



EmPower Up!

Empowering Educators:
A Guide to Community Engagement Methods



EmPowerUp!

- Empowering adult educators -
exchange of best practices
for the benefit of local communities

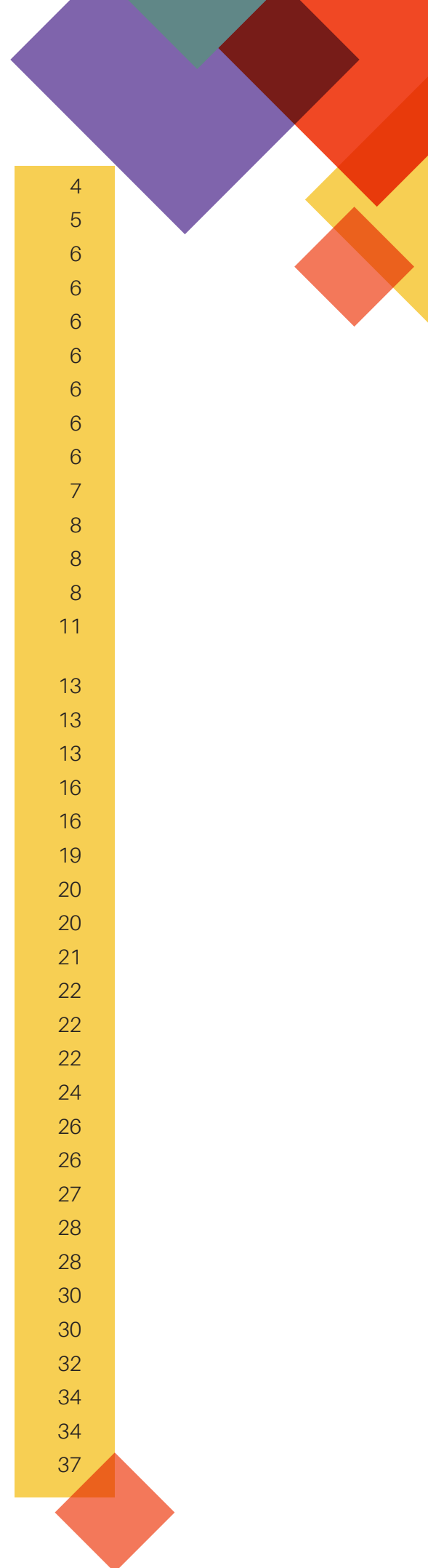


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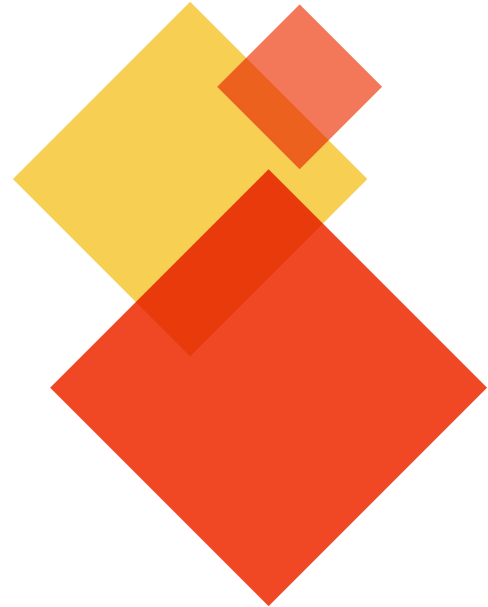
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1.

Introduction

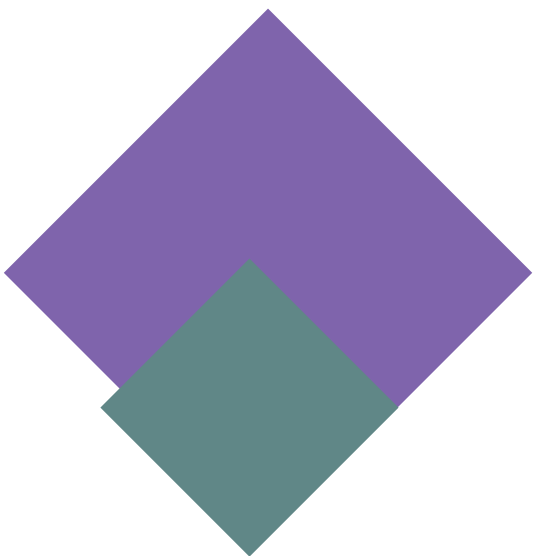
Community engagement is a critical component in fostering sustainable development and enhancing the quality of life within local communities. This guide aims to provide educators, animators, leaders, volunteers, and NGO members with a rich resource of innovative practices and methodologies to engage and benefit their communities effectively.

This guide was created within the framework of the "EmPowerUp! - Empowering adult educators - exchange of best practices for the benefit of local communities" project, financed by the Erasmus+ Programme. The project leader is Foundation STREFA (Poland), and the project partners are Initiative - Center for Education (Croatia), "Values, Virtues, Integrity" Foundation (Bulgaria) and Center Spirala - Center of Selfmobility (Slovenia).



During the Train the Trainer project activity held in May 2024 in Sofia, these partner organisations shared their unique methods and approaches to community engagement. These exchanges provided a platform for mutual learning and collaboration, highlighting best practices and practical applications that can be adapted and implemented across different contexts. The collective insights from these sessions form the backbone of this guide, ensuring it is grounded in real-world experiences and diverse perspectives.

The guide is designed to be a comprehensive resource for continuous learning. It encourages educators to adapt and evolve their strategies to meet the changing needs of their communities. By fostering effective community engagement, the guide aims to contribute to sustainable development goals. Engaged communities are better equipped to address social, economic, and environmental challenges.



2.

Purpose

The purpose of this guide is to introduce various community engagement methods, providing practical applications and examples to enhance the effectiveness and creativity of educators working with local communities. It is designed to be a comprehensive resource for those seeking to expand their methods, knowledge, and competencies in community engagement. By incorporating these innovative practices, educators can refresh their current approaches, enhance creativity, and improve competence in working with diverse groups and contexts.

The guide is structured to provide clear and actionable content, with each partner organisation contributing their expertise and methods. This collaborative approach ensures the guide is informative and practical, offering detailed descriptions and step-by-step instructions for implementation. Whether new to community engagement or an experienced practitioner looking for new ideas, this guide offers valuable insights and tools to support your work.



3.

Community Engagement Methods Overview

3.1. Importance of Community Engagement

Community engagement is a cornerstone of societal development and well-being. It refers to the process by which organisations and individuals work collaboratively with and through groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interests, or similar situations to address issues affecting their well-being. The importance of community engagement cannot be overstated, as it is pivotal in creating strong, vibrant, and resilient communities.

Building Trust and Relationships

At the heart of community engagement is the building of trust and relationships. When organisations engage with communities in a meaningful way, they foster a sense of trust that is crucial for any collaborative effort. Trust acts as the bedrock upon which all successful community projects are built. It ensures that community members feel valued and heard, leading to stronger, more genuine relationships. These relationships are vital for the effective implementation of community initiatives, as they ensure ongoing participation and support from community members.

Enhancing Participation and Ownership

Community engagement encourages active participation from community members. When people are involved in the decision-making processes that affect their lives, they are more likely to take ownership of the outcomes. This sense of ownership is crucial for the sustainability of community projects. When individuals feel that they have a stake in the success of an initiative, they are more likely to contribute their time, resources, and energy towards ensuring its success. This participation fosters a culture of collaboration and collective responsibility, essential for addressing complex community issues.

Empowering Individuals and Groups

Effective community engagement empowers individuals and groups by giving them a voice in the decisions that affect their lives. This empowerment is a fundamental aspect of democratic societies, where all individuals should have the opportunity to contribute to the shaping of their community. By involving community members in the planning and implementation of projects, organisations can tap into local knowledge and expertise that is often overlooked. This not only leads to more effective and relevant solutions but also builds the capacity of community members to address future challenges independently.

Fostering Social Cohesion and Inclusion

Community engagement plays a crucial role in fostering social cohesion and inclusion. In diverse communities, engagement efforts can bring together individuals from different backgrounds to work towards common goals. This interaction promotes understanding, reduces prejudices, and builds social capital. Inclusive engagement practices ensure that all voices, especially those of marginalised or disadvantaged groups, are heard and considered. This inclusivity is essential for creating equitable communities where all members feel a sense of belonging and can contribute meaningfully.

Facilitating Sustainable Development

Sustainable development hinges on the active participation of local communities. Community engagement is essential for identifying and addressing environmental, social, and economic challenges in a holistic and integrated manner. Engaged communities are better positioned to develop and implement sustainable practices that balance the needs of present and future generations. By fostering a sense of shared responsibility, community engagement encourages the adoption of sustainable behaviours and practices that contribute to the long-term health and vitality of communities.

