

5 TIPS TO BE AN ACTIVE CITIZEN

BRIEF GUIDE ON LOCAL PUBLIC SERVICES



Texts by

Cinzia Pollio – projects for Consumer policies, Cittadinanzattiva

With

Tina Napoli – Consumer policies manager, Cittadinanzattiva

Editing

Alessandro Cossu – communication, Cittadinanzattiva

Illustrations

Thea Pontecorvo

Graphic adaptation and layout

Lorenzo Blasina

This short guide is part of the information and awareness activities within the project “Consumers in the web: let’s make our rights stronger”, published by Cittadinanzattiva with the support of the Ministry of Economic Development and in collaboration with three other consumer groups.

The project’s general objective is to promote and facilitate, through information, assistance and counselling, activities to make citizens aware of their rights as passengers and know about all the opportunities and ways protect themselves.

INTRODUZIONE

CITTADINANZATTIVA AND THE LOCAL PUBLIC SERVICES

Cittadinanzattiva has been promoting for several years now policy initiatives, information and awareness campaigns with the aim to favour a new approach by users to local public services: **a role which includes the full involvement of citizens in the definition, accessibility, quality and care of services.**

The aim of this guide is to inform people on how to actively participate in asserting their rights and which protection tools to use to enforce them, since for us ***acting as a citizen is the best way to be one!***

THE LOCAL PUBLIC SERVICES (SPL)

Local public services are part of the daily life of every citizen and our quality of life depends directly on them. The right to have timely and frequent public transport, waste management aimed at recycling and the supply of drinking water in our homes have a strong and direct impact on the most simple actions we make every day.

Local public services produce goods and services for social purposes and promote economic and civic development in the community. Local authorities, within their respective competences, ensure their management.

THE PRINCIPLES

Local public services must follow the basic principles of:

- *equality and impartiality* – there must be no discrimination on grounds of gender, race, language, religion and political opinion. Particular attention should be paid to the disabled, the elderly and those belonging to vulnerable social groups;
- *continuity* - the service must be provided on an ongoing and regular basis, avoiding any disruption or cutting down its supply;

5 T I P S T O B E A N A C T I V E C I T I Z E N

- *participation* - user participation in the service must be guaranteed in order to protect the right to a correct supply and foster collaboration;
- *efficiency and effectiveness* - the service provider must ensure, by adopting the most appropriate measures, both effectiveness and efficiency;
- *courtesy* - the service provider should always respect users and be polite;
- *clarity and comprehensibility of messages* - operators must use plain language when dealing with users.



(1) BE PROACTIVE!

Be informed, study and don't delegate!

The first rule to enforce your rights is to know them. It is important to know how local public services are organized in order to identify the right people to contact, the quality standards requested and the forms of protection provided, in order to obtain what is due to you and make yourself heard.

Box Observatory of prices and tariffs

Over the years Cittadinanzattiva has published several papers regarding local public services with the aim of monitoring the progress of tariff policies compared with the quality of services provided. The areas monitored each year are: nursery schools, waste disposal, water and transport. The activities carried out by the **Observatory of prices and tariffs** of Cittadinanzattiva have been possible thanks to the involvement and participation of more than 100 **civic monitors** distributed throughout the country and engaged in monitoring and controlling services. To learn more visit our website www.cittadinanzattiva.it or write to mail@cittadinanzattiva.it

The organizations dealing with local public services are three: the public body, the service provider and the citizens.

The public body entrusts the management of local public services to a company which, according to a **Service Contract**, provides quality services to citizens and supplies the relevant information through the **Charter of Services**.

The services can be entrusted in different ways but always pursuing **effectiveness**, related to the purposes of general interest, **efficiency** and **cost effectiveness**, in terms of cost of service, in the interest of users and within the public finance budget limitations.

According to EU legislation local authorities may entrust the management of local public services to third parties, to public/private joint venture companies or to subsidiary companies within the public body (this is the so-called “in house” management). In most cases in our country the latter prevails.

Example. In Rome, the companies that manages public transport (ATAC) and the service waste management (AMA) are fully participated by the public body, while the company that provides the water service is an example of a public/private joint venture (ACEA).

Information about the organization of local public services (transport, waste disposal and water) are available to users both on the websites of the companies that provide them and at their offices.

