

PACT

P.A.C.T. PROJECT

POLITICAL ACTIVISM

CRITICAL THINKING

POWER TO THE
PEOPLE
!!!



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PACT - Political Activism & Critical Thinking

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1/ INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project idea

One of the greatest dangers people have faced in recent years is the increasing radicalization within Europe. The active participation of Europeans in political life is decreasing and, on the other hand, radical political ideas are gaining more and more supporters. These tendencies become even more visible in times of crisis. Especially in times of the Covid-19 crisis, when people experience severe cuts in the exercise of their personal fundamental rights, people are particularly susceptible to radicalization processes. Groups or individuals represent one-sided political views through their radical behavior and hardly allow any other opinion.

The phenomenon of radicalization is evident in the 21st century through terrorism and violent extremism. A review of European history shows that all areas of social life are politically motivated. The triggers for various radical acts result from the fact that socio-economic inequalities, discrimination and the like lead to disadvantages within large sections of the population, which subsequently become radicalized. To counteract this, more thought needs to be given to the role of political education, the recognition of rights and the strengthening of European cooperation. Which are the main reasons of radicalization and how do the processes of radicalization work?

- Who are the actors?
- How is radicalization propagated?
- How can democratic values be communicated and realized?
- What democratic means are available to implement initiatives?
- How does political participation work?
- What skills need to be acquired to be able to participate in socially relevant issues?

The aim of this project is to find out how people who may be at risk of radicalization can be methodically empowered to participate in socially relevant issues at the political level. As a result, an online article, a guide and a methodological kit will be created. It will also show how people can successfully leave radical groups and return to social life and how active participation in social and political life can be strengthened. In the exchange of best practices, tools and methods for developing critical thinking and political activism, this will be taught through concrete tools and approaches.

The results of the project will be implemented as working methods of the participating institutions in order to enrich their programs and trainings on the field. At the same time, others organizations and institutions of adult education will benefit from the gained knowledge and project results, as they will merge into the training and they will receive further education from the project content that will be distributed. It is expected that the project results will lead to further awareness and engagement with the topic.

1.2 Project partners

1.2.1 Project coordinator & project partners

The project consortium consists of five partners, with the Austrian partner "Akademie für Politische Bildung und demokratiefördernde Maßnahmen" as project coordinator, supported by partners from Italy "LUETEC", Germany "MITEINANDER IN EUROPA E.V.", Greece "MOSAIC" and Serbia "UG Klara i Rosa".



1.2.1.1 Akademie für Politische Bildung und demokratiefördernde Maßnahmen

The Akademie für Politische Bildung und demokratiefördernde Maßnahmen based in Linz is an association for civic education and democracy promoting measures. The Akademie für Politische Bildung und demokratiefördernde Maßnahmen was founded in 2017 with the aim of promoting equal opportunities. Through international cooperation and diverse educational offers for schools, companies and public institutions, we support the personal, scholastic and academic development of children and adults. We develop and implement projects in the field of civic education to ensure opportunities for European citizens to participate in socially relevant issues.

How is this project important for the Akademie für Politische Bildung und demokratiefördernde Maßnahmen?

It is very important for the Akademie für Politische Bildung und demokratiefördernde Maßnahmen to show the importance of political activism and critical thinking. So, we want to put together a mix of methods for teachers to address the issues of political participation, radicalization, democracy and related issues and to raise people's awareness about them.

How will the Akademie für Politische Bildung und demokratiefördernde Maßnahmen use the project results?

The Akademie für Politische Bildung und demokratiefördernde Maßnahmen will create workshops based on the methods created in the project and offer them to schools, adult education institutions and all previous cooperation partners.

Motto in relation to the project:

Participate actively // Think critically // Be a Citizen in Charge



1.2.1.2 Miteinander in Europa E.V.

Miteinander in Europa e.V. is based in Lüneburg and aims to promote the European idea through discussion and social engagement. The focus is on education and the promotion of networking and learning ideas in all areas of life in the European community.

MITEINANDER IN EUROPA stands for European values - especially democracy. Today, an open, pluralistic and liberal democracy is a matter of course. That is why MITEINANDER IN EUROPA is particularly committed to democracy-promoting activities and tries to counteract radicalization, especially right-wing radicalism.

How is this project important for MITEINANDER IN EUROPA?

The PACT project identifies problems that can arise from radicalization and shows ways to counteract it. To this end, it addresses the method of critical thinking, which is to be anchored more deeply in the field of education. Within the framework of the project, methods for democratisation and for learning critical thinking are tested and elaborated. It is important to address the topic in this project in order to promote MITEINANDER IN EUROPA.

How will MITEINANDER IN EUROPA use the project results?

MITEINANDER IN EUROPA will help to develop its competences in democracy building. Staff and volunteers will acquire methodological skills that will qualify them for future workshops locally, regionally and internationally.

Motto in relation to the project:

Education creates opportunities for active citizenship and democracy.



1.2.1.3 LUETEC - Libera Università Europea Luetec

LUETEC was founded in Naples (IT) in 2000 as a European university of the third age and has developed over the years into a centre for lifelong learning, a point of reference for Neapolitan citizens. Its main objectives are to promote European values and to work together to foster democracy and mutual respect among European people.

LUETEC is also a Euro-planning centre, recognised in Europe as a partner and coordinator of many projects both in the field of youth and adult education and in vocational training: In fact, LUETEC has participated in more than 50+ projects and partnerships, such as Leonardo da Vinci, Socrates, Grundtvig, Youth in Action and currently the Erasmus+ programme.

LUETEC cooperates with many private and public institutions: Municipalities, Community Consortia, Primary and Secondary Schools, Universities, Third Age Colleges, NGOs, Foundations and other adult education organizations all over Italy and Europe, most of them being our reference actors for this project.

We work in different educational contexts (formal and non-formal) and focus mainly on low-skilled and disadvantaged people.

LUETEC staff are experienced in the design and implementation of intellectual outputs, in the development of educational tools for adult educators, such as manuals, e-lessons, video-lessons, toolkits and e-books and other e-learning tools. Over the years, we have worked in particular on promoting European citizenship and human rights education for young people and adults.

More recently, we have been involved in developing critical thinking among seniors by planning workshops and conferences on misinformation and fake news (how to recognise and prevent it).

In this context, LUETEC is a writing partner of many manuals aimed at adult educators in tolerance education, hate speech prevention and inclusive education for migrants. Thanks to the participation in this project, we want to stimulate the local debate on political activism in our city by involving our older students in local activities related to the PACT partnership experience.

Motto in relation to the project

"Freedom is not a free space. Freedom is participation." By Giorgio Gaber



1.2.1.4 MOSAIC

MOSAIC // Culture & Creativity is a Greek social enterprise whose main goal is to support cultural and social innovation and creativity by mentoring and accompanying creative ideas and projects, entrepreneurs, start-ups, young people and synergies across Europe.

How is this project important for MOSAIC?

By participating in this project, we want to observe, study and eventually present the main good practices of political activism and critical thinking that have taken place in Greece over the years, especially from a cultural and educational perspective.

How will MOSAIC use the project results?

Consequently, we want to raise our voice against radicalization tendencies that could eventually cause deep trauma in the process of ever-evolving European integration.

We will take the good practices presented in the PACT project not only as positive theoretical examples of cultural and general political resistance, but also as practical inspiration for our future initiatives. In the near future, MOSAIC would like to adapt and reproduce the most effective good practices through workshops, seminars and other cultural initiatives (e.g. plays, artistic installations, etc.) to raise the awareness of the citizens of our region and country in a thoughtful and creative way. PACT could become a source of inspiration for several creative initiatives of political activism in an effort to achieve an everlasting process of democratization.

Motto in relation to the project:

Culture for open-minded and active citizens



1.2.1.5 UG Klara i Rosa

Living in a multinational environment with a strong influence of national and traditional elements encouraged us to found an association with the mission to create an independent space of freedom of expression, exchange and creation. Through culture and art, we connect different social groups, redefine public space and work to contribute to social change in the local community. UG Klara i Rosa is also the initiator of the foundation of the umbrella organization Center for Contemporary Culture and Art, Subotica, which is a platform that brings together artists and cultural workers and works to strengthen these actors, through promotion, education and other types of support.

How is this project important for UG Klara i Rosa?

Participation in the PACT project contributes to the development of knowledge and skills that further develop the activism and critical approach of the different actors. We put a special focus on young people in our community and work on improving the existing conditions.

The research of the Umbrella Association of Youth of Serbia "Alternative report on the situation and needs of youth in Serbia in 2018" states that 71% of respondents expressed the desire to leave the place where they live and that most of them want to go to Western European countries. The same survey says that 49% of young people believe that Serbia needs a strong leadership that the people will follow, and from this we can conclude that in our society there is a belief that an individual should not rely on his abilities, but passively wait for a savior who will solve problems. Our initiative promotes the idea of independence, activation and association.

The need for young people's activation and involvement in social flows is confirmed by the research "Youth - Our Present - Investigation of Social Biographies of Young People in Serbia", indicating low levels of social activism among young people (active 6.2%, partially passive 14.81% and passive 78.99%).¹

How will UG Klara i Rosa use the project results?

We will disseminate the acquired knowledge and results from this project through workshops for young people, but also through trainings for lecturers, high school professors, teachers, youth workers, with the aim of bringing this newly developed methodology as a useful tool for teachers in civic education.

Motto in relation to the project:

Guided by Gandhi's thoughts:

"Be the change you want to see in the world".

we are moving thoughtfully, planned, courageously towards our goal of creating an independent space of freedom of expression where all social actors can act proactively.

¹ Tomanovic, Smiljka; Stanojevic, Dragab: MLADI – NASA Sadasnjost. Istrazivanje socialnih biografija mladih u Srbiji. 2012. Available under: <https://isi.f.bg.ac.rs/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Smiljka-Tomanovic-et-al-MLadi-nasa-sada%C5%A1njost.pdf>. Last accessed on 23rd September 2021.





Political Activism and Critical Thinking

2/ Political Activism and Critical Thinking

2.2 Political activism

2.2.1 Definitions

"Activism as a form of political action - going into the system, reforming it, or protesting from the outside, drawing attention to grievances with actions and changing them? What is an activist? What is activism? Does it lead to the goal, or rather the integrationist path? Activism as a counter-model to passive acceptance."²

„Activism is what brings about social change. It is a way of acting. Activism occurs in different forms. In general, however, it always strives for a specific goal that involves changing some part of society.“³

„active behavior (progressive) determined action, urge to be active // (from about 1915 to 1920 prevailing) intellectual-political movement that understood literature as a means to achieve certain goals.“⁴

These selected definitions of activism, of which there are many more, show that activism unites many different fields. Mostly, art serves as a so-called transmitter for these actions in order to initiate political-social transformation processes. In this way, activism engages in a battle caused by multi-causal influencing factors from the fields of politics, society, art, etc.

² Ulrich Würdemann: *Aktivismus – das ist was?*. 28th November 2020. Available under: <https://www.2mecs.de/wp/2013/08/aktivismus/>. Last accessed on 2nd June 2021.

³ Sarah Hamer: *Was ist eigentlich ... Aktivismus?*. In: *frauenseiten.bremen.mitschreiben.mitreden*. 24th November 2020. Available under: <https://frauenseiten.bremen.de/blog/was-ist-eigentlich-aktivismus/>. Last accessed on 2nd June 2021.

⁴ Duden. Available under: <https://www.duden.de/rechtschreibung/Aktivismus>. Last accessed on 2nd June 2021.