3.2. Relevance in Diverse Contexts

Community engagement is not a one-size-fits-all endeavour. Its relevance and application span across various contexts, each with unique challenges and opportunities. Understanding the nuances of these different contexts is crucial for tailoring engagement strategies that are effective, inclusive, and sustainable. Here, we explore the relevance of community engagement in diverse contexts such as urban and rural settings, multicultural communities, educational environments, and in the face of socio-economic disparities.

In urban settings, community engagement plays a critical role in managing the complexities of densely populated areas. Cities are often characterised by a diverse mix of cultures, economic statuses, and social interests, leading to both vibrant interactions and potential conflicts. Effective community engagement in urban areas involves creating platforms for dialogue where residents can express their needs, aspirations, and concerns.

In rural settings, community engagement is equally important but takes on a different character due to the unique challenges and strengths of these areas. Rural communities often have strong social ties and a deep sense of place, which can be leveraged to foster collective action. Engagement strategies in these contexts might focus on harnessing local knowledge and traditions, which are invaluable for sustainable agricultural practices, natural resource management, and cultural preservation.

Community engagement is essential in multicultural communities for fostering inclusivity and understanding among diverse groups. These communities are enriched by a variety of cultural perspectives, but they also face the challenge of integrating these differences into a cohesive social fabric. Effective engagement in multicultural contexts involves creating spaces where cultural expressions are celebrated, and intercultural dialogue is promoted.

In educational environments, community engagement is crucial for creating supportive and inclusive spaces for learning. Schools and universities are not just places of academic instruction but also hubs of community interaction. Engaging students, parents, educators, and local stakeholders in the educational process leads to more holistic and effective educational outcomes.

The relevance of community engagement extends across a multitude of contexts, each requiring tailored strategies that respect and leverage local characteristics. Whether in urban or rural areas, multicultural settings, educational environments, or in addressing socio-economic disparities and crises, effective community engagement fosters collaboration, inclusivity, and sustainable development. By adapting engagement approaches to the specificities of each context, we can create more resilient, vibrant, and equitable communities.

4.

Method Descriptions

4.1. Foundation Strefa: Neighbourhood Activity Spaces (NAS)

4.1.1. Description

Introduction

NAS is premised on providing conditions for the local community to undertake grassroots initiatives. It is geared towards strengthening integration and giving residents space for active leisure activities in the immediate vicinity. Libraries, which at their foundation are institutions based on trust, sharing, and access to cultural goods, seem to be ideal spaces for developing cultural potential in the local environment. Libraries are increasingly serving as the main place for neighbourhood gatherings, even more so in the fall and winter, hosting events and, above all, being an open place to which residents are willing to invite their ideas. They seemed to be perfect places for us to develop the NAS idea.

Roles in animation. Who is needed in the NAS?

When creating a Neighbourhood Activity Space, it is worth thinking about the role that will be played by those appointed to run it, and what is hidden under the terms leader and animator.



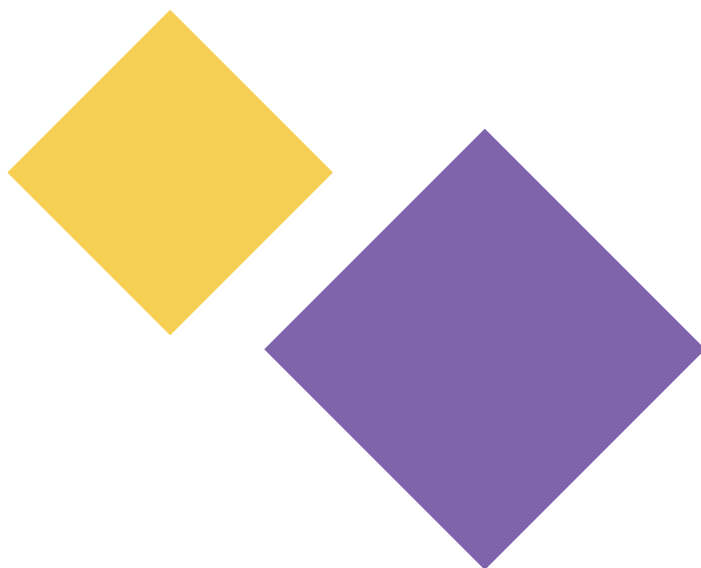
Animator

An animator is a person hired to work with residents. They should know what the work of an animator is about, be familiar with animation processes, have skills in working with people/groups, be communicative, have ease of networking, etc.

In neighbourhood activities, the animator is also a catalyst for change based on a shared vision of the goal the community wants to achieve. Their role is to facilitate the group. It is the members of the group who make the decisions and the role of the animator is to organise the interaction. Their activity is supposed to result in an increased sense of belonging, feeling comfortable in the group, and increased bonding. The animator mobilises people for action, and shows them what can be achieved together, but does not do their job. They empower individuals and groups by helping and showing them the possibilities of realising initiatives and ideas.

Leader

A leader is a person from a group of residents, an originator who motivates and leads. They lead the group to change and represent the group externally. They are charismatic authorities whose voices are often decisive. In the group, they take responsibility for the action and its results. The leader often not only presents the vision but also mostly implements it. The greatest qualities of a leader are the drive to achieve a goal with the group, commitment to the process, implementation of ideas and perseverance.



The animation process

When organising a Neighbourhood Activity Space, it is important to reach for the competencies of an animator. It is worth keeping the goal in mind - the NAS is a space where residents are to realise their initiatives, integrate, build and strengthen neighbourly relations. This is one of those activities where we should put down our ideas of what the pace of the group's development should be, what the dynamics of the meetings should be, what the neighbourhood group should strive for, and what activities it should undertake.

There are no ready-made formulas against which to measure whether things are going successfully, as each neighbourhood will develop at its own pace and individual residents may engage at their rhythm and scope.

A certain unpredictability in animating a neighbourhood can be fascinating for animators but also frustrating at times. We are used to projects where our role is to define in advance and then realise indicators - how many meetings will take place, how long they will last, how many people will come, what they will do, and what social change will take place. For activities which we want to hand over to the neighbourhood community, we need to be more careful in these assumptions. We can't take success for granted, neither when everything goes well at the beginning, nor when at the beginning of the process there are no indications that we will achieve animation success in the community.

The role of the animator in the process

The field of action is to create the conditions for neighbourhood face-to-face meetings, to disseminate information about the establishment of the NAS to different groups of inhabitants, and finally to motivate active measures to improve social life by showing visions for improvements and encouraging people to realise them.

This process consists of:

- **Mobilising** - a credible facilitator, believing in the sense of neighbourhood initiatives, will easily convince others that it is worthwhile to act together. During the implementation of an initiative, people may need the support and enthusiasm of an experienced person.
- **Sharing experience** - supporting with knowledge and experience should not overwhelm the members of the group, it is advisable to choose a basic set of guidelines or arrange a question-and-answer session. Excessive sharing of knowledge, and exuding experience, can be overwhelming.
- **Empowering** - showing people their strengths, making them realise how much work they have already done, how they have developed, and the value of the work they have completed.
- **Levelling the playing field** - providing an environment for people who want to get involved, but for some reason don't believe they can do it, being attentive to those who are shy, unsure of their competence.
- **Evaluation** - the animator, even though they accompany the activity, has a certain distance, they will help to guide the group through the process of summarising, assessing what was successful, and what needs improvement. It is useful to point out areas where residents have succeeded and encourage them to celebrate their achievements.

How to start?

Having decided to set up a Neighbourhood Activity Space, being aware of the benefits of activating neighbours, and being aware of what the role of the animator entails, we can go into action. Depending on where and with whom we act, there will be different group dynamics, different aims, needs, problems and outcomes of the work.

Preparation

Whether you are an experienced animator or a newcomer, it is important to be prepared to conduct neighbourhood community animation. If you are inexperienced, it can be helpful to work in tandem with a teammate - this allows you to share tasks, talk through the process, and find solutions together.

It is worth reading about the experiences of practitioners of the neighbourhood movement - there are many publications on the Internet, descriptions of completed projects, cultural animation manuals or ready-made integration exercises, and facilitation tools.