You can consult the:

1) Charter of Services (in the case of local public transport you will find the Mobility Charter) for information on quality standards, ways and means to make a complaint and an indication of possible compensation;

2) Regulations on how the service is organized and on its supply, any facilities provided and applied in your municipality, how the rates are determined (e.g. in the case of waste disposal).

! If you can't find the Charter of Services or the Regulations you can contact a consumer association such as Cittadinanzattiva.

Ready for use information in case you ...

➔ live in Rome and you have a child younger than 10. In your case local public transport is free. This and further information can be found in the **Mobility Charter** and in the **Transport Conditions**.

➔ live in Caserta and the total annual income of your household is less than € 6,500. You are entitled to a 50% reduction on waste disposal tax. This and further information

is available in the **Regulations for the application of the TARI** tax adopted by your municipality.

➔ live in Genoa and have problems paying you water bills. In this case the service provider is obliged to inform you by registered mail recorded delivery at least 20 days in advance on the date the water supply will be cut off. This and further information is available in the **Charter of the Water Services**.

Box

Charter of consumer's rights

1. Right to service

Every citizen has the right to access the service without distinction of gender, race, language, religion, political opinion, personal and social conditions.

2. Right to information

Every citizen has the right to receive timely information related to service delivery and methods of protection.

3. Right to transparency

Every citizen has the right to receive understandable, clear and transparent information at every stage of his/her relationship with the service provider.

4. Right to choose

Every citizen has the right to choose the agency or the company supplying a specific service, and be able to compare both economic conditions and technical details about delivery.

5. Right to a fair contract

Every citizen has the right to terminate the contract for the supply and access to a particular service, in compliance with existing rules and without being subject to clearly unfair contractual terms.

6. Right to economic sustainability

Every citizen has the right to make use of services that are not only affordable but also sustainable over time from an economic point of view.

7. Right to quality

Every citizen has the right to use a service which is up to the expected standards and which can be improved in time.

8. Right to safety

Every citizen has the right to a service safe in terms of physical and environmental safety, economic security and privacy protection.

9. Right to protection

Every citizen has the right to individual and collective action, as per current legislation. Alternative dispute resolution procedures (ADR) should be favoured since they are easy, quick and cost-effective.

10. Right to civic participation

Every citizen has the right to play an active role in the definition, delivery and evaluation of the service.

(2) PARTECIPATE AND CONTRIBUTE TO THE CHANGE

Become an active part in the organization of local public services and use them responsibly

→ PARTICIPATE IN THE DEFINITION AND ASSESSMENT OF THE QUALITY OF LOCAL PUBLIC SERVICES.

The Finance Act of 2008, Article 2, **paragraph 461**, has introduced a number of provisions to protect the rights of consumers regarding local public services. The most significant change concerns the involvement of consumer associations and citizens in the definition and monitoring of the operational standards. Basically, the provision requires the service provider to adopt the Charter of quality of services, drawn up and disseminated in accordance with agreements with business and consumer groups.

What can you do?

- know the regulation;
- push your local administration for action;
- contact the local offices of Cittadinanzattiva (or other organizations for the protection of consumers' rights and take part actively in the local assembly

→ CONTRIBUTE BY INTERACTING WITH THE INSTITUTIONS

Use all possible forms of debate and partnership that can be promoted by active citizenship such as:

- *regular meetings* between the citizens organizations and institutions/companies in order to find solutions to difficult situations;
- *memoranda of understanding* to establish common goals and how to achieve them;
- *service conferences*, in order to verify the performance of the services and the

improvement of relations between citizens and companies. The parties involved are the government, trade unions, workers, representative associations of citizens and the general public;

- *Work plan* in order to collaborate to continuously pursue objectives for the protection of citizens' rights.

Take part in the activities organized by your Administration or, if there aren't any, propose some.

→ BE INFORMED ABOUT PUBLIC INITIATIVES AND ENCOURAGE THE PARTICIPATION OF YOUR ADMINISTRATION.

There are several events that take place worldwide: the *European Mobility Week* (16-22 September) the *European Week for Waste Reduction* (November 22-30), the *World Water Day* (22 March), the *European Consumer Day* (March 16). These initiatives aim to involve institutions, companies and all consumers in issues which have an impact on our daily life such as transport, waste disposal and water. The goal is not only to stimulate interest and attention on our rights, but also to foster more aware and responsible behaviours and lifestyles.

