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CiviCon: Towards a Critical Reconceptualisation of Civic Space

CiviCon is a civil society event organised in Nicosia on 31 October and 1 November 2025 by Civic Space, a Technical Assistance Project funded by the European Union under the Aid Programme for the Turkish Cypriot community and implemented in Cyprus.

The rise of authoritarianism, post-truth politics, polarisation, and democratic backsliding on a global scale is significantly transforming the function and space of civil society. As conventional civil society frameworks struggle to respond to these layered crises, new forms of collective solidarity, practices of commoning, and truth-based resistance strategies are emerging. This transformation challenges not only the modes of action but also the very definition of what civil society means today.

What is CiviCon's aim and approach?

CiviCon aims to explore how we can reimagine the commons and strengthen solidarity-based civic practices in an era marked by shrinking civic space, the erosion of truth, and the rise of illiberal movements. By bringing together participants from different areas, CiviCon seeks to build bridges between different forms of knowledge and to generate new concepts and strategies for resistance, reconstruction, and “living together”.

Drawing on Bell Hooks' critical pedagogy (1994) and her reflections on engaged critical thinking (2009), CiviCon seeks to create a dialogic and participatory space for collectively examining, deconstructing, and reimagining the narratives surrounding civil society and civic space. Through an exchange of situated perspectives and collaborative reflection, the aim is to generate new conceptual frameworks, revisit existing definitions, and foster translocal networks of solidarity. Rather than solely diagnosing the effects of democratic backsliding in the present moment, CiviCon also aims to interrogate and redefine the commons of civil society and civic space as sites of both resilience and resistance.

Who are we looking for?

We are looking for civil society actors, academics, activists, practitioners, and students from different backgrounds to offer various formats, such as panel discussions, lectures, open spaces, workshops, networking opportunities, readings followed by discussion, etc.



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What criteria should the contributions meet?

The contributions need to...

- focus on one of the three thematic focal areas,
- include intercommunal, transnational and/or transregional perspectives,
- use interactive/innovative/creative methods,
- last between 1 to 1,5 hours,
- be in English or Turkish.

Contributions from Cyprus and designed with a non-formal approach will be prioritised. Regional, gender, age diversification will also be sought.

What are we offering speakers and workshop hosts?

- participation in the entire festival (if desired),
- transportation within Cyprus (if relevant),
- a networking platform, and opportunity to develop new ideas/actions with other speakers and participants.

What are the focal areas?

CiviCon will concentrate on three focal areas:

- Commoning: Redefining the Commons of Civil Society and Civic Space
- Reclaiming “Truth” as an Indispensable Common: in the age of “Post-Truth”, “Poly-Truth”, “Fugitive Truth”
- Democratic Backsliding, Illiberal Movements and Resistance Alternatives

Focal areas and guiding questions

Commoning: Redefining the Commons of Civil Society and Civic Space

In order to strengthen the capacity of civil society and civic spaces in fostering democratic life, there is a need to rethink, redefine and reclaim “commons” such as values, actors, spaces, methods, and languages. The focal area *Commoning: Redefining the Commons of Civil Society and Civic Space* will address, but are not limited to, the following questions:



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- What are the shared, collective and indispensable values of civil society?
- Who are the civic actors?
- What constitutes civic spaces?
- What obstacles to participation in or support for regional or global solidarity movements remain, and what are the reasons for their persistence?
- How can we forge alliances across multiple civic spaces for peacebuilding and reconciliation?
- How can we ensure civil society participation in decision-making processes?
- What is the role of public funding in the relationship between the state and civil society as well as amongst civil society actors?
- To what degree are the experiences of civil society actors esteemed inside civil society? What implications do the experiences of civil society actors have on collective memory, civic resilience, solidarity, and civic engagement within and between social movements?
- What resources and spaces do we have at our disposal? How can we cultivate collective resources to strengthen solidarity and cooperation?

Reclaiming “Truth” as an Indispensable Common: in the age of “Post-Truth”, “Poly-Truth”, and “Fugitive Truth”

Public discussions are increasingly shaped by mis/dis-information, conspiracy theories, and delegitimising narratives. The focal area *Reclaiming “Truth” as an Indispensable Common: in the age of “Post-Truth”, “Poly-Truth”, and “Fugitive Truth”* explores how civic actors can protect, reclaim, and reinvent open and democratic spaces for dialogue, truth-seeking, transparency, accountability, and restoring trust for the systems and institutions and freedoms in this era. The following non-exhaustive questions will be addressed under this focal area:

- How can civil society actors defend public spheres against mis/disinformation and conspiracy theories?
- How does mis/dis-information influence activism today?
- How does power shape what counts as “truth” in the public sphere?
- What role does dialogic learning, critical thinking, and fact-checking play in defending civic space against post-truth pressures?
- Who is shaping the internet?



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- How does youth participation, visibility, and organisation in digital spaces interact with public activism?
- To what extent AI-powered tools are effective to monitor, expose, and respond to disinformation? What risks and opportunities do they present for civil society?

Democratic Backsliding, Illiberal Movements and Resistance Alternatives

With the rise of the hegemony of anti-democratic and anti-rights movements across the globe, public sphere and civic spaces are shrinking and under threat. The focal area *Democratic Backsliding, Illiberal Movements and Resistance Alternatives* invites exploration of how right-wing populist, anti-democratic and anti-rights civic actors attempt to establish hegemony in the public sphere; how they claim and deprave democratic tools, methods and narratives even as they erode fundamental freedoms; and how resistance movements can push back and reposition themselves against their hegemony to defend democratic civic spaces, plurality, rights and liberties. We look forward to address questions such as:

- What are the major movements and dynamics that are currently shaping the concept of civil society? To what extent has civil society been able to address changing needs and historical challenges?
- What new or revised tools, strategies, and methods can democratic civil society actors, practitioners, and theorists develop in response to anti-democratic narratives?
- What role does/can civil society play in transforming anti-democratic narratives?
- How can liberal civil society reposition itself against domination, hegemony, oppression, and violence?
- What role does politics of resistance play against anti-democratic movements?

How can you apply?

Please complete the form [here](#) to submit your workshop proposal for CiviCon to be held on 31 October and 1 November 2025, in Nicosia. We look forward to getting to know your ideas and will contact you if they match our concept. We encourage proposals for highly interactive and participatory workshops.

Applications will be open until **31 August 2025, 18:00 hours (EEST-Nicosia)** and will be evaluated by an inter-disciplinary jury.



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Further questions?

In case you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to us via civicon@civicspace.eu and/or +90 533 8337950 and/or +90 392 2276505.

About Civic Space

Civic Space is a Technical Assistance Project funded by the European Union under the Aid Programme for the Turkish Cypriot community and implemented in Cyprus. It aims at contributing to build a stronger civil society, which supports democratic changes and confidence-building measures in the Turkish Cypriot community. Since 2020, Civic Space Project has been working to achieve four outcomes:

1. The public engages more in civic actions.
2. Civil Society Organisations' (CSOs) civic engagement and role in decision-making are reinforced.
3. A more enabling environment for CSOs actions is promoted in the Turkish Cypriot community.
4. Greater links with CSOs in the Greek Cypriot community are encouraged.

Civic Space took initiative and held activities to create spaces for conceptual discussions on civil society, civic space, activism, public sphere, shrinking civic space, rising anti-rights movements, etc. In this regard, numerous conceptual civil society workshops and discussions were held with CSO representatives and activists. CiviCon is hence both a continuation and a culmination of these discussions.



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