2.2.2 Political activism - activism - artistic activism

This fact is also explored in a paper published on H/SOZ/KULT entitled "Cultural and Political Activism". Artistically designed banners, leaflets etc. give political contexts a framework and optimize them in order to present themselves. This artistic form is also found in songs and literary texts. Theatre also offers space for activism, denounces grievances and often provides solutions. Later, this clash between social movements and artists and the excesses of civil disobedience will be discussed in more detail. Especially at solidarity rallies such as the protests in connection with migration policy, artists are brought on board to make use of their know-how on the design and implementation of protests or methods of intervention.⁵

Art thus helps activism to take on its most diverse forms and shapes. But what does political activism mean?

According to the political scientists Feldmann-Wojtachnia and Glab, it is a "direct political form of articulation by means of which dissatisfaction with current policies or political demands are expressed."⁶

Activism and political activism can also be used synonymously.

Activism is understood as a form of political participation and political activism is understood as a form of political participation that influences political processes.⁷

In principle, political science describes the forms of political participation according to individual and collective actions. In addition, it is analyzed at which level and in which area within the political system these take place and how and, above all, how frequently they spread. Furthermore, political participation can be realized conventionally or unconventionally. Conventional participation is understood to be "forms of participation embedded in an institutionally defined context, such as elections, organization in parties and interest groups" and unconventional participation is understood to be "forms of action that are not formally institutionalized". In addition, further forms of participation can be distinguished such as legal and illegal forms of participation as well as direct and indirect violent actions.

In her Master's thesis, Mirjam Pot quotes Hans-Martin Uehlinger, who has published several times on the topic of political participation, as saying that political participation can be summarized in five forms of participation:

- "Elections
- party-oriented participation,
- Problem-oriented participation (for example, citizens' initiatives and demonstrations)
- civil disobedience (illegal but not directly violent, for example squatting)
- direct political violence"⁸

Accordingly, activism is an unformulated, problem-oriented participation.

⁵ Kultureller und politischer Aktivismus. In: H-Soz-Kult, 5th February.2016. Available under: <https://www.hsozkult.de/event/id/event-79951>Last Last accessed on 2nd June 2021.

⁶ (Mirjam Pot: Affirmative Überidentifikation als Taktik der Kritik. Am Beispiel der Freunde des Wohlstands. Masterarbeit Wien 2015. Page 16 ff., Available under: http://othes.univie.ac.at/40241/1/2015-11-03_0702883.pdf, Last accessed on 28th February2021.)

⁷ Mirjam Pot: Affirmative Überidentifikation als Taktik der Kritik. Am Beispiel der Freunde des Wohlstands. Masterarbeit Wien 2015. Page 16 ff., Available under: http://othes.univie.ac.at/40241/1/2015-11-03_0702883.pdf, Last accessed on 28th February 2021.

⁸ Hans-Martin Uehlinger (1988: 67) zitiert in: Mirjam Pot: Affirmative Überidentifikation als Taktik der Kritik. Am Beispiel der Freunde des Wohlstands. Masterarbeit Wien 2015. Page 16 ff., Available under: http://othes.univie.ac.at/40241/1/2015-11-03_0702883.pdf, Last accessed on 28th February 2021.

2.2.3 Political activism - for the sake of democracy? // Democracy in danger?

In "Im Blickwinkel: Politische Erwachsenenbildung in Österreich", which was published by the Österreichische Gesellschaft für Politische Bildung (Austrian Society for Political Education), a non-profit association that aims to promote political education in the field of adult education, an article was published by Hakan Gürses, who acts as the scientific director of the ÖGPB and publishes in numerous research projects on this very topic,⁹ including the article "Democracy, Politics and the Political in Civic Education". This article deals with the problem of defining the concept of democracy. The title of the first chapter "Democracy as a Ghost" already shows how polemical Hakan Gürses's approach is to limit democracy as a clear concept and thus the question of whether democracy as a conceptual definition exists at all seems to hover over the reader of the text like a sword of Damocles and is definitely not tangible.

Hakan Gürses describes the democracy movements as waves with different forms. Democracy in its origin as something fought for, characterized by uprisings, it presents itself more recently as a non-violent form of resistance, such as the occupation, reinterpretation and re-functioning of public spaces, as an outgrowth of political action. In addition to these agora movements, Gürses sees two new forms of "democratic struggle", namely the citizen participation initiatives, the advocates of direct democracy, and the do-it-yourself initiatives that want to design new social and economic models.

But how democratic are these movements?

In this context, Gürses refers to Bonapartism, which shaped post-revolutionary France and has not lost its horror today as neo-Bonapartism.

Hakan Gürses explores the question of whether democracy is a kind of substitute for politics and how politics and democracy are anchored in the field of civic education. Hakan Gürses is particularly critical of the flood of methods that push the "real" subject - namely politics - to the side. Politics is not seen as something independent, but something political is recognized in everything. As a result, politics is divided into a narrow (political system) and broad concept of politics (everything other than a formal procedure, like democracy).

This would lead to the following conclusion:

"Politics encompasses more than that sector of society which in everyday life is simply called "politics"; it encompasses society as a whole. Democracy, on the other hand, which is both the goal and the foundation of politics, is not "achieved" and is equally not exhausted in the formal; it encompasses much more, namely life as a whole...Everything is political, and democracy must encompass everything."¹⁰

Thus, it seems plausible to understand political education as the learning of democracy. Which approaches now allow politics to be uncoupled from the shackles of democracy? What is politics and what is political?

Hakan Gürses tries to analyze these questions and describes politics as institutional, normative, legitimized as well as connoted with the establishment of a rule.

⁹ https://www.wien.gv.at/wiki/index.php?title=Hakan_G%C3%BCrses, 3rd June 2017.

¹⁰ Available under : https://moodle.jku.at/jku2015/pluginfile.php/178409/mod_resource/content/1/Artikel%20G%C3%BCrses.pdf, Page 22 f., Last accessed on 09th June 2017.

What is political cannot be determined from the outset and social dynamics are subject to constant change. This means that new conflicts are always arising that need to be resolved.

For this reason, Gürses attributes the following characteristics to the political:

- Unfathomability
- Conflictuality
- Eventfulness

In the case of a transformation process of political difference, civic education would have to recognise the change of the political and focus on political competence. Civic education explains democratic processes and should help to understand politics and to "question nation-state boundaries, the boundaries of the current configuration of the polis."¹¹

What about the concept of democracy - is democracy a ghost?

Hakan Gürses' circle is now closed by justifying this with the example of neo-Bonapartism.

Excursus:

Bonapartism: The party of Bonaparte's supporters (1815 - 1848) managed to master the unrest in France and thus seize power. This term thus stands for a form of government in a particular situation. Louis Napoleon Bonaparte closed a power vacuum in this difficult situation and presented himself as non-partisan, legitimized by the people.

In the post-communist countries (e.g. in Russia):

- Nationwide control of the media
- Nationalisations
- Hardly any total bans
- Difficult laws, therefore no real opposition
- Creation of NGOs close to the government or only charitable ones
- Forums for citizens

In countries with little experience of democracy (Egypt):

- Establishment of a totalitarian regime secured by plebiscite

In western democracies:

- Technicisation of the political
- Staffing of parliament
- Government by experts instead of politicians
- Lobbyism
- Parties with almost identical content¹²

¹¹ Available under: https://moodle.jku.at/jku2015/pluginfile.php/178409/mod_resource/content/1/Artikel%20G%C3%BCrses.pdf, Page 30, Last accessed on 09th June 2017.

¹² Available under : https://moodle.jku.at/jku2015/pluginfile.php/178409/mod_resource/content/1/Artikel%20G%C3%BCrses.pdf, Page 33, Last accessed on 09th June 2017.

According to Gürses, such a presentation of neo-Bonapartism can better clarify the political because of politics. Presentations such as the comparison of dictatorship and democracy are thus counterproductive, as these systems are not lived in this way.

Gürses also points out the dangers of citizen participation movements, including forms of active political participation. In this context, he speaks of a danger that is seriously emerging.

Democracy can thus degenerate into a ghost! Political education is thus an instrument to stand up to neo-Bonapartism.

Bonapartism in connection with contemporary forms of democracy shows how fragile democracy actually is.

Looking at the political conditions in Austria - i.e. at politics - there seem to be many descriptions of Bonapartism:

- a party landscape with few political differences
- non-partisan aspirations of some in politics
- demand for experts in politics
- lobbying - small but present
- increase in citizens' initiatives

2.2.4 Forms of political activism

These processes within democracies described by Gürses are particularly evident in the decline of political interest in conventional party systems, the rejection of conventional forms of participation such as participation in elections or decreases in party memberships. On the other hand, unconventional forms of participation in political life are steadily increasing.¹³

Demonstrations, vigils, petitions, information stands, art actions, human chains, squats, calls for boycotts, strikes, flash mobs, sustainable activism, activism 2.0 // protests on the internet, etc. are omnipresent.

These forms of living democracy are preferred above all by people who want to initiate new political and social processes on the street and on the net with little expenditure of time, easily and without binding membership. This new understanding of politics can be described as "more situational, context-dependent, experience- and concern-oriented". According to Paul Nolte, a political scientist, democracy "becomes a civil society event; it no longer aims at the involvement of the citizen in the state, but at a critique of power."¹⁴

2.2.4.1 Forms of political activism // Various examples

DEMONSTRATIONS

Demonstration can be derived from the Latin word "demonstrare" and can be translated as to show, to point out, to prove. In the political sphere, a demonstration is understood to be a gathering/assembly of people in public space who express their opinion on a certain topic.¹⁵ This is a fundamental right enshrined in Article 12 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

"Article 12, Freedom of assembly and association:

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and to freedom of association with others at all levels, in particular in political, trade union and civic matters, which includes the right of everyone to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his or her interests.
2. Political parties at the level of the Union shall contribute to expressing the political will of the citizens of the Union."¹⁶

Example

Title: A Europe for ALL - Your voice against nationalism

Organizer: Demobüro, NaturFreundeBerlin e.V.

Aim: To call on all European citizens to vote on 26 May 2019 and stand up against nationalism and racism.

Where: in 50 cities across the EU

¹³ Dennis Hauk: Digitale Medien in der politischen Bildung: Anforderungen und Zugänge an das Politik-Verstehen im 21. Jahrhundert. Jena 2015. Page 55 ff.

¹⁴ Dennis Hauk: Digitale Medien in der politischen Bildung: Anforderungen und Zugänge an das Politik-Verstehen im 21. Jahrhundert. Jena 2015. Page 56

¹⁵ Available under: <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demonstration>. Last accessed on 02nd January 2021.

¹⁶ In: Charta der Grundrechte der Europäischen Union. 18th December 2000. Available under: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text_de.pdf. Last accessed on 2nd June 2021.

Participants: Tens of thousands of participants, in Berlin and Cologne about 20,000 people demonstrated¹⁷, in Steyr - a small town in Austria - 600 people ¹⁸

MAHNWAKE

Vigils are demonstrations that draw attention to a social grievance or sad events in the past. They are a form of "non-violent action" and are often scheduled for a longer period of time. As early as 1917, a silent protest of the women's rights movement was held over several weeks in the USA.¹⁹

Example:

Title: Fridays against poverty in old age

Organizer: Facebook group "Fridays against poverty in old age".

Aim: To reduce poverty among the elderly

Where: Stuttgart and other cities

PEOPLE CHAINS

People chains mainly cover long distances during demonstrations. One of the most important was the human chain in 1989, with about two million people and a length of over 600 kilometers from Estonia, Latvia to Lithuania. Those countries demonstrated for their independence.²⁰

Example:

Title: A people' chain for our climate

Organizer: Greenpeace

Aim: To call for clear decisions and concrete action to reduce greenhouse emissions.