→ REMEMBER THAT CHANGE STARTS WITH YOU. BEHAVE RESPONSIBLY.

Living in a people-oriented city, not clogged by traffic, clean and with well planned and reliable services, depends also on the degree of civility and of citizen participation.



Box The ACTIVE CITIZEN Guide

1. **Separate waste** carefully and have a critical and proactive approach with your administration in order to improve the waste management service;
2. Leave your car at home. Walk or use **public transport**;
3. Always pay the ticket and be **civilised**;
4. Don't **waste**. Recycle, exchange and share instead of buying new things;
5. Know the importance of the environment and of natural resources: use water sparingly and **responsibly**;
6. Be **informed** about what, how and why you have to pay to receive a service;
7. **Expect** the quality you deserve and in the case of bad service make a formal complaint to bring about change;
8. Tell friends, relatives and acquaintances how to **foster action and civil behaviour**;
9. **Assess** the public services in your town;
10. You have the right to **expect** that rules be applied.

(3) CHECK

You have the right to local public services. So, monitoring and assessing their quality is also your duty. Use all the tools at your disposal.

CIVIC ANALYSIS

Citizens can and must contribute personally to change. They can do this by participating in the definition of the services prior to their supply and checking quality at the time of use. Citizens should carry out proper monitoring to expose the critical issues from a user point of view and giving a different perspective to the company. This is what is stated in the Finance Act of 2008, art. 2, **paragraph 461**.

The tool to do this is the **civic analysis** through which you can define, communicate and assert your own point of view on issues of social importance which have a direct impact on our quality of life such as the **appropriate level of local public services**.

! Civic information is a necessary tool to make things work. No authority is able to know exactly what the situation is in all places and the circumstances in which the rights of citizens are questioned or when it is necessary to protect the public interest.

Producing and using information is an exercise of power. Civic monitoring allows to observe behaviours considered normal by those who practice them, but which are actually harmful to the rights of citizens.

THE CHARTER OF SERVICES

The **Charter of Services** is a **pact** between the company and the citizens: the company takes a number of **commitments** towards the citizens regarding the service itself, the method of supply, **quality standards** and forms of protection provided. It allows citizens to advisedly exercise their rights.

The core of this “pact” is the definition of quality standards, to which correspond a series of obligations by the service provider. In case of any violation, citizens can access the **protection** tools provided by the Charter.

Example. If you live in **Bologna** and the water service is mistakenly disconnected, the provider (in this case Hera) is obliged to restore the supply within 3 hours from the complaint, 24/7 every day of the year, as stated in its Charter.



(4) COMPLAIN

If something doesn't work, make your voice heard. Things do not sort themselves out on their own!

→ File a complaint

The Charter of Services lists all the contacts to forward complaints.

! If the local train you commute on is often delayed, cancelled without notice or is dirty, if the waste bins are filthy, damaged or are not emptied regularly, if the water supply is interrupted without notice, **show your dissatisfaction in your complaint!** Besides being your right, your complaint is a civic duty since it is the basis for change and helps consumer associations to best represent you.

→ Contact agencies responsible for the quality of local public services.

These agencies have already been set up in some cities such as Genoa, Grosseto, Rome and Turin. Citizens can contact them in order to improve the efficiency and quality of local public services.

→ Contact the Consumers' Associations

To give more strength to your recommendations contact the Consumers' Associations. **Cittadinanzattiva** is one of them, recognized since 2000 by the National Council of Consumers and Users, established at the Ministry of Economic Development. To learn more visit our website **www.cittadinanzattiva.it**

→ Contact the Authority responsible for the service

Authorities have the power to assess complaints, appeals and reports submitted by individuals or groups on the compliance of quality standards and tariffs, and to impose fines.

New

- In 2011 the “functions related to the regulation and control of water services” were given to the **Authority for Electricity and Gas**. They go from the definition of admissible costs and the criteria for determining the rates to cover these costs, skills in terms of quality of service, area planning and drawing up standard service agreements.
- The **Transport Service Authority** was established in 2011 (Art. 37 December 6, 2011, n. 201) responsible for regulating the transport sector and access to infrastructures. It defines also the levels of quality of the transport services, minimum rights users can claim against the service providers also in terms of compensation.



