

**Active citizenship in prison:
Research insights**

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VUB PALD PARTICIPATION & LEARNING IN DETENTION RESEARCH GROUP

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If you want to read more:

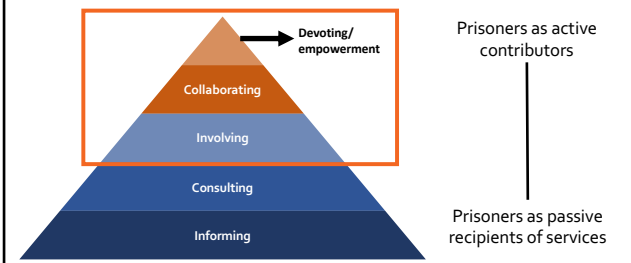


Downloadable from: www.prisonerseducation.org.uk/what-we-do/policy/active-citizenship-in-prisons/



1. Background information

**Different classifications of active citizenship:
1) Participation pyramid**



**Different classifications of active citizenship:
2) Thematic classification**

- **Organizing and supporting prison/leisure activities**
 - E.g. Organizing a quiz or sport activities for fellow prisoners, taking care of animals
- **Democratic participation**
 - = Involving prisoners in decision-making about the prison regime
 - E.g. Prisoner councils, prisoner forums, inmate committees, representative councils, prison forums, student councils
- **Activities that bring members of the community into prison**
 - E.g. Prison-university partnerships, singing together in a choir, using gym facilities

**Different classifications of active citizenship:
2) Thematic classification**

- **Peer-based interventions**
 - Peer education
 - E.g. Prisoners take up a role in promoting hygiene or the prevention of HIV, provide literacy training to fellow prisoners
 - Peer support
 - Providing basic information to recently arrived prisoners
 - Providing emotional support and preventing suicide



2. Online survey among professionals in Europe

Available active citizenship activities in Europe

- Many types of active citizenship are not or only seldom implemented in the majority of the prisons
 - E.g. taking care of animals, student council, organizing information sessions, helping teachers
- While other initiatives are organized more frequently
 - E.g. Filling in a questionnaire, participating in a focus group, meeting of prisoner council, activities with people from outside
 - E.g. providing practical or emotional support (formal versus informal?)

Obstacles	%	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



3. Testing and evaluating active citizenship: 9 learning areas

9 learning areas in 5 countries

- **Aim:** Testing how active citizenship activities could be implemented in prisons in Belgium, Croatia, Italy, The Netherlands, and UK
- 6 months time

78 prisoners participated

9 learning areas in 5 countries - examples

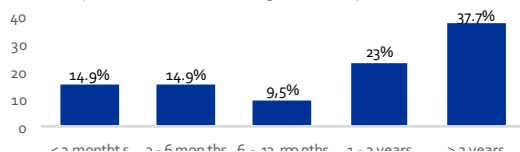
- **Organizing and supporting prison/leisure activities**
 - Italy: Managing a stable
 - UK: One of the results was a new poster about PET and the script for a prison radio advert
 - Italy: Dance and movement workshops to empower and help to rehabilitate
- **Democratic participation**
 - Belgium: Mini-society in which prisoners and prison officers participate together in prison activities and discuss topics related to living together

9 learning areas in 5 countries - examples

- **Activities that bring members of the community into prison**
 - The Netherlands: Juvenile prisoners cooked, painted, ... together with older people
- **Peer-based interventions**
 - Belgium and the Netherlands: Prisoners developed a brochure for newly arrived prisoners about life in prison
 - Croatia: Prisoners becoming peer-mediators

Profile of the 78 participating prisoners

- 48 males, 29 females
- Mean age: 37.9 years – between 16 and 64 years
- 92.2% was convicted, 7.8% awaiting trial
- Time in prison where the learning area took place



How have the learning areas been evaluated?

Quantitative evaluation

START: 78 starting questionnaires

Drop out: released from prison, stopped with participating, transferred, etc.

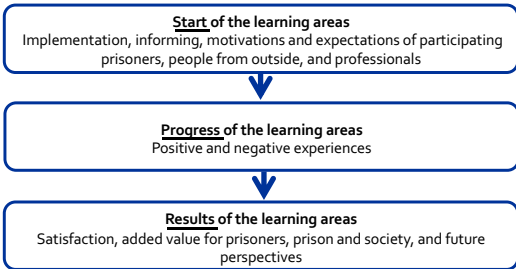
END: 50 ending questionnaires

Low number of participants
→ Being careful with interpreting the results!

Qualitative evaluation

- Group interviews
 - PAC-partners
 - Prisoners in 6 learning areas
 - Professionals in 5 learning areas

What has been evaluated?