Where: Luxembourg²¹

STRINGS OF LIGHTS

Strings of lights stand for peaceful demonstration and are often used for demonstrations directed against xenophobia, inhumanity and the like. All participants are united by the light source with which they want to draw attention to the respective grievances.²²

Example:

Title: no specific title, chain of lights in response to the attack on a Christmas market in Berlin.

Organizer: Pastor Markus Thomas

Goal: To live together in peace

Where: Neuenkirchen²³

NET ACTIVISM

This is a form of drawing attention to grievances through the use of digital communication channels such as social media 

Example:

¹⁷ In: tagesschau. Ein Europa für alle. Zehntausende bei Demo für soziales Europa. 19th May 2019. Available under: <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/demo-ein-europa-fuer-alle-101.html>. Last accessed on 1st June 2021.

¹⁸ <https://www.ein-europa-fuer-alle.de>

¹⁹ Available under: <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahnwache>. Last accessed on 20th June 2021.

²⁰ Available under: <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Menschenkette>. Last accessed on 20th June 2021.

²¹ Available under: <https://www.greenpeace.org/luxembourg/de/aktualitaet/10972/eine-menschenkette-fur-unser-klima/>. Last accessed on 20th June 2021.

²² Available under: [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lichterkette_\(Demonstration\)](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lichterkette_(Demonstration)). Last accessed on 20th June 2021.

²³ Available under: <https://www.kirche-und-leben.de/artikel/neuenkirchen-lichterkette-als-zeichen-nach-anschlag-in-berlin>. Last accessed on 20th June 2021.

²⁴ Available under: <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyberaktivismus>. Last accessed on 20th June 2021.

Title: "#MeToo"

Organizer: The phrase "Me too" goes back to the activist Tarana Burke and was popularised as a hashtag by the actress Alyssa Milano.

Aim: To call on women to address sexual harassment and assault.

Where: on the net, on social media²⁵

FLASHMOBS

Flashmob is, so to speak, a word creation from several languages. Flash means lightning in English and the word mob is derived from the Latin "mobile vulgus" and means an excitable crowd. A flash mob is a brief gathering of people who carry out unusual activities. In the beginning, these were not politically motivated, but there are now numerous flash mobs that are politically motivated.²⁶ Since this form of political activism is organized via the new communication technologies, it is often referred to as smart mobs in this context.²⁷

Example:

Title: "Jerusalema" Challenge

Organizer: Melissa Mriposa called for a dance challenge // flashmob online in Germany.

Goal: To help people in the Corona crisis to give positive energy for life

Where: nationwide²⁸

PETITIONS

Petition derives from the Latin word "petitio" and means petition, request.²⁹

"In accordance with Article 227 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, any citizen may, at any time, either individually or in association with others, exercise his or her right to petition the European Parliament.

Any citizen of the European Union or any person residing in a Member State of the European Union may, individually or in association with others, petition the European Parliament on a matter which comes within the Union's fields of activity and which affects him or her directly. Companies, organizations or associations based in the European Union may also exercise this right of petition, which is guaranteed by the Treaty."³⁰

Example:

Title: Plaster for the Soul

Organizer: Professional Association of Austrian Psychologists

Aim: For better care for people with mental illness in Austria

Where: in Austria³¹

²⁵ Available under: <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/MeToo>. Last accessed on 20th June 2021.

²⁶ Available under: <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flashmob>. Last accessed on 20th June 2021.

²⁷ Available under: https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smart_Mob. Last accessed on 20th June 2021.

²⁸ Available under: <https://www.mainpost.de/regional/schweinfurt/flashmob-mit-tanz-positiv-energie-versprechen-art-10512526>. Last accessed on 20th June 2021.

²⁹ Available under: <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Petition>. Last accessed on 20th June 2021.

³⁰ Available under: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/de/be-heard/petitions>. Last accessed on 20th June 2021.

³¹ Available under: <https://www.openpetition.eu/at/petition/online/fuer-eine-bessere-versorgung-von-menschen-mit-psychischen-erkrankungen-in-oesterreich>. Last accessed on 20th June 2021.

2.2.5 What is an activist?

Definition

"An activist campaigns for a social, environmental or political goal, such as ending war, curbing climate change and abolishing factory farming or surveillance, for example through information leaflets, manifestos, petitions and demonstrations, as well as social media engagement. Activism can be individual or take place within the framework of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Amnesty International, Greenpeace or Peta or movements such as Fridays for Future (FFF). It can be directed at other people's or one's own (also personal) circumstances."³²

Historical review

The word activism was first used for the representatives of the philosophical direction of activism and can be found for the first time in 1912 in the "Philosophen-Lexikon". It acquired its political meaning under the expressionist writer Kurt Hiller and other writers in 1914, who attributed a form of expression to expressionism and an attitude to activism. Due to the state of shock in which many people found themselves during the First World War, these writers joined forces and called for a so-called "will to change the world". Thus, after 1918, numerous activist literary magazines with a will to activism emerged. In the 1920s, the "activist" was described as the representative of nationalisms, such as the representatives of Polish activists, German activists, etc. During the National Socialist period, activists are mainly referred to as "ultra-nationalist putsching soldiers" who worked against the Nazi regime. By contrast, after the end of the Second World War, at the Nuremberg Trials, those who had to stand trial before the Tribunal and were sentenced to death were called activists. After 1950, the term activist came to have a positive connotation in East Germany and was given for special merits, so to speak. This word came from the Russian word activist. The end of communism released the word and today the Duden describes an activist as a "particularly politically active person". Since then, the frequency of the word activist in active language use has been steadily increasing.³³

2.2.5.1 Collective action

In order to better understand collective action as a form of activism, it is necessary to understand the theory of social identity. This theory goes back to Henri Tajfel and John C. Turner, who studied group processes and conflicts that develop in groups.

According to this theory, people belong to different groups that want to be treated fairly. If one's own group is disadvantaged, the group members who dislike this can take action against it as follows:

- They can change groups and join a more optimal group.
- However, this is not always possible because sometimes group boundaries are difficult to cross. For example, as a woman, it is difficult for me to join the group of men (only by

³² Oliver Bendel: In: Gabler Wirtschaftslexikon. Aktivist. Definition: Was ist "Aktivist"? Available under: <https://wirtschaftslexikon.gabler.de/definition/aktivist-123241>. Last accessed on 1st June 2021.

³³ Matthias Heine: Aktivisten aller Länder, vereinigt euch! 26th February 2014. Available under: <https://www.welt.de/kultur/article125202875/Aktivisten-aller-Laender-vereinigt-euch.html>. Last accessed on 2nd June 2021.

changing my biological sex). In this case, group members could take various measures to feel "better" again:

- o e.g. make a downward comparison, i.e. compare themselves with a group that is doing even worse in order to look better;
- o to stand up collectively against it - collective action.

Collective action is, so to speak, a form of protest that focuses on upgrading the social position of one's own group, e.g. to minimize or eliminate structural disadvantages.³⁴

2.2.5.1 Sir Karl Popper: Activism as a Concept of Political Action

Sir Karl Popper (1902 - 1994), founder of critical rationalism, "who admits that I can be wrong, that you can be right, and that together we may get to the truth.", described the attitude of an activist in "The Misery of Historicism" as follows: "the inclination to activity and the aversion to any attitude of passive acceptance."³⁵ For Sir Karl Popper, this attitude is necessary to counter the rise of totalitarian forms of society. He sees state or social forms that live the form of a pluralistic democracy as particularly desirable - above all through institutionalized public criticism and through debate through critical-rational discussions.³⁶

2.2.5.3 Henry David Thoreau // John Rawls // Jürgen Habermas // Hannah Arendt: Civil

Disobedience

For Hannah Arendt (1906 - 1975), the political is "the form in which freedom can unfold and reveal a sense of human activity"³⁷ and sees civil disobedience as a great democratic impact opportunity. But the idea of civil disobedience to change something on a political level goes back further in history. As early as 1846, the US-American Henry David Thoreau (1817 - 1862) did not want to pay his taxes because he did not want to support slavery on the one hand and the war against Mexico on the other. In prison, he wrote an essay entitled "On the Duty of Disobedience to the State".

"But if the law be such as necessarily to make thee the arm of wrong to another, then, I say, break the law."³⁸ Many subsequent conflicts followed the method of civil disobedience, such as the civil rights movement in the USA, among others, but were more limited to the American space. Hannah Arendt also saw civil disobedience as an American phenomenon. John Rawls (1921 - 2002) defined civil disobedience in his major work "A Theory of Justice" as follows:

"to explain why one should obey just laws made under a just constitution. [...] The real question is under what circumstances and to what extent one is bound to obey unjust regulations."³⁹

³⁴ Julia C. Becker: Kollektives Handeln – Außerparlamentarischer Aktivismus. In: The Inquisitive Mind. 2013 Ausgabe 3 / Politische Psychologie. Available under: <https://de.in-mind.org/article/kollektives-handeln-ausserparlamentarischer-aktivismus>. Last accessed on 2nd June 2021.

³⁵ Karl Popper: in: Das Elend des Historizismus zitiert von Ulrich Würdemann: Politisches. Aktivismus als Form politischen Handelns. 17. August 2013. Available under: <https://www.2mecs.de/wp/2013/08/aktivismus/>. Last accessed on 2nd June 2021.

³⁶ Available under: https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl_Popper#Popper_warnt_vor_totalitären_Gesellschaften. Last accessed on 2nd June 2021.

³⁷ Anna Hollending: Politische Prekarität. In: Zeitgenössische Diskurse des Politischen. Bd 17. 2020. Page 117. Available under: <https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/10.5771/9783748908005-117/4-hannah-arendt-und-die-fragilitaet-des-politischen>. Last accessed on 2. June 2021.

³⁸ Henry David Thoreau, Über die Pflicht zum Ungehorsam gegen den Staat. Ein Essay. Zweisprachige Ausgabe. Dt. von Walter E. Richartz. Zürich: Diogenes 2004.

³⁹ John Rawls, Eine Theorie der Gerechtigkeit. Frankfurt a. M. 1979, Page 386.

Rawls subsequently defines civil disobedience as "a public, non-violent, conscientious, but political act contrary to law, usually intended to bring about a change in the laws or government policy."⁴⁰

For Jürgen Habermas (1979), civil disobedience is "an element of a mature political culture"⁴¹ and for Hannah Arendt "the motor for social change".⁴² Hannah Arendt dealt above all with the theses of Socrates to Rawls and advocated the approach "that the individual as a moral subject should not make himself the arm of injustice."⁴³

⁴⁰ John Rawls, *Eine Theorie der Gerechtigkeit*. Frankfurt a. M. 1979, Page 392.

⁴¹ Jürgen Habermas, „Ziviler Ungehorsam – Testfall für den demokratischen Rechtsstaat. Wider den autoritären Legalismus in der Bundesrepublik“. In: Peter Glotz (Hrsg.), *Ziviler Ungehorsam im Rechtsstaat*. Frankfurt a. M. 1983, 32.

⁴² Arendt, Hannah: „Ziviler Ungehorsam“. In: *Zur Zeit. Politische Essays*. Herausgegeben und mit einem Nachwort versehen von Marie Luise Knott. Aus dem Amerikanischen von Eike Geisel. München 1989. Page 138.

⁴³ Andreas Braune: *Ziviler Ungehorsam. Texte von Thoreau bis Occupy*. Stuttgart 2019. Page 19.