(5) ACT AND INVOLVE

Remember that you are part of a community and that performance and good quality of local public services affect everybody.

The good performance of local public services concerns the community as a whole. In order to give more strength to your rights, find networks, committees and associations with which you share intents and approaches. **Get involved and participate actively in the association's activities!**

There are several movements and associations which deal with issues linked to local public services: *ZeroWaste*, *Retake* (Rome), *CleaNap* (Napoles) and *Puliamo il mondo* of Legambiente regarding waste **disposal**; commuters, cyclists and pedestrians' associations for **mobility**, and movements and environmental associations for **water**.

Knowing about the association network in your area and interacting with it guarantees **more strength to citizens in promoting the quality of service.**

! Partnerships with other subjects is fundamental to solve conflicts and promote rights.

Box

Being active citizens

You can improve your local public services by being an active citizen in the following roles:

- as an **“information activist”** - a person who on a daily basis supplies important information on services which have a direct impact on the life of citizens. A relationship of trust built with citizens allows to reach those segments of population which, owing to their age, social and economic conditions and education are unlikely to be reached by the usual information channels;
- as a **Civic monitor** – this is a key role in the promotion and protection of consumers’ rights. A Civic monitor carries out direct and constant monitoring on accessibility, quality and safety of the information and transparency of local public services and public administration;
- as a **Price and tariff monitor** – a key role in consumer protection which requires special skills and competences since the system of prices and tariffs of services is very complex.
- As a **Waste ‘spotter’** – singles out all those situations in which services are not used properly (e.g. street lights on also during daytime, unused machinery and structures etc.), puts together all the documentation regarding data and cases, not only to report them but above all to contribute to their solution;
- as an **Analyst** – this activity can be carried out also by people who do not have much free time and wish to offer their competences to analyse complex and important documents such as balance sheets, regulations, contracts and test results on services and products.

Source: excerpt from G. Trincia, *Il consumatore attivo*, Baldini Castoldi Dalai, 2008

Bibliography for active citizens

- Cotturri G., *La forza riformatrice della cittadinanza attiva*, Carocci editore, 2013
Moro G., *Manuale di cittadinanza attiva*, Carocci editore, 1998
Moro G., *Azione civica. Conoscere e gestire le organizzazioni di cittadinanza attiva*, Carocci Faber, 2005
Trincia G., *Il consumatore attivo*, Baldini Castoldi Dalai, 2008

Do you want to receive information, report an unsatisfactory service or forward a complaint?

Contact the nearest Cittadinanzattiva agency by writing to the offices of:

Bologna	<i>segreteria@cittadinanzattiva-er.it</i>
Cagliari	<i>cittadinanzattivaca@tiscali.it</i>
Catania	<i>pit.catania@yahoo.it</i>
Chiaravalle	<i>cittadinanzattiva_ancona@yahoo.it</i>
Chiavari	<i>cittadinanzattivaliguria@yahoo.it</i>
Latina	<i>cittadinanzattivalt@libero.it</i>
Milano	<i>consumatori@cittadinanzattivailombardia.com</i>
Perugia	<i>perugia@cittadinanzattiva.umbria.it</i>
Riva del Garda	<i>info@cittadinanzattivadel trentino.it</i>
Roma	<i>pitroma@cittadinanzattiva.it</i>
Spoletto	<i>cittattiv.umbria@libero.it</i>
Torino	<i>pit.torino@cittadinanzattiva.it</i>
Urbino	<i>urbino@cittadinanzattiva.it</i>

The National head office can be contacted at: **pit.servizi@cittadinanzattiva.it**

Do you want to learn more about Cittadinanzattiva, participate in its activities organized in your area, or join our Movement? Visit www.cittadinanzattiva.it, look for the assembly closest to you ... *and good participation!*

Watch our videos

5 TIPS FOR GETTING
AROUND TOWN



5 TIPS FOR KEEPING
YOUR CITY CLEAN



5 TIPS FOR THE USE OF WATER
AS A COMMON RESOURCE





*Ministero
dello Sviluppo Economico*

Spesa finanziata dal Ministero dello Sviluppo Economico
ai sensi del Decreto 21 marzo 2013