3.1. Start of the learning areas

Convincing professional stakeholders in the (local) prison is necessary, but takes time

- E.g. Ministry of Justice, prison manager, activity organizers, prison officers
- Meetings to
 - Explain active citizenship
 - Convince
 - Get approval, support and involvement

*"But when it comes to experiences, how to implement this sort of thing (active citizenship activity), it is a **very delicate process** because I had to **convince** them (i.e. other people working in prison) first of the idea of active citizenship. I had to convince the prison staff of the importance of this and that was quite something to be honest."* (PAC-partner)

Informing potential participants

- Mainly word of mouth
 - Staff working in prison
 - Fellow prisoners
- Combination of face-to-face and written channels

"For us (the prisoners) this way of communication is fine, it works."
(Prisoner)

Involving prisoners in co-creation increases their level of participation

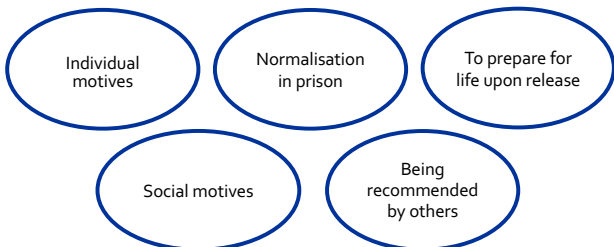
- Brainstorming and deciding what type of active citizenship activity will be set up

"I thought, since this is a project about active citizenship, it should not be me bringing ideas but it should be us." (PAC-partner)

- Appreciated by prisoners

*"This then gives us the idea that we are not in detention, but that we are also in society, that we are also appreciated, that we are **allowed to think along with them** (the professionals). That gives us a very good feeling and that makes it very different here. It seems more like assisted living than being in detention. This involvement is very much appreciated among the prisoners, that they also **have a say in something**."* (Prisoner)

Prisoners' motives to get involved



Expectations at the start

- **Prisoners' expectations**
 - To improve knowledge and skills - *"To learn something more useful"*
 - To have a voice - *"A chance to get a say in things"*
 - Facilitate reintegration in society after imprisonment - *"I hope to learn something that I can apply when I get out"*
- **Professionals' expectations**
 - To be able to experiment with the idea of active citizenship and learn from it
- **Expectations of people coming from the outside**
 - To learn from each other



3.2. Progress of the learning areas

Positive experiences during the learning areas

- In many learning areas: **Low drop-out rate**
 - Possible reasons: New activity, feeling that voice matters, being able to contribute to something
- **Working together towards an end goal** kept the motivation high (E.g. Exhibition, magazine or brochure for new coming prisoners)
"The fact that there was a clear result every week, which they could share with the rest of the participants and people from outside, worked very positively, they (the prisoners) were proud." (PAC-partner)
- **Support of the prison itself**

Positive experiences during the learning areas

• Improved relationships among prisoners

• Within the group of participants
"The relationship between us (the prisoners) has improved because it is a new context." (Prisoner)

• With prisoners that were not taking part in the learning areas
"I also like to involve certain people and when it's all done, everyone will be a little proud of it, then it's a bit of everyone's business." (Prisoner)

"The guy in my cell keeps whining about his wife and children. I learned in the workshops to listen to him instead of telling him what he should have done differently." (Prisoner)

Positive experiences during the learning areas

• Improved relationships between prisoners and people who guided the learning areas

• Prisoners got the feeling they were listened to
"The contact persons of activity x are people who transmit a great trust in life and I am very happy to be in contact with people who listen to us, detained in our suffering." (Prisoner)

- Building trust and respect
- Mainly if decisions are taken in partnership

• Building relationships between prisoners and participants coming from the outside

Negative experiences during the learning areas

• However, some learning areas had a **high drop-out rate**
 • E.g. due to sanction, another mandatory activity at the same time, not feeling appreciated by other prisoners

• **Relationships between prisoners did not always improve**

• **A lack of involvement of key stakeholders** (e.g. prison guards)

• **Too short time span**, too little 'meeting' times



3.3. Results of the learning areas

Prisoners' general satisfaction

	(Totally agree (%))	N
I am very satisfied with this activity	93.8	45
I feel this activity served my needs	89.4	42
If I had the opportunity to participate in a similar activity, I would gladly do so	86.7	39

"I found it very helpful and I hope we could help you too." (Prisoner)

**Added values for prisoners:
Feeling that their voices are heard**

- I feel that prisoners' voices are heard
- My voice matters here
- I feel that my views and opinions are respected here
- I have the feeling that I am listened to



Other added values for prisoners

- **Improvement of skills**

- Communication skills
- Being able to better control themselves

"I learned that I am too violent and that I have low threshold of tolerance (that leads) to frustration. My folks at home are the same. I learned here that I can deal with that differently if I use different ways than before, let's solve this instead of reacting violently." (Prisoner)

Added value for prisons

- **Dynamic security**

"It secures your prison. It is little bit a cliché but it is true." (PAC-partner)

- **Supported decisions**

- Dialogue



4. Future perspectives

Future perspectives

- Enthusiasm for the idea of active citizenship in prison
- Searching for and getting support of essential stakeholders in prison and making them understand the idea of active citizenship
- Continuously embedded versus project-based
- Time and money
- What is possible depends on the local context