2.3 Critical thinking

2.3.1 Explanation approaches

"Critical thinking is not an accumulation of knowledge that can be applied at any time and in any context. It is a way of thinking that even 3-year-olds can use - and that even trained scientists can fail at." Daniel Willingham⁴⁴

"Criticism comes from the Greek word krino, which means to recognize, select, judge. Criticism is the analysis, judgement and evaluation of a case (case stands for the entity at which a process is directed (in this case the process of analysis, judgement and evaluation)), a procedure, an act, etc.⁴⁵

"Critical thinking is a complex concept that does not only relate to the field of education, but covers a much wider area."⁴⁶

We also use critical thinking in professional activities, in daily communication with others and in daily problem solving and decision making. There are also professional critics who have developed areas of so-called music, art, literature and film criticism.

Critical thinking is a complex process and the result of:

- Analyzing and evaluating claims,
- Finding reasons for claims,
- comparing with other and / or opposing claims and generating objections to claims, and finally
- Taking a stand

Critical thinking is therefore the analysis of facts in order to form a judgement. Critical thinking is also a complex process of creatively bringing together ideas and sources, re-conceptualizing and reshaping concepts and information. It is active and an interactive cognitive process that occurs simultaneously at multiple levels. Critical thinking is usually directed towards clearly defined goals, but it can also be a creative process, with less clear goals. In this process, it is very important to include uncertainty and freedom, as well as to free oneself from the fear of making mistakes. Therefore, a person should cultivate a radical openness to the emerging self.

⁴⁴Available under: <https://www.institut.edu.rs/en/primeri-dobre-prakse-razvoj-kritickog-misljenja/> Last accessed on 23rd September 2021.

⁴⁵ Dragan Klaić: *Mobility of Imagination: A companion guide to international cultural cooperation*. Central European University Press 2007.

⁴⁶ Available under: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/292996183_Kriticko_misljenje. Last accessed on 23rd September 2021.

2.3.2 Who is a critical thinker?

Critical thinking includes the following intellectual skills:⁴⁷

- Ability to analyze concepts, information and views
- Ability to distinguish relevant and irrelevant information within a given context
- Ability to interpret information
- Ability to combine prior knowledge and new information as well as different information from different fields
- Ability to synthesize information
- Ability to organize content into a meaningful whole
- Ability to distinguish between substantiated and unsubstantiated claims
- Ability to perceive the subject of discussion from different points of view
- Ability to evaluate information and viewpoints
- Ability to form views and present ideas
- Ability to justify views and points of view
- Ability to take an active role in the learning situation
- Ability to monitor and evaluate own understanding of information
- Ability to orient one's own opinion towards correctness
- Critical thinking cultivates and develops the following intellectual values: clarity, relevance, depth, precision, consistency, coherence, logic and objectivity.

⁴⁷ Available under: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/292996183_Kriticko_misljenje. Last accessed on 23rd September 2021.

2.3.3 Methods of critical thinking

Socratic Method⁴⁸

Socrates is a Greek philosopher, the founder of Western philosophy, the first philosopher of morality. His "Socratic Method" laid the foundation for the Western systems of logic and philosophy.

The first part of the method is irony. Socrates denied knowing the truth precisely in order to make his interlocutors seek the truth by expressing their own opinions. Therefore, his method was to ask questions and not give answers. Socrates began the conversation by asking questions in the form "What is X?". The thematic circle of the initial question consisted of the basic concepts of moral life, such as justice, courage, virtue, knowledge, etc. Socrates' interlocutors thought they knew the answers to these questions because they had spontaneously adopted some of the widespread and deeply held beliefs beforehand. After the interlocutor had announced what he thought, it was the turn of the deductive part of the ironic procedure. During this part, the conversation moved from general attitudes to individual conclusions about the subject of the conversation. This means that Socrates continued to ask questions, leading the interlocutor from the initial statement to its logical consequences in the form of attitudes that explain more clearly and concretely the meaning of the initial answer. As the interlocutor took responsibility for further determinations of the original statement, Socrates drew a negative conclusion as to its truth content. At the end of this part of the conversation, the interlocutor would admit that he did not know what he thought he knew. This is the aim of irony: to enable the interlocutor to free himself from delusion by recognizing the untruthfulness of his original belief. When he realized his own ignorance, the interlocutor was ready to continue the search for truth.

The second part of Socrates' method is maieutics, or "midwifery". Unlike irony, this method is inductive and positive. Inductive because the conversation flowed from individual to general definitions of the subject. Positive because Socrates was not satisfied with the negative outcome of irony, but wanted to know the truth. But even now he did not offer his interlocutor a ready answer to the question "What is X?", but asked questions as before. Such actions correspond to his basic conviction that the truth is already in a person and that he only needs help to "give birth" to himself. As a starting point for further conversation, he took examples from everyday life and opinions related to the topic. He then led the interlocutor to notice the similarities between different events and things. The crucial part of the conversation was when Socrates helped his interlocutor to recognize in these similarities the common essential characteristics of seemingly different phenomena. In this way, what was common to the concept or truth of X emerged from individual opinions.

Robert Ennis⁴⁹, the contemporary American philosopher, was one of the first theorists who developed the concept of critical thinking. According to him, critical thinking is the skill of rational judgment of what to believe or what to do that includes the values of intellectual honesty and openness, autonomy and self-criticism, fidelity to truth and sensitivity to context. According to Ennis, critical thinking includes the skills of distinguishing between facts and values, distinguishing between explicit and implicit assumptions, distinguishing between argued and unsubstantiated claims, recognizing errors of inference, and determining the strength of arguments.

⁴⁸ Available under: <https://kultivisise.rs/sokratov-metod/> Last accessed on 23rd September 2021.

⁴⁹ Available on: <https://www.uio.no/studier/emner/uv/uv/UV9407/critical-thinking.pdf> Last accessed on 23rd September 2021.

Matthew Lipman⁵⁰ (1922-2010) is one of the known best contemporary theorists of critical thinking as an educational concept. He developed a specific educational concept closely related to critical thinking - philosophy for children. The field of education is an extremely fertile ground for exemplary critique. In this context, critique should be seen as an educational concept whose elements - such as critical listening, reading and writing - form an important part of the positive development of education that meets the needs of individuals and society.

Critical thinking is linked to elements of the process of creativity. Divergent thinking is a thinking process in which we manage to look at a problem or task from different perspectives and try to find several possible, sometimes very unusual solutions to it. The term itself can usually be associated with the famous phrase "think outside the box" and with creativity in general.

J. P. Guilford⁵¹ said that opinion can be - convergent (logical thinking, looking for the right solution) and divergent (creating new ideas, having fun with the search process - finding as many right solutions as possible). Creative people have divergent opinion. People who use convergent thinking, although intelligent (have the ability to think), can also be intolerant: they believe that there is a "right and wrong way to solve a task". Some of the techniques of divergent thinking are brainstorming, keeping a diary, free writing, mind or subject mapping.

Mihay Csikszentmihalyi⁵² (1975) showed that individuals who actively participate in the learning process, when challenged enough, show satisfaction and an improved ability to think and understand. Individuals who achieve such full participation understand that when they put enough energy and effort into their learning, they are involved in the learning process, feel satisfaction in the process and deep experiential achievement.

To understand how to improve the process of critical thinking, it is very important to understand the motivation for learning and thinking. According to Carol Dweck, an American psychologist, individuals can be placed on a continuum according to their implicit beliefs about where abilities come from. Some believe that their success is based on innate abilities; these are said to have a "fixed" theory of intelligence (fixed mindset). Others, who believe their success is based on hard work, learning, training and persistence, have a "growth" or "incremental" theory of intelligence (growth mindset). She advises parents to teach their children to love challenges, to be fascinated by mistakes, to enjoy trying hard and to keep learning. In this way, their children do not have to be slaves to praise. They will have a lifelong path to build and repair their own self-confidence.

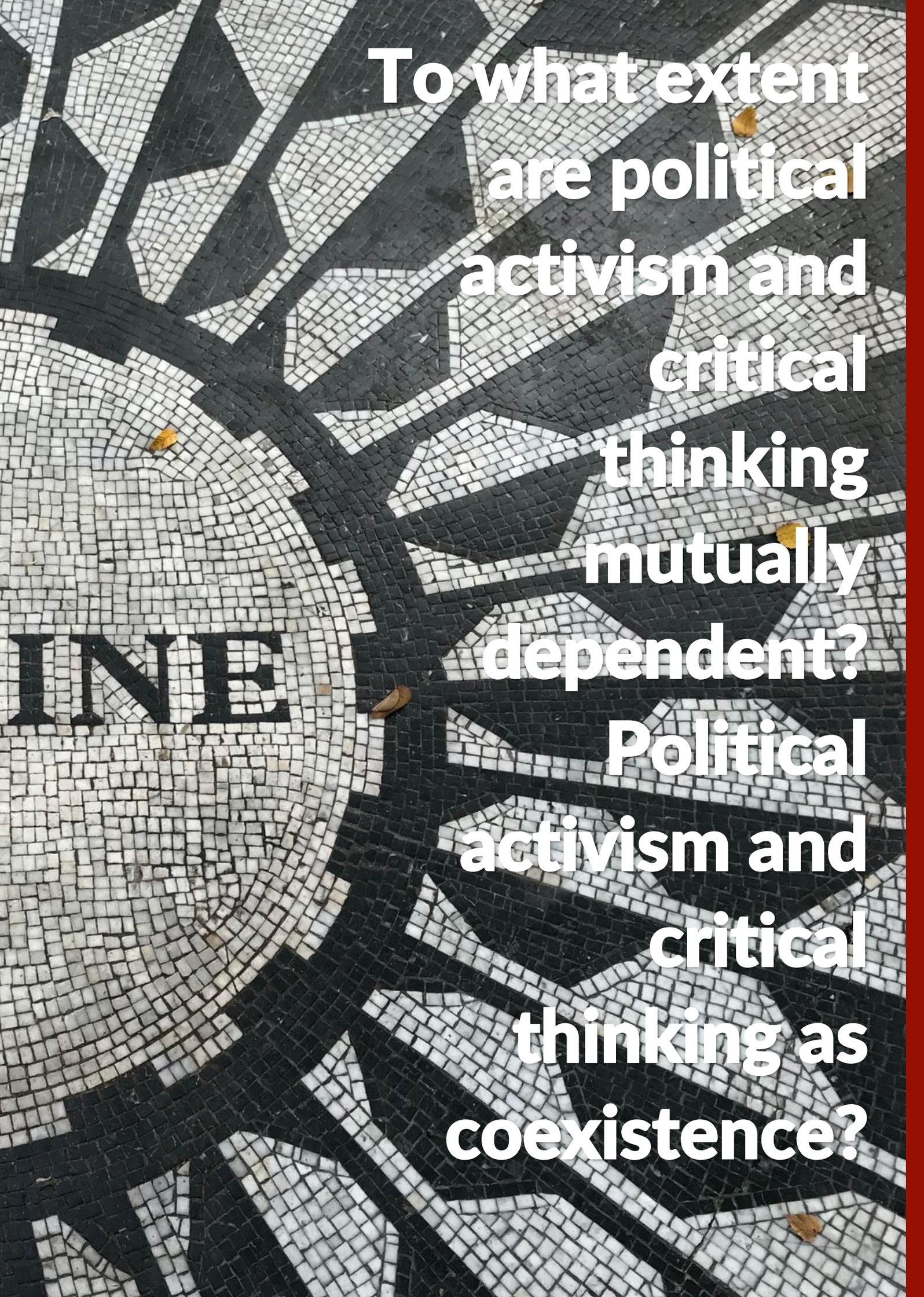
⁵⁰ Available under: <https://theconversation.com/why-children-should-study-philosophy-23404> Last accessed on 23rd September 2021.

⁵¹ Available under: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/292996183_Kriticko_misljenje. Last accessed on 23rd September 2021.

