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# PRISONERS' ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

AN INSIGHT IN EUROPEAN PRISONS



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# Prisoners' Active Citizenship: An insight in European prisons



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Prisoners Active Citizenship  
PAC

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## Colophon

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3. Unione Italiana Sport Per Tutti (UISP, Italy)
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## About the Prisoners' Active Citizenship (PAC) project

*'We take citizens and turn them into prisoners and then expect them, with minimal preparation, to turn back into citizens again, with all the responsibilities this involves for themselves, their families and for others'*  
(Burnside, 2008: 8).

*'There is a huge scope for prisoners to take on responsibility, engage in constructive work, and contribute to the life of the prison community'*  
(Edgar, Jacobson & Biggar, 2011: 5).

PAC or 'Prisoners' Active Citizenship' is a 2-year project which has been funded by the European Commission under the KA2-program (Erasmus+). It runs from December 2017 until the end of 2019. The goal of this project is to test various active citizenship participation models in different European prisons and to develop a participation toolkit based on these experiences. Before those participation models are being piloted, this research report aims to provide insight into existing active citizenship practices in European prisons through an overview of the existing literature about active citizenship in prison, and the results of an online survey.

Before presenting the existing literature and the results of the online survey, we first want to underline that this research report considers prisoners as human beings. All people – including prisoners – are of equal value and deserve respect as human beings, irrespective of their race, nationality, gender, religion, disability, or differences in authority or status (Faulkner, 2003). Imprisonment is inevitably linked with the deprivation of liberty. Except for the rights linked to their liberty, prisoners preserve all their rights as human beings (Coyle, 2009). All other aspects of prison life should be as similar as possible to life outside prison (Van Zyl Smit & Snacken, 2009), what means that **prisoners also have rights concerning 'active citizenship'**.

This implies that prisons should also be seen as potential 'active citizens'. Although the concept active citizenship is not used explicitly, this theme moves higher up European political agendas. For instance, article 27.6 of the European Prison Rules stipulates that *'recreational opportunities, which include sport, games, cultural activities, hobbies and other leisure pursuits, shall be provided and, as far as possible, prisoners shall be allowed to organize them'*. In addition, article 50 of the European Prison Rules puts: *'Subject to the needs of good order, safety and security, prisoners shall be allowed to discuss matters relating to general conditions of imprisonment and shall be encouraged to communicate with the prison authorities about these matters'* (Council of Europe, 2006). However, Inderbitzin and colleagues mention in their book chapter 'Leading by example: Ways that prisoners give back to their communities' (2016: 86)

that *'we rarely hear about the good work being done in prison and those prisoners who have grown up, matured and changed their life while incarcerated'*. Therefore, this research report aims to provide insight into the concept of active citizenship and how this is currently implemented in European prisons.

## Part 1: Literature review

### 1. From 'citizenship' to 'active citizenship'

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The word 'citizenship' has several meanings. For instance, nationality law uses this word to distinguish citizens of different countries, but it is also used in debates about national culture and identity, or to overcome the feeling of alienation which may be felt by disaffected groups. These descriptions all separate those who belong to from those who do not, and often encompass the implication that the former are more reliable and trustworthy than the others (Faulkner, 2003).

Traditionally, citizenship literature focused on the rights and responsibilities of individuals to the state (Hoskin & Mascherini, 2009), what is also known as the rights model of citizenship (Delanty, 1997). Influential is the work of Marshall (1950) that makes a distinction between three types of citizenship: civil, political and social. The first, civil citizenship, implies the rights to individual freedom like liberty, freedom of speech, thought and faith, and the right to own property, but also the right to justice. The second type, political citizenship, encompasses the right to participate in the exercise of political power in for instance the parliament, councils or the local government. The last type, social citizenship, involves that people can live the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in society. Social services and educational systems are most closely connected with this.

This rights model of citizenship posits a formal understanding of citizenship and has been criticized as it excludes the nuance of 'active citizenship'. Citizenship not only relates to rights but also encompasses other responsibilities or duties, identity and participation (Delanty, 1997). Using the word 'active' emphasizes the involvement of citizens and is mainly used in the field of education (Hoskin & Mascherini, 2009). In this framework, the European Commission states that there are three dimensions of active citizenship: affective, cognitive and pragmatic. The affective dimension refers to the extent to which individuals and groups feel a sense of attachment to the societies and communities to which they theoretically belong. This dimension is closely related to identity and values, and the promotion of social inclusion and cohesion. The second dimension, cognitive active citizenship, means that people need basic information and knowledge upon which they can take action. Lastly, the pragmatic dimension involves that people take action and gain experience in doing so (European Commission, 1998). This broad

definition implies that a variety of activities can be considered as active citizenship: e.g. government accountable, voting, and participating in everyday life in the community (Hoskin & Mascherini, 2009).

Recently, several European countries have more attention for people's possibilities to participate in everyday life in the community and aim to put more power in people's hands. In other words, they want that people take up a more active role in society. For instance, in the Netherlands there is the evolution towards a '*participating community*'. This was introduced in 2013 by king Willem-Alexander. He incited everyone from which it could be asked to take responsibility for their own life and their surrounding (Verschoor & de Bruijn, 2017). Besides, in the UK there is the evolution of building the big society (Cabinet Office, 2010, 1): '*We want to give citizens, communities and local government the power and information they need to come together, solve the problems they face and build the Britain they want. We want society – the families, networks, neighborhoods and communities that form the fabric of so much of our everyday lives – to be bigger and stronger than ever before. Only when people and communities are given more power and take more responsibility can we achieve fairness and opportunity for all*'.

However, there is also critique on this evolution. Many people feel that the evolution of giving more responsibility to citizens is a hidden saving, that the most vulnerable people frequently do not get the support they need to be able to participate (Verschoor & de Bruijn, 2017), and that it overlooks the role that the state needs to play in promoting social justice (Kisby, 2010). Putting more power in people's hands is a long process that needs time (Verschoor & de Bruijn, 2017), in particular in prisons where individual's autonomy and choices are controlled and constrained (Hannah-Moffat, 2000). Prisoners' autonomy is restricted in the sense that the rules of the prison determine for instance when, how, where, and with whom they can eat. They can make few choices during their time of imprisonment, and all of their choices are influenced by the fact that they are imprisoned (Stohr & Walsh, 2012). '*We take citizens and turn them into prisoners and then expect them, with minimal preparation, to turn back into citizens again, with all the responsibilities this involves for themselves, their families and for others*' (Burnside, 2008: 8). In other words, prisoners' responsibilities are stripped, but we expect that they retake them upon release from prison.

Although prisons do little to promote a sense of empathy, agency and autonomy, they can create spaces where prisoners can develop social capital and practice the skills and competences necessary for active citizenship (Costelloe, 2014). In prisons in the UK, prisoners are given greater autonomy than historically, while they are still controlled by prison staff. To give an example, prisoners are given more responsibility for their own rehabilitation, and have to regulate all aspects of their conduct while power is still all-encompassing and invasive. This is also known as the pain of self-government (Crewe, 2011). This pain arises '*as the uniformed staff takes a more hands-off approach to running the prison. As inmates are given a broader range of potential actions and power to make decisions, they are also held responsible for failures to*

*live up to the standards of rehabilitation interventions like deeply intrusive cognitive behavioral programs'* (Shammas, 2017: 4).

The criminal justice system frequently only focuses on the offence someone committed, while many other aspects like their strengths are ignored (Toews, 2006). Offering active citizenship activities is a way to anticipate the strengths, and let prisoners take responsibility. By doing this, prisoners change their self-image and recognize that they are individuals with a continuing stake in society, which is positive for their reintegration after being released from prison (Easton, 2018). It is essential that taking up an active role in the prison or not may not be considered as the full responsibility of the individual prisoner (Brosens, 2018). Attention needs to be paid to the structural reasons why certain prisoners might not be able to take up this responsibility, such as limited financial resources to support active citizenship activities. According to Edgar et al. (2011), resources are broader and also imply people that are willing and able to make positive contributions. Besides, also the prison culture plays an important role. The creation of a culture in which active citizenship of prisoners is not questioned (Brosens, 2018) and the recognition of the valuable resources available in prison are essential steps to diminish participation barriers for those prisoners who want to take up a role as active citizen, but experience barriers to realize this.

## 2. Types of prisoners' active Citizenship

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In this part, we describe how the concept active citizenship relates to prisoners' participation and involvement possibilities in prison life. As Easton (2018) in the book chapter 'the question for citizenship in prison' states: *'There are a number of means of pursuing citizenship'*. We describe three different classifications of active citizenship activities in prison: (1) pyramid of citizen participation, (2) thematic classification, and (3) formal and informal types of prisoners' active citizenship.