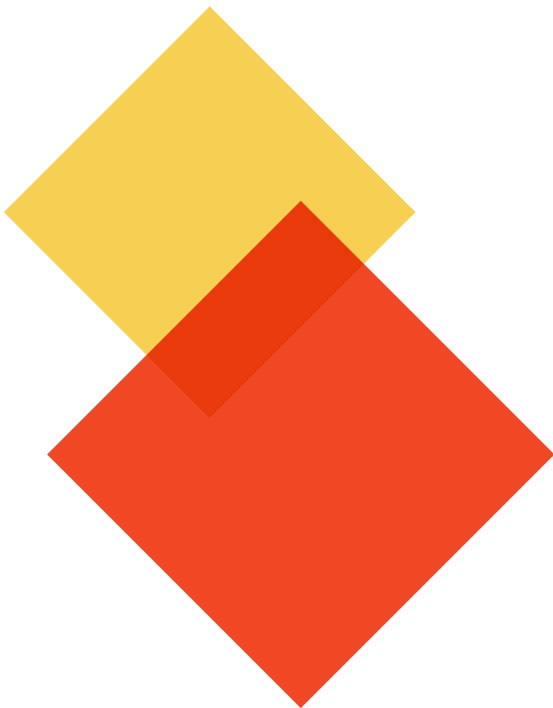
Recognising the area - with whom and where we will work.

Working in a library that wants to set up the NAS, we should know many of the people who will make it up - the recipients of our cultural offer, dedicated readers. We can expect some of them to be keen to get involved, or to support us in our outreach activities - they will pass the news on to their neighbours about the new activity in the library.

What do we know about the environment in which we will be working? What is its history, what is currently happening in it, and which people, institutions, and organisations are working here? What problems affect this space?

The knowledge gathered will allow us to better understand the group and the dynamics of its work. Another important aspect of the activities is information. The most effective method is to talk directly and invite people to act.

At NAS we often start with workshop activities and it is to these that we invite the immediate community. The next step in animation work is to make the most of the first meeting. It is worth focusing on creating a friendly atmosphere, building trust and introducing the idea to which people are invited. It is important to ensure that everyone can see each other, has a chance to speak, and no one is left out. This will enhance the participation and ownership of future initiatives.



4.1.2. Practical Applications

One example of creating a Neighbourhood Activity Space is the NAS (Neighbourhood Activity Space) established at the Tatarak City Library in Łódź, Poland. To properly illustrate the entire process, we must walk through it step by step, chronologically.

The Tatarak Library was opened in a long-unused shopping pavilion. For years, the neighbourhood had grown accustomed to the sight of the empty building; people parked their cars in front of it, teenagers decorated it with graffiti (often vulgar), and the area around it was overgrown with weeds. This state lasted for years.

The library was built from scratch in this location. The interiors were renovated, and the space was furnished with new furniture and books. It opened in December 2021. Despite being attractive and stocked with a new collection of books, the library didn't enjoy much popularity among residents, which could be attributed to the lingering effects of the coronavirus pandemic and the fact that few people were familiar with the location.

We began working on the creation of the NAS in February 2022. The initial meetings were held exclusively with the library staff. We educated them on what a NAS is, the role of a community animator, who a leader is, how to engage with local residents, and, most importantly, the role of the library as a place, as a Neighbourhood Activity Space. During these meetings, we also explored the neighbourhood, identifying resources and places where the community gathered, such as playgrounds or local marketplaces. We scheduled the first meetings with residents, distributed information to library patrons, and posted flyers in communal areas like stairwells of nearby apartment blocks.

At the meetings, we provided warm drinks and light refreshments. We arranged chairs in a circle so that everyone could feel equally important and see one another. Before starting, we asked everyone to write their name on a sticker and place it on their clothing. Addressing each other by first names shortened the distance and fostered a sense of familiarity. Each meeting was designed to attract attendees with something appealing, such as a creative, handicraft, artistic, or even carpentry workshop. At

the start of each workshop, we sat in a circle, and the librarians introduced themselves as the hosts of the space, always emphasising that the library is for everyone in the community, that it's a place they can use for various meetings, not just for borrowing books. After that, the community animator took over, briefly introducing themselves and inviting participants to do the same. It's important not to pressure anyone, especially those attending for the first time—if they wish to share more about themselves, that's great; if they only give their first name, that's fine too.

A good tool for gathering ideas for activities, workshops, or meetings is a 'The Dream Box,' as described in section 5.1. I remember that many young people, aged 13-15, attended the first meeting. Reading the ideas from the wish box brought a lot of joy. One of the suggestions was... a cat in the library. Many agreed it would be lovely to pet a cat while sitting in an armchair and reading. The idea was widely approved, and had it not been for the library's night-time alarm system, the suggestion would likely have been implemented.

Each meeting ended with setting the date for the next one, and eventually, a regular schedule was established. With each meeting, more and more people attended. However, there may be times when only one person shows up—that's part of the process. We need to remember that attendance can be influenced by many factors beyond our control. Some people came just once, others stopped attending for a while but returned later. Gradually, relationships formed, people began recognizing each other on the streets, and they started meeting outside of our scheduled sessions. A micro-community began to emerge.

As summer approached, attention shifted to the green area behind the library, which was in a state of disrepair. During meetings, ideas were discussed on how we could transform it into a relaxing outdoor space. Together with neighbours, library patrons, and staff, we planned the initiative, assigning tasks, designing the garden, and building furniture from wooden pallets. Sewing workshops were organised to create cushions for the wooden seats. A project proposal was written and submitted to the Łódź City Microgrants Program in 2022. The informal group, 'Wild Gardeners,' won funding for the initiative, which gave the group a fresh burst of energy and motivation to carry out their plans.



Małgorzata Sobczak, head of the Tatarak City Library, recalls the creation of the relaxation zone as a breakthrough moment: 'Following the residents' ideas, a space for relaxation was created. Building the furniture turned out to be an activity that caught people's attention: People enjoy engaging in projects with tangible and visible results. Nowadays, we rarely have the opportunity to do DIY projects, and when the chance arises, it turns out to be a relaxing and enjoyable way to spend time together.' (The initiative's documentation can be found at this link: <https://opus.org.pl/wersja-robotyczna-36277>.)

'Securing the funds for the project was a significant step for the community group—it was a success that instilled a sense of agency. Someone from the outside recognized and rewarded our idea, which motivates people to dream bigger and plan future initiatives.'

Outdoor activities beyond the library's walls caught the attention of passersby and neighbours, who peeked out of their windows, curious about the commotion and noise. Neighbours who had never attended SAS meetings began joining in—someone passing by offered help, another person went home to fetch a missing tool. It's essential to understand that different residents will engage at varying levels—some will participate in just one activity that aligns with their interests, while others will get involved in everything. This was also true for Tatarak. Even those who participated occasionally gained benefits from the SAS, which could have long-lasting effects—they might reach out to someone they met at the activities, feel more confident, or start taking part in cultural events at nearby institutions. What the NAS needs most is time: It's important not to expect that everyone will engage equally or at the same pace.

Carpentry and gardening weren't the only activities happening at the NAS. Małgorzata Sobczak lists others: 'beginner art classes, breathing workshops for busy people, artistic recreation for adults, board games... Were there challenges? Of course, we had them.'

A psycho-oncologist approached the library with the idea of offering free sessions for cancer patients and their families. She had significant experience and knowledge to share, but unfortunately, there was no interest. It was a difficult situation, but we worked through it. Together with the facilitator, we analysed the situation and decided that we would try again in the future. Perhaps the neighbours need more time to open up to such a topic, or maybe the format of the session needs to be restructured or communicated differently. It's important not to leave a neighbour or community member alone when they encounter difficulties—this prevents them from losing the motivation to engage in activities for the benefit of others. Everyone who has led a session has a list of small setbacks—what's important is to learn from them, not give up, and keep trying.

The community activities have taken deep root at the Neighbourhood Activity Space in the Tatarak Library. Even after the official end of the project, the community meetings continued.

A fun fact: While visiting the Tatarak Library to borrow a book, I noticed a ginger cat wandering around. I asked where it came from. I was told that it's the 'library cat.' And what about the alarm system? Someone built the cat a little house in the community garden, and that's where it sleeps. The neighbours feed it, and sometimes library patrons bring pouches and toys for the librarians to give to it. Incredible!

4.2. Initiative - Centre For Education: Storytelling Method for Migrants and Local Communities

4.2.1. Description

The Storytelling Method for Migrants and Local Communities is a community engagement technique designed to bridge gaps between diverse cultural groups through shared narratives. This method involves migrants and locals sharing personal stories, which fosters mutual understanding, empathy, and social cohesion. By focusing on individual experiences, it highlights common human experiences while respecting cultural differences. This approach not only helps in integrating migrants into the local community but also strengthens the community's social fabric, promoting inclusion and reducing cultural barriers.

In Europe, storytelling has been particularly effective in migrant integration programs. Research indicates that storytelling creates a safe space for dialogue, allowing migrants to express their identities and experiences, while locals gain insights into the challenges and contributions of newcomers. This method has been employed in various European countries, especially in urban areas with significant migrant populations, to enhance social integration and build inclusive communities. Storytelling as a method leverages the innate human ability to relate to and learn from personal stories. It emphasises shared human experiences while acknowledging cultural differences. The aim is not just to tell stories but to create a space where people can listen, connect, and reflect on the similarities and differences in their experiences.

