

VISUAL-EU WINTER SCHOOL



European Citizenship & Community Engagement

From Abstract Concepts to Lived Experiences in Higher Education

Module 4

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LECTURE STRUCTURE

Lecture Overview

This lecture block explores how European citizenship becomes visible, meaningful, and actionable in the everyday life of Polish higher education institutions.

01

Understanding European Citizenship

Exploring rights, participation, and belonging in the European context

02

Higher Education Institutions as Civic Spaces

Universities as sites of civic formation and community engagement

03

Translating EU Values into Action

Practical engagement strategies for campus and community



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Why European Citizenship Matters Today



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Linking Rights and Opportunities

European citizenship creates tangible connections between individual rights and practical opportunities for mobility, education, and professional development.

Bridging Mobility and Participation

It transforms physical movement across borders into meaningful civic engagement and cross-cultural dialogue.

Connecting Identity and Belonging

Citizenship addresses fundamental questions of who we are and where we belong in an interconnected Europe.

Uniting Frameworks and Everyday Life

European citizenship links institutional structures with lived experiences, making abstract policies tangible.

Critical Insight: In higher education, students encounter Europe not only as an idea, but as a **lived environment** —through mobility programs, diverse classrooms, and institutional practices.



Core Question Question

How can European citizenship become visible, meaningful, and actionable in the everyday life of Polish higher education institutions?

What is European Citizenship?



Core Dimensions and Analytical Framework



Legal Status

Linked to citizenship of a Member State, European citizenship adds a transnational layer of rights and protections.



Rights & Opportunities Opportunities

A comprehensive framework enabling free movement, non-discrimination, and access to education and employment across the EU.



Participation Framework Framework

Structures and channels for democratic engagement, from voting rights to civic initiatives and public dialogue.



Symbolic Connection Connection

A civic and emotional bond to the European project—shared values, historical memory, and collective aspirations.

Seven Analytical Dimensions

- ✓ Rights
- ✓ Duties
- ✓ Participation
- ✓ Mobility
- ✓ Inclusion
- ✓ Belonging
- ✓ Solidarity

Key Point: European citizenship is both legal and social —combining formal status with lived experiences and emotional connections.

Rights, Duties & Participation

The Balance of Entitlements and Responsibilities



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Rights

Free Movement & Residence

Live and work in any EU member state without discrimination

Non-Discrimination

Equal treatment regardless of nationality within EU law scope

Educational Access

Study opportunities, recognition of qualifications, Erasmus+

Democratic Participation

Vote in European and local elections under certain conditions

Institutional Protection

Access to information, consular protection, ombudsman services

Duties

Democratic Responsibility

Active commitment to democratic processes and institutions

Respect for Others

Upholding the dignity and rights of fellow citizens

Inclusion & Non-Discrimination

Commitment to creating inclusive, equitable spaces

Ethical Public Behavior

Acting with integrity in public and civic life

Informed Participation

Engaging in civic life with knowledge and critical thinking

Participation

Voting & Democratic Engagement

Exercising electoral rights and engaging in political processes

Student Self-Government

Active involvement in university governance structures

Volunteering

Contributing time and skills to community initiatives

Advocacy & Public Dialogue

Voicing concerns, participating in debates, shaping policies

Co-Creation of Projects

Collaborative development of educational and social initiatives

Essential Principle: A passive understanding of citizenship is insufficient. Citizenship becomes real through active participation –it is lived, not merely possessed.

Mobility, Belonging & Layered Identity



Critical Insight

Belonging cannot be imposed. It must be cultivated through meaningful experiences that create emotional connections to Europe.



Mobility in Higher Education Education



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Mobility is one of the most visible dimensions of European citizenship. In higher education, it manifests through:

- ✓ Erasmus+ exchanges
- ✓ Summer & winter schools
- ✓ Academic exchanges
- ✓ Joint research projects
- ✓ Cross-border learning
- ✓ Professional mobility

Mobility is not only movement; it is also exposure to diversity and shared frameworks.