⁵² Available under: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/292996183_Kriticko_misljenje. Last accessed on 23rd September 2021.



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**To what extent
are political
activism and
critical
thinking
mutually
dependent?**

**Political
activism and
critical
thinking as
coexistence?**

3/ To what extent are political activism and critical thinking mutually dependent? Political activism and critical thinking as coexistence?

In addition to institutional and legal, political-economic and socio-cultural aspects, the promotion of democratic citizenship also involves attention to the educational dimension: indeed, the core of democracy does not lie in the equal submission of all people to the law, but in the possibility of conscious and critical participation in public life.

Over the last thirty years, various forms of political activism by citizens in public policy have emerged all over the world, representing a transformation of democratic and civic participation in life in European countries. These changes have affected the field of education, making it necessary to adapt education and training systems, since education and democratic participation have been an essential combination since ancient times. In the Greco-Roman period, the basic idea of education was based on fundamental concepts, those of *paideia* and *humanitas*, which were linked to the political dimension of the human being.

The dominant models of civic education so far have been: the academic model / theoretical, based on the explanation and discussion of many concepts in an abstract way, and that of the laboratory / practical, which turns to and opens up - even with moments of simulation - operational politics (real politics). A major contribution to the development of active citizenship education in recent decades is undoubtedly that of the American philosopher and educator J. Dewey, who influenced many of his European colleagues. In *Democracy and Education*, John Dewey addresses the challenge of providing quality public education in a democratic society. In this classic work, Dewey calls for the complete renewal of public education and argues for the fusion of vocational and contemplative studies in education and for the necessity of universal education for the progress of the self and society. For Dewey, what matters is not only that a democratic order provides means to eliminate the effects of economic inequalities so that all members of the new generations have the opportunity to be educated and trained, but above all, "modifications of traditional cultural ideals, traditional subjects of study, and traditional methods of teaching and disciplining are necessary to keep all youth under educational influence until they are empowered to be masters of their own economic and social careers."⁵³

Dewey's analysis recognizes that the individual has a responsible and active role in his or her education and in building democratic societies, which necessarily teaches everyone to act independently by developing their own critical thinking skills.

FROM EDUCATION TO POLITICAL ACTIVISM TO EDUCATION AND CRITICAL THINKING

It is the common conviction of philosophers and educators who have addressed the issue of education for active citizenship that political education can be achieved in different learning contexts: in family, school and extracurricular contexts, and also in a lifelong perspective.

From a pedagogical point of view, the way to teach political activism requires non-traditional teaching methods, but is based on the approach of self-education as citizens living in a globalized

⁵³ Dewey, John: *Democracy and Education*. The Pennsylvania State University. 2001. Page 103.

Active political activism in Europe and its countries



4/ Active political activism in Europe and its countries

4.1 Political activism in Europe

There is no doubt that a change has taken place in European politics in the 21st century. There are certainly tendencies of progressive activism after various strong crises that have hit the European space in recent years, such as the economic, the migration and even the recent Corona virus crisis. These tendencies of political activism based on critical thinking have a positive effect on the democratization of European integration and the fight against radicalization, as they seem to go beyond institutional politics and directly express the voices of European citizens. In this context, many questions arise:

- Are they efficient enough?
- Are they properly coordinated?
- Or as B. Dreano, wonders: "There are movements in every European country, but is there a debate in Europe?". Or has even the intensity and frequency of political and civil society activism, which according to Richard Young (2019) of Carnegie Europe has increased dramatically, changed in a way that could affect the lives of European citizens?⁵⁷

4.1.1 From a historical perspective

The concept of activism is closely linked to the realist philosophical movement as well as to the expression of voluntarism. The realist view of the world tends not only to observe the world but also to try to improve it, based on the inner morality of citizens. With the prerequisite of critical thinking, which develops through education, various theoretical forms of activism were transformed into movements and initiatives of activism. From a historical perspective, we could therefore put as a brief philosophical foundation for activism Nietzsche's voluntarism and the concept of "conscious action" in neo-idealism.

From its philosophical foundation until today, there are various expressions and changes of the concept of activism. Specifically concerning political and civic activism, in European democracies we observe above all the decline of conventional forms of political participation, including falling voter turnout, stigmatized party membership and other traditional forms of political engagement.

⁵⁷ Richard Young: Civic Activism Unleashed: New Hope or False Dawn for Democracy? 31st January 2019. Available under: <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2019/01/31/civic-activism-unleashed-new-hope-or-false-dawn-for-democracy-pub-78202>. Last accessed on 1st August 2021.

The long-term decline suggests that the core functions of the democracies concerned are eroding, posing a threat to their legitimacy.⁵⁸

So what happens when we talk about European democracy?

In any case, we cannot be strictly pessimistic, as various forms of engagement have emerged in the current century. Some striking examples are protest politics and internet activism. Therefore, the decline of conventional forms of participation is not necessarily alarming. Perhaps we could describe it more as a change in the style of participation, rather than a general indifference of the public. But is this new style strong enough?

4.1.2 European political activism

In order to observe the phenomenon of political activism within the complex system of European integration, initiatives should be analyzed according to their "dominant" area of interest and observe political activism movements that emerged on European terrain. For example, some of them have emerged due to economic circumstances, others as a kind of demonstration against the environmental degradation of our planet, others again as a form of reaction by young citizens - especially students - within educational institutions and last but not least as cultural commentaries through artistic expressions and cultural projects.

Some current examples from the 21st century representing the above areas could be as follows:

"In 2002, the European Social Forum (ESF) in Florence opened with a march of one million people, and the subsequent ESFs in Paris (2003) and then London (2004) each gathered over 50,000 activists. The Greek demonstrations, the British Uncut campaigns, the French youth and student mobilizations, and the Spanish and Portuguese protests in the squares all denounced European policies with virtually the same arguments, but without significant coordination."⁵⁹

Another notable example of political and civic activism and strong citizen collective initiative was that which emerged and hit Europe after the devastating economic crisis around 2008. The Indignados and Occupy movements spilled over into the wave of economic crisis that had a devastating impact on youth precarity and unemployment. However, the demands of this movement focused even more on a crisis of democracy, pointing to the real and structural limits of representative democracy. Activists denounce an "empty democracy", as policies that have a real impact on their lives are decided in circles over which citizens have no influence.⁶⁰

A typical example of this was the "M15" movement in Spain after the crisis, a movement that denounced not only austerity measures but the concept of institutional democracy in general, lamenting its imposing nature. In any case, we must stress that this movement, originally activist, was partially transformed into a member of the coalition of the Spanish government from January 2020.

⁵⁸ Wiebke Drews: Going, Goin, ... Reviving? Political Activism in Modern Europe. Abstract. Available under: <https://ecpr.eu/Events/Event/PaperDetails/28682>. Last accessed on 1st August 2021.

⁵⁹ Available under: <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-europe-54130150>. Last accessed on 1st August 2021.

⁶⁰ Geoffrey Pleyers: "Beyond Occupy: progressive activists in Europe", Open Democracy. 8th October 2012. Available under: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/beyond-occupy-progressive-activists-in-europe/>. Last accessed on 23rd September 2021.

Similar reactions, but from a professional-scientific perspective, also came from economists, intellectuals and academics after the euro crisis. Expert activists published dozens of appeals, books and articles during this period, developing both rigorous analyses and policy statements that underlined the irrationality of the way the EU and national governments were handling the crisis (see, for example, the work of the French "Les Economistes Attérés"⁶¹).⁶² This type of initiative is often described by experts in the bibliography of activism as "argumentative democracy".

4.2 Current situation in the individual countries

But what exactly is the situation in European countries at the moment? What is the current state of political activism in Europe?

We could observe that nowadays the most important collective activist actions take the form of civil demonstrations, often with a non-political background, and activist campaigns on the internet and social media. The most conspicuous areas of action are: Climate, Human Rights, Health;

Specifically, a historic mobilization took place in September 2019, just before the UN Climate Summit. Millions of young people, coordinated through the internet and motivated by social media invitations and hashtags, took to the streets around the globe to demand more effective action on climate change. The same happened in the biggest European capitals with coordinated demonstrations in Hamburg, Brussels, Berlin, London, etc. Their actions continue to this day, with less intensity but with remarkable cohesion.⁶³

A similar phenomenon, but with a different theme, emerged in France in 2018 and continues to this day (in smaller groups). It is the so-called yellow waistcoats movement. A mixed, almost apolitical group of people who started demonstrating against economic injustice and got as far as civil rights and police repression. Could this movement, apart from its intensity, bring about lasting change?

Finally, we must not forget to point to the Provacx (pro-vaccination) campaigns that have recently emerged around the world in the aftermath of the Corona virus pandemic. Conspiracy theories and anti-vaccination messages on social media quickly spread around the globe since the health crisis began. In response, several scientists (often in the form of public health groups) spoke out loudly to combat the disinformation and make the case for the need for protection through vaccination.⁶⁴ Advocacy, scientific arguments, expertise and social media were combined into an ongoing initiative of (after all) political activism.

⁶¹ Available under: <http://www.atterres.org/article/les-economistes-atterrés-réagissent-aux-sujets-proposés-à-lépreuve-de-spécialité-du-bac-ses>. Last accessed on 1st August 2021.

⁶² Geoffrey Pleyers: "Beyond Occupy: progressive activists in Europe", Open Democracy. 8th October 2012. Available under: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/beyond-occupy-progressive-activists-in-europe/>. Last accessed on 23rd September 2021.

⁶³ Rafael Cereceda, Cristina Abellan-Matamoros: Millions of young people march for climate in historic mobilization. 20th September 2019. Available under: <https://www.euronews.com/2019/09/20/global-climate-strikes-kick-off-ahead-of-un-summit-on-climate-change>. Last accessed on 1st August 2021.

⁶⁴ Megan Molteni: An Army of Volunteers Is Taking On Vaccine Disinformation Online. 15th June 2020. Available under: <https://www.wired.com/story/can-a-keyboard-crusade-stem-the-vaccine-infodemic/>. Last accessed on 1st August 2021.

4.2.1 Best practices of political activism in the countries of the project partners

Across Europe, there are many notable examples of projects under the banner of political activism and critical thinking. Accordingly, we would like to highlight some of these good practices. In order to reflect the diversity of political activism and critical thinking, we cite examples from different areas of everyday life - such as the environment, education, politics, society and culture.

Ecologically motivated political activism in Austria

The occupation of the Hainburger Au

In December 1983, the government had decided to build a Danube power plant. Many people did not agree with this and protest groups formed. However, the government did not listen to them. Only when hundreds of people took up a protest march to the Au and occupied it, was the clearing stopped. There was a huge confrontation between the protesters and the police and finally ended with the construction of the power plant being stopped and a national park being established. The protest was directed against the construction of the power plant in order to ensure the preservation of the floodplain landscape. This was a consequence of an emerging environmentalism in the 1980s. Although this project initially met with broad approval and only small citizens' initiatives opposed it, this subsequently triggered waves of indignation when WWF Austria increasingly launched campaigns against this construction. This protest action was an event that became engraved in the memory of the people of Austria and is still a topic of discussion generations later, as it represents one of the most significant events in the Second Republic in terms of environmental policy.⁶⁵ The protesters were supported by various political camps, the WWF and the Austrian Student Union, but also by Nobel Prize winner Konrad Lorenz. He even introduced a petition for a referendum.⁶⁶

Ecologically motivated political activism in Serbia

"Defend the Rivers of Stara Planina - Odbranimu reke Stare planine".