Key aspects of the storytelling method include:

- **Personal Narratives:** Encouraging participants to share personal anecdotes, life events, or cultural traditions that are meaningful to them.
- **Active Listening:** Storytelling sessions involve not only telling but also listening, which promotes empathy and understanding among participants.
- **Facilitation:** A facilitator often helps guide the storytelling process, ensuring a respectful and inclusive environment.
- **Reflection:** After stories are shared, participants are encouraged to reflect on the experiences and discuss any insights gained, fostering deeper connections and understanding.

4.2.2. Practical Applications

A wide array of storytelling workshop exercises are versatile and can be effectively utilised across various social groups, making them universally applicable to any local community. Some basic characteristics of storytelling include:

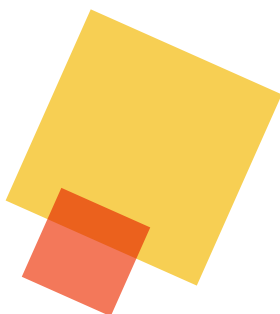
- **Shared Experiences:** Storytelling fosters connections by encouraging both locals and migrants to share personal experiences, creating empathy and understanding of each other's backgrounds.
- **Cultural Exchange:** Storytelling highlights the diverse cultural heritage of migrants and locals, enriching the community's understanding and fostering mutual respect.
- **Community Building:** Storytelling acts as a bridge for fostering relationships, creating a sense of belonging, and building trust among different groups.
- **Empowerment:** Storytelling gives a voice to marginalised groups, allowing them to share their perspectives and experiences, thus promoting the engagement of individuals and inclusion.
- **Breaking Stereotypes and Prejudices:** Storytelling challenges stereotypes and biases by humanising both locals and migrants through personal stories, fostering more accurate and respectful perceptions.
- **Language Learning:** Storytelling can be used as an informal method for language learning and exchange, helping migrants integrate into the local community while preserving their native languages.
- **Conflict Resolution:** Storytelling can help mediate conflicts by offering different perspectives, allowing both sides to express their experiences and find common ground.
- **Education and Awareness:** Storytelling educates locals about migration realities and helps raise awareness about the challenges faced by migrants, encouraging more inclusive attitudes.



To effectively incorporate the storytelling method into activities and projects aimed at integrating migrants into the local community, a structured yet flexible approach is essential. Here's how it can be implemented:

1. Workshops and Storytelling Circles:

- Organise storytelling workshops where both migrants and locals can gather to share their personal stories. These can be informal sessions at community centres, libraries, or schools.
- Facilitate small group discussions where participants are encouraged to share stories about their lives, their journeys, cultural traditions, or experiences of migration.
- Create a safe space where participants feel comfortable sharing vulnerable or sensitive parts of their experiences without judgement.
- Example: Storytelling circles where each participant brings an object or photograph that represents an important moment in their life. This can serve as a starting point for storytelling and help break the ice.



2. Cultural Exchange Programs:

- Integrate storytelling into cultural exchange programs where migrants and locals engage in dialogue about their respective cultural backgrounds.
- Storytelling can be used to introduce cultural traditions, festivals, or family customs, allowing participants to see beyond stereotypes and prejudices and gain a deeper understanding of each other's heritage.
- Example: Organising a "Cultural Heritage Night" where migrants share stories about their home country's festivals, and locals share traditions from their own culture.

3. Intergenerational and Intercultural Storytelling Projects:

- Create opportunities for intergenerational storytelling where older migrants can share their life experiences with younger community members, helping both to bridge generational and cultural divides.
- Involve local schools or youth groups, encouraging students to learn about migration through the stories of local immigrants. This can enhance empathy and understanding among young people and help integrate migrants into the broader community.
- Example: A school project where students interview migrant families about their journey, creating a book or multimedia project that shares these stories with the broader community.

4. Public Storytelling Events:

- Host public storytelling events that are open to the entire community, offering a platform for migrants and locals to share their stories in a supportive and public setting.
- These events can be part of cultural festivals or standalone events designed to promote integration and community building.
- Example: A storytelling event titled “Journeys of Hope,” where migrants and locals share stories about overcoming challenges and finding a sense of belonging.

5. Storytelling as a Tool for Language Learning:

- Incorporate storytelling into language-learning programs for migrants. Sharing personal stories in the local language helps migrants improve their language skills while also allowing locals to hear their experiences.
- The informal nature of storytelling can reduce the pressure of formal language learning and create a more relaxed, supportive environment for language practice.
- Example: A community language café where migrants practise speaking the local language by telling stories about their lives, and locals provide feedback and support.

6. Digital Storytelling:

- Use digital platforms to create video or audio recordings of migrant stories that can be shared online. This can reach a wider audience and help dispel myths or misconceptions about migrants in the community.
- Migrants can record their stories in their native language with subtitles or translations, allowing locals to understand and appreciate their journey while also preserving their cultural identity.
- Example: A Voices of Migration project where migrants’ stories are shared on social media, accompanied by photographs or artwork that visually represents their experiences.

7. Integration into Community Projects:

- Incorporate storytelling into broader community development projects. For example, during neighbourhood improvement initiatives or public art projects, storytelling sessions can be organised where migrants and locals work together and share their experiences while contributing to a common cause.
- Example: A public mural project where locals and migrants co-create a mural that represents the community’s diversity, accompanied by a storytelling workshop where participants explain what the mural means to them.

Storytelling is a highly adaptable and effective method for integrating migrants into local communities. By creating opportunities for dialogue, cultural exchange, and personal connection, storytelling fosters empathy, reduces cultural barriers, and strengthens the social fabric of communities. When incorporated into workshops, public events, and community projects, it becomes a powerful tool for building stronger, more inclusive communities.

4.3. Center Spirala - Center of Selfmobility: SELcoaching Doctrine

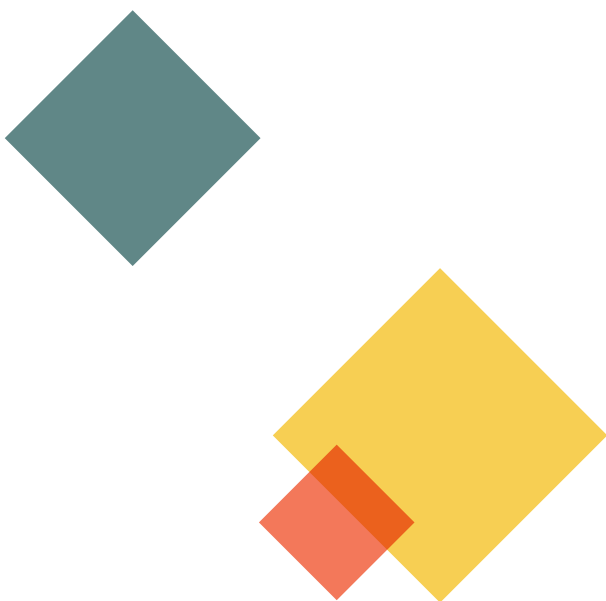
4.3.1. Description

Contextual background

The ability to have 'self-knowledge', knowledge about self, is the most characteristic of human beings compared to other species. Socrates' call 'know thyself' is more relevant today than ever in recent history, due to the accelerated phenomena of change in modern Western society, especially in the last two decades. Individuals today confront the transformation of modern Western society into a so-called liquid society (Zygmunt Bauman 2002, Umberto Galimberti 2015, Umberto Eco 2018). This liquid society is externally recognisable by many complex phenomena and trends: The weakening of cultural and religious traditions, the inferiority of the nation-state as a result of globalisation, the relativisation of professional identity, the deflation of reality at the expense of virtuality (Jean Baudrillard 1999), the relativisation of the individual's adulthood in modern society, the confusion of identity within a field of the individual's physical body (Daniel Estulin 2014), the reduction of the importance of the virtues of humanism due to the coming dataism (Yuval Noah Harari 2017). These manifestations of a fluid society weaken necessary identity anchors for the modern individual. Inadequate attention to this kind of self-knowledge also has implications for an individual's community engagement within local or other kinds of communities.



SELcoaching doctrine (*hereafter* SELcoaching) tries to approach the issue of self-knowledge holistically, emphasising that self-knowledge is not only about our *evolving self* in terms of identifying and realising our interests and motives, potentials, talents and gifts, abilities, values and beliefs, competences and skills, or the *defined self*, given to us at birth (to be of this or that gender, race, nation, community, subcultures, family, etc.). In addition to these two dominant and better-known dimensions of our self, the defined self and the evolving self, SELcoaching, especially due to the emergence of a fluid society and the blending of physical and virtual reality, reveals and draws attention to another dimension of our self, the so-called *transcending self*. This, the final dimension of our self, relates to issues of self-realisation and the well-known philosophical-psychological-religious phrase "here and now", and seeks to focus attention on the individual's mastery of time to achieve peace of mind.