The Question of Belonging

- ? Do individuals feel connected to Europe?
- ? Do they see themselves as part of a wider community?
- ? Do institutions create spaces where belonging can develop?

Layered Identity Framework

European identity does not erase local or national identity. Individuals often combine local belonging, national attachment, regional identity, and European orientation—a layered identity especially relevant in academic environments.

Inclusion, Access & Equity

Examining Citizenship Through the Lens of Equity



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Barriers to Participation Participation

Citizenship is meaningful only if people can actually access opportunities. Key barriers include:



Financial Barriers

Costs of travel, accommodation, and living expenses



Language Barriers

Limited proficiency in English or other EU languages



Digital Exclusion

Lack of access to technology and digital literacy



Disability Access

Physical and attitudinal barriers for persons with disabilities



Unequal Information Flows

Lack of awareness about available opportunities



Confidence Barriers

Unequal confidence in ability to participate



Equity Imperative Imperative

European citizenship must be examined through the lens of equity. Without addressing these barriers, citizenship activities become selective rather than inclusive.

Critical Question: How can universities design engagement activities that actively dismantle rather than reinforce these barriers?



Strategic Responses Responses

- **Financial support:** Scholarships, travel grants, fee waivers
- **Language support:** Preparatory courses, multilingual materials
- **Digital inclusion:** Equipment loans, training programs
- **Universal design:** Accessible venues, assistive technologies
- **Targeted outreach:** Proactive communication to underrepresented groups
- **Mentorship programs:** Peer support to build confidence

Higher Education Institutions as Civic Spaces



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HEIs are important because they serve multiple functions that make European citizenship tangible:



Places of Learning

Academic environments where knowledge about Europe is transmitted and critically examined



Spaces of Socialization Socialization

Contexts where students develop social skills, networks, and civic dispositions



Centres of Public Debate Debate

Forums for discussing European issues, values, and policies



Hubs of Internationalisation Internationalisation

Gateways to cross-border collaboration and exchange



Actors in Regional Development

Contributors to local economic, social, and cultural vitality



Bridges Between Policy & Practice

Translators of abstract European frameworks into lived experiences



Beyond Academia

A university is not only an academic institution. It is also:

- A civic environment
- A site of participation
- A space for encounter
- A training ground for democracy
- A platform for public responsibility







HEIs as Community Hubs & Social Levelers



Connecting Universities to Communities and Promoting Equity

Community Hub Functions

Higher education institutions can act as community hubs by:

-  **Cooperating with NGOs**
Partnerships for community service and advocacy
-  **Engaging Local Authorities**
Collaboration with municipal institutions
-  **Supporting Student-Led Initiatives**
Resources and mentorship for civic projects
-  **Opening Campuses to Public Debate**
Hosting forums, exhibitions, and discussions
-  **Linking European Themes to Local Needs**
Making EU policies relevant to community contexts
-  **Facilitating Civic Learning Beyond Classroom**
Experiential and service-learning opportunities

Social Leveler Role

HEIs can contribute to equity and social justice by:

- Widening access to underrepresented populations
- Supporting underrepresented groups through targeted programs
- Offering inclusive participation formats that accommodate diverse needs
- Connecting academic and social support for holistic student success
- Creating low-threshold opportunities for involvement

Key Principle: The university can be both inward-looking (focusing on student development) and outward-facing (engaging with communities).

This links European citizenship to social justice—making it not just a privilege for the few, but a reality for the many.

From Values to Action



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Core Principle

EU values become credible when they are translated into concrete action. Values without practice remain merely rhetorical.



Inclusion → Accessible Event Design

The abstract value of inclusion becomes tangible through wheelchair-accessible venues, sign language interpretation, multilingual materials, and sensory-friendly spaces.



Democracy → Participatory Dialogue

Democratic values manifest through town halls, deliberative forums, student consultations, and collaborative decision-making processes that give voice to diverse stakeholders.



Solidarity → Support for Vulnerable Groups

Solidarity translates into food banks, mental health services, emergency funds, mentorship for first-generation students, and advocacy for marginalized communities.