The main goal of the Defend the Rivers of Stara Planina (Balkan Mountains) (DRSP) movement is that the construction of small-scale derived hydroelectric power plants (SHPPs) be banned, not only in Stara Planina, but on the entire territory of Serbia, because of the extremely harmful impact they have on natural resources, as well as the quality of life of the local population. The organization also advocates the use of solar, wind and biomass energy to generate electricity. In the FB group of the same name, possible solutions and actions are discussed, news is exchanged, opinions and expert analyses are expressed, and various ideas and proposals are commented on. The movement started back in the late 1980s, when residents of Temska and other villages opposed the plan to divert water from the Toplodolska River into Lake Zavojsko. In 2017, the ministry again took the initiative to pipe the river. In response, the people who later founded the Defend the Rivers of Stara Planina movement staged a performance entitled "River Prayer" on the Temištica River. The performance attracted great public attention and informed the population about this issue. At the beginning of 2018, a Facebook group was created with the aim of spreading awareness about the harmful consequences of small hydropower plants. By December 2019, the group had gathered over 85,000 members. Since then, the number of

⁶⁵ Available under: <https://www.hdgoe.at/hainburger-au>. Last accessed on 23rd September 2021.

⁶⁶ Available under: <https://wirprotestieren.at/proteste-oesterreich/>. Last accessed on 23rd September 2021.

members has been growing steadily. As a result, the group has become a major channel for sharing opinions, experiences and all kinds of relevant information. As a result of their activist achievements and struggles, in 2020 the government issued a ban on the construction of new hydropower plants in the next 15 years on the territory of Stara planina. Nevertheless, they continued the struggle for the preservation of rivers and nature throughout the country, being recognized as one of the largest and most influential ecological movements in Serbia.

More on: <https://novastaraplanina.com/en/>⁶⁷

Politically motivated activism in Italy

How to involve seniors in the democratic participation of the country they live in?

The project "InVisible Talents: encouraging the talents of 80+ people", supported by the European Erasmus+ program, aims to support the learning, participation and recognition of citizens over 80 as active citizens. Research has shown that learning and participation in later life are essential for well-being, health and social engagement. However, older people who are not used to having their voices heard and sharing their ideas with others tend to participate little in activities that involve proactive participation.

More on: <https://www.invisible-talents.eu/>⁶⁸

Politically motivated activism in Germany

The best-known example of PA in Germany is the "Monday demonstrations" in Leipzig and other cities in the former GDR. Citizens took to the streets to demonstrate for the opening of the borders. For human rights, freedom and democracy. These demonstrations led to the "fall of the wall" on 09.11.1989.

Pro-education motivated activism in Greece

Goldendawnwatch.org is a unique initiative - organized by the Hellenic League for Human Rights, the Greek Observatory against Fascism and Racist Expressions in the Media, the Anti-Fascist League of Athens and Piraeus and the Integration Council of the City of Athens for Migration with the aim:

- to observe the trial of the (now officially) criminal organization and former political party "Χρυσή Αυγή" from beginning to end. (Golden Dawn);
- "to make public all information about the actions of Golden Dawn and to shed light on all aspects of the process
- to have continuous and reliable information for every citizen, in Greece and abroad, about everything that happens inside and outside the courtroom, throughout the duration of the trial
- to provide analysis from specialists, lawyers and GDW's monitoring team
- to keep Golden Dawn and its actions in the light".

From an educational perspective, Golden Dawn Watch's work provided an exemplary bibliography on the topic under investigation, analyses, commentaries, published opinions and interviews from specialists and advocates in the field. In the form of a freely accessible digital educational/information tool, GDW pursued the case to engage people in the fight against fascism, hate speech, discrimination practices and racism.

⁶⁷ Available under: <https://novastaraplanina.com/en/>. Last accessed on 23rd September 2021.

⁶⁸ Available under: <https://www.invisible-talents.eu/>. Last accessed on 23rd September 2021.



(Organization's logo from their official site, sited above)

Not only did they objectively observe and present, year by year the case and day by day the final process, but they also contributed to the most open democratic educational practice at the national level. A fair and progressive practice of political activism through the dissemination of quality information online, related to the sensitive issue of fascism. All this in a world filled with fake news and hate speech. And why?

Because, to use their own words again, "we believe that only a well-informed and sensitized public can develop a strong resistance to the spread of racism, fascism and neo-Nazism, and ultimately to fear."⁶⁹

Pro-education motivated activism in Greece

Another exceptional best practice of political activism from an educational perspective, always in the Greek field, is none other than the organization of the EUDEC Greece Conference, in 2018. The Greek version of EUDEC, i.e. the regional offshoot of the European Democratic Education Community - a non-profit organization working across Europe - was a unique opportunity to unite and present all alternative education projects in Greece. Organized in Crete, it gathered various progressive and democratic minds from our country and all over Europe to:

- To open a dialogue on children's rights in relation to education.
- To link education with social organization and the possibility of the emergence of a project of social emancipation.
- To contribute to the dissemination of democratic values and the redefinition of the democratic state.
- To network the supranational and supra-social class.
- To create open educational structures, accessible to minorities, through collaborative ventures.
- To be a tool to find resources to create a long-term program for the introduction of democratic methods in public schools and the consolidation of democracy in the school system. (Aims of the conference, eudec.gr)⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Available under: <https://goldendawnwatch.org>. Last accessed on 1st August 2021.

⁷⁰ Available under: <https://www.eudec.gr>. Last accessed on 1st August 2021.



(Picture from EUDEC Greece official website, cited above)

This initiative aims to promote democratic values through modern educational means while engaging hundreds of students, teachers, parents and "experts" in the field of education through fun interactive activities that go far beyond the standards of a typical conference.

4.2.2 Best practices of critical thinking in the countries of the project partners

Best practice for encouraging citizens to think critically in Austria Austria is Free

This initiative started in May 2020 and was founded by the entrepreneur Edith Brötzner. Since April 2021, "Austria is Free" has been a non-profit association whose projects will be presented in more detail in the coming weeks and months.

The goal of "Austria is Free" is to remind citizens that free, independent and critical thinking is desired, permitted and currently demanded more than ever. Because silent acceptance and simply hoping for better times are far from enough. Free opinion and critical questioning must not be ostracized, denounced and censored. Experts whose ideas and findings differ from those of the government are degraded to "conspiracy theorists".⁷¹

Ecological Best Practice of Critical Thinking in Serbia "Struggles for Climate"

In this series of events, the organizers of System Change not Climate Change invited to a discussion on the climate crisis. This event was organized together with the Institute of Political Science at the University of Vienna and other institutes and civil society organizations. It was discussed how more just transitions can be created and what the next steps could be.⁷²

Ecological Best Practice of Critical Thinking in Serbia "Right to Water - Pravo na vodu"⁷³

⁷¹ Available under: <https://www.oesterreichistfrei.info>. Last accessed on 12th August 2021.

⁷² Available under: <http://systemchange-not-climatechange.at/de/kaempfe-ums-klima/>. Last accessed on 12th August 2021.

⁷³ Available under: <https://pravonavodu.weebly.com/?fbclid=IwAR3lMXBY-kIYjVCitWFCAvLH67lijUYT4pmm71qmlNPOFLfCvraY-peWPA>. Last accessed on 12th August 2021.

The Right to Water initiative is a network of various activists with the aim of protecting the fundamental right to water and preserving lakes, rivers, springs and underground water that are endangered by pollution, privatization and aggressive exploitation. Through scientific and critical debate in the free media, panel discussions, performances, videos, etc., they raise awareness and attention among citizens.

The initiative wants to address the numerous problems in dealing with clear water, what impact this has on citizens and how important it is that water remains a public good and is not privatised for profit. Everyone should have access to water to meet basic needs.

Through a series of panel discussions, debates with experts and citizens, videos, texts, collaboration with artists, the initiative aims to influence how people are informed and become aware of the importance of access to clear water for all.

PolEkol, the political ecology organization, as part of the Right to Water initiative and the Water, Democracy and Fair Energy Transition project, organized a World River Day event for local activists and the general public. The event included consultations with local activists and a presentation "Introduction to the Fair Energy Transition" followed by a discussion. Shifting from a system using mainly non-renewable energy (fossil fuels) to renewable sources (wind energy, solar energy, etc.) is one of the most important challenges to overcome in order to prevent the continuation of the planet and climate change. The presentation opened many topics related to renewable energy and environmental development, with the key question being: will the energy transition be in the interest of citizens and according to the needs of local communities, or in the interest of private investors and companies?⁷⁴

Ecological Best Practice of Critical Thinking in Germany

REZO, a German You-Tuber best known for his music videos, published a video on 18 May 2019, which he called "Destruction of the CDU" and in which he takes a critical look at the climate policy of the governing parties. His well-researched, well-founded and vivid representations for a "failure" of politics in the climate issue, led on many levels of politics and private consumers to strengthen a rethinking of climate policy. Young people in particular joined the Thunberg movement "Fridays-for-future".

Best practice for promoting critical thinking through art in Greece

LATRA Innovation Lab in a refugee camp on the island of Lesbos.

The social-innovative creative agency LATRA has enabled innovators, designers, makers, producers and social entrepreneurs to develop various technology-driven creative projects together with the refugee community. Under the motto "build the world better", the Latra project provided a unique opportunity for a part of the refugee community residing in Greece to openly express themselves through creative means in order to provide some adaptive and resilient responses to the migration crisis. Art, creativity, education and innovation were the inspirational factors of this project, which was awarded the Intercultural Achievement Recognition Award by the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2018) and first place in the Global Be.Creative competition (2017).⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Available under:

https://pravonavodu.weebly.com/?fbclid=IwAR1i_VSyIGR7OouG_FoGvKY_ky7XjfJ34IjiCoiSv_MlrV8KB5gWV8gZl9E. Last accessed on 12th August 2021.

⁷⁵ Available under: <https://latra.gr>. Last accessed on 1st August 2021.



(Photo from LATRA official Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/LATRALESVOS/>)

Best practice for promoting critical thinking through art in Greece

The participating artists came from different corners of the planet, all outside the West, and presented their stories through unusual performances that made the audience think. They all used their bodies as a field of expression to make their comments on various provocative social issues. The body, then, as a "vehicle for resistance" and art as a tool for critical thinking.



(Festival logo and photo from performance found at <https://www.onassis.org/whats-on/body-politics>)⁷⁶

Best practice for promoting critical thinking among children in Serbia

The program "Philosophy with Children"⁷⁷ is realized in Belgrade at DKC by philosophy professor Marija Popović. It is one of the very popular and effective programs for the development of

⁷⁶ Available under: <https://www.onassis.org/whats-on/body-politics>. Last accessed on 23rd September 2021.

⁷⁷ Available under: <https://www.facebook.com/Filozofija-sa-decom-111052890256699>. Last accessed on 23rd September 2021.

thinking skills in children aged three to sixteen / eighteen. The program was started by American philosopher and educator Matthew Lipman more than thirty years ago, as "Philosophy with Children" has given various forms and ways of application, inspired by the history of philosophy, but not to teach philosophy. Opinions in children (argumentation, conceptualization, problematization, explanation, analysis.) This program is realized through activities in the form of dialogue, where attention is paid to thinking, understanding and reflection. The focus on thinking is important when working with children at this age. The aim is for the children to "get rid of" patterns and preconceptions and to express their thinking skills through a simple and attractive method of working. Advantages of doing philosophy with children - relying on oneself and thinking independently, forming independent attitudes, being proud of one's insight, being brave in thinking. Results are achieved by reading interesting stories, listening to music, watching films, playing different games.