Methodological grounds

SELcoaching is methodologically based on the Selfmobility Thinking Model, which was developed as a synthesis of various activities related to social or humanistic themes between 2001 and 2007 at the Center Spirala (Center Spirala 2007). As a model, Selfmobility consists of four constituent elements: potential, mission, vision, and driving question (regarding the last element, it is a kind of essential question that constantly appears in our mind, related for example to success, money, satisfaction, happiness or any other issue). Selfmobility illustrates an individual's ability to first identify and then realise his or her potential, mission, vision, or driving question, or more abstractly, *it symbolises an individual who thinks his or her own thoughts and goes his or her own way*. It rests on two pillars, the first of which emphasises the importance of an individual deprogramming their thinking behaviour, on the assumption that we as individuals often adopt (more likely unconsciously) externally promoted views and samples about what it means to have potential, a mission or vision, to be successful, to achieve satisfaction or happiness, and we mistakenly treat such adopted views as our own. The second pillar of self mobility points out that deprogramming our thinking behaviour (or finding our true essence after the deprogramming step) can only be achieved by triggering insights under so-called 'insightful thinking' (Center Spirala 2007). This type of insightful thinking occurs in the reverse order of an individual's other ways of thinking so that an individual first gains insight and then verbalises it appropriately (Ash et al. 2012, Klemm 2014, Sotto 2007: 51-54). Attempts to create confusion in an individual's mind to encourage this kind of insightful thinking are not new.

De Bono (2006) encourages this kind of mental confusion in his participants through lateral thinking. Even more elementary and ancient is the well-known Socratic Maieutic, as a method of questioning which, in its elentic phase, deliberately provokes resistance in the individual as a conundrum, a kind of 'mind embarrassment' (Sloterdijk 1996). Well-known and present in Eastern philosophies are Zen Buddhist koans, which are also used to throw the individual off balance in logical thinking (Heine and Wright 2000).

Various human mindsets

Within the first pillar of self mobility, SELcoaching addresses elements of self mobility through four different mindsets (Inertia, Deprogramming, Essence, and Activation - I.D.E.A.). SELcoaching takes the position that an individual's state of mind is most likely to be within the first, inertial mindset, meaning that such a driven mindset is primarily driven by externally imposed views and patterns about fulfilling an individual's potential, vision, or mission, or some other issues under driving question as the last selfmobility element. SELcoaching emphasises that the individual needs to make strong thinking efforts to get out of this inertial thinking mindset and move closer to other human mindsets by strengthening his or her insightful thinking behaviour.

Phase of Inertia

SELcoaching takes a different approach from these types of coaching, which seems to go straight to helping the client achieve their specific goals in the area being addressed. In contrast, SELcoaching tries to explore with the individual (as a client) whether their challenges are their own. To check this, SELcoaching gently pushes them back a step to deprogramming their thinking behaviour.



Phase of Deprogramming


SELcoaching takes individuals (either as clients or participants) through the process of questioning four elements of selfmobility on four levels (how, where, what, how). This phase leads the individual to the necessary insights about how our thinking behaviour within society is often unconsciously influenced by external factors. After this process of questioning, the coach assesses (in the case of working with an individual client) whether the client is ready to move on to the next phase, the search for their essence. This phase can also include coaching for different groups of participants, to make them aware of how their thinking behaviour is potentially programmed and why it needs to be deprogrammed.

Phase of Essence

The client's search for the essence of one of the four selfmobility elements involves two successive challenges. Firstly, the client needs to gain insight into the personal importance of some of these selfmobility elements. Once this insight is gained, the client faces the next challenge (e.g. what their vision is) which is identified as the most important element for them. Both types of insight need to be achieved through insightful thinking. This phase is the most unpredictable because the coach cannot push the client to speed up the process of gaining the necessary insights. It is, therefore, a protracted phase with more coaching sessions, during which the coach can offer the client further clarification on selfmobility elements, while patiently waiting for the client to arrive at the necessary insights. Once this happens, SELcoaching moves into the final, fourth phase of activation. This phase of essence can also be an educational approach and is used with larger groups of participants to educate them about the logic of essence regarding the selfmobility elements.

Phase of Activation

SELcoaching plays a classic coaching role here, supporting the client in realising their identified essence. If a client needs a very specific coaching intervention at this stage (e.g. selling, parenting, retirement, presentations, public speaking, etc.), it is better to find such a specific coach. Concrete steps between the four phases within the SELcoaching process do not always follow a linear logic (i.e. the client and coach may enter another phase before the client has fully clarified the previous phase). This is because the coaching process takes a relatively long time, and the client cannot always afford to gain all the insights about their situation and do nothing in between to survive. Though, if the client skips a particular step between phases, they need to be aware of this and return to this step in the coaching process if possible.





4.3.2. Practical Applications

SELcoaching can be used (within coaching, educational, or some other approaches) to address many issues such as identity, development, leadership, change, motivation, and human mindset, which directly or indirectly relate to issues of community engagement.

- **Self-Knowledge Wholeness**

SELcoaching provides a holistic approach to self-awareness to help individuals better understand their place in the community and society.

- **Building understanding**

SELcoaching encourages people to rethink concepts and terms in different contexts or situations to achieve a better understanding between the parties involved.

- **Overcoming management approaches**

SELcoaching emphasises the need for self-leadership as a prerequisite for being a good leader and for adding leadership elements to management.

- **Creativity and innovation**

SELcoaching promotes creativity and innovative practices to move beyond existing developmental paths and patterns.

- **Motivation and change**

SELcoaching links motivation to change, pointing out that real change in any kind of entity is most likely to be achieved by triggering intrinsic human motivation.

- **Clarifying human thinking**

SELcoaching provides a holistic understanding of human thinking behaviour by distinguishing between the many thinking styles and different human mindsets.

- **Mastering time**

SELcoaching addresses time issues on a physical-organisational and psychological level to help individuals master their time in the emerging mixed reality.

- **Balancing development**

SELcoaching aims to balance development at every possible level, inside which development can be balanced by challenging existing developmental patterns.

- **Deepening human soft skills in the light of artificial intelligence**

SELcoaching aims to deepen human soft skills and promote human transcendence through better coexistence with rapidly growing artificial intelligence.

4.4. Values, Virtues, Integrity Foundation: Participatory Art Methods

4.4.1. Description

Participatory art is an approach to artistic expression that actively involves community members in the creation, development, or presentation of the artwork. Unlike traditional art forms where the artist is the sole creator, participatory art emphasises collaboration, inviting individuals from diverse backgrounds to contribute their ideas, experiences, and creativity. This approach transforms the artistic process into a shared experience, blurring the lines between artist and audience and making art more accessible and relevant to the community.

The essence of participatory art lies in its inclusivity and diversity. It welcomes individuals from various backgrounds, skill levels, and perspectives, allowing for a richer and more meaningful artistic outcome. Projects often take place in public or communal spaces such as parks, community centres, or streets, making art a part of everyday life and accessible to all. By fostering dialogue and reflection among participants, participatory art encourages deeper engagement with social issues, personal stories, and cultural heritage, promoting empathy and understanding within the community.

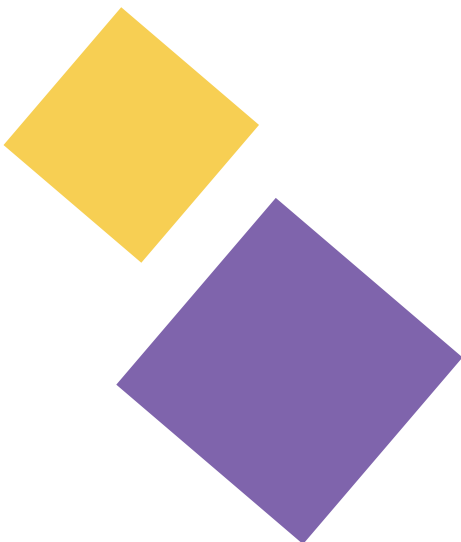
In practical terms, participatory art is a powerful tool for community engagement. It empowers individuals by giving them a voice and agency in shaping their environment, leading to increased civic participation and pride in local culture. For instance, collaborative mural projects allow communities to visually express their shared values and histories, while street art initiatives can transform public spaces into vibrant, creative hubs.



Participatory art also addresses social issues by providing a platform for collective exploration and awareness-raising. It builds social connections, fostering a sense of belonging and solidarity among participants, which strengthens community bonds and promotes civic engagement. Additionally, it offers educational opportunities, where people can learn new skills, explore creative expression, and gain insights into different cultural perspectives.