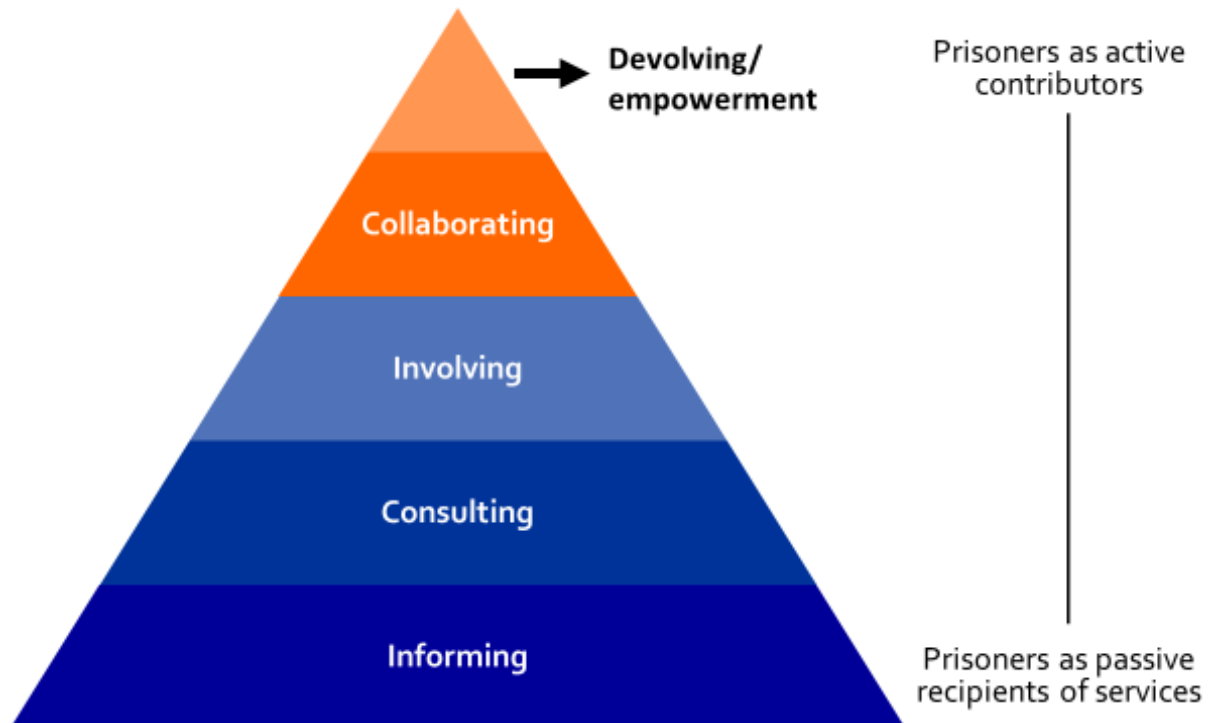
### 2.1. Pyramid of citizen participation

Recently, the ladder of citizen participation (Arnstein, 1969) has been applied to participation of the prison population (e.g. Brosens, 2018; Nacro, 2014; Taylor, 2014) and converted into 'the pyramid of citizen participation' (see figure 1). During several focus groups with prisoners and professionals in Belgium, respondents received a paper with the participation ladder and were asked to reflect on participation initiatives that existed on each level. The reflection was made that using the symbol of a ladder assumes that lower participation levels are inferior to the higher ones, as you have to climb the ladder, but not everyone has to reach the higher levels according to both professionals and prisoners themselves (Brosens, 2018). A pyramid visually demonstrates that more prisoners are/ can be involved at the lower participation levels, and less at the levels where prisoners take up a more active role. Not every prisoner needs to reach



the higher levels, but it is important to make it possible for those prisoners that want to reach a higher level and take up a more active participation role.

Figure 1. The pyramid of citizen participation



Five levels of citizen participation in prison can be distinguished:

- 1) The bottom level of the participation pyramid is *informing*, implying that prisoners are provided with objective information about their rights and ways to participate inside prison (Taylor, 2014) or to help them to understand problems, alternatives, opportunities and solutions (Nacro, 2014). Prisoners can be informed orally (for instance, through prison guards, activity organizers), or in writing (for instance, through flyers, posters, informational panels) (Brosens, 2018).
- 2) The second level is *consulting*. On this level, the meaning of prisoners have been asked (Taylor, 2014) and the prison management committ themselves to act on these views, if possible (Nacro, 2014). Ways to consult prisoners are spreading a questionnaire, hearing them in discussion/focus groups, or putting a suggestion box somewhere in prison (Brosens, 2018).
- 3) The third level is called *involving*. The decision-process is fed by prisoners' concerns, aspirations and advice, implying that prisoners are involved in making decisions to some degree (Nacro, 2014; Taylor, 2014). The prisoner council that is responsible to provide advice about issues of general interest is a way to involve prisoners in prison life (Brosens, 2018; Solomon & Edgar, 2004).

- 4) The fourth level is *collaborating*, meaning that prisoners are collaborating with staff to identify problems, and discuss possible solutions or alternatives (Nacro, 2014). Decisions are taken in collaboration with prisoners (Taylor, 2014). An example of collaborating is that prisoners are structurally members of working groups (for instance about the sport activities, communication) together with professionals (Brosens, 2018).
- 5) The last level *devolving* (Nacro, 2014) or *empowering* (Taylor, 2014) means that prisoners are responsible to make (some) management decisions on their own (Nacro, 2014; Taylor, 2014). An example is that prisoners receive a budget to independently organize activities for other prisoners (Brosens, 2018).

On the lower rungs of the participation pyramid, prisoners rather fulfill passive roles, while at the higher levels, prisoners can be seen as active contributors. Research has demonstrated that prisoners in Belgium have more possibilities to become involved in one of the lower rungs of the participation pyramid, like informing or consulting. However, as not everyone has a need to reach one of the higher participation levels, this may not be considered as invaluable. Important is that participation barriers are diminished for those prisoners who want to take up a more active participation role (Brosens, 2018). Nevertheless, prisoners can also make progress, and first take up a more passive role and afterwards become more active. Table 1 provides an overview of the role prisoners and managers have on each level of the participation pyramid.

Table 1. Role of prisoners and managers (*This is partly based on Edelenbos, Domingo, Klok, & Van Tatenhove (2006)*)

	ROLE OF PRISONERS	ROLE OF MANAGERS
<b>DEVOLVING/ EMPOWERMENT</b>	Initiators. Decision-makers. Responsibles. Owners.	Offer support and give prisoners the possibility to outline policy.
<b>COLLABORATING</b>	Co-decision-makers, sometimes within boundary conditions.	Set out policy taking into account the decisions of prisoners.
<b>INVOLVING</b>	Advisors.	Outline policy, while listening to prisoners' ideas and solutions.
<b>CONSULTING</b>	Consulted persons.	Outline policy and give prisoners the possibility to provide comments, but without the promise that they take into account these comments.
<b>INFORMING</b>	Target group of research and information, do not provide input.	Outline policy independently and inform prisoners.
<b>NO PARTICIPATION</b>	None.	Outline policy independently and do not inform prisoners.

## 2.2. Thematic classification of active citizenship activities in prison

In addition to the level of participation, different thematic types of active citizenship activities in prison are discovered in the literature: (1) organizing and supporting prison activities, (2) democratic participation (3) peer-based interventions, and (4) activities that bring members of the community into the prison.

*Organizing and supporting prison activities.* International instruments like the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (also known as the Nelson Mandela Rules - United Nations, 2015) and the European Prison Rules (Council of Europe, 2006) underline that prisoners have the right to access several prison activities (e.g. cultural activities, educational courses, sport activities, vocational programs). Organizing and supporting prison activities goes further in the sense that prisoners are actively involved in the organization of several activities in prison, or that they support those activities. Article 27.6 of the European Prison Rules for instance mentions that '*recreational opportunities, which include sport, games, cultural activities, hobbies and other leisure pursuits, shall be provided and, as far as possible, prisoners shall be allowed to organize them*' (Council of Europe, 2006). This implies that prisoners are not only considered as passive recipients of services, but also as active citizens (Edgar et al., 2011).

To give an (old) example: In a prison in New York, prisoners – also called 'library assistants' – have been involved in the development of a Hispanic and African ethnic library collection. A Hispanic and a black prisoner selected the greatest part of the library collection, including books taking into account the historical, cultural and political significance for Hispanics and Blacks, biographies, fiction books, poetry, etc. (Haymann-Diaz, 1989). Prisoners can also play a role in the organization of sports activities in prison. For instance, in Drake Hall (a prison in the UK) female prisoners can follow training courses to get a (larger) teaching role and provide active input into the running of the prison gym (Ozano, 2008). Another example can be found in two prisons in Belgium that actively involve prisoners in the organization and support of several activities (e.g. quiz, sport tournament, films). Prisoners announce the activities, prepare participants lists, provide logical support, evaluate the activity, etc.