Best practice for promoting critical thinking through art in Serbia

An example of good practice in which artists challenge, engage and guide audiences to think critically is the Kosztolányi Dezső Theatre⁷⁸ from Subotica, Serbia. This theatre was founded in 1994. and since that time they have been making the audience think, confronting them with astonishment, stimulating them, making them curious and captivating them. Over the years, the theatre has developed into an experimental, so-called artistic theatre, characterized by the unique working methods and aesthetics of András Urbán's productions. The plays are performed in Hungarian, with Serbian subtitles since 2007. In recent years, the troupe has been a guest at various theatre festivals in Europe, Asia, South America. The institution is constantly present at the most important theatre festivals in Hungary and Serbia, as well as at other theatre events in the region. The theatre puts a special emphasis on contemporary workshops, organically connecting the local and the global reality. The Kosztolányi Dezső Theatre has proven that experimental performances can also enter the mainstream, and in artistic terms the theatre has gained a significant position in the region. In the name of diversity, the Kosztolányi Dezső Theatre launched the Tramway of Desire in 2006. This is a unique, year-long series of events that aims to present to the Vojvodina audience artists who are revolutionary, exciting and first-class in their own genre of theatre performance. Since 2009, the theatre has organized its own festival, Desiré Central Station. This contemporary, international and regional festival of theatre and dance has become an important moment in the cultural life of the region.

Best practice for promoting critical thinking to improve the quality of life of urban dwellers in Serbia

Škograd⁷⁹ are rethinking the relationship between the school and the settlement on the city periphery and want to contribute to improving the quality of life in the city. Together with children, neighbors and staff of the "Vlada Obradović Kameni" school, they talk, organize workshops where they think, imagine and work together on how to improve the neighborhood of Ledine, a neighborhood in Belgrade.

Škograd was formed by the merger of three teams in autumn 2016. They found themselves with a common desire to think about the relationship between education and the city and a will to explore this relationship on Ledine. Škogled represents a collective social engagement with the

⁷⁸ Available under: <http://www.kosztolananyi.org/en/> Last accessed on 23rd September 2021.

⁷⁹ Available under: <https://skograd.org/en/home-en/> Last accessed on 23rd September 2021.

idea of building social capacities directed from citizens to society. The team brings together experts from the fields of psychology, education, art, design, architecture and urbanism. Through transdisciplinary work, the team seeks to discover and interpret creative and urban practices and place them in new relationships that have the potential to positively impact the quality of life in the city. The School of Urban Practice (Gradska Gerila) is committed to building dialogue and engaging the community in the process of developing new concepts for shared public spaces. Linked to a Master's degree, the team aimed to guide the call of architects to think about the environment, its changes, its actors and their (own) role in these processes. Since 2013, ŠUP has been exploring new local participatory design practices through meetings with citizens, experts, investors and city officials.

More info at: <https://skograd.org/en/home-en/>⁸⁰

Best practice for promoting critical thinking to address citizens' participation opportunities in Serbia

The Centre for Cultural Decontamination (CZKD)⁸¹ is a non-profit cultural institution whose work is based on critical thinking and cultural and artistic production. Through cultural and social engagement that has involved thousands of people, CZKD articulates initiatives to politicize and re-politicize public space, culture and art.

Founded in a time of war and temporary devastation, the center has managed to become an institution of resistance. It opened at the "First Decontamination", on 1 January 1995, with the firm conviction that nationalism, xenophobia and all kinds of violence can be challenged in the same way they are created - through culture, art and public speech. Since then, the center has been an institution of critical thinking and affirmation of the right to rebellion, without separating human rights and justice, art, culture and truth. Since its foundation, the CZKD has organized several thousand different programs: Plays, performances, exhibitions, concerts, public discussions, film screenings, workshops, seminars, conferences, lectures and complex performance experiments. The CZKD is a place of political and cultural dialogue, a public space open to both criticism and affirmation.

One of the features of the Centre for Cultural Decontamination (CZKD) is its ability to respond quickly to current cultural phenomena, to articulate answers to daily emerging problems and questions, which distinguishes it in a time of limited institutional flexibility due to political partitocracy and the limitation of independent culture by an imposed project-action model. The CZKD offers initiatives, individuals and organizations the opportunity to realize programs, projects, meetings and actions of solidarity. Through the long-term platform "Delegated Public Space" we offer "unpredictability": an openness to unplanned potential arising from both official and independent culture.

In addition to putting ideas into practice, the organic connection between text and context is another principle of CZKD's politics and poetics. If culture is a public good, and if disputes, ruptures and breaks, conflict and competition, are the basis of society - then this is the spirit of CZKD.

The production process in CZKD is based on collectivity and collaboration in the community, consisting of artists, activists, theorists, NGOs, international and local cultural, art and human rights initiatives, and this dynamic of collaboration develops CZKD both regionally and

⁸⁰ Available under: <https://skograd.org/en/home-en/>. Last accessed on 23rd September 2021.

⁸¹ Available under: <https://www.czkd.org/en/>. Last accessed on 23rd September 2021.

internationally. CZKD strives for and achieves a two-way cooperation: visits, co-production, support and exchange are just some of the ways to develop a CZKD public space dynamic - CZKD is both guest and host.

CZKD's program includes very diverse activities:

- Producing cultural events: Plays, exhibitions, performances, various cultural and political "public gestures".
- Creating a digital platform for the affirmation of progressive politics
- Developing a public space for flexible and rapid responses to social issues, with the aim of ensuring social cohesion
- Promoting and supporting collaboration between artists and activists locally and in neighboring countries, as well as cooperation with cultural organizations and institutions in Europe and the world
- Promoting cooperation between the public and private sectors, especially in relation to culture and human rights
- Strengthening the development of civil society in Serbia

More info at: <https://www.czkd.org/en/>⁸²

Best practice for promoting critical thinking among students in Italy

Routines of thinking

How can students be made to acquire civic skills, and in particular what is usually called critical thinking? One answer from a didactic perspective is, for example, the Making Learning Visible project (MVL) developed at Harvard University. In the framework of this project, operational practices were developed, the Thinking Routines, with the focus precisely on the term "routine", as it refers to the goal that "critical thinking training" can become a common practice, indeed a routine. One of the tools to realize this is group learning, defined as "a group of people emotionally, intellectually and aesthetically involved in solving problems, creating products and attributing meaning. "A group in which everyone learns both independently and with and thanks to the others" (PZ & Reggio Children, 2001)⁸³.

Best practice to promote critical thinking to counter radicalization tendencies in Italy

How can teachers be helped to prevent forms of radicalization?

The PRACTICE - Preventing Radicalization through Critical Thinking Competences project (funded by the Erasmus+ Key Action 2 Programme, Strategic Partnerships in School Education Sector) aims to respond to the challenges and need to prevent radicalization in schools by providing in-service training opportunities for teachers in this area and developing, testing and promoting an innovative approach involving the use of collaborative tools.

The project has developed an innovative and collaborative professional development programme on the prevention of radicalization in schools at European level;

The PRACTICE programme is an Open Educational Resource (OER) with the aim to:

- Promote critical thinking and effective strategies to engage with students on local, national and international issues.

⁸² Available under: <https://www.czkd.org/en/>. Last accessed on 23rd September 2021.

⁸³ Available under: <http://innovazione.indire.it/avanguardieeducative/integrazione-mlty/>. last accessed on 24th September 2021.

- Develop personal critical thinking skills in students through small group work and other activities.
- Address controversial issues effectively by challenging students' misinformed views and perceptions
- Challenge false myths and promote understanding and appreciation of diversity
- Incorporate basic knowledge about radicalism
- Improve teachers' and school leaders' skills in identifying and defusing potential risks⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Available under: <https://practice-school.eu/oer-radicalization-prevention-programme/>. Last accessed on 23rd September 2021.



Photo by NeONBRANDon Unsplash



5/ What factors influence critical thinking?

Critical thinking is generally linked to skills that enable one to form conscious, self-regulating judgements and to derive interpretations, analyses, evaluations and conclusions. This applies to all areas of human life and specifically includes education, information gathering, media literacy and socio-economic background.

Critical thinking is the ability to reflect and question information, attitudes and statements:

- Make careful judgements and evaluations of information and statements.
- To show respect and appreciation for other points of view (even if one disagrees with them).
- An attitude that sees the questionability of a position and a willingness to change that position in the face of new information.

Critical thinking is influenced by two main factors:

- Through upbringing - This is where everyone involved in a person's upbringing plays an important role.
- Through the family's heritage and environment.

How attitudes and information are handled in a family structure influences young people to a very great extent. For example, is discussion open, are other opinions treated with respect? Are all participants included in the discussion and valued? Are sources of information supplemented or questioned? Etc.

5.1 Education (knowledge of historical facts, means of propaganda, neopopulism)

"Promoting critical thinking involves the promoters themselves: Teachers should be open to examine their thinking, to expand it, and to be prepared to replace held views when necessary, as new insights replace the old".⁸⁵

An important factor in this is the system in which we grew up. This includes the structure and educational level of the family, the circle of friends, as well as the school career that the learners have taken. (See Socio-economic background).

School education must also be seen in the context of the political system of the state; political education and the evaluation of historical events are mutually dependent. In school education, critical thinking tends to be taught through the attitude of teachers and through the application of teachers in school subjects. As a method, critical thinking still receives too little attention in teacher training. When critical thinking is taught, learners are empowered to think more independently and question what is taught.

However, critical thinking can be effectively promoted in the classroom:

- First of all, it is important that teachers make the promotion of critical thinking a stated teaching goal in the first place. There is a wide range of promising ways in which this can look in the classroom: From (guided) class discussions to role-plays; from explicitly teaching general principles of critical thinking to closely linking them to specific subject content.
- Students can learn not only cognitive tools but also, to some extent, a critical stance. So far, most of the available research on critical thinking comes from the English-speaking world. For the German-speaking school context, however, this research provides indications of how teachers can support their students in questioning facts and developing independent arguments within the framework of their teaching.

"Klaus-Peter Hufer, one of the best-known political adult educators, writes: "Why do political 'educators' always have to emphasise that they are 'critical'? It seems like a mantra. [...] In my understanding, political education is always critical, otherwise what is being staged there would be neither 'political' nor 'education'. It would be training, indoctrination or agitation with the aim of forcing a willingness to conform on the part of the participants; it would not be education, but its opposite." (Hufer 2013, p. 120).

According to Hufer, the claim to train critical faculties is already contained in the concept of education itself. It stands for the ability to "use one's intellect without the guidance of another" (Kant 1967, p. 55)."⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Dirk Jahn: „Was es heißt, kritisches Denken zu fördern. Ein pragmatischer Beitrag zur Theorie und Didaktik kritischen Nachdenkens“. In: Mediamanual Texte 2013. Nr. 28. Page 7. Available under: https://www.mediamanual.at/mediamanual/mm2/themen/kompetenz/mmt_1328_kritischesdenken_OK.pdf. Last accessed on 23rd September 2021.

⁸⁶ Kerstin Pohl: Kritik: Wie kritisch soll politische Bildung sein? 19th March 2015. Available under: <https://www.bpb.de/gesellschaft/bildung/politische-bildung/193192/kritik>. Last accessed on 20th July 2021.

The reality of political education in German schools, however, is that the "subjects" of politics and history are subordinate in the subject canon. In some cases, they are only taught intermittently or not at all. Either there are no subject teachers or "other things are more important".

In Bulgaria, politics and thus political education is still not a regular subject even 30 years after the democratic change. The debate on education for critical thinking needs at the same time to include the training of educators in media literacy and mediality.

In the history of mankind, it has never been possible to access information so quickly on almost any subject in which people are interested. The other side of the coin is that there are also false reports, misinterpretations and deceptions that are presented in the media disguised as information.

The term "googling" has long been a colloquial term for obtaining information from the internet. In contrast to encyclopaedias, for which money was paid and which for many years served to look up general information in households, information is expected to be made available free of charge. Users often do not consider that every knowledge query "costs" data. In addition to checking the knowledge, information retrieval always includes checking the source (see media literacy education).