Moreover, by revitalising public spaces, participatory art encourages public interaction and promotes a sense of ownership and stewardship among residents. This collaborative approach often leads to innovative solutions to community challenges, as it taps into the collective creativity and imagination of the participants. In September 2021, VVI Foundation organised a participatory art event in Samokov, Bulgaria by inviting citizens to co-create the future of their town and put their wishes in a box and a mobile application. In the central park of Samokov participants from all ages and backgrounds had the opportunity to draw, play instruments and engage in creative activities.

Participatory art is a method that not only creates art but also builds and strengthens communities. By engaging people in the artistic process, it fosters social change, cultural expression, and collaborative problem-solving, making it a valuable tool for enhancing community life.



4.4.2. Practical Applications

One of the primary applications of participatory art is in **community empowerment**. By engaging residents in the creation of public art, such as murals or sculptures, communities are given a voice in shaping their environment. For example, a neighbourhood might collaborate with an artist to create a mural that reflects its history and values, fostering pride and a stronger sense of identity. Such projects empower individuals by making them active participants in the cultural life of their community, rather than passive observers.

Participatory art is also used to **address social issues**. Through creative collaboration, communities can explore and raise awareness about challenges they face, such as inequality, environmental degradation, or mental health. For instance, a community might come together to create a public installation that highlights the impact of pollution on local waterways. This not only draws attention to the issue but also sparks conversation and motivates collective action to find solutions.

Another practical application is in **building social connections**. Participatory art projects often bring together people from different backgrounds, fostering interactions that might not occur otherwise. A good example is a community quilt-making project where individuals contribute squares that represent their personal stories or cultural heritage. The process of creating the quilt together strengthens social bonds and promotes a sense of belonging among participants.

In addition, participatory art provides **educational opportunities**. It offers a hands-on way for people to learn new skills, from painting and sculpture to digital media and storytelling. Educational programs might involve youth in creating art that reflects their experiences or aspirations, providing a constructive outlet for expression and personal development. For instance, digital storytelling workshops where community members share and document their life stories can serve as both a creative and educational experience, preserving local histories while teaching new media skills.

Participatory art also plays a crucial role in **transforming public spaces**. By involving the community in the design and creation of art installations in parks, streets, or other communal areas, these spaces are revitalised and imbued with a sense of collective ownership. For example, a project might involve residents in designing mosaic benches for a local park, turning an ordinary space into a vibrant and welcoming gathering place. This not only beautifies the area but also encourages public interaction and a stronger connection to the community.

Overall, participatory art is a powerful tool for enhancing community engagement. Whether empowering individuals, addressing social issues, building connections, providing education, or revitalising spaces, it brings people together to create art that reflects their collective experiences and aspirations. These collaborative projects not only result in meaningful artistic outcomes but also strengthen the fabric of the community, making it more resilient and cohesive.



5.

Concrete exercises

5.1. Neighbourhood Activity Spaces

Exercise 1

Name of the Exercise The Dream Box

Type	Brainstorming exercise, group engagement, idea generation
Phase	Collecting and sharing ideas
Group Size	Flexible (can be done with small or large groups)
Duration	30 to 60 minutes (depending on the size of the group)
Required Material	A box (e.g., a shoebox) labelled "The Dream Box", small blank pieces of paper (or sticky notes), pens or markers, a large piece of paper or a flip chart for writing down the ideas

Description

1. Preparation:

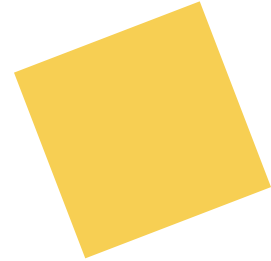
- Cut a hole in the top of the box so that the notes can be dropped into it.
- Label the box with a large font or attach a sheet of paper with the title "The Dream Box."
- Arrange the meeting space so that everyone can see each other – set up chairs in a circle.
- Place the Dream Box in a visible and accessible location.

2. Generating Ideas:

- Give each participant small blank pieces of paper and pens.
- Ask the participants to think about activities, workshops, events, or changes they would like to see in the space/neighbourhood.
- Encourage everyone to write each idea or need on a separate piece of paper and drop it into the box.
- Each participant can submit as many ideas as they like.

3. Reviewing the Ideas:

- Once all willing participants have placed their ideas in the box, the facilitator opens the box and reads each idea aloud.
- If any idea sparks interest and enthusiasm, pause for a moment to discuss it with the group.
- Guiding questions:
 - Would other group members be interested in this idea?
 - What would be needed to make this idea a reality?
 - What resources are essential (e.g., materials, people, time)?
 - Who could help in implementing this idea?
 - When would be the best time to realise this idea?



4. Recording and Expanding Ideas:

- During the group discussion, write each idea on a large sheet of paper or a flip chart.
- Keep the ideas in a visible spot, allowing participants to add more thoughts and comments over time. For example, someone might add a note to a woodworking workshop idea: "I can bring a drill – Kamila."

Notes

- Ensure a welcoming environment where all ideas are appreciated and considered.
- As the facilitator, do not judge the ideas – you never know how they might evolve.
- This exercise encourages collaborative idea generation and can help gather a wide range of creative suggestions.
- Follow-up activities may include organising and prioritising the most feasible or popular ideas and planning further steps for their implementation.



Exercise 2

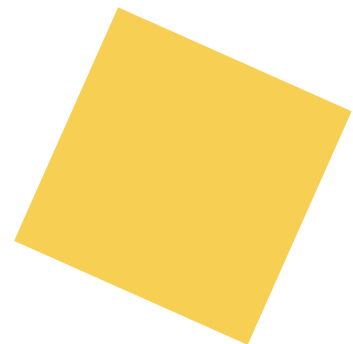
Name of the Exercise Locals

Type	Intercultural communication exercise
Phase	Team building, cultural exchange
Group Size	Minimum: 6 people, Maximum: 20 people
Duration	30-40 minutes
Required Material	Scissors, tape, paper, markers.

Description

This exercise helps to understand the work of animators in the Neighbourhood Activity Space. It shows how to act when entering a local community. As animators, we need to learn to listen, observe and respect the rules of the community.

1. Divide the participants into two equal groups.
2. The groups must be in two different rooms so that they cannot hear each other.
3. One group is the locals and the other is the constructors.
4. Both have a separate instruction that must be explained to the groups at the same time.
5. Facilitate a group discussion on the diversity of experiences and cultures represented, highlighting common themes and unique differences.
6. During the exercises, observe and take notes on how the groups behave (do they judge each other, how do they approach each other during the exercise, how do they behave and speak to each other).
7. At the end of the exercise, ask the participants how they felt in the exercise, how they feel after the exercise and what was the origin of their behaviours and attitudes.



INSTRUCTIONS FOR CONSTRUCTORS

You are constructors in bridge building.

In the village where you arrive the nearest bridge is one week away.

Your goal is to teach the locals how to build the bridge.

Locals are friendly and they know your language

In 30 (or 15') minutes there is going to be a rainy season and you won't be able to build the bridge.

You can use: Scissors, tape, paper and markers.

You have 15 minutes to read the rules.

Everyone goes to the village immediately.

You will achieve your goal when locals will build the bridge so that they will be able to cross it. You have 30 (or 15') minutes before the rainy season comes and building will be impossible.

INSTRUCTION FOR LOCALS

You live in a village in the middle of the jungle.

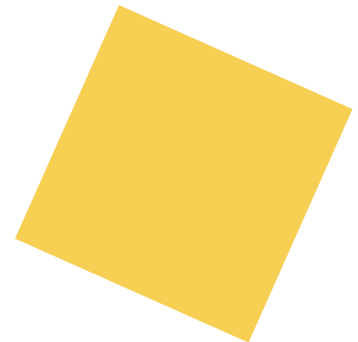
It takes you a week to reach the nearest bridge. You are often plagued by illnesses. You want and need a bridge that will shorten the journey to the city is up to 2 hours.

You are friendly and know the language spoken by constructors.

Your culture is very old and you are deeply attached to it.

There are rules:

1. You cannot betray tradition.
2. You cannot shake hands.
3. You have your own greeting ritual.
4. If you want to say something to someone, you must touch or hold them. You cannot speak to someone without physical contact. If someone wants to speak to a group of people, it is enough to touch one member of the group.
5. If anyone breaks the rules, everyone else expresses their disapproval by clicking their tongues.
6. If someone breaks the rule(s) or tradition three times in a row, all other villagers turn their backs on them and count to 30. After this time, the villagers have no hard feelings.
7. Every 3 minutes during work, all villagers rest in a relaxing position. You need to figure it out.
8. You cannot make decisions on your own. Only at a meeting.
9. Only one person - Dodo - can communicate decisions.
10. Men cannot touch scissors and tape, and women cannot touch paper and markers.