There is only limited research attention for activities that are organized or supported by prisoners, but the study of Haymann-Diaz (1989) points to some positive outcomes. The library project in New York has shown that both ethnic library collections are heavily used by other prisoners. Besides, as the prisoners that selected the library collection were concerned about the physical maintenance of the book collections, they developed several procedures to limit the loss of materials, which reduces the 'waste' of resources. On its turn, the study of Ozano (2008) demonstrates that prisoners who take up a role as coach, teacher or instructor during sports activities find this a rewarding and fulfilling experience.

*Democratic participation in prison.* Democratic participation means that prisoners are actively involved in decision-making about the prison regime (Edgar et al., 2011). On the prison floor this is also known as prisoner councils, prisoner forums, inmate committees, representative councils or consultative councils (Bishop, 2006). Article 50 of the European Prison Rules refers to democratic participation without using

this term explicitly: '*Subject to the needs of good order, safety and security, prisoners shall be allowed to discuss matters relating to general conditions of imprisonment and shall be encouraged to communicate with the prison authorities about these matters*' (Council of Europe, 2006). This communication must allow prisoners to express their complaints and remarks on the working of the prison and suggest possible changes (Bishop, 2006). According to Bishop (2006), several European countries have implemented prisoner councils in their prisons.

Another example of democratic participation is a learner council/ forum. In one prison in the UK, each class has one elected representative in the learner council. The educational manager and other members of this department are also able to attend the meetings (Auty, Taylor, Bennallick, & Champion, 2016). As educational managers attend the meeting, they can inform the learner council about any development and provide feedback on the suggestions of the council. In addition, representatives of the council can provide feedback to the other students during the classes (Champion & Aguiar, 2013).

Research has shown that there are several benefits related with democratic participation. It can reinforce the principles of democracy as prisoners are shown that their voices count (Inderbitzin et al., 2016), and the relationships between prisoners and prison staff may be improved, resulting in a better general atmosphere in prison (Bishop, 2006; Champion & Aguiar, 2013). Democratic participation furthermore improves the working of the prison (Champion & Aguiar, 2013; Edgar et al., 2011) because prisoners can express their thoughts about where progress and improvements are needed or required in the future (Champion & Aguiar, 2013).

*Peer-based interventions.* There are mainly 2 types of peer-based interventions in prison: (1) peer education and (2) peer support (Bagnall et al., 2015; South, Bagnall, & Woodall, 2017). Literature on peer education mostly focuses on how prisoners can take up a role in the prevention of HIV and risk reduction. The Irish Red Cross volunteer inmate program which is implemented in all Irish prisons is an example. Prisoners are trained to become peer-to-peer educators who promote hygiene, health and first aid among their fellow prisoners (Mehay & Meek, 2016). Another example is the Toe-by-Toe program (England) through which prisoners provide literacy training to other prisoners. The aim is to teach them to read and write (Perrin & Blagden, 2016).

Peer support is a second type of peer-based interventions. Prison systems have 2 formally organized types of peer support. First, some programs focus on providing basic information, reassurance and practical support to recently arrived prisoners (Boothby, 2011; Perrin & Blagden, 2016). Examples are the insider schemes in the UK (Boothby, 2011; Edgar et al., 2011; Perrin & Blagden, 2016) and prison orientation in Australia (Deville, Sorbello, Eccleston, & Ward, 2005). Second, other peer support programs concentrate on providing emotional support and preventing suicide. Examples are the listener schemes in the UK (Edgar et al., 2011; Perrin & Blagden, 2016), the SAM's in the Pen' program in Canada (Hall & Gabor, 2004) and the 'co-détenu support' program in France (Auzoult & Abdellaoui, 2013). These programs offer the possibility to have confidential conversations with fellow prisoners during their full period of

incarceration (Edgar et al., 2011; Perrin & Blagden, 2016). Those peer-based interventions are not officially included in International and European legislation.

As with prisoners' democratic participation, there are also positive outcomes related to peer-based interventions in prison. Prisoners that take up such role feel trusted by the prison and fellow prisoners (Edgar et al., 2011). In addition, being a listener increases prisoners' wellbeing because the relationship with prison staff, other prisoners and family members improves, they gain social skills, more knowledge and awareness of mental health issues, and also a better self-esteem. A negative outcomes was the emotional burden of care (South et al., 2014). Many prisoners take up a role as listener after benefiting from the support they received from other listeners when they arrived in prison. Positive outcomes are also related with being involved in providing basic information, reassurance and practical support to recently arrived prisoners. For instance, by doing this some prisoners feel that then can be a father figure for younger prisoners (Edgar et al., 2011).

*Activities that bring members of the community into the prison.* Community members can be brought into prison to – for instance – use prison facilities like the gym (Edgar et al., 2011), sing together with prisoners in a community prison choir (Cohen, 2012), or follow a university course together with incarcerated students in the prison (Arthur & Valentine, 2018; Link, 2016). Also article 7 of the European Prison Rules touches upon this: '*Co-operation with outside social services and as far as possible the involvement of civil society in prison life shall be encouraged*' (Council of Europe, 2006).

An example can be found in prison-university partnerships. Prisons in Belgium, Denmark, UK, and USA bring inside and outside students together in prison to study (Armstrong & Ludlow, 2016; Champion, 2018). Examples are the 'inside-out exchange program' of Denmark, the 'Inside-Out project' of the USA, the 'Samen Leren in Detentie' or the 'Bars out of the way' of Belgium (Champion, 2018), and the 'Learning Together project' of the UK (Armstrong & Ludlow, 2016). Mixing with people from the outside community learns prisoners to appreciate the other people's needs and how to interact with them (Edgar et al., 2011). Those projects are not only beneficial for prisoners but also for community members. With the words of Armstrong & Ludlow (2016: 11): '*By Learning Together university students also benefit from learning with and alongside people who may have different life experiences but who, just like them, are seeking to expand their horizons and maximise their potential. But Learning Together is not trying to change people. We are learning with, from and through each other. This changes us all.*'

### 2.3. Formal and informal types of active citizenship activities

Lastly, a division can be made between formally organized, supported types of active citizenship and informal types (Brosens, 2018). Related to the first one, a division can be made between project-based ('short-term') and structural embedded activities ('long-term'). The difference between them is that project-based activities offer the possibility to generate new ideas and test them. If this becomes an everyday practice, the project can become sustainable and structurally embedded.

Many things however also happen in an informal, non-organized manner. For instance, informal peer support exists when prisoners notify one another about different aspects of prison life. Getting this information of peers is extremely important for recently arrivals. In particular cellmates are of great importance for those new arrivals (Brosens, 2018). Also Inderbitzin, Cain & Walraven (2016) indicate that fellow prisoners support each other in an informal way by sharing advice and exchange information.

## 3. Combining different types of active citizenship

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In this part, we combine the aforementioned different classifications of prisoners' active citizenship activities and provide examples of activities. This list of examples is absolutely not exhaustive.

### 3.1. Combination of participation pyramid and formal/ informal activities

A first possibility is to combine the different levels of the participation pyramid and the division between formal and informal activities.

Table 2. Combining the levels of the participation pyramid and formal/ informal activities

LEVEL OF PARTICIPATION	FORMAL		INFORMAL
	STRUCTURAL	PROJECT-BASED	UNORGANISED
DEVOLVING/ EMPOWERMENT	Prisoners get a budget to organize 1 or 2 activities for other prisoners every year.	Prisoners get a budget to organize an activity for other prisoners once.	<i>Not possible.</i>

COLLABORATING	Prisoners and prison officers meet every week to discuss aspects related to a particular wing. They make decisions about what they can do together (e.g. improving regime aspects, doing a sport activity together).	Prisoners and prison officers collaborate to make a documentary. During group discussions, they first decide about the topic and afterwards they make the documentary together.	<i>Not possible.</i>
INVOLVING	A structurally embedded prisoner council meets regularly.	A new plan must be written about which activities will be organized during the upcoming year and prisoners are involved to provide input.	Prison staff asks prisoners about their ideas during daily conversations and actively do something with these ideas.
CONSULTING	Annual survey among the prison population, suggestion box in the library.	A survey or discussion/focus groups to gain insight into the ideas of prisoners at one point in time.	Prison staff asks prisoners about their ideas during daily conversations.
INFORMING	Providing all recently arrived prisoners written and/or oral information about the working of the prison.	Prisoners receive written and/or oral information about project-based activities.	Prisoners get information about the working of the prison by their cellmates.

**3.2. Combination of thematic classification and prisoners’ role**

The thematic classification of prisoners’ active citizenship activities and the role prisoners play (i.e. active or passive) can also be combined (see table 3). Again, we provide examples of activities but this list is not exhaustive.