Equality → Fair Access & Representation

Equality becomes visible through needs-based scholarships, diverse representation in leadership, inclusive curricula, and equitable resource distribution.

Designing Effective Engagement Activities



Principles for Meaningful Campus and Community Initiatives



Essential Design Elements

An effective campus or community activity should have:

- 1 **Clear Purpose**
Well-defined objectives and expected outcomes
- 2 **Defined Target Group**
Specific audience with identified needs and interests
- 3 **Realistic Scope**
Achievable within available resources and timeframe
- 4 **Visible Value Connection**
Clear link to EU values or civic issues
- 5 **Simple Structure**
Overcomplicated design often weakens participation
- 6 **Achievable Outcomes**
Concrete, measurable results
- 7 **Accessible Participation**
Low barriers to entry for diverse participants



Low-Threshold Activities

Low-threshold activities are especially useful because they reduce barriers to participation:

- ✓ EU Day on campus
- ✓ Visual exhibition on European values
- ✓ Student debate on mobility and inclusion
- ✓ Mini-workshop on rights and opportunities
- ✓ Public poster or infographic campaign
- ✓ Community storytelling wall

These formats are realistic and scalable.

Quality over Quantity: The issue is not quantity alone, but **meaningfulness and continuity**—sustained engagement matters more than one-off events.



Design Principle

Principle

Effective initiatives combine **bottom-up energy** (student initiative) with **institutional anchoring** (staff facilitation, resources, support).

Campus-Based & Community-Based Initiatives



Concrete Examples of European Citizenship in Action



Campus-Based Activities Activities

These activities bring European themes into everyday institutional life:

Student Forums

Regular gatherings for discussing European issues and student concerns

Thematic Weeks

Focused programming on specific EU topics (e.g., sustainability week)

Participatory Mapping

Collaborative exercises to identify campus resources and needs

Intercultural Events

Celebrations, food festivals, and cultural exchanges

Policy-in-Comics Exhibitions

Visual storytelling to make EU policies accessible

Collaborative Digital Campaigns

Social media initiatives on European themes

Citizenship Mini-Labs

Short, intensive workshops on civic skills and EU knowledge



Community-Based Activities Activities

These activities connect Europe to local relevance:

Cooperation with Schools

University students mentoring high schoolers on EU topics

Municipality Partnerships

Joint projects with local government on European priorities

NGO-Based Events

Collaborative initiatives with civil society organizations

Public Awareness Campaigns

Information drives about EU rights and opportunities

Youth Forums

Intergenerational dialogue on European challenges

Visual Storytelling Projects

Photography or video projects with local residents

Civic Workshops

Linking local issues (e.g., environmental concerns) to EU priorities

Integration Principle: The most effective initiatives often combine campus and community dimensions—creating bridges between the university and its surrounding environment.

Project Design: Stakeholders, Logic & Indicators

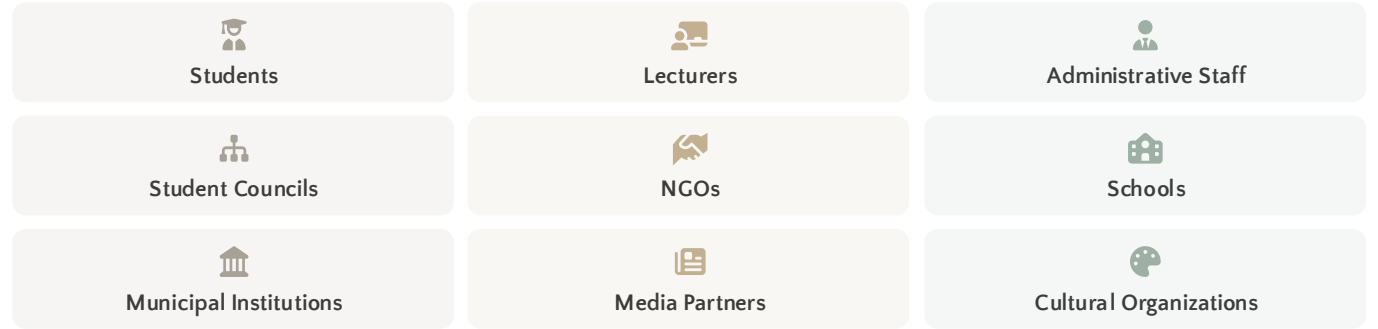


Planning Principle

A small engagement initiative should answer fundamental questions that prevent vague and symbolic planning.