Notes

The exercise demonstrates the work of animators with the local community. The locals are the local community and the constructors are the animators. The exercise helps to understand and guide how to behave and what to do when entering an unfamiliar community. After the exercise, listen carefully how the locals felt and how the constructors behaved. Similarly, transfer this to the work of the animator, bearing in mind that each environment has its own rules, traditions and relationships.

5.2. Storytelling for Migrants and Local Communities

Exercise 1

Name of the Exercise Personal Picture Mixture

Type	Storytelling exercise, cultural sharing
Phase	Team building, cultural exchange
Group Size	Minimum: 4 people, Maximum: 30 people
Duration	Approximately 20-40 minutes (depending on group size)
Required Material	Personal photos from albums or photos representing participants' areas, optionally: food items or motifs representing their culture

Description

1. Request participants to bring a few personal photos from their albums or images that represent their hometown or region. They can also include photos of food or other cultural elements.
2. Split the participants into small groups of 4-6 people.
3. Within each group, participants take turns sharing their photos, describing the location, the significance of the photo, and any personal stories or cultural information associated with it.
4. Encourage group members to ask questions and engage in discussions about each photo shared.
5. After everyone has shared in their small groups, reconvene and invite volunteers to share an interesting story or cultural insight they gained from their group with the larger group.
6. Facilitate a discussion on the diversity of experiences and cultures represented, emphasising both common themes and unique differences.



Notes

This exercise encourages a deeper understanding of each participant's background and facilitates cultural exchange. It helps foster connections and appreciation for the group's diversity. Be sure to maintain a respectful and open atmosphere for sharing personal stories.

Exercise 2

Name of the Exercise The Web of Association

Type	Memory-activating exercise, personal awareness exercise
Phase	Creating and sharing stories
Group Size	N/A
Duration	30 to 60 minutes
Required Material	Sufficient pens and paper

Description

1. Have participants form pairs and provide each with a pen and paper.
2. Instruct each participant to write a word related to the theme in the centre of their paper.
3. Participants begin creating an association web, writing words or phrases that come to mind around the central word, and connecting them with lines.
4. Each person helps their partner by asking questions to explore the connections between the words.
5. As the web expands, the questioner may spot patterns or connections and ask about moments or events tied to the words.
6. These connections often lead to a story, which participants can further develop.
7. To clarify the method, demonstrate it with a large sheet of paper (flip chart) using one participant's example.
8. While pair work is preferred, participants may work individually if needed.

Notes

This exercise can elicit strong emotions, so it's important to be ready to offer support if necessary. It encourages participants to explore profound personal insights, helping them shape and share meaningful stories.

5.3. SELcoaching doctrine

Exercise

Name of the Exercise Deprogramming Individuals' Thinking Behaviour

Type	Coaching for individual client Coaching for a group of participants
Phase	Exercise belongs to the second phase of Deprogramming inside the SELcoaching process.
Group Size	Coaching for individual client: 1 client Coaching for a group of participants: 10 to 50 participants (or more)
Duration	Coaching for individual clients: approximately 45-60 minutes (depending on the specific situation within the coaching process, the extent to which the coach is forced to offer educational interventions to the client about the logic of the exercise). Coaching for a group of participants: approximately 120-180 minutes (depending on the size of the group and the extent to which the coach needs to educate the participants about the logic of the exercise).
Required Material	Pen for client and participants Printed 'Work Form' for inserting answers for client and participants The document with the questions and answers at the four levels, and the display of the relevant answers, is accessible to the client or participants in one of two ways: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Coach uses a Powerpoint presentation during an exercise• Interested individuals can access the document via this LINK.

Description

Guidelines to be considered for both types of exercise:

- Questioning goes on under the 4 levels (offering questions and answers on the elements of self mobility; potential, mission, vision and driving question).
- Clients/participants choose answers according to the given instructions
- Answers of the clients/participants need to be strongly related to their real situation
- All four levels of questioning are strongly interconnected (the logic of the previous level is strongly related to the logic of the next level - in the sense that the understanding achieved at one level is strongly needed to successfully approach and deal with the next level).

Exercise steps – Coaching for individual client

1. The coach gives this exercise to the client during a session within the coaching process (more likely at the beginning of the coaching process, when and especially if the coach feels that the client is approaching their challenges without being aware that their thinking behaviour is too programmed to do so).
2. Addressing and closing the first level of questions.
3. Brief feedback from the client (no comments from the coach on the feedback given).
4. Display of correct results by coach (without additional explanation).
5. Starting the second level of questioning (and so on to the last- fourth level of questioning).
6. Clients reach a certain number of points within the Work Form according to their answers to the questioning process (from 0 to 40 points); more points represent very likely better insights of the clients into the way their thinking behaviour is programmed within society.
7. The coach decides either to offer some clarification on how the questioning is structured or to let the clients wait until the next session and then explain the logic of the questioning of the exercise.
8. The coach assesses when individual clients are sufficiently aware of their thinking behaviour according to their insights in this regard, based on which the SELcoaching process moves to the next phase of searching for the client's essence.

Exercise steps – Coaching for group of participants

1. Divide participants into groups of 3-6 (depending on group size).
2. Introducing and completing the first level of questioning.
3. Short feedback from the participants (no comments from the coach on the feedback given).
4. Display of correct results by the coach (without additional explanation).
5. Starting the second level of questioning, and so on until the last-fourth level of questioning (although the participants are supposed to discuss the questioning process among themselves in smaller groups, they give individual answers related to their real situations).
6. The participants reach a certain number of points in their Work Form according to their answers to the questioning process (from 0 - 40 points); more points represent very likely better insights of the participants into the way their thinking behaviour is programmed within society.
7. Presentation of the explanation of why the questioning is structured as it is and what it symbolises (also possible during the process, depending on the specific context, situation or needs).

Notes

Both types of exercise encourage and support individuals (either clients or participants) to deprogramme, to some extent, their self-knowledge of themselves, in line with the Selfmobility Thinking model. Such a deprogramming logic serves to strengthen the individual's awareness, especially of the interactions between them and society, based on which such an individual can see their(co-)relations with their communities and societies with greater clarity, allowing them to play a more intrinsic and self-made community engagement.

5.4. Participatory Art

Exercise 1

Name of the Exercise Painter and Model

Type	Participatory art
Phase	Team building exercise
Group Size	Minimum: 8 people, Maximum: 30-40 people
Duration	Approximately 15-40 minutes (depending on group size)
Required Material	Clipboards (one for each participant), A4 paper sheets (one for each clipboard), multicoloured markers (enough for all participants), chairs (optional), tape.

Description

Part one:

The facilitator begins with a few introductory words about how others perceive us. They might mention that in the past, artists painted portraits of princes and princesses, which were often used to create impressions and even arrange marriages between royals. The facilitator then asks the participants how they think they appear in the eyes of others. Each participant is given the opportunity to describe how they believe they are perceived by others. What specific characteristics or details do they think others would notice? Are they concerned about what others might see, or not? And are they curious to find out how others perceive them?

This part of the activity should be serious, serving as a counterpoint to the more fun segment that will follow. The facilitator should encourage participants to express themselves freely without worrying too much about the reactions of others, while also finding ways to make the more reserved participants feel comfortable.

Part two:

The facilitator invites the participants to form two circles – an inner and an outer circle. Both circles should have an equal number of participants. If the number is uneven, the facilitator (or their assistant) joins one of the circles to even out the number and gives instructions from there.

There are two ways to form the circles – with participants standing or sitting. For a smaller group, it is recommended that participants stand, while for a larger group, it is better for them to sit.

The facilitator ensures that each participant is facing another participant. The facilitator then provides details and explains the rules of the activity. Participants in the inner circle will act as models, while those in the outer circle will be the artists. Each “model” receives a clipboard with an attached A4 sheet of paper. Each “artist” receives a different coloured marker. The goal of the activity is for the artists to collaboratively draw portraits of each model.

On a signal from the facilitator, for 20-30 seconds, each artist first observes the person in front of them and then makes a quick sketch of the model's portrait. The idea is for the artist to sketch only a part of the portrait, leaving space for another artist to further develop and complete it.

After the first interaction, the models remain in their positions while each artist steps back and goes to the next model to make the next sketch in the new model's portrait. In this way, the artists move around, adding more features to each model's portrait until they return to their original position (in front of the first model they were facing). During the process, models should not look while their portraits are being created. This is done to enhance their curiosity and ensure that the final result is a surprise for them.

Once the cycle is complete, the facilitator gives participants time to review the portraits. At the end of the process, each model receives a portrait created by the hands of all the artists. The process is then repeated with roles reversed – the "models" become artists and vice versa.