Table 3. Combining different types of prison programs and the role of prisoners

PRISON PROGRAM		ROLE OF PRISONERS	
		PASSIVE	ACTIVE
ORGANIZING AND SUPPORTING PRISON ACTIVITIES	IND.	Prisoners participating in individual leisure activities that are organized by fellow prisoners (e.g. filling in a brain twister).	Prisoner developing individual leisure activities (e.g. developing brain twisters).
	GROUP	Participating in a leisure activity that is organized by fellow prisoners (e.g. quiz, sport activity).	Prisoners organizing a leisure activity (e.g. quiz, sport activity): announcing the activity, making the participants list, guiding the activity, etc.
DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION	IND.	Reading the minutes of the prisoner council.	Voting for representatives of a prisoner council.
	GROUP	Participating in a group information moment about the work of the prisoner council.	Being a representative of the prisoner council.
PEER PROGRAMS	IND.	Getting individual support of a fellow prisoner.	Provide practical or emotional support to a fellow prisoner, after having followed a training in which they learned how to do this.
	GROUP	Receiving support of a peer teacher in group.	Being involved in supporting activity providers in the organization of prison activities; being involved in a research projects as a peer researcher.
BRINGING COMMUNITY MEMBERS INTO PRISON	IND.	Volunteers coming into prison to support individual students (e.g. visiting volunteers, volunteers who learn prisoners to read and write).	Prisoners coach/ tutor outside students.
	GROUP	Volunteers coming into prison to support incarcerated students during the classes.	Prisoners organizing a leisure activity (e.g. quiz, sport activity), in which both prisoners and community members can take part: announcing the activity, making the participants list, guiding the activity, etc.

Note: IND. = individual



## Part 2: The online-survey research

The literature review has demonstrated that studies concerning active citizenship of prisoners are scarce. The purpose of this research project is to gain insight into the active citizenship activities that exist throughout prisons in Europe. To do this, an exploratory survey research was developed to provide an answer on the following research questions:

- 1) What types of **active citizenship activities** exist in prisons across Europe?
  - a. How frequently are prisoners involved in different types of active citizenship?
  - b. At which level of the participation pyramid can the involvement of prisoners be situated?
  - c. Which level of involvement of prisoners of the participation pyramid should be desirable according to prison stakeholders?
- 2) **Which prisoners are currently involved** in active citizenship activities?
- 3) What **changes** have been brought about by prisoners' active citizenship activities?
- 4) What are the biggest **obstacles** to improve prisoners' active citizenship?

### 1. Data collection and methods

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An exploratory survey design was used to provide an answer on the research questions. The online survey consisted of structured and open-ended questions and has been distributed through professionals who worked in prisons in Europe. For a number of reasons, we used an online survey to gain insight into the active citizenship activities that are organized in prisons in Europe: (1) the respondents were geographically distributed across Europe, (2) anonymity could be guaranteed as the Qualtrics survey software was used, and (3) respondents could feel safe about providing honest answers in an online environment (Sue & Ritter, 2012).

The online survey has been distributed through the national and international networks of the PAC partners. All partners sent the link to the online survey to their own network via e-mail. In addition, the PAC partners also had a paper version of the survey through which respondents could also fill in the survey on paper. Besides, the European Prison Education Association (EPEA) included the link to the online survey in their newsletter, which was sent to all their members. The survey was available in Croatian, Dutch, French, English and Italian and respondents could fill it in during 1 month and 10 days (between 1 April and 10 May 2018).

As our sample was a random sample, the results are not representative for all prisons in Europe. The results described further are applicable to the respondents and prisons that filled in our survey, but it does not provide an overview of active citizenship activities in all European prisons. Due to this, it is advisable to

interpret the results with caution and not generalize it to the entire European region. All data were analyzed using SPSS version 25.

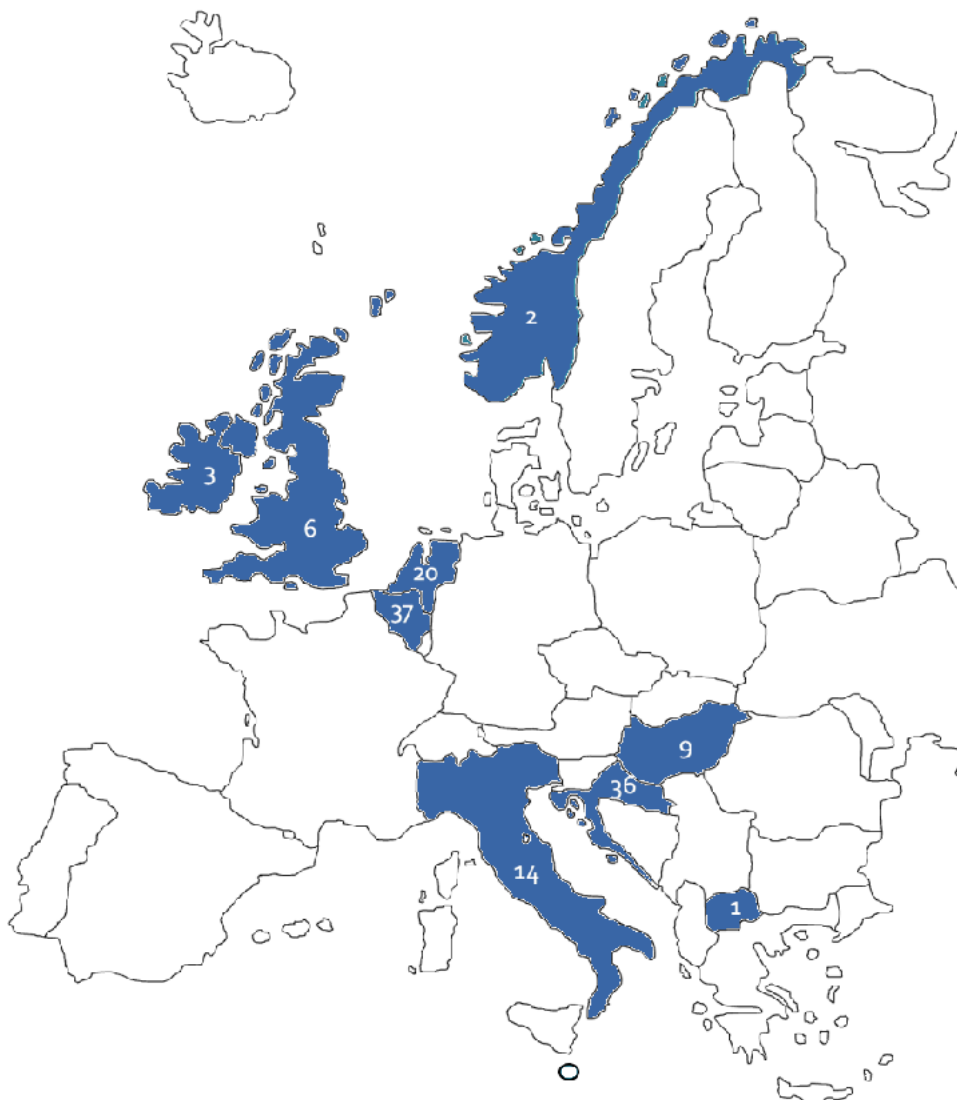
## 2. Participants of the survey

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### 2.1. Background information

129 respondents out of 9 different countries voluntarily took part in the study. Figure 2 provides an overview of how many respondents per country participated. Belgium and Croatia are the countries with the highest number of respondents (N=37 and N=36 respectively). The top 5 is further completed by the Netherlands (N=20 respondents), Italy (N=14 respondents), and Hungary (N=9 respondents). Less respondents came out of the United Kingdom (N=6 respondents), Ireland (N=3 respondents), Norway (N=2 respondents) and Bulgaria (N=1 respondent). 1 respondent did not answer this question.

Figure 2. Number of respondents per participating country



The participants worked in 73 different European prisons, implying that several respondents answered the survey for the same institution. Two respondents did not fill in the name of the prison in which they worked.

47.2% was employed by a prison, 16.5% by an NGO and 0.8% by a university. The other 35.4% indicated the option 'other' and filled in for instance cultural organization, sports organization, or government. Besides, we asked respondents about their function/ job within prison (see table 4). 25.2% were activity coordinators, 18.9% indicated 'other' and were for instance librarians, reintegration coordinators, or prison reformers. 18.1% were prison officers and 14.2% teachers, instructors or coaches.

*Table 4. Function of the professionals.*

	%	N
Activity coordinator	25.2	32
Other	18.9	24
Prison officer	18.1	23
Teacher/ instructor/ coach	14.2	18
Policy coordinator	6.3	8
Administrative staff	4.7	6
Prison manager	3.9	5
Psychologist	3.9	5
Volunteer	3.1	4
Health professional	1.6	2

## **2.2. Prison-related information**

Table 5 contains information about the types of prison in which the respondents were employed, their security level and the gender of the people detained in the institution. Respondent could choose more than one answer on all these questions.

Most of the respondents worked in a prison where sentences are served with a closed regime (62.9%). More than half of the respondents worked in a remand prison (55.6%), and 27.4% in a prison where sentences are served with a (semi-)open regime. 5.4% worked in a juvenile prison and 4% in a psychiatric prison.