The Wiki principle is described here as an example of the possibility of obtaining information:

A wiki (Hawaiian: Quick) is a website whose content can not only be read by visitors but also directly edited. One aim is to collect knowledge and experience and make it accessible to a large number of users in an understandable form. The best-known example of this is the online encyclopaedia Wikipedia, which is at the top of the list of websites accessed for the purpose of gathering information. The principle of a large number of users editing the information leads to a lot of knowledge being collected and reviewed again and again.”

In the past, this offer of knowledge collection initially attracted a lot of criticism. To this day, of course, it must be said that this source must not be the ONLY source for research. Critical thinking always involves comparing several sources and drawing appropriate conclusions. Here we come to the importance of media literacy:

Media literacy (fake news, mass media, new media...)

“Media literacy includes both the acquisition of skills in dealing with digital media and the development of critical reflection on media use and media content. Both are educational contents that promote general media literacy. The teaching of critically reflected media literacy remains at the discretion of the individual, the parents and the individual school. The term critically reflective media literacy includes the ability to think critically. Research is about using different sources to avoid falling for fake news and being seduced by conspiracy theorists.

Therefore, it is of great importance to have skills to decipher fake news.

Critical thinking is a key skill of media and information literacy, and it is the task of libraries to train and promote it. The discussions around Fake News have led to a new focus on media literacy more broadly, and on the role of libraries and other educational institutions in teaching it.

When Oxford Dictionaries announced that "post-truth" was the word of the year for 2016, many librarians realized that they need to do something to train and promote critical thinking - a crucial skill to navigate the information society.”

IFLA has created this infographic with eight simple steps (based on the 2016 article How to Spot Fake News by FactCheck.org) to discover the verifiability of a particular news article in front of you. Download the infographic, print it, translate it and share it - at home, in your library, in your community and on social media. The more we crowdsource our wisdom, the wiser the world becomes.⁸⁷

HOW TO SPOT FAKE NEWS

- 

CONSIDER THE SOURCE

Click away from the story to investigate the site, its mission and its contact info.
- 

READ BEYOND

Headlines can be outrageous in an effort to get clicks. What's the whole story?
- 

CHECK THE AUTHOR

Do a quick search on the author. Are they credible? Are they real?
- 

SUPPORTING SOURCES?

Click on those links. Determine if the info given actually supports the story.
- 

CHECK THE DATE

Reposting old news stories doesn't mean they're relevant to current events.
- 

IS IT A JOKE?

If it is too outlandish, it might be satire. Research the site and author to be sure.
- 

CHECK YOUR BIASES

Consider if your own beliefs could affect your judgement.
- 

ASK THE EXPERTS

Ask a librarian, or consult a fact-checking site.

IFLA
International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions

Other topics that are indispensable for media literacy education:

⁸⁷ Available under: <https://www.ifla.org/publications/node/11174>. Last accessed on 20th July 2021.

- Data protection - the internet is not a legal vacuum
- Cyberbullying on the net - legal background and ways of dealing with it
- Raising awareness of media addiction and
- Learning to criticize addiction
- Reflecting on one's own media behavior
- Digital ethics
- Integrating brain research findings into educational programs and curricula
- Emotion regulation
- Strengthening self-confidence
- Appreciation of the individual

5.2 Socio-economic background as an important factor influencing critical thinking

The term "socio-economic background" stands for a bundle of characteristics that can be used to describe a person or a group of people. It refers to various social and economic circumstances that have a direct or indirect influence on the lives of these people. These include, for example, the level of education, the financial wealth of the parents, what citizenship someone has and whether they grew up with siblings.

The level of education varies greatly in all societies, as does the respective economic situation and also the family situation of the inheritor. These factors also influence the formation of critical thinking and media literacy. Therefore, we believe that special attention should be paid to young people from socio-economically difficult backgrounds and that they should be "taken along" - in education and critical thinking. For critical thinking socio-economic aspects are important:

- Data capitalism and the questioning of utility and ownership.
- Cui bono (for whose benefit)? Etc. must also always ask who benefits from the information:
 - If it's free, it costs your data. Data Capitalism? Data is the new gold
 - Who commissioned a study?
 - What image is being supported?
 - What is the financial bias of the media?
 - Who benefits from the information disseminated?

In people's social relationships, different opinions are often discussed. Here, too, it is advisable to ask critical questions about the basis on which the conversation takes place.

Five questions as examples of the application of critical thinking:

Question 1: Who is the source of the statement?

Is it an own opinion, or an opinion based on frequently repeated statements. But also, who benefits from the statement?

Question 2: What was said?

Is it the observation of an individual, or an opinion that has been often repeated?

Are there facts that support this statement, have these facts possibly been taken out of context?

Question 3: Where was the statement made?

Did I hear it in a personal conversation, or in the media? The where also includes the context in which the statement was made.

Question 4: Why was it said?

Is there a background to what was said? Can there be a specific purpose? Do I agree with the purpose and background of what was said?

Question 5: How?

In what tone, with what attitude was what was said passed on. You can find out the tone in conversations as well as in comments or news/films. Does it fit?



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6/ Critical thinking - the engine of political activism?

Critical thinking is becoming an imperative of the modern world.⁸⁸ There are at least two reasons for this. A modern democratic society requires an active citizenry who think, deliberate, evaluate and make decisions, so only citizens with developed critical thinking skills will be able to meet the demands of the modern democratic world.

The characteristics of the modern world are extraordinary technological advances, a period of rapid and constant change, the exposure of individuals to a large amount of information and a significantly increased level of information availability, which requires an active, thoughtful and questioning critical approach.

It is estimated that in the next ten years, 100% of the world knowledge we have today will be only 10% of the available knowledge base. In 1992 Phillips⁸⁹ wrote that most of our knowledge has a life span of ten years or less and then becomes inaccurate or obsolete. Under these circumstances, it is extremely important to teach young people and children how to use information for critical thinking and not to make them collect so much information that they do not know what to do with. Individuals need to know how to approach new ideas from different angles, how to judge their credibility and value, and how to determine the overall value of ideas based on their own needs and goals.

Henri Giroud under the strong influence of Paul Freire's pedagogical ideas on critical thinking is primarily viewed from a political aspect, as a form of exercising freedom that aims to create an experience of the meaning of life in each individual in the classroom, but also to promote the common good and create a true democracy (destruction of government structures). Advocates encourage compassion and understanding towards others in the classroom and other communities to which they belong, recognize authoritarian tendencies within them, reconsider commonly accepted beliefs and myths that give legitimacy to old and debilitating social practices, and consider personal and social agency aimed at democratizing these communities. The pedagogical foundation of the emancipatory sees educational programs as "a political project that creates conditions for personal autonomy and sets liberation and the practice of freedom as a general goal" (Giroud, 2013: 226).⁹⁰

Referring to Freire's alternative pedagogical approach, he states that "any progressive vision of learning must include pedagogical principles characterized by a tendency towards dialogue, rethinking and communication".⁹¹

⁸⁸ Available under : https://www.researchgate.net/publication/292996183_Kriticko_misljenje. Last accessed on 23rd September 2021.

⁸⁹ Available under: http://147.91.75.9/manage/shares/Quality_of_education/Susreti-pedagoga-2020-Zbornik-radova.pdf. Last accessed on 23rd September 2021.

⁹⁰ Available under : http://147.91.75.9/manage/shares/Quality_of_education/Susreti-pedagoga-2020-Zbornik-radova.pdf. Last accessed on 23rd September 2021.

⁹¹ Paulo Freire: Pedagogy of the Oppressed. 1968. available under: <https://generojournal.org/download/genero-23-2019-pp-245-250.pdf>. Last accessed on 23rd September 2021.



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7/ Opportunities to empower empowered citizens to participate in socially relevant issues

A look at the definition of competence in citizenship according to the European Union:

The Council of the European Union has included competence in citizenship in the key competences for lifelong learning. In the European Reference Framework, we find its definition: Citizenship competence is the ability to act as a responsible citizen and to participate fully in civic and social life, based on an understanding of social, economic, legal and political concepts and structures, as well as global developments and sustainability.

It is noted that these skills require knowledge and understanding of important content, including: Current affairs as well as the critical interpretation of major events in national, European and world history, which brings us back to the very close link that exists between the development of political activism and critical thinking to ensure a full understanding of the rights and responsibilities of every citizen.

The Council of the European Union adopted a recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning in May 2018, which also defines the essential knowledge and attitudes needed to acquire citizenship competences:

Citizenship competences refer to the ability to engage effectively with others for the common or public interest, including the sustainable development of society. This includes critical thinking and integrated problem-solving skills, as well as the ability to develop arguments and participate constructively in community activities and decision-making at all levels, from local and national to European and international. This also includes the ability to access, critically understand and interact with traditional and new media and to understand the role and functions of the media in democratic societies.

In conclusion, political activism - which is a civic competence - and critical thinking are linked.



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8/ Project outlook

The Erasmus+ funded project Political Activism and Critical Thinking (PACT) is predicted to have a duration of 24 months, aiming at the fruitful exchange of good practices between partner countries in the broader field of political activism – active citizenship – democratic participation – maintenance of the European values, in view of the augmented radicalization observed. That is to say, since the acquisition of necessary tools – such as the collective online article of the team that will be broadly distributed - to develop awareness of political activism and commitment to social welfare, is not the only step forward for the promotion of the project. In fact, after the completion of the article within the first year, several steps are designed by the partnership in favor of the project.

8.1 Next steps: foresights and sustainability of the project

More specifically, uncovering the problem of radicalism in various areas, as well as raising awareness of citizen participation, improving methods of critical thinking, political activism and informal learning are our main goals. To this aim, we have designed a strategic series of actions that will take place during the second half of the project. First of all, its distribution will take place inside the organizations involved, i.e. educators and volunteer, and outside of the organizing core of the PACT project, i.e. regional education, authorities, NGOs and institutions that work with adults, trainers, professors at local, national and European level. EPALE and Erasmus+ Results platforms are only some of the channels that will be used to ensure broad dissemination and what is more, the results of the project will be implemented in the working methods of the participating institutions. In line with the project outline, after the kick-off and the transnational project meeting of the partnership, short-term joint staff training events are predicted for the second year of PACT focusing on how to boost political activism. What is more, during the final transnational project meeting, all partners will reflect on the future of the project, with an emphasis on its sustainability, and they will evaluate the progress that has been made. Hopefully, already with the online publication and the following dissemination of our article, the readers could be convinced to participate more actively in political decision-making processes and socially relevant topics, inspired by the newly collected, designed and optimized methods and work of the partners towards avoiding radicalization tendencies. The participation of high-quality associate partners will increase awareness far beyond the participating partners, thanks to their well-established networks in different areas (adult education, civil participation, culture and arts field). For example, partners' priority during the second year and after the completion of the project, will be the presentation of project results to universities of teacher education and to teacher training centers, which then could implement the new methods and the best practices in their training, in an effort to create a chain of knowledge. Last but not least, the project will enrich with content its own website so that all interested and affected people (trainers, teachers, learners, adult education institutions, universities, teacher training colleges, educational policy-makers etc.) can find out about the current project status and, subsequently, about the results and approaches of PACT. In addition, PACT is and will continue to be active on social media, aka its successful Facebook page with regular posts and updates by the partners. In addition, the brochure prepared by the Akademie für Politische Bildung und demokratiefördernde Maßnahmen with the project content will be forwarded to several adult education institutions and other organizations that deal with this topic, hoping to create a leverage effect of the project results in the entire educational system.

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