Part three (optional):

The group can organise an exhibition with the completed portraits. They can simply arrange the portraits side by side, taping them to a long wall. The facilitator should allow 10-15 minutes for the participants to look at their own portraits and those of the others in the group. Afterward, the facilitator invites everyone to sit in a large circle to discuss what happened.

If the feedback session takes place in another room, participants should be allowed to take photos of their portraits. In any case, they should be able to see the portraits during the discussion.

Part four:

This part can take place in a large circle. The facilitator summarises the process by asking questions. Some of them might include:

- How did you feel during the exercise?
- Did you feel more comfortable in the role of an artist or the role of a model? Why?
- Do you like your portrait?
- Was there anything about the portrait that surprised you?
- What are your distinguishing features (that you know of) depicted in the portrait?
- Are there any details in the portrait that you didn't expect your peers to capture?
- What did the artists depict that you didn't know about yourself?
- Does your portrait include elements of your clothing?
- How would you dress or what would you add to your image if you were going to a business meeting?
- Would you show your portrait to anyone? Who do you think would react?

Notes

The facilitator needs to be well-prepared for the logistics of the exercise. Adequate space is necessary, especially if the activity is conducted using chairs. It must be considered that all the "artists" need to move to the next "model" to start the next stage of drawing (i.e., there should be no chair left unoccupied). This will help the facilitator manage the process. If the exercise is conducted while standing, there is always a risk that one artist might be slower, leading to a blockage in parts of the circle – for instance, two or three artists waiting their turn in front of a particular model, while other models remain without an artist in front of them.

The facilitator should also give instructions aloud (possibly using a microphone so that everyone can hear) and ensure that participants move smoothly and synchronously in the outer circle.

Exercise 2

Name of the Exercise Precious Stones – Silk Scarves Painting

Type	Participatory art
Phase	Team building exercise
Group Size	N/A
Duration	20 to 60 minutes
Required Material	Silk scarves, paint for silk, paint brushes, water, hairdryer, scissors and thread, aprons.

Description

Step 1: Tying the knots

This is the most important part of the workshop. The facilitator demonstrates the special technique to tie the knots before painting the scarves. One person is holding the twisted cloth at one place and the other is tying the knots with thread as shown in the picture below. You can make as many knots of different sizes as you like. Minimum 3 are recommended.



Step 2: Make the scarf wet - tap the cloth into water to make it wet.
Squeeze it.



Step 3: Colouring the knots

Choose 3 or 4 colours of paint for silk and dye one knot with different colours in horizontal lines. Use the same for the other knots on the scarf.

Step 4: Use a hairdryer to make the whole scarf dry.

Step 5: Cutting the cloth and releasing the knots

Once the whole scarf is dry, participants can use scissors to cut the thread and see the result of the technique. Here is the moment of the “Wow” effect of the workshop. Once all knots are released, the result is visible. Other techniques for silk painting can be used to further work on the scarf.

Step 6: This part can take place in a large circle. The facilitator summarises the process by asking questions. Some of them might include:

- How did you feel during the group creative process?
- How did you cooperate with your partner?
- What do you think about the result?

Notes

Take care of participants' clothes since the paint can damage them. It is recommended to use aprons.

6.

Possible connections

In developing this guide, our primary objective was to provide a comprehensive toolkit of methods that can foster stronger community engagement and support the integration of diverse social groups into local communities. By exploring different approaches, we aimed to create opportunities for cultural exchange, personal development, and social cohesion. The methods outlined in this guide offer unique strengths in engaging individuals and groups. However, they can also complement one another in significant ways, forming a cohesive framework for community-building. By combining these methods, organisations can address multiple dimensions of integration and empowerment, from personal self-awareness and leadership development to fostering social ties and creating inclusive spaces for dialogue.

6.1 Learning from each other

Strefa within *Neighborhood Activity Spaces* conducted an exercise described by the Values, Virtues, Integrity Foundation during the tie-dye workshop "*Precious Stones – Silk Scarves Painting*" at the Local Activity Place in Łódź.

The workshop focused on the Tie-Dye technique, a popular fabric dyeing method known for its unpredictable and always surprising results. Participants had access to special silk paints and fabric similar to silk, which they transformed into colourful scarves.

Thanks to the simple format of the workshop, everyone could engage in the creative process – even those without prior artistic experience. Participants eagerly worked in pairs, with those more experienced in the Tie-Dye technique helping others. Children who took part not only learned new skills but also connected with other children and adults, fostering intergenerational integration.

The time spent dyeing scarves together became not only an opportunity for self-expression but also a form of relaxation. The process of creating colourful patterns on fabric had a calming effect, while simultaneously sparking creativity and curiosity.

Many participants emphasised that the workshop allowed them to take a break from daily responsibilities and focus on creative work, which brought them great satisfaction. At the end of the workshop, each participant could admire their unique, colourful scarves, which not only pleased the eye but also served as a keepsake of the time spent together. The participants were proud of their work, and the results of their creativity caught the attention of others.

Key takeaways for social animators:

- **Simplicity of tasks:** Choosing a technique like Tie-Dye, which is easy to perform, allows people of various skill levels, from children to adults, to participate.
- **Family atmosphere:** Inviting entire families to join in promotes the building of intergenerational bonds and a positive atmosphere.
- **Integration through collaboration:** Working in pairs or groups and supporting each other during tasks fosters social integration.
- **Relaxation and creativity:** Creative workshops provide an excellent form of relaxation and a break from daily life, increasing participant satisfaction.

This workshop is a great example of how local events can contribute to community integration, engage different age groups, and create a friendly space for collective activities.

The **Values, Virtues, Integrity Foundation** (VVI) has enhanced its organisational toolkit by integrating new methods across various programs, which has enabled the foundation to diversify its activities and engage a broader range of participants. VVI has successfully implemented the *SEL Coaching* method with all of its international volunteers, while utilising the *Neighborhood Activity Spaces and Storytelling* techniques in non-formal education activities targeted at adults. These methods have seamlessly fit into VVI's existing profile and ongoing initiatives, strengthening its capacity to foster community engagement and support social cohesion.

The **Initiative - Center For Education** effectively integrated the *Neighborhood Activity Spaces* (NAS) method into workshops designed for employers and management staff at a company employing migrant workers from third countries. Given the significant cultural differences between these workers and the local population, it was crucial to implement simple yet impactful exercises that addressed biases and fostered an appreciation for diverse cultural identities and work practices. The *Speed Date Exercise* was conducted by seating participants in two rows facing each other, ensuring that each person had a partner directly across from them. During the exercise, the facilitator guided the conversations by asking a series of questions. Initially, the questions were light and easy, allowing participants to ease into the interaction. As the exercise progressed, the questions became more personal, encouraging participants to share deeper, more meaningful stories. This gradual shift helped create a sense of trust and openness among the participants, allowing them to connect on a more profound level. By the end of the session, participants had shared a wide range of experiences, from casual anecdotes to more personal reflections. This approach fostered a sense of empathy and understanding, breaking down initial barriers and helping the group form deeper connections. The exercise was particularly effective in creating a comfortable environment where participants felt free to express themselves and connect with others on both personal and professional levels.

Also, during this workshop, the *Locals* exercise was used very successfully. One group received instructions that outlined specific cultural customs and communication rules they were required to follow. These participants represented a fictional community living in a remote village, with unique traditions and rituals that dictated their interactions. For example, they could not shake hands or speak without physical contact, and they had a designated leader responsible for communication. The second group was instructed to assist the first group in building a bridge, despite the cultural differences and unique customs they were adhering to. This group was tasked with finding common ground and establishing effective communication strategies to facilitate collaboration. They had to navigate the challenges posed by *the locals'* customs and work together to devise a plan for building the bridge within a set deadline. The exercise proved to be highly valuable in promoting awareness of cultural differences and fostering empathy among participants. By working together towards a common goal—building the bridge—participants learned to appreciate diverse perspectives and the complexities of cross-cultural communication. Ultimately, the *Locals Exercise* reinforced the importance of finding a shared language and mutual respect in achieving successful collaboration, laying a foundation for a more inclusive workplace.

The **Center Spirala - Center of Selfmobility** has started to work on supervision with target groups of professionals, especially social workers and other similar professions who work with migrants as final beneficiaries. At this initial stage, the *Storytelling for Migrants and Local Communities* method seemed the most appropriate. This method was therefore briefly presented to 7 groups of professionals working with migrants. In addition, it seems that the *Neighbourhood Activity Spaces* (NAS) method will soon be suitable for this target group of professionals, as it is expected that migrants, especially those who are more likely to stay in Slovenia according to certain formal procedures, will need to have more contact with local communities outside the asylum centres as their current place of residence. As part of the supervision activity, we will certainly soon equip these professionals working with migrants with some of the exercises of the NAS.

7.

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