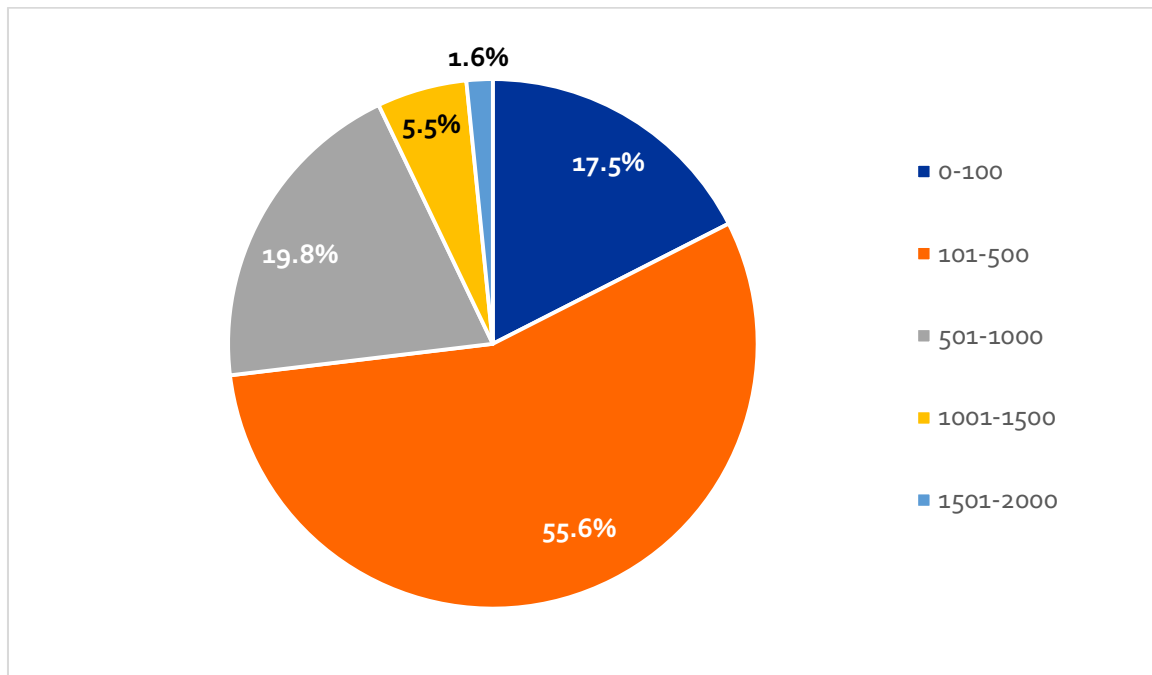
The majority (60%) worked in a high security institution, half of the respondent in a medium security institution, and only a minority (8%) in a low security institution. Lastly, almost all respondents indicated they worked in a prison that housed male prisoners (98.4%), 37.3% had female prisoners and 11.1% transgender prisoners.

Table 5. Prison-related characteristics

	%	N
<b>TYPE OF PRISON</b>		
A remand prison (i.e. housing people who are awaiting trial)	55.6	69
A prison where sentences are served with a closed regime	62.9	78
A prison where sentences are served with a (semi-)open regime	27.4	34
A juvenile prison	5.4	7
A psychiatric prison	4	5
<b>SECURITY LEVEL</b>		
High security	60	75
Medium security	50.4	63
Low security	8	10
<b>GENDER OF THE PRISON POPULATION</b>		
Male prisoners	98.4	124
Female prisoners	37.3	47
Transgender prisoners	11.1	14

In addition, we asked respondents how many prisoners are incarcerated in their prison. The majority (56.6%) worked in a prison with a population between 101 and 500 prisoners. Almost 1 out of 5 respondents worked in a prison with a population between 501 and 1000 prisoners. 17.5% worked in small institution that housed between 0 and 100 prisoners. 5.5% of the respondents was involved in a prison with a population of 1001-1500 prisoners, and only a minority (1.6%) in a prison with more than 1501 prisoners.

Figure 3. The number of people incarcerated in the prisons (N=126)



### 3. Results

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In this part, we present the results of the questions about the active citizenship activities in which prisoners could get involved.

#### 3.1. What types of active citizenship exist within prisons throughout Europe?

##### *Types of active citizenship*

A first question was "Select for each type of active citizenship how frequently prisoners are involved". Respondents could choose between never, once or twice a year, several times a year, about once a month and every week. The different types of active citizenship activities have been clustered in the thematic classification of the literature review: (1) organizing and supporting prison activities, (2) democratic participation (3) peer-based interventions (including peer support and peer education), and (4) activities that bring members of the community into the prison.

Figure 4 is based on the following questions related to **prisoners' involvement in organizing and supporting leisure/ prison activities**:

- How often do prisoners organize recreational activities for other prisoners (e.g. quizzes, sport activities)?
- How often do prisoners manage a leisure organization inside prison (e.g. sports club)?
- How often are prisoners involved in organizing information sessions for other prisoners?
- How often do prisoners work?

- How often are prisoners involved in taking care of animals?

87.5% of the respondents indicated that prisoners could work every week, which outranks all the other types of active citizenship (also the types included in figures 5 - 8). 36.8% of the respondents indicated that prisoners were never involved in organizing recreational activities for other prisoners (e.g. quizzes, sport activities). If prisoners organized such activities this was mostly once or twice a year (28.2%) or several times a year (23.9%). Prisoners were mostly never involved in managing a leisure organization inside prison (62.7%) and in taking care of animals (70.1%). In addition, more than 57% of the respondents indicated that prisoners are never involved in organizing information sessions for other prisoners.

Figure 4. Organizing and supporting prison/leisure activities

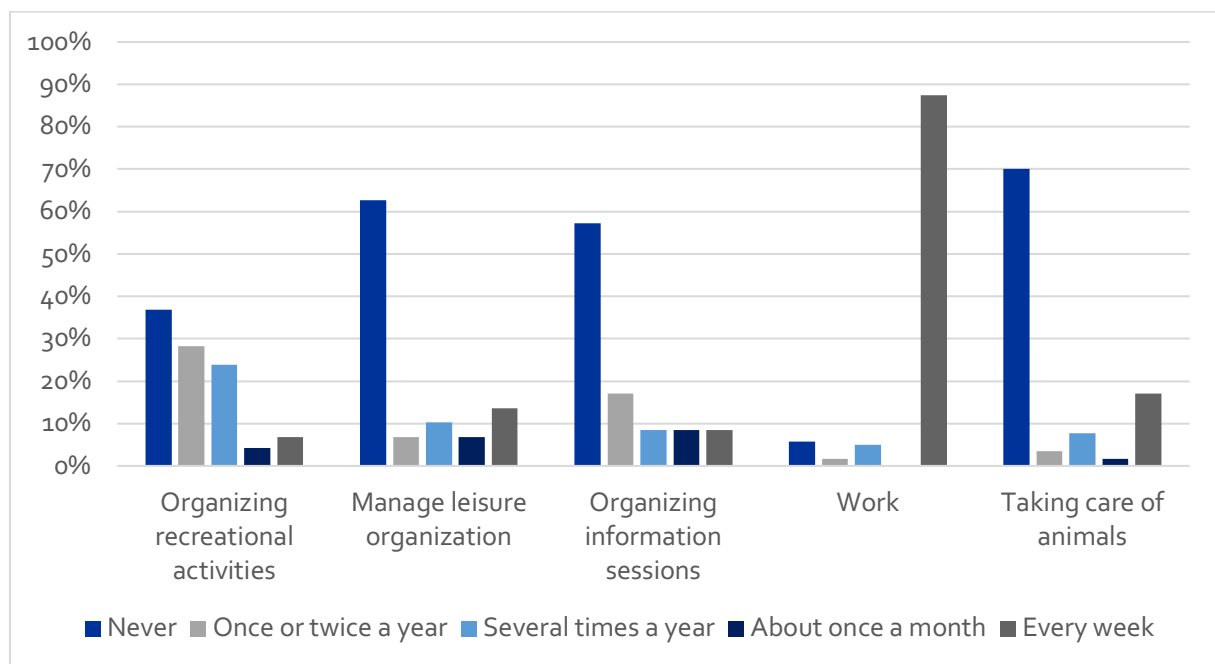
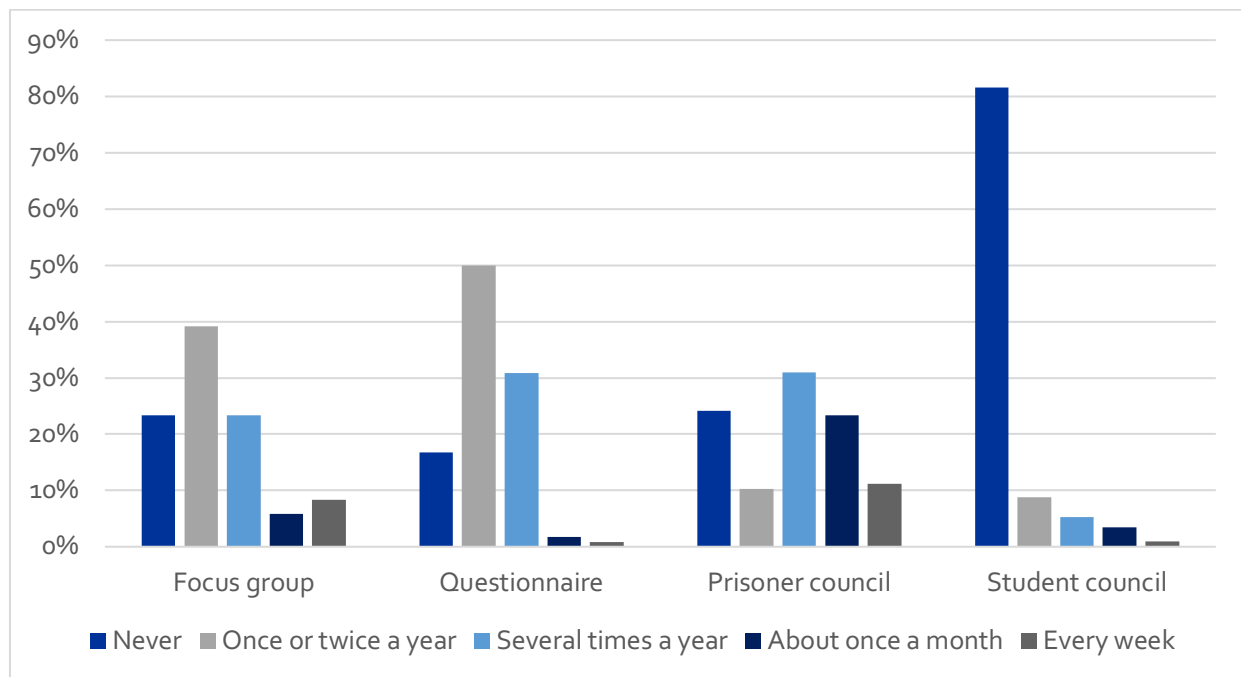