Key Stakeholders Stakeholders

A good initiative identifies who needs to be involved and why:



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Simple Project Logic Logic

A small engagement initiative should answer:

- ? What is the problem or need?
- ? Who is the target group?
- ? What is the objective?
- ? What activities will be carried out?
- ? What outputs are expected?
- ? What indicators will show progress?

Simple Indicators

- Number of participants
- Diversity of participants
- Materials produced
- Engagement/feedback level
- Visibility on campus/online
- Follow-up interest








Accessibility, Inclusion & Risk Management



Ensuring Effective and Sustainable Engagement









Accessibility & Inclusion

Every initiative should consider:

-  **Plain Language**
Clear, jargon-free communication
-  **Visual Clarity**
Readable fonts, high contrast, intuitive design
-  **Physical Accessibility**
Wheelchair access, accessible restrooms, seating
-  **Digital Accessibility**
Screen reader compatibility, alt text, captions
-  **Affordable Participation**
Free or low-cost events, travel subsidies
-  **Linguistic Inclusiveness**
Multilingual materials, interpretation services
-  **Welcoming Atmosphere**
Safe space for different groups and identities

Common Risks & Limitations Limitations

A realistic design acknowledges these risks in advance:

-  **Weak student interest** – lack of relevance or awareness
-  **Overformal design** – bureaucratic, uninviting structures
-  **Symbolic participation** – tokenism without real influence
-  **Lack of sustainability** – one-off events without follow-up
-  **Poor stakeholder coordination** – conflicting agendas
-  **Limited visibility** – insufficient promotion and reach
-  **Lack of follow-up** – no pathways for continued engagement
-  **Confusing value connection** – unclear link to EU values

Credibility Markers Markers

-  Concrete value focus
-  Clear local relevance
-  Visible participant benefit
-  Evidence of preparation
-  Accessible design
-  Transparency in communication
-  Realistic scale
-  Opportunity for reflection

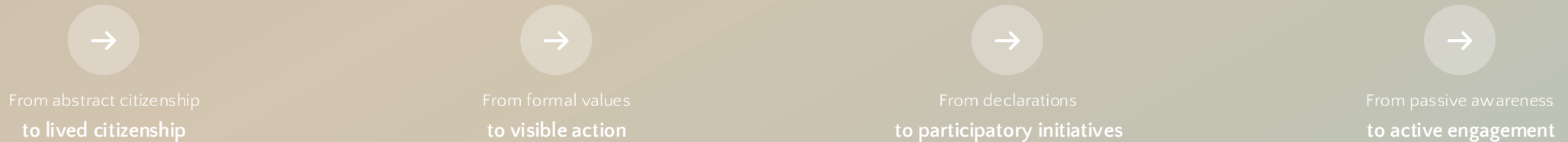
Critical Principle: Without inclusion, citizenship activities become selective rather than universal.

From Theory to Institutional Practice

Key Takeaways

- ★ **European citizenship** combines rights, participation, and belonging—it's both legal status and lived experience
- ★ **Universities** can act as community hubs and public spaces, bridging policy and practice
- ★ **Credible engagement** requires inclusion, realism, and institutional grounding—sustained effort matters more than symbolic gestures
- ★ **Higher education institutions** are vital sites of civic formation where citizenship becomes tangible
- ★ **EU values** become **meaningful** through accessible and well-designed activities, not rhetoric alone

The Essential Shift



This is where universities can make a **real difference**—transforming European citizenship from an abstract concept into a lived reality for students and communities.
communities.