How is digital participation different from traditional forms of engagement?

Digital participation uses online tools—like e-petitions, online forums, or social media—to express views, collaborate, or access information. It can complement offline action but also raises questions about access, misinformation, and digital literacy.

7. What is the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) and how does it involve youth?

The ECI allows EU citizens to propose laws to the European Commission by collecting signatures. Although only citizens aged 18+ can formally support initiatives, young people can help organise, promote, or debate proposals.

8. How does civic engagement support inclusion and equity?

When done well, civic engagement gives a voice to those often left out of decision-making. Schools can help by creating safe spaces for discussion and encouraging participation from students of different backgrounds.

9. Can civic engagement be taught in non-civics subjects?

Yes. History, literature, science, and even maths can include civic elements—like ethical questions, public policy debates, or group decision-making. Civic learning works best when it's interdisciplinary.

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10. What are simple first steps for schools that want to support civic engagement?

Start with student councils, debates on local issues, partnerships with local NGOs, or classroom projects linked to the Sustainable Development Goals. Build gradually, and include students in shaping the process.

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APA-Style Reference Examples

Book

Format:

Author, A. A. (Year). *Title of work: Capital letter also for subtitle*. Publisher.

Example:

Smith, J. K. (2020). *The art of coding: A journey through algorithms*. TechPress.

Journal Article

Format:

Author, A. A., & Author, B. B. (Year). Title of article. *Title of Periodical, volume number*(issue number), pages. https://doi.org/xx.xxx/yyyy

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Example:

Doe, J., & Roe, R. (2019). The effects of laughter on productivity. *Journal of Fun at Work, 15*(2), 123–134. https://doi.org/10.1234/jfw.2019.5678

Website

Format:

Author, A. A. (Year, Month Date). Title of webpage. *Site Name*. URL

Example:

Brown, L. M. (2021, July 15). The secret to success: Coffee and code. *Tech Guru*. http://www.techguru.com/secretsuccess

Edited Book Chapter

Format:

Author, A. A. (Year). Title of chapter. In E. E. Editor (Ed.), *Title of book* (pp. pages of chapter). Publisher.

Example:

Jones, P. R. (2018). Debugging the myths. In S. L. Roberts (Ed.), *Modern programming challenges* (pp. 45–67). CodeHouse Publishing

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