Figure 5 shows the results of **democratic participation** and is based on the following questions:

- How often are prisoners involved in focus groups?
- How often are prisoners invited to fill in a questionnaire?
- How often does the student council meet?
- How often does the prisoner council/committee meet?

Participating in a focus group and filling in a questionnaire were mostly organized once or twice a year (39.2% and 50% respectively). If a prisoner council existed, they mostly gathered together several times a year (31%). And lastly, 81.6% indicated that the prison in which they worked do not have a student council but if this existed they mostly met once or twice a year (8.8%).

Figure 5. Democratic participation

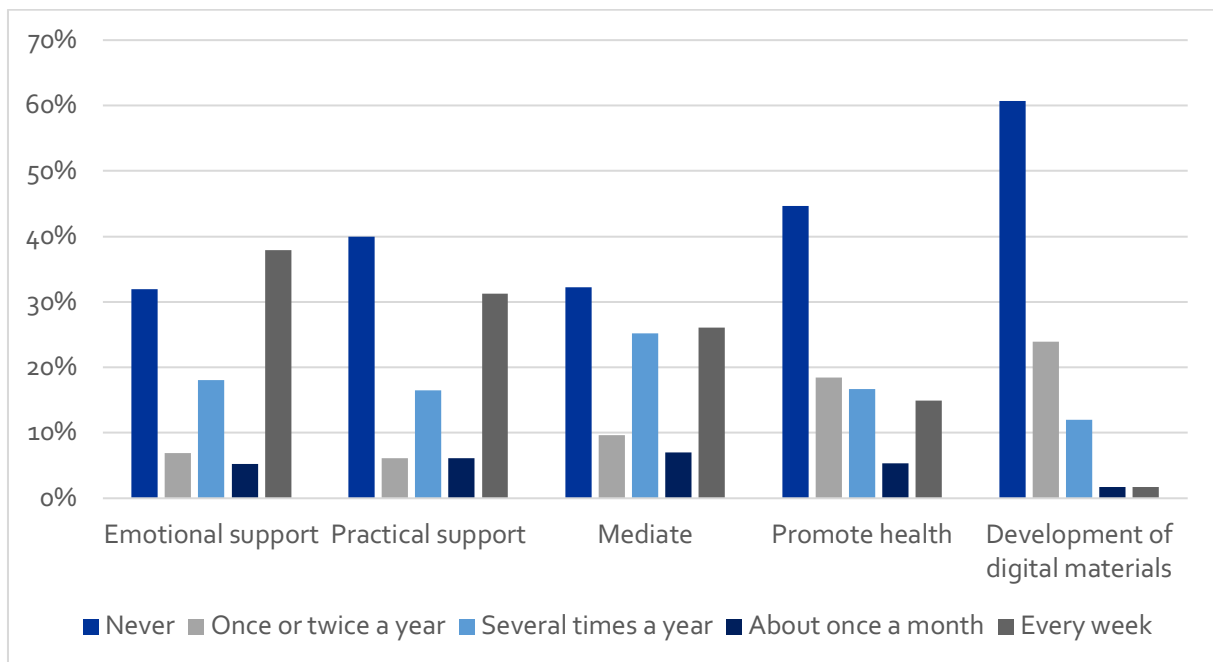


The third thematic type of active citizenship activities discovered in the literature were peer-based interventions. These interventions can be divided into peer support and peer education. Figure 6 is based on the following questions, which are all related to **peer support**:

- How often do prisoners provide emotional support to fellow prisoners?
- How often do prisoners provide practical support to newly arrived prisoners?
- How often do prisoners mediate between other prisoners in cases of conflict?
- How often do prisoners promote health and wellbeing among fellow prisoners?
- How often are prisoners involved in the development of digital materials (e.g. short films, digital course materials, radio shows)?

Providing emotional support to fellow prisoners turned to be the second most existing type of active citizenship regarded on a weekly basis (37.9%). Also providing practical support (31.3%) and mediating between other prisoners in cases of conflict (26.1%) took regularly place on weekly basis. At the same time, the results demonstrate that many of the peer support activities never take place. For instance, 44.7% indicate that prisoners never promote health and wellbeing among fellow prisoners and 60.7% that prisoners are never involved in the development of digital materials (60.7%).

Figure 6. Peer support



At the end of the survey respondents could write some suggestions or comments about the questionnaire. Some of them noted that they do not officially organize these types of support, but that many prisoners offer support to their fellow prisoners in an unorganized, informal manner.

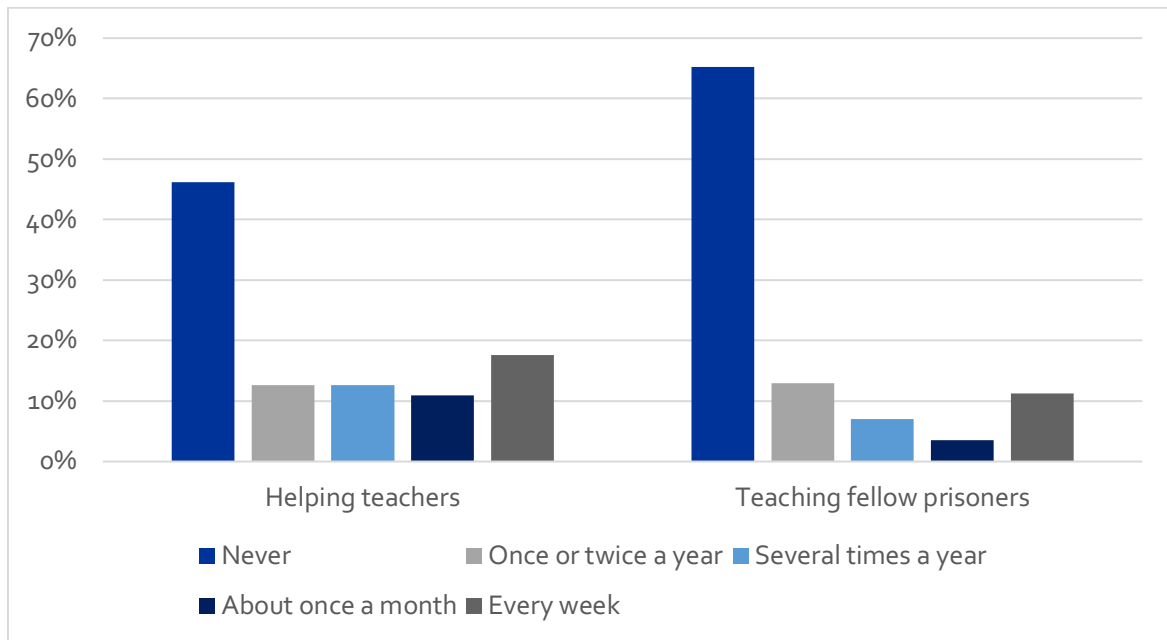
In addition, the following questions about **peer education** have been asked (see figure 7):

- How often do prisoners help teachers during their classes to provide additional support to some of the students?
- How often do prisoners teach fellow prisoners?

65.2% of the respondents stated that prisoners are never involved in teaching fellow prisoners, and 46.2% that prisoners never help teachers during their classes. If prisoners are teaching fellow prisoners, it is mostly once or twice a year (13%) or every week (11.3%), and if prisoners help teachers during their classes to provide additional support to some of the students this is mostly on weekly basis (17.6%).



Figure 7. Peer education

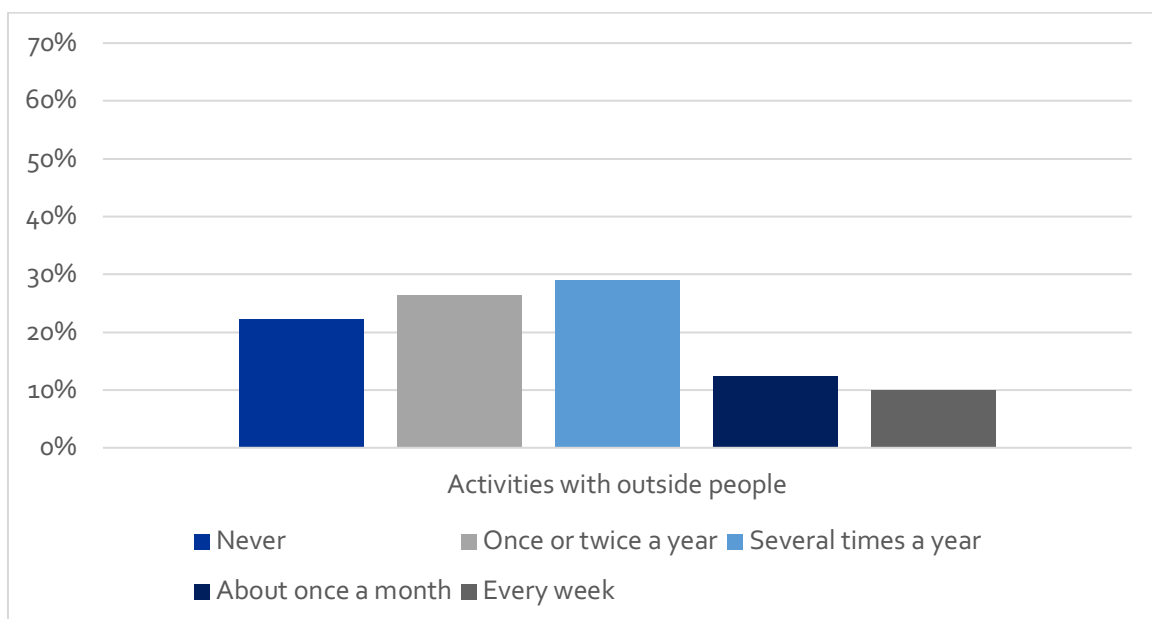


The last question we posed was related to **activities that bring members of the community into the prison** (see figure 8):

- How often are prisoners involved in activities with people coming from the outside (e.g. doing a sport activity together, following a course together)? (*Do not include getting visit*)

If activities that bring members of the community into the prison were organized, they took place once or twice a year (26.4%) or several times a year (28.9%).

Figure 8. Activities that bring members of the community into the prison

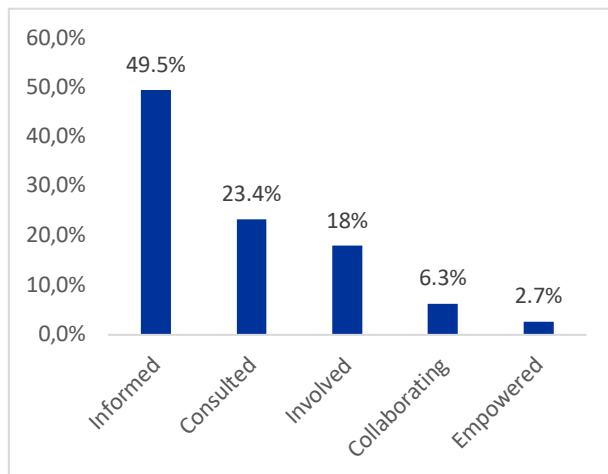


### ***Prisoners' level of involvement situated on the participation pyramid***

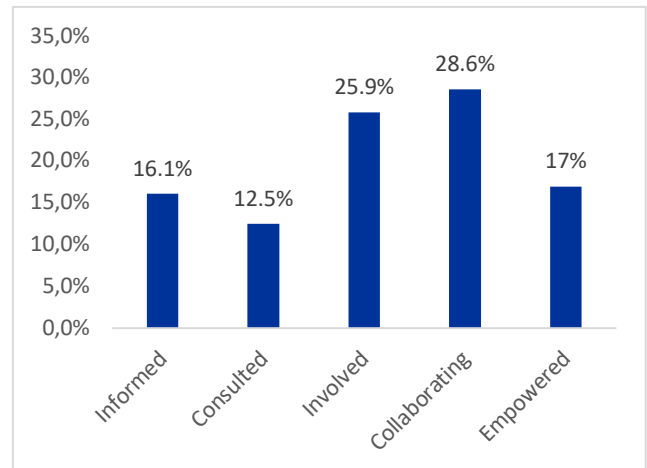
In addition, the following questions have been asked: (1) At which level can the involvement of prisoners in your prison be situated? (figure 9), and (2) Which level of involvement of prisoners should be desirable? (figure 10). Respondents could choose one of the 5 levels of the participation pyramid:

- **Prisoners are informed:** Information is provided about their rights and ways to participate in the organization and the activities that are organized in the prison.
- **Prisoners are consulted:** The views of prisoners have been sought and the prison management commits to act on these views, if possible. Consulting prisoners can be by means of surveys, panel discussions, suggestion boxes or focus group interviews.
- **Prisoners are involved:** Prisoners' concerns, aspirations and advice are fed into decision-making processes. On this level, prisoners are involved in decision-making to some degree. They can provide advice, but the professionals take the decisions.
- **Prisoners are collaborating together with professionals:** This implies that prisoners participate in identifying problems, and discussing possible solutions or alternatives. Decisions are taken in partnership with prisoners.
- **Prisoners are empowered:** Prisoners are responsible for making (some) organizational decisions by themselves. For example, they are given a budget for a particular activity.

*Figure 9. Actual level of involvement of prisoners*



*Figure 10. Desired level of involvement of prisoners*



Desired level is higher than the actual level: 67.3%

Desired level = actual level: 30%

Desired level is lower than the actual level: 2.7%

Figures 9 and 10 demonstrate that there were big differences between the actual and desired situation. According to almost half of the respondents, the actual involvement of prisoners was situated at the level of informing, and 23.4% situated it at the level of consulting. These two levels were the less desired levels (16.1% and 12.5% respectively). 25.9% of the respondents wanted to reach the level of involvement, 28.6% of collaborating and 17% of empowering.

67.3% of the respondents desired a higher level of involvement, 30% indicated that the desired level of prisoners' involvement is already obtained, and 2.7% of the respondents noted that the desired level of prisoners' involvement is lower than the actual involvement level.

### **3.2. Which prisoners are involved in current active citizenship activities?**

We asked the respondents to indicate which prisoners are involved in their current active citizenship activities, and they could choose more than one answer (see table 6).

Most respondents (33.9%) indicated nobody took part as they do not have any active citizenship activities in their correctional institution. 28.8% stated that all prisoners are involved in those activities, and almost 1 out of 4 respondents suggested that convicted prisoners are taking part. Also 13.6% indicated that native language speaking prisoners take up a role as active citizen, and 14.2% crossed the option 'other'. Those respondents filled in which prisoners were taking part, and their answers were diverse, for example only prisoners who are interested and take the initiative to become involved, prisoners of a specific wing, or prisoners involved in a particular project. In particular foreign national, foreign language speaking, remand prisoners, prisoners with physical disabilities and vulnerable prisoners were less involved.

Table 6. Prisoners who are involved in active citizenship activities

PRISONERS	%	N
Nobody – we do not have any active citizenship activities in our prison	33.9	40
All prisoners	28.8	34
Convicted prisoners	19.5	23
Native language speaking prisoners	13.6	16
Other	14.2	17
National prisoners	11.9	14
Prisoners with mental health issues	9.3	12
Foreign national prisoners	8.5	10
Foreign language speaking prisoners	8.5	10
Remand prisoners (i.e. people who are awaiting trial)	8.5	10
Prisoners with physical disabilities	6.8	8
Prisoners housed in separate wings (i.e. vulnerable prisoners)	6.8	6.6

### 3.3. What changes have been brought about by prisoners' active citizenship activities?

The online survey also included the following question: 'What changes have been brought about by prisoners' active citizenship activities?'. Respondents could tick multiple answers.

Respondents that indicated that their prison organized no active citizenship activities did not provide an answer on this question. Most of the respondents that mentioned that there were active citizenship activities in their prison (N= 67 respondents), answered that prisoners improved their team work skills (49.3%). The other changes of the top 5 were related to changes in prison itself: implementing prisoners suggestions and ideas (47.8%), better atmosphere in prison (44.8%), better relations between prison staff and prisoners (43.3%), and less conflicts between prisoners (35.8%).

Table 7. Changes brought by prisoners' active citizenship activities

CHANGES	%	N
Prisoners have improved their team work skills	49.3	33
Prisoner suggestions and ideas have been implemented	47.8	32
There is a better atmosphere in prison	44.8	30
There are better relations between prison staff and prisoners	43.3	29
There are less conflicts between prisoners	35.8	24
Prisoners have improved their employability skills	31.3	31.3
Prisoners have become better at managing conflicts	28.4	19
Prisoners have improved their wellbeing and health	26.9	18
Prisoners have become more friendly and respectful during their conversations with prison staff	23.9	16
Prisoners have improved their language skills	22.4	15
Active citizenship activities are more accepted by prison staff	19.4	13
Prisoners have improved their digital skills	13.4	9

### 3.4. What are the biggest obstacles to improve prisoners' active citizenship?

The online survey also included the following question: 'What are the 3 biggest obstacles to improve prisoners' active citizenship?', implying that each respondent could indicate maximum 3 barriers. Table 8 presents that 55% of the respondents considered safety/security rules as one of the biggest barriers. 43% indicated that they were confronted with a lack of resources to improve prisoners' active citizenship. The top 3 is completed by a lack of knowledge and understanding about prisoners' active citizenship (39.3%). The same percentage of respondents (39.3%) also chose lack of prison staff as one of the biggest barriers.

Table 8. Barriers to improve prisoners' active citizenship (N=107)

BARRIERS	%	N
Safety / security rules	55.1	59
Lack of financial resources	43	46
Lack of knowledge and understanding about prisoners' active citizenship	39.3	42
Lack of prison staff	39.3	42
Policy makers do not support active citizenship activities in prison	19.6	21
Public opinion does not support active citizenship activities in prison	17.8	19
There are no legal conditions to involve prisoners in prison life to a higher degree	15	16
Prisoners do not ask to be actively involved in prison life	9.3	10

## Part 3: Conclusion

This research report aims to explore the types of active citizenship activities that exist in prisons across Europe, which prisoners can take up a role as active citizen, what changes have been brought about by prisoners' active citizenship activities, and what the biggest obstacles are to improve prisoners' active citizenship.

### 1. Existing active citizenship activities in prisons in Europe: A thematic classification

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The literature review demonstrated that three different classifications of active citizenship activities in prison can be used: (1) pyramid of citizen participation, (2) thematic classification, and (3) formal and informal types of prisoners' active citizenship. This first part of the conclusion is about the thematic classification.

The exploratory study found that conducting work in prison (belonging to the category *organizing and supporting leisure/ prison activities*) is the most frequently available type of active citizenship in prison on weekly basis. Most of the other activities belonging to this category (i.e. managing a leisure organization, organizing information sessions for fellow prisoners and taking care of animals) are never organized.

The second type are *peer-based interventions*, which can be divided into peer support and peer education. Related to peer support, the results demonstrate that prisoners often provide emotional and practical support and mediate between other prisoners in cases of conflict. Some professionals note that they do not officially organize these types of peer support, but that many prisoners provide support to their fellow prisoners in an unorganized, informal manner. Prisoners are less involved in the development of digital materials (e.g. short films, digital course materials, radio shows). Concerning peer education, prisoners are more involved in helping teachers during their classes than in teaching fellow prisoners.

If consultative types of *democratic participation* (e.g. inviting them to fill in a questionnaire, participating in focus groups) are organized, and if prisoners are *involved in activities with people coming from the outside* (e.g. doing a sport activity together, following a course together) this is in most of the prisons once to several times a year.

Based on this, we dare to conclude that several initiatives already exist to implement active citizenship activities in prison, but additional efforts are necessary to fully realize the positive outcomes related to active citizenship activities in prison (e.g. learn how to interact with people from the outside community, feel being trusted by the prison and fellow prisoners (Edgar et al., 2011), reinforce the principles of

democracy as prisoners are shown that their voices count (Inderbitzin et al., 2016), improve relationships between prisoners and prison staff, resulting in a better general atmosphere in prison (Bishop, 2006; Champion & Aguiar, 2013). Our research also highlights that active citizenship activities brings changes, both for prisoners as for the prison as institution. According to professionals, the top 5 of changes that have been brought about by active citizenship activities are (1) prisoners improve their team work skills, (2) prisoners suggestions and ideas have been implemented, (3) there is a better atmosphere in prison, (4) there are better relations between prison staff and prisoners, and (5) there are less conflicts between prisoners. Although prisons do little promote a sense of empathy, agency and autonomy, they can thus create spaces where prisoners can develop social capital and practice the skills and competences necessary for active citizenship (Costelloe, 2014).

## 2. From informing to involving and collaborating, the most desired levels of prisoners' involvement

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Another classification presented in the literature review is the participation pyramid. Our study classified the level of involvement of prisoners using the pyramid of citizen participation (Brosens, 2018), based on the ladder of citizen participation (Arnstein, 1969). The *actual level of involvement* of prisoners clearly demonstrates the shape of a pyramid, meaning that in most institutions prisoners are informed (i.e. the bottom level of the participation pyramid), while less institutions offer prisoners the possibility to take up a more active role. Only in a few prisons, prisoners are empowered (i.e. the highest level).

The *desired level of involvement* does not support the shape of a pyramid. Both the lowest levels of the participation pyramid (i.e. informing and consulting) as the highest one (i.e. empowered) are indicated as the less desired, while the levels of involving and collaborating are the most desired. This implies that not all professionals consider the level in which prisoners take up the most active role as the level they want to reach, the level they need to strive for. This is in line with previous research that indicates that not all prisoners want to take up an active role in prison (Brosens, 2018).

However, our study demonstrates that for the majority of the respondents there is a difference between prisoners' actual level of involvement and their desired level of involvement, in that sense that they want that prisoners can reach a higher level of involvement. Therefore, it is essential to break down participation *barriers* for those who want to become more actively involved in prison (Brosens, 2018). People who work in prison are mainly hindered by safety/security rules to improve active citizenship activities in prison. Previous research has demonstrated that there are clashes between prison staff and health care staff, as prison staff has a disciplinary focus while health care staff mainly focuses on prisoners' health (Walsh,

Forsyth, Senior, O'Hara, & Shaw, 2014). The majority of our respondents were responsible for coordinating, providing or guiding activities, and not for security aspects.

The second most important obstacle to improve active citizenship activities in prison is a lack of financial resources. The top 3 is further completed by a lack of knowledge and understanding about prisoners' active citizenship and a lack of prison staff (they share the 3<sup>rd</sup> position). This might be linked to the fact that European countries only recently have more attention for people's possibilities to participate in everyday life in the community and aim to put more power in people's hands. In other words, they want that people take up a more active role in society (for instance: evolution towards a participating community in the Netherlands (Verschoor & de Bruijn, 2017) or building the big society in the UK (Cabinet Office, 2010)). Putting more power in people's hands is a long process that needs time (Verschoor & de Bruijn, 2017), in particular in prisons where individual's autonomy and choices are controlled and constrained (Hannah-Moffat, 2000).

### 3. Challenges for future advancement

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As mentioned earlier, several initiatives already exist to implement active citizenship activities in prison, but additional efforts are necessary to structurally implement activities in which prisoners can take up a role as active citizen. To make such activities more sustainable, the social innovation spiral can be used (Murray, Caulier-Crice, & Mulgan, 2010) (see figure 11).

Figure 11. The social innovation spiral (Murray et al., 2010)





A social innovation process consists of 6 phases. During phase 1 (prompts), the need for innovation arises. This stage involves diagnosing the problem and framing the right questions. After the phase of generating ideas and a project proposal (phase 2), the phase in which the project has been tested and executed follows (phase 3 – prototyping). Related to this third phase, the PAC project will undertake some steps during the upcoming months. This report about prisoners' active citizenship activities in prisons throughout Europe provides insight for the realization of 10 innovative learning areas in 5 European countries: Belgium, Croatia, Italy, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. During these learning areas, different experimental active citizenship activities will be developed, tested and implemented in practice. The 4th phase of the social innovation process is sustaining, meaning that the idea becomes everyday practice, including a long-term financial sustainability. The 5th phase is called scaling and diffusion, implying that the innovation grows and is spread further. When the innovative idea has been implemented and leads to systemic change, phase 6 of the spiral for social innovation has been reached (Murray et al., 2010). The PAC project will move to phase 3 of the spiral of social innovation (prototyping and pilots), but will need sustaining and scaling-up to reach systemic change afterwards. To contribute to this, the learning practices (phase 3 – prototyping and pilots) will be scientifically evaluated. This scientific evaluation will form the basis on which a European toolkit about active citizenship activities in prison will be developed. The results of the scientific evaluation will be presented in a report that will be ready by half 2019.

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